

# Modeling of bending-torsion couplings in active-bending structures. Application to the design of elastic gridshell.



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# Contents

<b>Contents</b>	i
<b>List of Figures</b>	iii
<b>List of Tables</b>	v
<b>1 Elastic gridshells</b>	1
1.1 Elastic gridshells : a review . . . . .	1
1.2 Building free-forms . . . . .	17
1.2.1 Non-standard forms . . . . .	17
1.2.2 Importance of free-forms in modern architecture . . . . .	17
1.2.3 Canonical approaches to build free-forms . . . . .	17
1.2.4 Main challenges . . . . .	17
1.3 Gridshell structure : definition and classification . . . . .	17
1.3.1 Historic overview . . . . .	17
1.3.2 Rigid gridshell . . . . .	17
1.3.3 Elastic gridshell . . . . .	17
1.4 Elastic gridshells : revisiting Mannheim . . . . .	18
1.5 Elastic gridshells : the benefits of composite materials . . . . .	18
1.6 Gridshells . . . . .	20
1.6.1 Recent projects . . . . .	20
1.6.2 Recent developments . . . . .	20
1.6.3 Gridshell in composite material . . . . .	21
1.7 References . . . . .	25



# List of Figures

1.1	Steel gridshell built in 1962 in Berkeley, USA . . . . .	3
1.2	Timber gridshell built in 1962 in Essen, Germany . . . . .	4
1.3	Timber gridshell built in 1967 in Montreal, Canada . . . . .	5
1.4	Timber gridshell built in 1962 in Essen, Germany . . . . .	6
1.5	Roundwood gridshell built in 1995 in Dorset, England . . . . .	7
1.6	Carboard gridshell built in 2000 in Hannover, Germany . . . . .	8
1.7	Timber gridshell built in 2003 in Downland, England . . . . .	9
1.8	Timber gridshell built in 2006 in Savill, England . . . . .	9
1.9	Known elastic gridshells built by the past. . . . .	10
1.10	Prototypes and projects of GFRP elastic gridshells. . . . .	18
1.11	Major permanent projects of elastic wooden gridshells built since 1975. . . . .	19
1.12	Prototypes and projects of GFRP elastic gridshells. . . . .	23
1.13	Erection of the primary grid by two cranes . . . . .	24
1.14	Erection plan and construction stages . . . . .	24



# List of Tables

1.1	Key numbers	14
1.2	Key numbers	15
1.3	Key numbers	16



# 1 Elastic gridshells

## 1.1 Elastic gridshells : a review

Ted Happold (1930–96), founding partner of Buro Happold, worked on the Mannheim gridshell in Germany (Architect Frei Otto, built 1975), when he was with Ove Arup & Partners. For many years after its completion, Happold promoted the benefit of the timber gridshell as a construction technique and stated that he could not understand why it had not been adopted more widely. He perceived the benefits to be in the efficiency of the construction method to enable doubly curved (shell) structures to be constructed quickly and cost effectively. A doubly curved structure offers the benefits of a minimal use of materials and therefore an efficient coverage of space. Such a structure can be made either in situ in the case of concrete or in a factory in the case of steel or aluminium. Except in the case of a spherical gridshell, the repetition of the elements is very limited and the shell is made from a complex set of components. In contrast, a timber gridshell enables doubly curved structures to be formed from a set of straight, prefabricated, identical components. A number of Happold's partners at Buro Happold had worked with him on the Mannheim gridshell and, when the opportunity arose to design a series of small landscape structures at the Earth Centre, near Doncaster, UK, in 1994, gridshells were proposed. [Har+03, p. 2]

“The key to the modern use of timber gridshells is the development of computer methods in modelling complex three-dimensional shell structures.” [Har+03, p. 2]

At present, the architectural significance of grid shells can hardly be fully envisioned. Too little experience has been gained as yet. However, the first signs of a grid shell architecture are already apparent. The projects planned

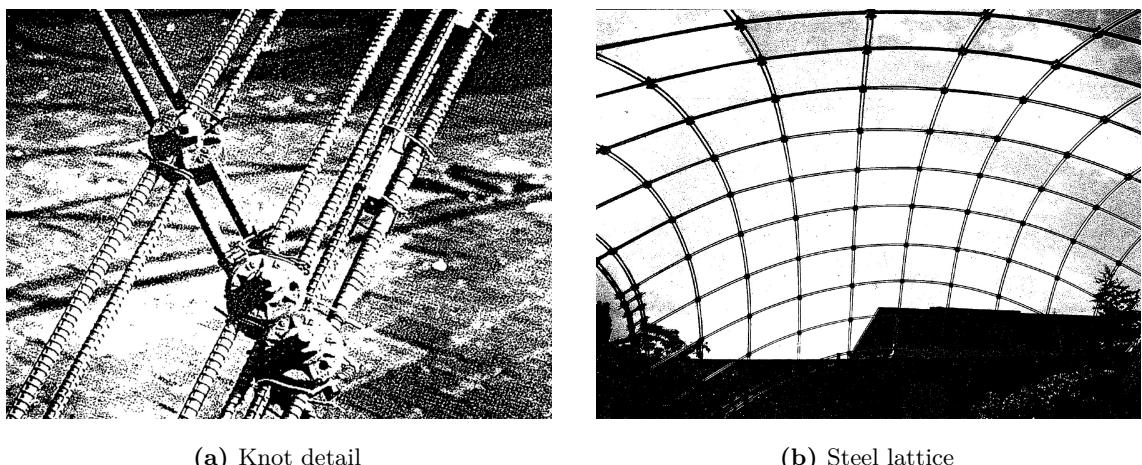
and executed to date and the results of this research work indicate possibilities that open up a wide field of applications for grid shells. Two things stand out above all. The first is the nearly unlimited variety of forms that can be realized with grid shells, the second is the fact that there is no closed shell surface, but rather a simple, spatially curved grid composed of rods. Both features are of fundamental significance. They fully characterize the architectural essence of the grid shell support structure. [BHS74, p. 250]

“From the inverted form to the gridshell” [BHS74, p. 179]

### The beginnings : from the first prototype to the German Pavilion

Frei Otto started his studies in architecture in 1947 in Berlin, Germany, and completed his doctorate on tensile structures in 1953. This first work was published and translated later in the 60's. He then began to work in the field of lightweight structures using physical models such as soap films or hanging nets, and photographic measurements.<sup>1,2</sup> These tools were essentials for his exploration of forms and structures as there were no computers at that time.

