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Abstract

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Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
1. Building a framework for adsorption data processing	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Physical models of adsorption	2
1.2.1. The Henry model	3
1.2.2. Langmuir and multi-site Langmuir model	3
1.2.3. BET model	6
1.2.4. Toth model	7
1.2.5. Temkin model	7
1.2.6. Jensen-Seaton model	8
1.2.7. Quadratic model	8
1.2.8. Virial model	9
1.2.9. Vacancy solution theory models	9
1.3. Characterisation of materials through adsorption	10
1.3.1. Specific surface area and pore volume calculation	11
1.3.2. Assessing porosity	14
1.3.3. Predicting multicomponent adsorption	19
1.4. pyGAPS overview	21
1.4.1. Core structure	21
1.4.2. Creation of an Isotherm	23
1.4.3. Units	25
1.4.4. Workflow	25
1.4.5. Characterisation using pyGAPS	26
1.5. Processing a large adsorption dataset	33
1.5.1. The NIST ISODB dataset	33
1.5.2. A comparison between surface area calculation methods	35
1.5.3. Variability of the dataset	36
1.6. Conclusion	39
Bibliography	40

2. Extending bulk analysis of porous compounds through calorimetry	43
2.1. Introduction	43
2.2. Energetics of adsorption	44
2.2.1. Forces involved in adsorption	44
2.2.2. Adsorption thermodynamics	45
2.3. Measuring the enthalpy of adsorption	49
2.3.1. Isostatic enthalpy of adsorption	49
2.3.2. Microcalorimetry	50
2.3.3. Experimental apparatus and accuracy	52
2.4. Measurements and analysis	53
2.4.1. Comparison between enthalpies of adsorption measured through the direct and indirect method	53
2.4.2. An example dataset on a reference material	54
2.4.3. A study on a novel MOF	56
2.5. Conclusion	59
Bibliography	61
3. Exploring the impact of synthesis and defects on adsorption measurements	64
3.1. Introduction	64
3.2. The defective nature of MOFs	66
3.2.1. Types of crystal defects and their analogues in MOFs	66
3.2.2. Consequences of defects	68
3.2.3. Defect engineering of MOFs	69
3.2.4. The propensity of UiO-66(Zr) for defect generation	69
3.3. Materials and methods	71
3.3.1. Materials	71
3.3.2. Methods for quantifying defects	72
3.4. Results and discussion	74
3.4.1. Crystallinity of leached samples	74
3.4.2. NMR	74
3.4.3. Thermogravimetry results	74
3.4.4. Nitrogen sorption at 77K	77
3.4.5. Characterisation of trends	77
3.4.6. Carbon dioxide isotherms	83
3.5. Conclusion	84
Bibliography	85
4. Exploring the impact of material form on adsorption measurements	90
4.1. Introduction	90

Contents

4.2. Shaping in context	91
4.3. Materials, shaping and characterisation methods	93
4.3.1. Materials	93
4.3.2. Shaping Procedure	94
4.3.3. Characterisation of powders and pellets	95
4.3.4. Sample activation for adsorption	95
4.4. Results and discussion	95
4.4.1. Thermal stability	95
4.4.2. Adsorption isotherms at 77K and room temperature	97
4.4.3. Room temperature gas adsorption and microcalorimetry	99
4.4.4. Vapour adsorption	105
4.5. Conclusion	112
Bibliography	113
5. Exploring novel behaviours	115
5.1. Introduction	115
5.2. Compliance in porous crystals	116
5.2.1. Examining the assumption of an inert adsorbent	116
5.2.2. Flexibility in metal organic frameworks	117
5.2.3. Describing and inducing MOF compliance	119
5.2.4. Consequences and applications of flexible MOFs	120
5.2.5. Unique flexible behaviour of DUT-49	121
5.3. Materials and characterisation methods	122
5.3.1. Materials	122
5.3.2. Characterisation methods	123
5.4. Results and discussion	125
5.4.1. The structural transition leading to NGA in DUT-49	126
5.4.2. Impact of framework structure on transition mechanics	129
5.4.3. An in-depth look at the NGA mechanism	131
5.5. Conclusion	131
Bibliography	132
A. Common characterisation techniques	137
A.1. Thermogravimetry	137
A.2. Bulk density determination	137
A.3. Skeletal density determination	138
A.4. Nitrogen physisorption at 77 K	138
A.5. Vapour physisorption at 298 K	138
A.6. Gravimetric isotherms	139

Contents

A.7. High throughput isotherm measurement	139
A.8. Powder X-ray diffraction	139
A.9. Nuclear magnetic resonance	139
A.10. Adsorption manometry and calorimetry at 303 K	139
Bibliography	139
B. Synthesis method of referenced materials	120
B.1. Takeda 5A reference carbon	120
B.2. MCM-41 controlled pore glass	120
B.3. Zr fumarate MOF	120
B.4. UiO-66(Zr) for defect study	121
B.5. UiO-66(Zr) for shaping study	121
B.6. MIL-100(Fe) for shaping study	121
B.7. MIL-127(Fe) for shaping study	122
Bibliography	122
C. Appendix for chapter 4	123
C.1. Calorimetry dataset UiO-66(Zr)	123
C.2. Calorimetry MIL-100(Fe)	124
C.3. Calorimetry MIL-127(Fe)	127
Bibliography	127
D. Calculation of uncertainty in adsorption measurements	129
Bibliography	129
D. Appendix for chapter 3	129
D.1. Acid and solvent properties	129
D.2. Powder diffraction patterns	130
D.3. TGA curves	130
D.3.1. DMF leached samples	130
D.3.2. Water leached samples	131
D.3.3. Methanol leached samples	132
D.3.4. DMSO leached samples	133
D.3.5. High resolution curves	134
D.4. Nitrogen sorption isotherms	135
D.4.1. DMF leached samples	135
D.4.2. H ₂ O leached samples	136
D.4.3. MeOH leached samples	137
D.4.4. DMSO leached samples	138
D.5. Characterisation	139

Contents

Bibliography	140
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5. Exploring novel behaviours

5.1. Introduction

Until this chapter, it has been assumed that the porous materials are static when adsorbing a gas. Differences in pore size, crystallinity or structure may exist, but these properties did not change as the host fluid enters the pores. In most cases this is a reasonable assumption. However, it is not universally applicable, as the forces and interactions exerted during adsorption may induce changes in solid itself.