Simultaneously, he became interested by the study of lightweight shells and the way they were form-found. One of his very first elastic gridshell was built in 1962 with students at Berkeley, USA [BHS74, p. 270]. It is funny to remark that this first gridshell was not a timber gridshell but a steel gridshell made out of twin steel rods linked in a grid fashion by bolts with clamping plates (see fig. 1.1a). This first experiment demonstrated at small scale the ability to bend a regular grid with no shear rigidity into a curved shape (see fig. 1.1b). The grid was loosely braced and shell effects were not investigated. The same



(a) Knot detail

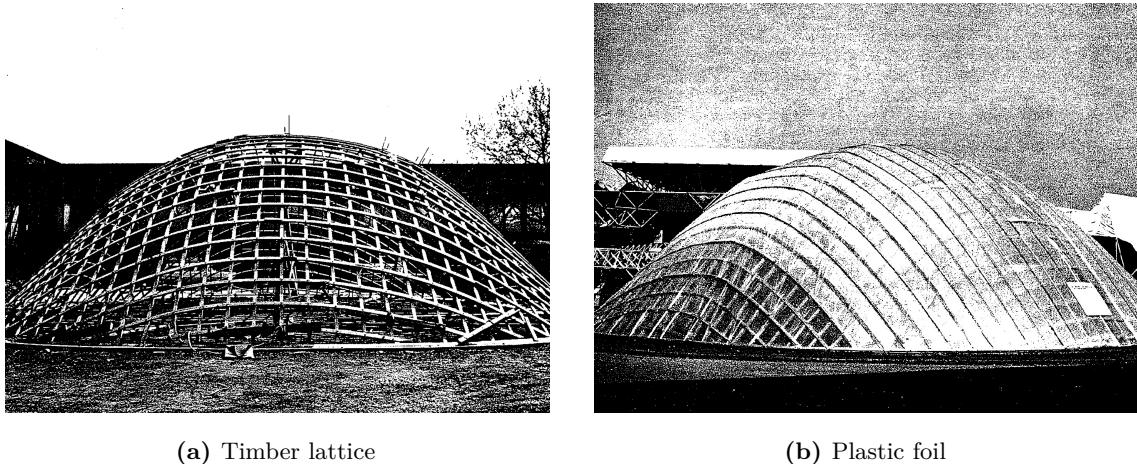
(b) Steel lattice

**Figure 1.1** – Steel gridshell built in 1962 in Berkeley, USA.

year he designed and built a first timber gridshell at Essen, Germany [BHS74, p. 272]. The prototype – a single layer gridshell spanning 17 m and covering an area of 198 m<sup>2</sup> – was made with 3-ply laminated timber profiles in hemlock pine (see fig. 1.2a). The cross-section of the profiles was rectangular (60 mm x 40 mm) and the elements were assembled in a grid fashion with simple steel bolts. Once erected, nothing was specifically done to improve the in-plane shear stiffness of the grid and activate a shell behavior. Finally, the structure was covered with a transparent plastic foil nailed directly on the grid's profiles (see fig. 1.2b).

<sup>1</sup>In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries model testing was at the heart of structural innovation [Add13]. Analog models were employed successfully by well-known architects and engineers to go beyond the limits of existing knowledge (A. Gaudi, H. Isler, F. Candela, F. Otto, ...) and are still employed today where numeric models failed to represent accurately some physical phenomena (for instance in wind analysis for high rise towers and bridges).

<sup>2</sup>“Photography is the medium through which the form and content of a model are communicated. It is one of our most important tools in that it provides the basis for documentation and information, supplements our creative potential [...]” [BHS74, p. 56]



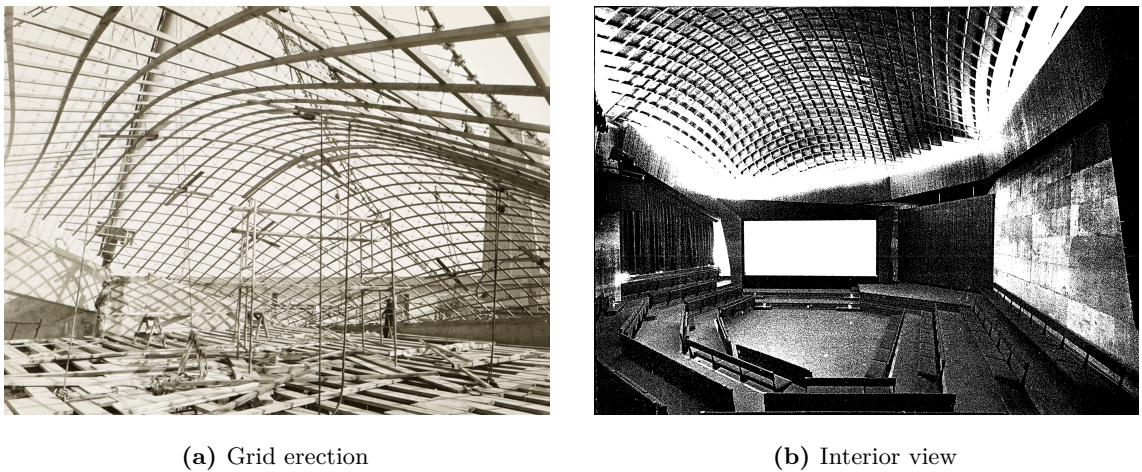
**Figure 1.2** – Timber gridshell built in 1962 in Essen, Germany.

Fiver years later, on the occasion of the *1967 International and Universal Exposition* in Montreal, Canada, Frei Otto was appointed to design the German Pavilion : a large cable net tent prefiguring the realization of the olympic stadium of Munich, Germany, in 1972.<sup>3</sup> The pavilion required two auditoria and these were designed using the principle of elastic gridshell [BHS74, p. 274]. All together, the auditoria covered an area of  $365 \text{ m}^2$  and spanned 17.5 m. The construction technic employed in Montreal was quite similar to the one developed in Essen, but this time the grid was fully braced with a layer of nailed plywood boards and offered a proper roofing made out of insulation panels covered with a PVC coated fabric (see figures 1.3a and 1.3b).