Such effects in classic porous inorganic materials like zeolites, carbons and clays take the form of structural contraction and expansion, swelling or counterion displacement.⁽¹⁾ It is only recently that flexibility was discovered in coordination polymers, such as MOFs. A feature which arises from their comparatively weak coordination bonds or pliant organic components, it allows for a systematic deflection of bonds throughout the entire crystal lattice. As such, the term “soft porous crystals” defines porous solids that are both highly ordered and possess the ability to reversibly transform their structure upon external stimuli. Part of the so-called third generation of crystalline porous compounds, they represent some of the latest developments in the field of MOFs.

The unique properties of flexible materials can result in their application in fields such as sensing, micromechanical devices and highly efficient gas storage. It is these perspectives that make their synthesis and design a key research interest. However, their flexible nature introduces new challenges in their characterisation, as factors such as temperature and thermal history⁽²⁾, crystal size^(3,4), external pressure^(5,6), structural defects⁽⁷⁾ and even adsorption kinetics play a role in their compliance. This type of variability goes beyond what has been insofar discussed in this thesis and it is here where a combined characterisation approach becomes essential in understanding the fundamental physics governing flexibility and potential prediction of adsorption behaviour.

Summary

After a brief introduction of the background of soft porous materials, this chapter will present the characterization of a novel flexible MOF (DUT-49) and its analogues. This material un-

dergoes a sudden collapse of its pore network into a closed form state upon adsorption, resulting in the expulsion of gas from its pores. This phenomena was coined “negative gas adsorption” (NGA). The text will focus on characterisation through calorimetric methods performed by Paul Iacomi, together with references of results obtained by collaborating groups included in order obtain a complete story of the underlying mechanism behind NGA.

Contribution

The synthesis of all MOFs was performed by Simon Krause (TU Dresden), together with their initial characterization through nitrogen adsorption at 77 K. Ambient and low temperature calorimetry was carried out by Paul Iacomi. Computer simulations of adsorption isotherms are the result of work from Jack Evans and Prof. FX Coudert. Mechanical compression experiments were performed in the group of Prof. Guillaume Maurin in Montpellier. Prof. Philip Llewellyn and Prof. Stefan Kaskel were instrumental in the analysis of the results obtained.

5.2. Compliance in porous crystals

5.2.1. Examining the assumption of an inert adsorbent

Adsorption induced changes in porous media have been known to occur for over 90 years⁽⁸⁾, with both clays, coals and polymers undergoing swelling during gas or vapour uptake.⁽⁹⁾ However, the effect upon the macroscopic properties of the material is often negligibly small and of little consequence to industrial adsorption processes. Studies of this aspect of porous adsorbents have therefore been scarce in the large part of the 20th century, likewise influenced by lack of sufficiently accurate methods for characterising and modelling such occurrences.

In recent years, the advent of reference materials, highly sensitive methods such as synchrotron-grade light sources and *in silico* computational techniques such as DFT has put at our disposal the tools required to study these transformations. Together with the discovery of their role in natural and industrial processes e.g. the swelling of shale during natural gas extraction, maturation of concrete and the perspectives afforded by novel porous materials, these factors have generated much scientific interest in material compliance. For example, the attractive option of combined carbon capture and methane recovery implemented through pumping of carbon dioxide into reservoirs is prohibited by swelling-induced loss of porosity and well blocking.⁽⁹⁾

In-depth studies⁽¹⁰⁾ have revealed that most porous materials posses some small degree

of compliance, with *in-situ* dilatometry going so far as to obtain pore size distributions from accurate volume changes.⁽¹¹⁾ Most flexible processes can be likened to continuous order processes. It is, however, the discovery of large scale flexibility in MOFs such as MIL-53 and linker-controlled gate opening like in ZIF-8, where the transformation between the different framework states occurs suddenly at precise points in the loading curve, which has shown that compliance may also take the form of a first-order transition. Such types of transformations are desirable⁽¹²⁾ due to their highly specific response. The possible dependence of flexibility on other stimuli, such as light, mechanical pressure, temperature, magnetic fields may allow for precise tuning of structural changes. As such, it is reasonable to state that the mobility of the solid phase can no longer be ignored.

5.2.2. Flexibility in metal organic frameworks

Since the highlight of compliance in porous coordination polymers in the report of Kitagawa et al.⁽¹²⁾, much progress has been made in the synthesis and understanding of this phenomenon. An exhaustive review of MOF flexibility is outside the scope of this thesis, with the field progressing rapidly enough to generate a wealth of critical literature.^(13–19) Some of the known types of structural flexibility encountered in MOFs will be briefly discussed, with a summary available in Figure 5.1.

Since MOFs, like clays and graphite, can form discrete two-dimensional sheets, bound together by weak Van-der-Waals, $\pi - \pi$ interactions or hydrogen bonds, adsorbed molecules may force these layers apart by intercalation. The concept is taken further in the pillared layer approach, where the sheets are connected by tertiary linkers instead of weak attractions. With the judicious choice of linker they can act as springs, allowing pore expansion while maintaining structural integrity.

As briefly mentioned in chapter 3, a large void space in the unit cells allows secondary networks to grow throughout the MOF, effectively creating an intercalated structure.^(21,23) These secondary grids are independent of the primary framework and are displaced upon guest adsorption.⁽²⁸⁾ This internal translation may also be associated with a tilting of the linker⁽²⁹⁾, combining intercalation with structural-deformation type flexibility.

The origin of flexibility may be purely due to the linker itself. Organic bonds are inherently labile, as seen in polymer chains, unsaturated connections in the linker may bend if the strain on the organic strut overcomes its tensile strength. Increasing the linker length often induces this type of flexibility, for example in the IRMOF isorecticular series of materials.⁽²⁴⁾ Even an unsaturated bond may be induced by a photon with a suitable energy to undergo an analogue of a *cis-trans* transition. The deformation may also lead to expansion and therefore of framework swelling, as encountered in MIL-88 and its derivatives.⁽³⁰⁾

5. Exploring novel behaviours

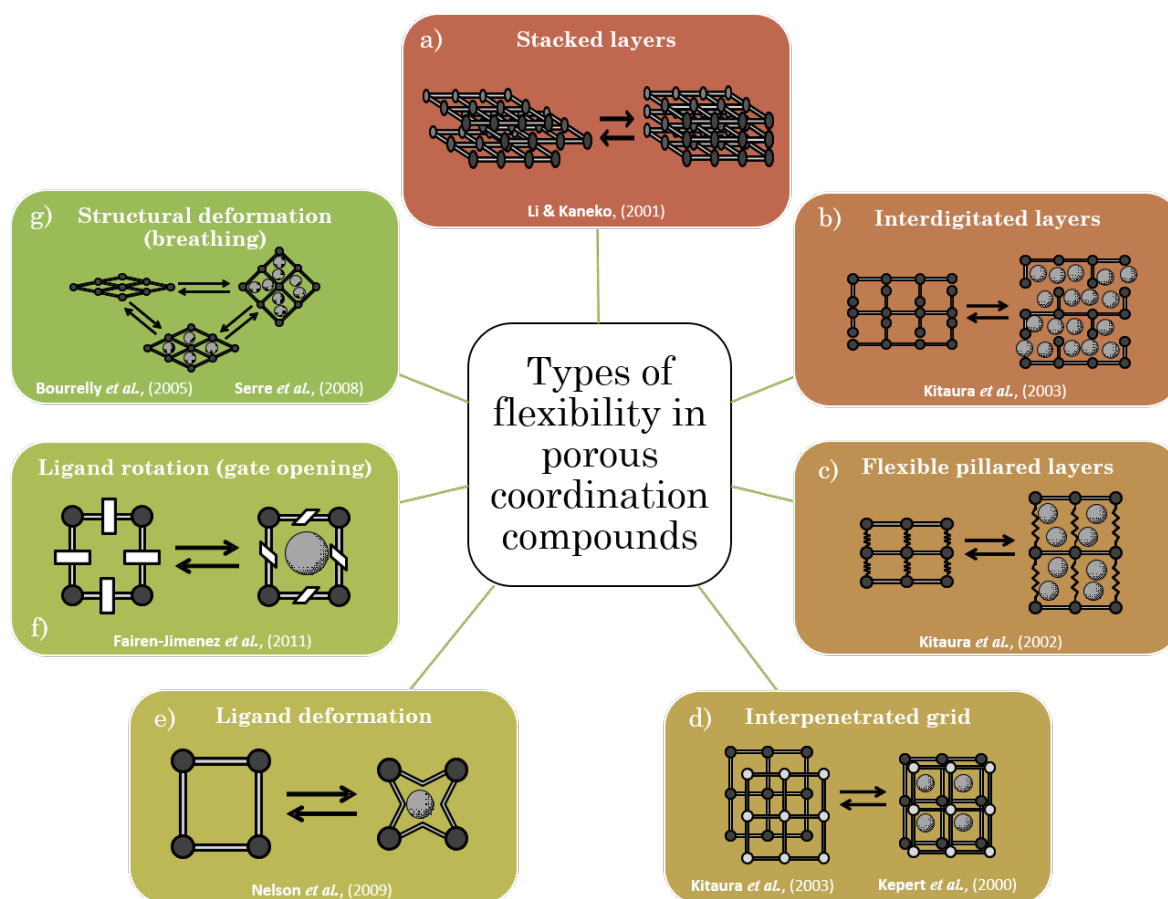


Figure 5.1.: A (non-exhaustive) visual summary of the types of flexibility documented in MOFs, as detailed in (a) Li and Kaneko⁽²⁰⁾ (b) Kitaura et al.⁽²¹⁾ (c) Kitaura et al.⁽²²⁾ (d) Kitaura et al.⁽²¹⁾, Kepert et al.⁽²³⁾ (e) Nelson et al.⁽²⁴⁾ (f) Fairen-Jimenez et al.⁽²⁵⁾ (g) Bourrelly et al.⁽²⁶⁾, Serre et al.⁽²⁷⁾

MOFs can also have structural flexibility which does not require any volume changes in the unit cell. The rotation of linkers can act as gating for different guests, allowing entry of probes larger than the window size would suggest or preferential adsorption of a gas which has the right property to act as a “key” from a mixture.⁽³¹⁾ The former effect is common in zeolitic imidazole frameworks (ZIFs).⁽²⁵⁾

The discovery of the so-called “breathing” type of structural deformation^(26,27,32) in the MIL-53 family of materials has revealed step-like transformations in its unit cell size and metastable intermediaries with an open pore (**op**), closed pore (**cp**) and narrow/intermediate states (**np/ip**). No other family of flexible MOFs has, to date, generated more scientific interest. This is likely due to the relative stability of the material, combined with its ability to undergo massive and reversible structural deflections, while retaining its crystallinity. The relatively simple structure and large capability for functionalisation, either through ligand modification or exchange of the metal node (with variants of MIL-53 synthesised for Cr, Fe, Al, Sc, Ga or In), allowed for its use as an archetypal material for the study of flexible be-

haviour. More recently, similar materials, like DUT-8(M) (M=Ni, Co, Cu, Zn) which allow the the impact of the metal⁽³³⁾ on compliance to be evidenced have emerged.

5.2.3. Describing and inducing MOF compliance

The mechanistic phenomena during adsorption can be seen as an overlap⁽³⁴⁾ of several competing effects: a sub-monolayer contraction⁽³⁵⁾ resulting from micropore bridging or surface stresses, followed by a monotonic expansion with the gradual decrease of the solid-fluid interface energy also known as the Bangham effect.⁽³⁶⁾ Such behaviour is highly dependent of pore size, geometry and anisotropy, with condensation in macropores a further complex source of strain.^(37–39) The degree of adsorption induced changes in a framework is generally a function of its porosity, with very high surface area materials such as aerogels capable of undergoing up to 30% deformation.⁽⁴⁰⁾ In MOFs, the adsorption stresses are no different than in other materials. However, the ability of the porous network to undergo displacements is much higher, due to its low rigidity, in between that of “hard” adsorbents such as zeolites/silica and purely organic polymers (although porous covalent frameworks can also achieve self-support and porosity).