The two gridshells built in Montreal mark a significant step in the maturation process of the technic leading to the major realization of Mannheim in 1976 : a methodology has emerged to progress “from the inverted form to the gridshell” [BHS74, p. 179] ; main construction details have been validated ; various erection methods have been tested ; mid-scale buildings have been built to host public. However, due to the over complexity of these structures, lots of unknowns remained unsolved at this stage and the behavior of the structures could not be fully predicted.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Actually, Frei Otto became the director of the newly founded *Institute for Lightweight Structures* (Institut für Leichte Flächentragwerke or IL) at the University of Stuttgart in 1964. It was the IL that was commissioned by the German government to conduct research in connection with the planning of the German pavilion for the exposition in Montreal.

<sup>4</sup>“Snow accumulations in the throat of the common edge beam probably caused one of the two grid shells of project Montreal to buckle in a relatively flat region. The diameter of the buckled area was about 3 meters. Neither grid rod was broken, i.e. the buckling progressed elastically. It might have been possible to press the buckled area back into shape.” [BHS74, p. 219]



**Figure 1.3** – Timber gridshell built in 1967 in Montreal, Canada.

It is worth to mention that several unexecuted large-scale projects were studied by Frei Otto between 1967 and 1973 at the *IL* or at the *Atelier Warmbronn*.<sup>5</sup> These projects are basically documented in [BHS74, pp. 278 - 288] and reveal that he was training his capacity to master large-scale projects with the technic of elastic gridshells for more conventional building projects (wave pool, swimming hall, multi-purpose hall, auditorium, . . . ).

### The Mannheim Multihalle : the completion of a decade of research

The project of the Multihalle started in 1970, when the decision was made that Mannheim, Germany, would hold the Bundesgartenschau in 1975.<sup>6</sup> The architects of the project, *Carl Mutschler & Partners*, consulted Frei Otto at *Atelier Warmbronn* as he was starting to get known in the field of innovative lightweight structures. This is how the idea of the gridshell was introduced in the project [Lid15].

A thorough report on the project is available in [Bur+78]. A more condensed but still precise description of the engineering problematics related to this projects are availables in the excellent papers from Happold and Liddell [HL75] and Liddell [Lid15].

Mannheim is an unprecedented realization because it is more than twenty times larger than the previously built gridshells in Montreal and is meant to last many years and not only for the duration of a short-term exhibition. The timber lattice, still existing in 2017, covers an area of 7400 m<sup>2</sup> (see fig. 1.11b). It is composed of two interconnected domes, one for the multi-purpose hall (span : 60 m | height : 20 m) and one for the restaurant (span : 50 m | height : 18 m).

<sup>5</sup>Atelier Warmbronn is the architectural studio founded by Frei Otto in 1969.

<sup>6</sup>The Bundesgartenschau is a national horticultural exhibition that takes place every two years in Germany.



(a) Interior view



(b) Sky view

**Figure 1.4** – Timber gridshell built in 1975 in Mannheim, Germany.

Although the constructif system deployed at Mannheim clearly inherited from the previous developments, the challenge was such that it had to be revisited. In particular the main additions were the introduction of the double layer system and the proper bracing of the grid. A major advance was also the use of the very first numeric models to study the structure.

The double layer system was introduced to tackle a two issues : the grid needed some flexibility to be bent into the desired shape, but once erected it should provide sufficient bending stiffness to resist disturbing loads and avoid a buckling collapse.<sup>7</sup> One erected, the two grids, one sliding on top of the other one, were connected together to form a single grid with much higher ladder profiles (from 50 mm to 150 mm), increasing their bending stiffness by 26 (see fig. 1.11a).

Because the in-plane stiffness of the grid also plays a major role in the resistance to buckling, this question was considered with care. The bracing of the grid was first achieved by preventing the nodes to turn once the grid was erected. This was done by creating some friction in the nodes when tightening the bolts linking the laths, after the grid was erected. Additional bracing cables were put in the grid.

Finally, the project of Mannheim was a key project in the development of modern lightweight structures. Great engineers were born in touch with Frei Otto, following its footsteps or collaborating with him. This heritage has irrigated for several decades the engineering of lightweight structures in Europe and gave birth, directly or indirectly, to several studios among which we can cite *Buro Happold*, *Schlaich Bergermann & Partner* and *RFR*.

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<sup>7</sup>Theoretically, self-weight loads would produce only compression in the members because the (funicular) form of the grid resulted from the inversion of a hanging chain model in pure tension.



**Figure 1.5** – Roundwood gridshell built in 1995 in Dorset, England.

### The dry period : 25 years from Mannheim to Hannover

Although the experience of Mannheim proved the feasibility and the potential of gridshell structures for large-scale projects, it also revealed that these projects were subject to an incredible complexity in terms of structural design, geometry, modeling, testing, team work, construction methods, ... At that time, very few people could pretend to master all the knowledge and technics required to design and built timber gridshells and developed in the bosom of the *Institute for Lightweight Structures* in Stuttgart.

This project was obviously well ahead of its time and the engineering cost to design such structures was probably prohibitive considering the tools available at that time. This certainly explains why no elastic gridshells were built during the 25 following years, despite the optimism of the pioneers of the Multihalle :

For many years after its completion, Happold promoted the benefit of the timber gridshell as a construction technique and stated that he could not understand why it had not been adopted more widely. He perceived the benefits to be in the efficiency of the construction method to enable doubly curved (shell) structures to be constructed quickly and cost effectively. [Har+03].

Note that around 1975 small workshop and experiments lead to the construction of several but small elastic gridshells, as reported in [BHS74]. A non-exhaustive but quite extensive list of known executed gridshell projects is presented in fig. 1.9. The dry period is clearly visible.