Finding a suitable model that would predict both the adsorption induced stress and the resulting structural changes from strain has so far remained a challenge. A thermodynamic-based method which has been successfully applied to breathing MOFs is that of Neimark et al.⁽⁴¹⁾. This model assumes that the deformation strain is fully determined due to surface stress, calculated from the grand thermodynamical of a rigid analogue of the pore. It has been used to explain the existence domains of MIL-53(Al)⁽⁴²⁾, in conjunction with an osmotic thermodynamic description of the framework itself.⁽⁴³⁾ For mesoporous materials, the stress-strain model has been extended by Gor and Neimark⁽³⁴⁾ through the Derjaguin–Broekhoff–de Boer (DBdB) theory⁽⁴⁴⁾ and applied to predict the resulting strain in mesoporous silica. Nevertheless a complete theory of adsorption-deformation which can fully predict the changes in the measured enthalpy of adsorption and the mechanistic behaviour of MOFs has remained elusive.

The most promising characteristics of flexible MOFs are the ability to control the compliance through external means which are detached from guest loading, which would dramatically expand their potential applications. Pure mechanical pressure on a flexible material is often enough to induce transitions. First observed on ZIFs, through pressure induced phase change^(45,46) and latter applied to breathing MOFs using mercury porosimetry^(47,48), it shows a direct relationship between the bulk modulus of a MOF and its flexible behaviour. Entropic control through temperature-induced switching has been shown to be possible in MIL-53 by Liu et al.⁽²⁾, explained as a change in the range of metastability of its pore forms.⁽⁴²⁾ More precise external control may be possible if molecules which have the ability

to switch their state when exposed to suitable wavelengths are used as linkers. In this case light irradiation may be used to force the transition.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Magnetic field dependent switching can also be theorised, although has not been so far encountered. One of the least understood factors that changes the flexible behaviour of porous crystals is the effect of particle size. It is clear that the thermodynamical potential of the crystal surface has a profound influence on its compliance, as shown on the large shift of the gate-opening pressure of ZIF-8.⁽³⁾ However, a rigorous model of the contribution of the surface on breathing has yet to be developed in our knowledge. Finally, the presence of structural defects likely impacts the framework flexibility, as highlighted by Bennett et al.⁽⁷⁾ in a recent article, although currently few studies have focused on this subject.

5.2.4. Consequences and applications of flexible MOFs

The study of flexible MOFs is motivated from both a desire for fundamental understanding of compliance and from the potential applications of such systems. The use of soft porous crystals in sensing and gas storage and separation is evident, although applications in catalysis, electrochemistry and drug delivery have also been alluded to by recent studies.

The usefulness of adsorption induced flexibility for sensors or actuators has been recognised, initially by nature itself, with humidity induced swelling acting to open pine cones.⁽⁵⁰⁾ More recently, similar sensing devices based on adsorption strain in mesoporous silica have been developed such as a flexing silica-polymer membrane⁽⁵¹⁾ or deformation of a nano sized cantilever⁽⁵²⁾ which show promise for use in micromechanical systems.

From a gas storage and separation point of view, changes in the adsorbent structure may yield crucial process improvements. Pressure swing adsorption (PSA) is heavily dependent on the working capacity of the adsorbent used, or the difference between loading at the operation pressure and at the regeneration pressure. In this case, an S-shaped isotherm, with the vertical part of the slope in the aforementioned pressure range would lead to high process efficiency gains by eliminating material “dead volume adsorbed”.⁽¹³⁾ In a temperature swing process (TSA), where the regeneration is performed through heating of the adsorbent bed, the key parameter is the integral enthalpy of adsorption, a measure of the energy requirements for the process. As a part of the chemical potential of the adsorbed phase is used by the mechanical contraction of the material, flexible adsorbents have the potential of intrinsic thermal management, reducing the energy cost.⁽⁵³⁾ Both effects are equally applicable to the storage of pure gasses, increasing the storage capacity and minimizing the energetic requirement of recovery. Entrapment of guest molecules inside a gated pore might lend itself to temperature controlled storage and release of gasses⁽⁵⁴⁾, or “sealing” of a target gas inside the structure once adsorption has taken place. It is also possible that by using external mechanical pressure to control flexibility, the adsorption behaviour of porous

materials may be tuned, as suggested by the work of Chanut⁽⁶⁾ on MIL-53.

Catalytic applications of flexible MOFs could be envisaged where the switching behaviour can bring into contact active sites or hold reactants in place until complete reaction has taken place. A recent study by Souto et al.⁽⁵⁵⁾, has shown that the redox potential of the sulphur bond in a tetrathiafulvalene breathing MOF is dependent on its dihedral angle in different pore states. This raises the possibility of tunability of the oxidation potential of flexible framework. Finally flexible MOFs constructed of biocompatible materials could be used as drug delivery methods^(56,57) if release of the encapsulated molecule is triggered through a structural transition.

5.2.5. Unique flexible behaviour of DUT-49

It is clear that one of the most desirable kinds of flexibility is one that can be likened to a Heaviside step function, with switching between two states or phases. However, not many MOFs synthesised to date follow this type of behaviour. It is why the surprising compliance of DUT-49, a highly porous MOF constructed with a super-molecular approach, has generated interest in the MOF community.

In the initial paper of Stoeck et al.⁽⁵⁸⁾, the synthesis of DUT-49 through a super-molecular approach is described, with the goal of generating a highly porous material. The MOF is built through the secondary building unit or SBU approach, where the crystallographic vertices of the structure are metal organic polyhedra (MOP), in this case 12-connected cuboctahedra based on copper paddlewheels, which are then connected by a tetratopic carboxylate linker. The resulting MOF forms a face centered cubic (**fcu**) net if the MOP are considered as nodes and a trimodal pore size distribution: the 12 Å MOP, a 18 Å tetrahedron and a very large 26 Å octahedron. The material has a high nitrogen accessible surface area (of more than 5000 m²/g) and accessible volume (84.7%).

In the original study, the MOF did not show any flexible behaviour. However, it was later found by Krause et al.⁽⁵⁹⁾ that when adsorbing CH₄ at 111 K, a sharp step occurs in the isotherm, corresponding to an **op/cp** transition. More interestingly, the step is accompanied by an expulsion of the adsorbed gas from the interior of the pores, increasing the pressure in the experiment cell. This type of pressure-amplifying transition has been coined negative gas adsorption (NGA) and was found to occur with other adsorbates at different temperatures such as C₄H₁₀ at 303 K or Xe at 195 K, which allowed study of the transition at ambient temperature and through ¹²⁹Xe NMR spectroscopy.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The origin of this phenomenon has been elucidated by Evans et al.⁽⁶¹⁾ where it has been shown to emerge due to a buckling of the central strut of the tetratopic linker under compressive stress induced by adsorption, similar to the failure of a metal column under critical

load. The **op** and **cp** phase stability depends on the adsorbate loading of the material, with the **op** form being energetically favoured at zero and high loadings. At intermediate pore filling, the **cp** state is stabilized by the fluid molecules and becomes energetically favoured. At this point, the **op** phase is metastable and can contract if the energy barrier between the two states is overcome. As the transition from the **cp** to the **op** state requires an activation energy, re-opening of the structure is only possible through complete structure loading. If the system is in its **cp** state during adsorbate removal, the structure undergoes complete structural collapse.

However, questions still remain about the driving forces behind the transition itself such as the contribution of guest-host interactions, as well as the temperature range and adsorbates where it is possible. The rational design of such materials is also put into question, where framework parameters such as linker length, functionalisation and composition may be used to tune the pressure and extent of NGA. It is here where the adsorption methodology introduced in chapter 1 combined with *in-situ* calorimetry as presented in chapter 2 can be used to shed light on the energetic background of NGA in DUT-49.

5.3. Materials and characterisation methods

5.3.1. Materials

Several DUT materials have been synthesised in order to study the effect of different parameters on the switching behaviour. From the point of view of the criterion of interest, the materials can be divided into the following categories:

- Series dedicated to studying the influence of isorecticular design through variation of linker length in the order of theoretical increasing porosity: DUT-48, DUT-46, DUT-49, DUT-50, DUT-151/DUT-152. These materials are designed with a linker of increasing size by using differently structured phenyl rings. A corresponding increase in porosity is expected, however, starting from a 4-linear phenyl chain (DUT-151), the internal voids are large enough to allow for a secondary interpenetrated network to develop. An attempt to prevent this by grafting bulky naphthalene rings was made in the synthesis of DUT-152, but the resulting structure was still found to be interpenetrated.
- Series assessing the impact of steric hindrance of the central linker bond on NGA, in the order of connectivity: DUT-49, DUT-149, DUT-148, DUT-147. The rationale behind this approach is to improve the tensile strength of the strut by the addition of sterically hindering side connections.
- Series investigating the effect of heterocycles on compliant behaviour, using thiophene as replacement for the benzene rings, in the order of increasing linker size: DUT-170,

5. Exploring novel behaviours

DUT-171, DUT-172, DUT-173. If interactions with the framework plays a role in NGA, the addition of potentially stronger host-guest sites.

- Series aiming to possess a progressively more labile central strut through the use of different degrees of saturation, in order of central bond hybridization: DUT-160, DUT-161, DUT-163. It was found that the removal of solvent from DUT-162 could not be performed without structure collapse. The softness of the saturated backbone lends itself to an unstable **op** state.
- Series of increasing crystallite size to study the effect of the crystal surface to volume ratio on NGA. Different sizes of DUT-49 were synthesised either through the addition of an acid modulator for obtaining large crystals or through the addition of a base to inhibit crystal growth. A series of 4 DUT-49 was received, of 800 nm, 1 μm , 4 μm and 10 μm average size respectively.

The material name, together with the central part of the linker, which was modified to change the flexible behaviour of the framework, is presented in Table 5.1.

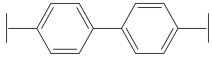
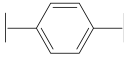
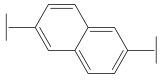
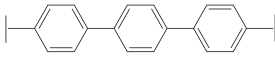
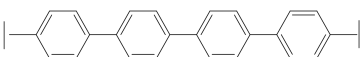
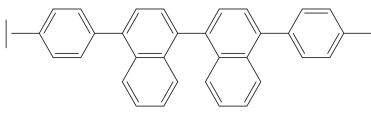
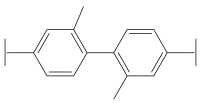
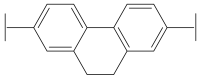
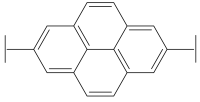
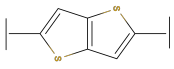
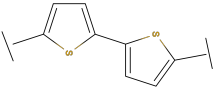
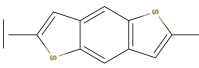
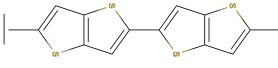
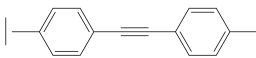
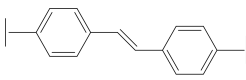
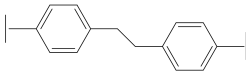
5.3.2. Characterisation methods

In order to examine the energetic components of both adsorption and NGA, the combined manometry and calorimetry methodology first presented in chapter 2 was used. Ambient temperature calorimetry was conducted at 303 K with probes such as butane, propane and propylene using the step-by-step gas introduction method. The exact procedure for such an experiment can be found in section A.10 of Appendix A.