### The signs of a renewal : Dorset and Doncaster

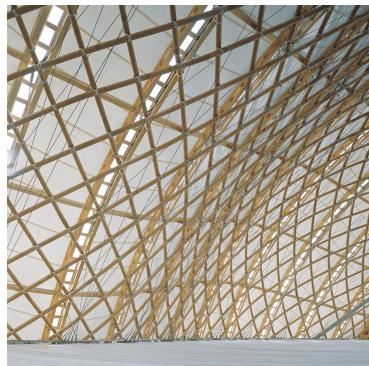
It is only 20 years later that gridshells started to reappear. In 1995, a small student residence named *Westminster Lodge* was built in Dorset, England. This dwelling was part

of a larger project – Hooke Park – aiming at investigating how the local forest resources, in particular immature roundwood thinnings, could be better utilized. The project was lead by ABK, Frei Otto, Buro Happold and Cullinan Studio. Unlike Mannheim, the timber shell was bent and weaved rod by rod on a scaffold platform. But the structural system exhibited a double layer gridshell pattern very similar to the one employed for the Multihalle (see fig. 1.5a). The rods were made out of splice-jointed roundwood to form long-length poles of diameter 200 mm. The development of this jointing technic, which could be produced directly in the forest, was part of the project’s investigations [BDH98]. The grid was braced by a layer of diagonal boards nailed to the roundwoods. The structure was finally cladded with a planted turf roof (see fig. 1.5b).

At the same time, a project of the same spirit<sup>8</sup>

### The renewal : Hannover, Dowland and Savill

with thinnings and arranged in a double layer gridshell pattern, very similar to the one employed in Mannheim.



(a) Interior view



(b) Sky view

**Figure 1.6** – Carboard gridshell built in 2000 in Hannover, Germany.

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<sup>8</sup>“The Earth Centre Forest Garden was intended to demonstrate how managed woodland could supply the vast majority of all natural resources needed for human survival”



(a) Interior view



(b) Exterior view

**Figure 1.7** – Timber gridshell built in 2003 in Downland, England.

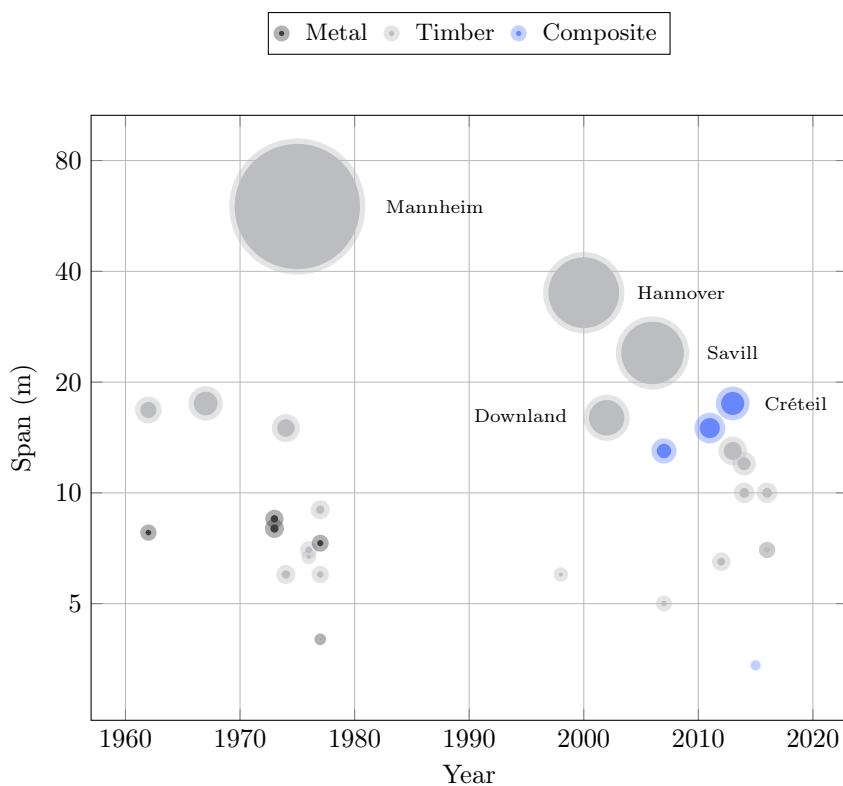


(a) Interior view



(b) Exterior view

**Figure 1.8** – Timber gridshell built in 2006 in Savill, England.



**Figure 1.9** – Known elastic gridshells built by the past. The surface of the bubbles is proportional to the covered area. Color indicates the material employed for the rods.

#### The beginnings

F. Otto and its team started their experimentations in the later 60's. One of the first elastic gridshell known was made in a workshop with students in Berkeley, USA, in 1962 [BHS74, p. 270]. Actually, this gridshell was not a timber gridshell but was made of twin steel rods. The techniques started to expand with the construction of a timber gridshell at Essen, Germany the same year. Five years later, in 1967, he designed two gridshells in wood that served as auditoria inside the German Pavilion for the 1967 exposition in Montreal, Canada. At this time, the IL had some deep links with a Japanese contractor called Seibu. This company was partly funding the research at the IL. They built an experimental structure made with tubes of hollow square section in aluminium in 1973 [Bur+78, p. 245]. Some links were set up with India too and a quite large bamboo gridshell was built there in 1974 [BHS74, p. 304].

#### Mannheim

Tous ces projets racontent une prise en main progressive (1962-1973), aussi bien technique que constructive, de cette technologie. Ce n'est qu'à l'issue de ce cheminement fait de recherche, d'enseignement, d'expérimentation, en relisant de manière critiques les expériences réalisées, que l'IL se donne la capacité à intervenir en amont d'un processus de conception habituel, et peut pousser sa technology. C'est l'avènement du projet de Mannheim, qui marque l'histoire comme le premier gridshell élastique en bois de grande ampleur (toujours un record de surface et de portée pour cette typologie structurelle).

Dans l'IL13, on trouve également de nombreuses références à des projets étudiés qui sont restés inconstructs, signe que F. Otto était très sollicité pour ce type de structures. L'expérience de Mannheim est fondatrice pour l'ingénierie européenne des structures légères. Vont s'y croiser Lehnardt (chez qui commencera) et T. Happold qui fondera plus tard son propre bureau à Bath et concevra le reste des gridshells iconiques.

EN particulier, une expérience constructrice très riche. Chaque nouveau séminaire, est l'occasion d'expérimenter une nouvelle méthode de mise en forme, un système d'assemblage nouveau, une autre façon de contreventer, un autre matériau, une autre façon de couvrir, une forme nouvelle, etc.