For low temperatures (77 K), a high resolution continuous introduction method was employed, together with a home-made calorimetric system first described in the work of Rouquerol et al.⁽⁶²⁾. To summarize, the adsorbate is placed in a J-shaped custom designed glass cell which is then sealed with an oxyacetylene torch prior to evacuation and sample activation. Borosilicate glass is selected as the material of choice to prevent any thermal expansion induced leaks. The cell is then introduced into a LN_2 -filled dewar, through the bottom of the differential calorimeter. Good thermal equilibrium between the cell and surrounding thermopile is ensured using by using a helium blanket in the calorimetric enclosure, kept under positive pressure through a continuous low flow. The connection to the gas dosing system is made through a Swagelock VCR $1/4''$ stainless steel connection. High leak resistance and gas purity is assured by the single use copper joint metal-to-metal interlock. Pressure is measured through the use of a double gauge assembly, a sensitive low pressure gauge (up to 2 kPa) and an ambient pressure gauge (up to 120 kPa). A sonic nozzle is used to control the flow of adsorbate into the reference volume and the cell. A separate calibration step is performed at the start of each experiment to determine the adsorbate flowrate

5. Exploring novel behaviours

Table 5.1.: Flexible materials analogous to DUT-49

Name	Linker center	Study	Observations
DUT-49		Original material	Multiple crystal sizes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DUT-49(o)-0.8 μm • DUT-49(s)-1.0 μm • DUT-49(m)-4.0 μm • DUT-49(l)-10.0 μm
DUT-48		Linker size	—
DUT-46		Linker size	—
DUT-50		Linker size	—
DUT-151		Linker size	Interpenetrated
DUT-152		Linker size	Interpenetrated
DUT-149		Functionalization	—
DUT-148		Functionalization	—
DUT-147		Functionalization	—
DUT-170		Heterocycle	—
DUT-171		Heterocycle	—
DUT-172		Heterocycle	—
DUT-173		Heterocycle	—
DUT-160		Strut saturation	—
DUT-161		Strut saturation	—
DUT-162		Strut saturation	No stable op state

5. Exploring novel behaviours

and the dead volume before the entrance to the cell. An experiment takes between 1–4 days depending on the flowrate used. A picture of the different components of the setup can be seen in Figure 5.2.

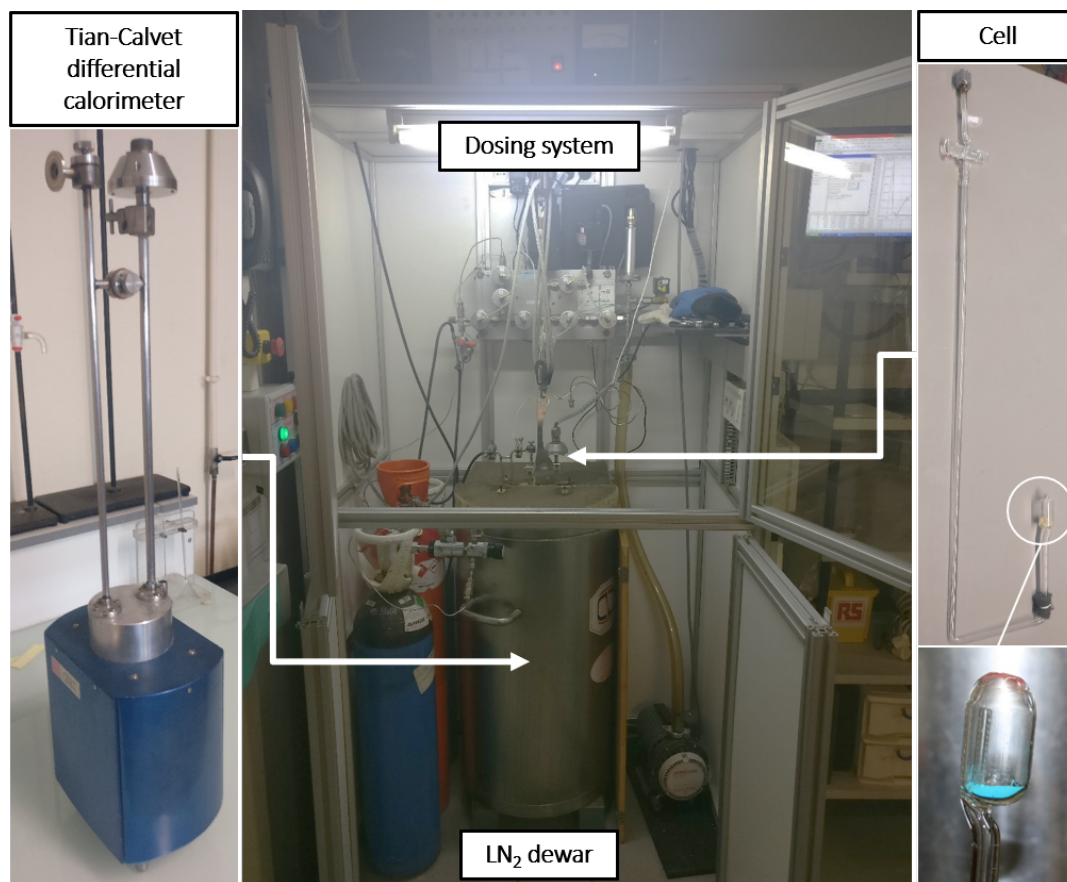


Figure 5.2.: The low temperature calorimetry setup

Extreme care has to be taken during sample preparation, as all materials studied are sensitive to heat and water vapour. To prevent any decomposition, the samples were stored under an inert argon atmosphere in a glovebox. The loading of ambient temperature cells was performed inside the glovebox while filling and sealing of low temperature glass cells was done in an argon flow. After sample cell preparation, the materials are activated under dynamic vacuum at 120 °C.

5.4. Results and discussion

The first part of this section will present the characteristics of the NGA step in DUT-49 as recorded by ambient calorimetry, and what a cursory examination of the isotherm and enthalpy curves at 303 K can reveal about the energetics of the system and the stability of the

two phases.

The following subsection contains the results of the studies on DUT-49 analogues, highlighting the effects that linker elongation and functionalization have on the adsorption behaviour and NGA extent at ambient temperature.

Finally, an in-depth study of the DUT-49 NGA mechanism is performed, employing a variety of gas probes (N_2 , Ar, O_2 , CO) at low temperature. The time-resolved data obtained through continuous adsorbate introduction sheds light on the influence of the host-guest and guest-guest interactions on transition mechanics, the energetic barrier of the transition state and on system kinetics. A comparison with non-flexible analogues allows an assessment of the role of the pore filling mechanism on the structural transition to be made.

5.4.1. The structural transition leading to NGA in DUT-49

In the time-resolved pressure and calorimetry signal recorded when performing butane adsorption at 303 K, the NGA step is clearly visible as the pressure in the cell suddenly increases after a dosing point. An example can be seen in Figure 5.3, next to a regular dosing step. A short time after the adsorbate is introduced in the measurement cell, the material contracts. The calorimeter signal is positive, therefore the overall process is still exothermic — even though desorption and structural transition, both endothermic processes, are taking place.

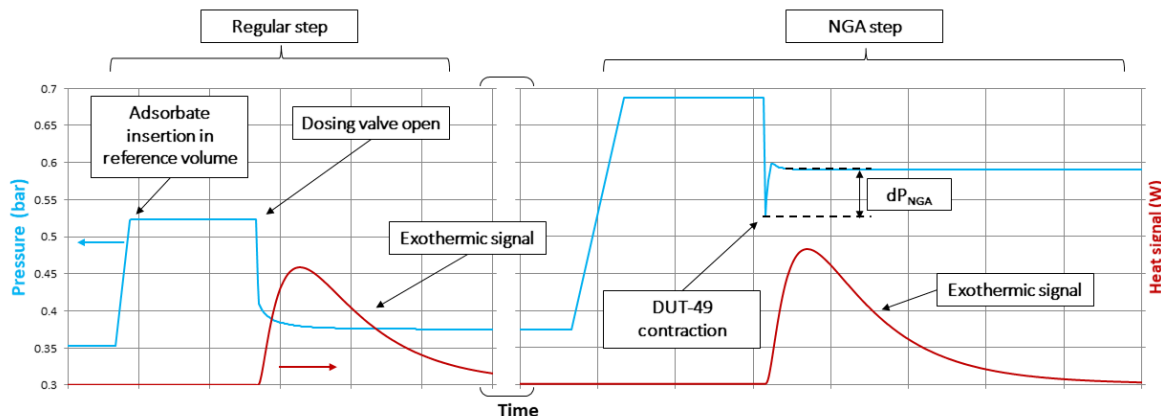


Figure 5.3.: The pressure and calorimeter signal from butane adsorption on DUT-49, highlighting a typical step (left) and the observed NGA step (right)

The signals are then processed to yield the combined isotherm and differential heat of adsorption. Figure 5.4 shows two isotherms recorded on different DUT-49 samples. Several observations can be made. First, a clear transition takes place around $0.15 p/p_0$. This corresponds to the **op/cp** transition which *decreases* the amount adsorbed per gram of material. After NGA, the material is in its **cp** form, where it remains throughout the remainder of the measurement. Unlike in the methane experiments performed at 111 K, the structure does

5. Exploring novel behaviours

not re-open. A secondary transition to the **op** form is expected at higher pressures, close to the saturation pressure of the adsorbate. However, this pressure range could not be reached within the experimental conditions.

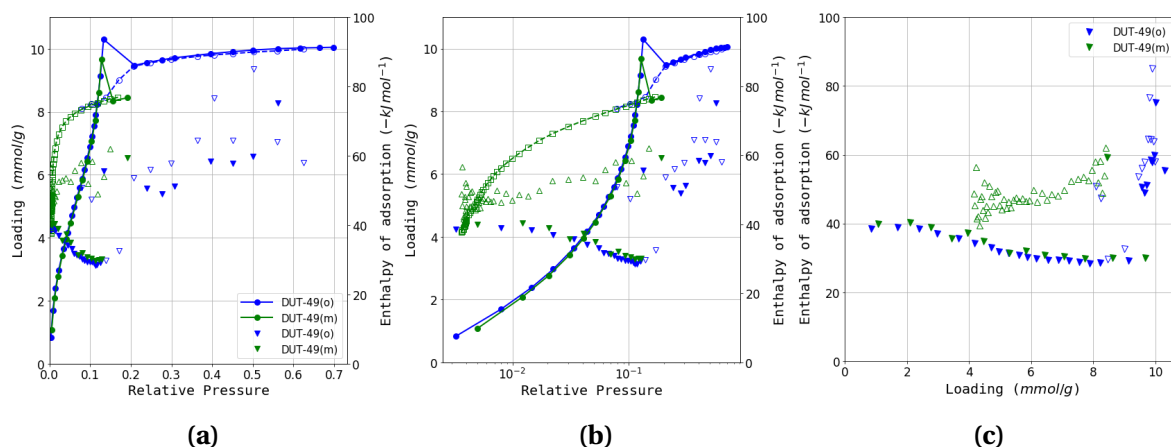


Figure 5.4.: Butane adsorption experiments on two samples of DUT-49, DUT-49(o) and DUT-49(m) shown as (a) regular isotherms (b) logarithmic isotherms and (c) enthalpy as a function of pressure.

Due to the steep knee in the adsorption/desorption branch of the **cp** form, a complete desorption branch cannot be obtained, with the minimum attained loading of 4 mmol. As such, framework collapse is not seen in the experiments. Another shortcoming is that the isotherm and energy landscape of the **op** form in its metastable region is inaccessible, since by definition the material will undergo a transition in this pressure range.

Another key feature visible in the two recorded isotherms is that, while adsorption on the open pore form fully overlaps between the two experiments, both the location and extent of NGA differ slightly. In the DUT-49(o) isotherm, a smaller NGA step occurs, with the resulting structural contraction apparently unable to achieve a complete closing of the pores. Upon desorption, a secondary step occurs in the same 0.15 – 0.2 pressure range, after which the material is fully in its **cp** state, as evidenced by the overlap with the DUT-49(m) isotherm. The reason behind the dissimilar behaviour is the contribution of crystal size to the energy barrier of transition. A thorough analysis can be found in the paper published by Krause et al.⁽⁴⁾ where it is shown that a high surface to volume ratio has a negative impact on NGA, with smaller crystallites unable to achieve a complete contraction, instead accessing an intermediated or **ip**, with the “*a*” lattice parameter 5–7% smaller than the **op** phase rather than 24% in the **cp** phase.