#### The desert

Après Mannheim, il y a un creux de 25 ans. A la lecture de l'IL13 on perçoit que les outils développés par F. Otto sont très avangardistes et ne peuvent pas s'appliquer à des contextes plus courants (économie, temps), recherche de forme sur des maquettes physiques à diverses échelles, mesures élaborées par photogrammétrie, calculs informatiques (les premiers pour l'époque). Celà est mis en valeur par T. Happold dans son article de Dowland, le manque d'outils numériques.

Néanmoins, cette expérience aura été formatrice pour un grand nombre d'ingénieurs ayant

travayé sur ce projet, en témoigne la richesse et la diversité des articles regroupés dans l'IL13. C'est d'ailleurs le propre de tels projets : une expérience collective qui amène un saut technique, une rupture, au sein de la profession, en ce sens qu'il plante les graines pour la diffusion d'un savoir nouveau. Lorsque de tels projets commenceront à refaire surface, le B. Happold aura l'exclusivité sur la conception de la grille.

De petits projets se font ci et là, en continuant d'explorer les systèmes constructifs et en particulier la question de l'enveloppe. Sous l'impulsion des héritiers directs de l'expérience de Mannheim. On rappelle qu'à Mannheim, le gridshell n'était pas isolé. Par exemple un projet avec du FerroCement. Une activité effective jusque à la fin des années 70. Puis s'en suit une vraie période de trou. Il faut attendre 1995 pour voir réapparaître ce qui ressemble à un gridshell (tissé sur son centre) à Hooke Park, pour la Westminster Lodge. On retrouve sur ce projet, centré sur la valorisation des thinnings, F. Otto et T. Happold [BDH98]. En 1998, Happold renoue avec les GS à l'occasion de la construction du Earth Center.

### Le renouveau

Avec les nouveaux logiciels de calcul, cela ouvre des portes. EN 2000 Shigeru Ban, assisté de F. Otto propose un gridshell en tubes de carton pour l'expo de Hannover. Le bureau sera Happold (T. H étant décédé). [MBO06]. Le projet rencontrera de nombreuses difficultés techniques (des problèmes de creep dans les tubes nécessitant un renforcement par des arches en bois, qui serviront également au contreventement du gridshell en carton). Et des difficultés avec le contrôleur technique allemand. Donc toile PVC transparent supplémentaire par-dessus la toile en papier, spécialement développé.

En 2002, c'est le grand retour du gridshell bois avec Downland [Har+03]. Confirmé avec Savill [HHR08]. Projets tous effectués avec le même charpentier Green Oak Carpentry, signe de l'importance de la sinergie entre architecture, conception et construction. Cette équipe réitère pour l'orangerie en 2006 avec une couverture en verre. Ce sont les premiers bâtiments de ce nom, qui assurent plus qu'une couverture, mais un véritable clos couvert, avec de l'isolation.

Ces projets restent dans la ligne historique dessinée à Mannheim par F. Otto et ses collègues.

### Des pistes ouvertes

Les méthodes numériques de Day, Barnes, Adriaenssen, Douthe, Lefevre, Tayeb 3/6/4 DOF, prise en compte de la torsion.

Le formfinding vs. grid finding (COmpas Lionel, Compas Baptise, GFFT, Compas Yannick singularité, Lina)

Les matériaux composites

Les méthodes de montage. L'inflatable(Otto, Pugnale, Quinn)

### **1.1. Elastic gridshells : a review**

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La simplification (gridshell.it => ZA, UTSA, Cluj, quaternion + Navier, Navier)

La robotisation de la production (ENPC)

Une reflexion sur l'enveloppe (booby ENPC).

Flambement (Malek, Mesnil, Lefevre)

Optimisation des sections

Description analytique de la forme (C. Williams)

N	Nickname	Year	City	Country	Type	Architecte	Enginneer	Ref
1	Berkeley	1962	Berkeley	USA	Prototype	F. Otto	F. Otto	[BHS74]
2	Essen	1962	Essen	Germany	Pavilion	F. Otto	F. Otto	[BHS74]
3	German Pavillion	1967	Montreal	Canada	Pavilion	F. Otto	F. Otto	[BHS74]
4	Seibu	1973	Tokyo	Japan	Prototype	K. Matsushita	T. Shirayanagi	[Bur+78, p. 245]
5	Ahmedabad	1976	Ahmedabad	India	Building	G. Sarabhai	G. Ramaswamy	[Bur+78, p. 249]
6	Bamboo	1976	London	England	Workshop	J. Park	B. Oleiko	[Bur+78]
7	Mexico	1973	Tokyo	Japan	Protorype	J. Hennicke	J. Hennicke	[Bur+78]
8	Mexico	1973	Tokyo	Japan	Workshop	J. Hennicke	J. Hennicke	[Bur+78]
9	Mexico	1977	Zitacuaro	Mexico	House	F. Montero	F. Montero	[Bur+78]
10	Mannheim	1975	Mannheim	Germany	Building	C. Mutschler	Arup + F. Otto	[Bur+78]
11	Japan Pavilion	2000	Hannover	Germany	Pavilion	S. Ban + F. Otto	Buro Happold	[]
12	Downland	2002	Singleton	England	Building	E. Cullinan	Buro Happold	[Har+03]
13	Savill	2006	Englefield	England	Building	G. Howells	Buro Happold	[HHR08]
14	Chiddingstone	2007	Chiddingstone	England	Canopy	P. Hulbert	Buro Happold	[]

Table 1.1 – Key numbers.

N	Year	Nickname	Type	City	Country	Architecte	Engineer	Page	Citation
1	1962	Experimental structure	Workshop	Berkeley	USA	Students	F. Otto	p. 270	[BHS74]
2	1962	Exhibition pavilion	Pavilion	Essen	Germany	F. Otto	F. Otto	p. 272	[BHS74]
3	1967	German Pavilion	Pavilion	Montreal	Canada	F. Otto	Lehonardt	p. 274	[BHS74]
4	1973	Seibu	Experiment	Tokyo	Japan	IL	IL	p. 245	[Bur+78]
5	1974	Basket shell	Experiment	Amehabad	India	G. Sarabhai	IL	p. 304	[BHS74]
6	1974	Experimental structure	Experiment	London	England	Students	Arup + IL	p. 306	[BHS74]
7	1975	Mannheim Multihalle	Building	Mannheim	Germany	C. Mutshler	Arup + IL	p. 308	[BHS74]
8	1973	Ferrocement gridshell	Building	Ahmedabad	India	G. Sarabhai	G. Ramaswamy + IL	p. 248	[Bur+78]
9	1976	AA Bamboo Latice Shell	Workshop	London	England	Students	J. Park + B. Oleiko	p. 255	[Bur+78]
10	1976	Test structure of a gridshell	Experiment	Stuttgart	Germany	Students	J. Hennicke	p. 298	[BHS74]
11	1977	Small Pavilion	Workshop	Mexico City	Mexico	Students	J. Hennicke	p. 258	[Bur+78]
11	1977	Small Greenhouse	Workshop	Zitacuaro	Mexico	Students	F. Montero	p. 260	[Bur+78]
12	1977	Experimental structure	Workshop	Mexico City	Mexico	Students	F. Montero	p. 270	[Bur+78]
13	1977	Experimental structure	Workshop	Mexico City	Mexico	Students	F. Montero	p. 270	[Bur+78]
14	1995	Westminster Lodge	Building	Dorset	England	E. Cullinan	F. Otto + Happold	p. 90	[Burton2010]
15	1998	Earth Center	Building	Doncaster	England	Grant	Happold		
16	2000	Japan Pavilion	Pavilion	Hannover	Germany	S. Ban + F. Otto	Happold		[MBO06]
17	2002	Downland	Building	Downland	England	E. Cullinan	Happold + C. William		[Har+03]
18	2003	Life Science Centre Trust	Building	Pishwanton	England				
19	2006	Savill	Building	Savill	England	G. Howells	Happold + C. William		[HHR08]
20	2007	Chiddington Orangery	Roofing	Kent	England	P. Hulbert	Happold		
21	2007	ENPC	Experiment	Noisy-Champs	France	Navier	Navier		[DBC06]
22	2011	Solidays	Pavilion	Paris	France	ENPC	Navier + T/E/S/S		[Bav+12]
23	2012	Toledo	Workshop	Naples	Italy	gridshell.it	B. D'Amico		[DKZ14]
24	2013	Créteil	Building	Créteil	France	T/E/S/S	T/E/S/S + Navier		[dPel+16]
25	2014	Toledo 2.0	Workshop	Naples	Italy	gridshell.it	B. D'Amico		[DAm+15]
26	2016	JPO	Pavilion	Toulouse	France	Quaternion	Navier + Terrell		
27	2016	FAV	Pavilion	Montpellier	France	Quaternion	Navier + Terrell		
28	2016	CLC	Workshop	Noisy-Champs	France	ENPC	Navier		
27	2016	Trondheim	Workshop	Trondheim	Norway	Students	NTNU		[Had+16]

Year	Nickname	Project			Structure		
		Country	Duration	Material	Layer	Pitch	
1975	Mannheim	Germany	LT	hemlock	double	0.5 m	

Table 1.3 – Key numbers.

9 10

## 1.2 Building free-forms

### 1.2.1 Non-standard forms

### 1.2.2 Importance of free-forms in modern architecture

### 1.2.3 Canonical approaches to build free-forms

### 1.2.4 Main challenges

## 1.3 Gridshell structure : definition and classification

### 1.3.1 Historic overview

### 1.3.2 Rigid gridshell

### 1.3.3 Elastic gridshell

The invention of the gridshell concept is commonly attributed to Frei Otto, a German architect who devoted several years to gridshells. In 1975 he achieved the famous *Mannheim Multihalle* [HL75], a wooden shell of 7500 m<sup>2</sup>, in collaboration with the engineer Edmund Happold (Arup). Literally, the word “gridshell” refers to grids behaving like shells : from a mechanical point of view that means stresses acting on the structure are mainly transmitted through compression and traction. These structures can cross large-span with very little material.

However, according to the historic evolution of the concept, characterizing a gridshell as the combination of a structural concept – a grid behaving like a shell – and a specific construction process – using the bending flexibility of the material – seems to be more accurate. The Mannheim project (in which a wooden regular and planar grid, lacking shear stiffness, is elastically deformed up to a targeted shape with the help of stays, and then braced and covered) is regarded as the starting point of this new concept.

The Mannheim project is regarded as the starting point of this new concept for which a wooden regular and planar grid, lacking shear stiffness, is elastically deformed up to a targeted shape with the help of stays, and then braced and covered. This type of gridshell, known as elastic gridshell, offers a very elegant manner to materialize freeform shapes from an initially flat and regular grid, which obviously has many practical benefits: planar geometry, standard connection nodes, standard profiles and so on.

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<sup>9</sup>German pavilion 1967 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0mtFMoseUk>

<sup>10</sup>German pavilion 1967 : <http://www.uncubemagazine.com/magazine-33-15508949.html?page1>



(a) Forum Café, Solidays (2011).



(b) Prototype (2007).



(c) Prototype (2008).

**Figure 1.10** – Prototypes and projects of GFRP elastic gridshells.

## 1.4 Elastic gridshells : revisiting Mannheim

## 1.5 Elastic gridshells : the benefits of composite materials

Glass fiber reinforced polymer (GFRP) tubes are at the heart of the presented technology. They can favorably replace wood where both resistance and bending ability of the material is sought [DCB10].

The tubes are made by pultrusion, “a continuous molding process whereby reinforcing fibers are saturated with a liquid polymer resin and then carefully formed and pulled through a heated die to form a part. Pultrusion results in straight constant cross section parts of virtually any shippable length”.<sup>11</sup> This process is very economic and its standardization guarantees very stable material and mechanical properties. It frees designers from the problem of joining wood pieces with finger joints to obtain long and continuous members and of wood durability.

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<sup>11</sup>Video explaining the pultrusion process : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MoHNZB5b\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MoHNZB5b_Y)



(a) Mannheim (1975).



(b) Mannheim (1975).



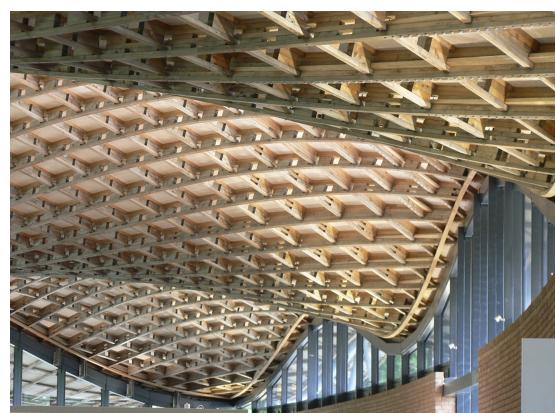
(c) Downland (2002).



(d) Downland (2002).



(e) Savill (2006).



(f) Savill (2006).

**Figure 1.11 – Major permanent projects of elastic wooden gridshells built since 1975.**

## 1.6 Gridshells

### 1.6.1 Recent projects

In 2000, Shigeru Ban innovated by shifting from wooden materials to cardboard for the construction of the Japan Pavilion at the Hanover Expo [McQuaid2006]. More recently, with the development of numerical tools, two new projects were carried out: the wooden gridshells of Downland in 2002 (Weald and Downland Gridshell, Chichester, UK) [Har+03] and Savill in 2006 (Savill Garden Gridshell, Wick Ln, UK) [HHR08]. The principles of these projects are similar to that of Mannheim; however, new construction methods were used for the newer gridshells.

The first research works on elastic gridshells are attributed to Frei Otto, founder of the *Institute for Lightweight Structures* (IL, Stuttgart, Germany). Probably one of his first elastic gridshell was built in 1962 with students at Berkley, USA, and was made with steel rods and not wooden elements. During the 60's, he built several experimental structures including one at Essen in 1962 and two at Montreal in 1967 [Lid15]. In 1975 he completed the famous Mannheim Multihalle, a wooden shell of  $7500\text{ m}^2$ , in collaboration with the engineer Edmund Happold [Otto1976, HL75]. This project is generally regarded as the starting point of this new concept.

In 2000, Shigeru Ban innovated by shifting from wooden materials to cardboard for the construction of the Japan Pavilion at the Hanover Expo [McQuaid2006]. More recently, with the development of numerical tools, new projects were carried out : the wooden gridshells of Downland, UK, in 2002 [Har+03] and Savill, UK, in 2006 [HHR08]. The principles of these projects are similar to that of Mannheim. However, new construction methods were used for the newer gridshells. The flat lattice of the Downland gridshell was built on a modular scaffold platform, which height was altered progressively to deform the lattice. The grid was braced by a third direction of laths. The lattice of the Savill gridshell was built on a fixed scaffold platform. Small jacks where used to deform the lattice, pushing from below. The grid was then braced with plywood panels, which also served as the first cladding layer.

The Orangery roof at Chiddingstone Castle is a smaller gridshell built in 2006. The lattice is very similar to the one employed in Downland. But this time the grid is braced with a diagonal cable network and the cladding is made of triangular glass panels (the first of this kind). To this end, the steel connection includes a cable clamping system and is equipped with a threaded hole to accept fixing parts for the glazing.

### 1.6.2 Recent developments

Based on this groundwork, the Navier laboratory has developed a research program on gridshells for the last decade, focusing on both the use of new materials and the development of more efficient numerical methods [Dou07]. These developments have been validated by the construction of two prototypes (Figures ??a and ??b) whose areas were about  $150\text{ m}^2$ .

In 2011, the laboratory used its expert knowledge for a large-scale project [Bav+12], the forum of the Solidays festival (??c). This achievement, built by voluntary workers, has been the first composite material gridshell to house public.

In 2012, the context is favorable for a new achievement named "*Temporary Cathedral of Crêteil*". Although this gridshell has an area very similar to the Solidays one, the project raised new challenges, in particular the challenge of reliability. Indeed, its period of use is at least two years. Additionally, the skills coming from T/E/S/S company made possible important developments such as for doors, lacing edge beam, anchorages and sleeves.

Unlike the two first prototypes, the gridshells built for Solidays and at Crêteil are based on a new approach regarding shape-structure relationship. Indeed, thanks to a numerical tool performing the compass method, the geometry of the object is no longer defined as the reversal of a hanging net – in this case, only the flat geometry could be mastered [Add13] – but now the flat geometry is straight deducted from the one proposed by the architect. This new approach opens up new architectural horizons, making possible the exploration of new shapes for gridshells.

The Faraday Pavilion : [NLG13] The Pishwanton / lothian : [Pishwanton2003] The laboratory Navier tested various numerical methods to generate such grids [BBC09] Masson : [MM17].

### 1.6.3 Gridshell in composite material

The benefits of GFRP gridshells have been covered previously. We just recall the main aspects.

The gridshells built in composite material, being at the heart of this paper, are consistent with the framework defined previously, that is to say :

Glass fiber reinforced polymer (GFRP) tubes are at the heart of the presented technology. They can favorably replace wood where both resistance and bending ability of the material is sought [DCB10].

The tubes are made by pultrusion, “a continuous molding process whereby reinforcing fibers are saturated with a liquid polymer resin and then carefully formed and pulled through a heated die to form a part. Pultrusion results in straight constant cross section parts of virtually any shippable length”<sup>12</sup> This process is very economic and its standardization guarantees very stable material and mechanical properties. It frees designers from the problem of joining wood pieces with finger joints to obtain long and continuous members and of wood durability.

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<sup>12</sup>Video explaining the pultrusion process : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MoHNZB5b\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MoHNZB5b_Y)

### Structural Typology

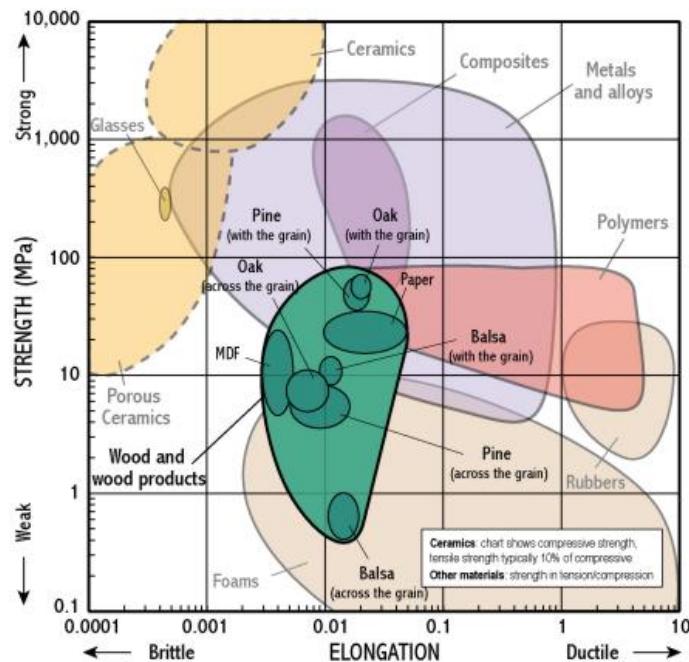
Their mechanical behaviour is very similar to the one of real shells even if the material is discrete and located in a grid more or less open. In spite of that, gridshells benefit from the same advantages as the ones showed by an eggshell : they can cross large span using a low amount of material. Their stiffness is mainly linked to their double-curved shape.

### Material Flexibility for Structural Rigidity

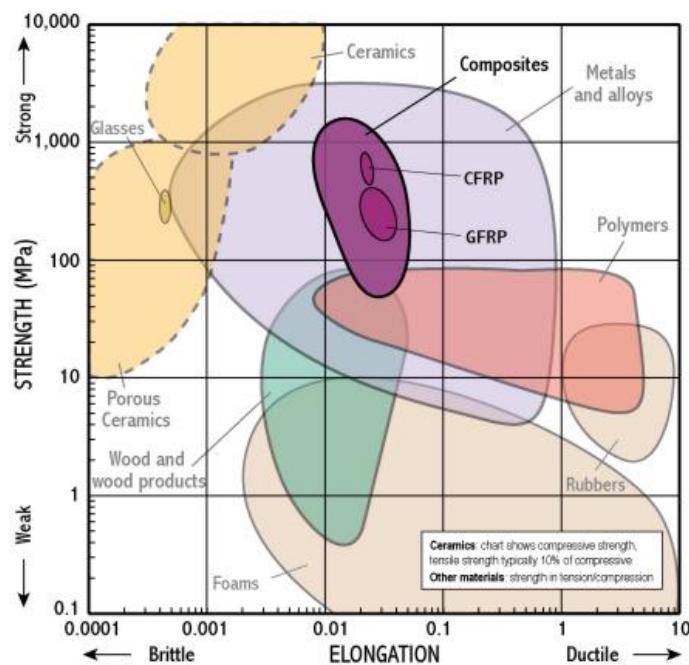
In this field of application, composite materials like glass fibre reinforced polymer (GFRP) could favourably replace wood, where both resistance and bending ability of the material is sought [DCB10]. The stiffness of the structure does not derive from the intrinsic material rigidity but principally from its geometric curvature. Ideally, the composite profiles are produced by pultrusion, an economic continuous moulded process. The standardization of the process guarantees very stable material and mechanical properties. It frees designers from the painful problematic of wood joining and wood durability. The characterization of this material is presented further in the paper.

### Erection Process

Usually, the grid morphology is not trivial and leads to design numerous costly and complex joints. To overcome this issue, an original and innovative erection process was developed that takes advantage of the flexibility inherent to slender elements. A regular planar grid made of long continuous linear members is built on the ground (Figure 1.14a). The elements are pinned together so the grid has no in-plane shear stiffness and can accommodate large-scale deformations during erection. Then, the grid is bent elastically to its final shape (Figure 1.13). Finally, the grid is frozen in the desired shape with a third layer of bracing members (Figure 1.14b) and the structure becomes a shell.



(a) Forum Café, Solidays (2011).

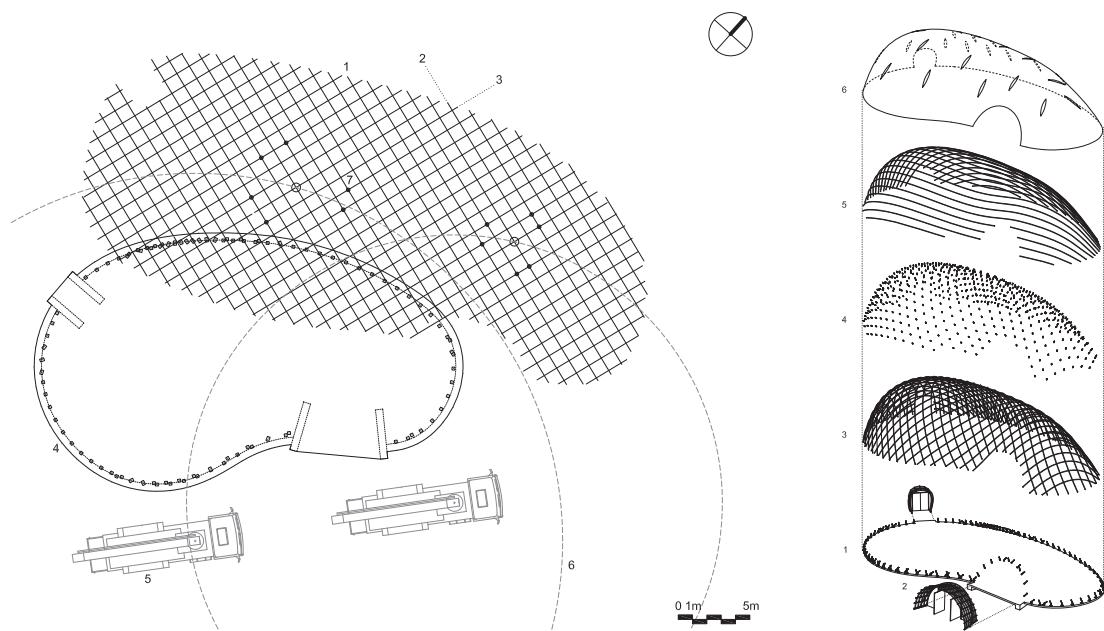


(b) Prototype (2007).

Figure 1.12 – Prototypes and projects of GFRP elastic gridshells.



**Figure 1.13** – Erection of the primary grid by two cranes



**Figure 1.14** – Erection plan and construction stages

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