The enthalpy curves in Figure 5.4c, paint a picture of the energetic landscape of both phases. First it should be noted that the differential enthalpy of the NGA step itself does not appear on the graph as it is a negative value. This is not because the transition step is endothermic, as proven in Figure 5.3. However, as the net change in adsorbed amount

between the two points where the transition occurs is negative, the calculated enthalpy *per mol of gas adsorbed* takes the same sign.

In the adsorption branch, the initial enthalpy of adsorption can be observed to be around 38 kJ mol^{-1} to 40 kJ mol^{-1} . This value is relatively low for a copper-based MOF⁽⁶³⁾ and suggest that the interaction of the pore wall with the adsorbate is relatively low. After 2 mmol g^{-1} , the enthalpy curve slopes downwards until a local minima around 30 kJ mol^{-1} before NGA. This is the multilayer adsorption region, where the field gradient of the pore wall decreases and guest-guest interactions dominate. The enthalpy calculated for the desorption curve is essentially the differential enthalpy of adsorption on the **cp** form. A large difference, in the range of 10 kJ mol^{-1} to 20 kJ mol^{-1} , exists between the enthalpy of adsorption in the two states. This can be attributed to the microporous nature of the **cp** form, with the smaller pore walls increasing the interaction of the framework backbone with an adsorbate molecule. The energy required to drive the transition and generate the observed thermal effect can be accounted for by the increased total interactions of remaining adsorbed molecules with the **cp** state of the framework. A more in-depth analysis of the NGA energetics will be presented in subsection 5.4.3.

A brief analysis of measurement uncertainty

In order to assess whether results obtained through calorimetry are within acceptable accuracy, uncertainty calculations have been carried out. The method used here is laid out by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) in the Guide to the expression of Uncertainty in Measurements (GUM). The method is fully detailed in Appendix D, and consists of an identification of all variables used in the calculation of the final result, and estimation of the uncertainty in the final value as a function of the uncertainty in each such variable. The result is multiplied by a factor of confidence, which has been chosen as 95% in the figures presented in Figure 5.5.

The use of the manometric method for isotherm measurement entails a cumulative error in the pressure measurement that leads to an increase in uncertainty with each measured point. It can be seen in Figure 5.5a that in spite of the margin of error, there is perfect overlap between the two measured isotherms in the adsorption branch and in the desorption branch. It is reasonable to assume that the error is therefore much smaller than the calculation would suggest.

The uncertainty in the differential enthalpy of adsorption (Figure 5.5b) is a function of Δn , the amount adsorbed in each step, as well as pressure, with the same cumulative error applicable. The former variable accounts for the large uncertainty in flat sections of the isotherm where almost no adsorption takes place, while the latter results in the spread seen at the end of the desorption curves. However, when observing $\Delta_{ads} \dot{h}$ as a function of loading

5. Exploring novel behaviours

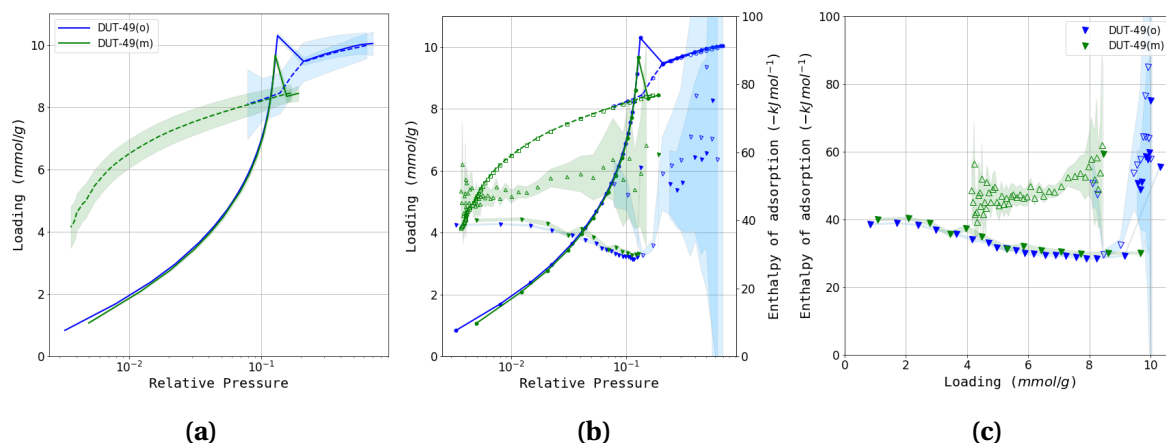


Figure 5.5.: Estimated errors at a 95% confidence range for (a) loading as a function of pressure, (b) differential enthalpy as a function of pressure (c) differential enthalpy as a function of loading.

in Figure 5.5c, the uncertainty is confined to high values on the x axis, with a clear separation of isotherm branches.

As the display of uncertainty ranges clutter the isotherm graphs and makes it hard to distinguish features, the remainder of this chapter will only display them if the error range is significant.

5.4.2. Impact of framework structure on transition mechanics

While the discovery of the NGA transition in DUT-49 was a result of serendipity, it opens the door to a rational design approach to modify the extent and the location of the phenomenon. In principle, there are several avenues that could be taken in order to tune the contraction mechanics.

- Changing the range of metastability of the open pore state.
- Decreasing the porosity of the closed pore state.
- Increasing the capacity of the open pore form.

These factors are bound to be tightly interlinked, with a slight alteration in one possibly leading a shift in all. For example, the addition of a stabilizing group which would increase the tensile strength of the linker is also likely to decrease the porosity of the entire system.

There are a range of physicochemical modifications available to tune the properties of the framework, many already employed in the MIL-53 and MIL-47 family of flexible MOFs. Through functionalisation or modification of the linker, the strength of the guest-guest and guest-host interactions is affected, as evidenced by the different gate opening behaviour with nitrogen and water on several functionalised versions on MIL-53.⁽⁶⁴⁾ In the case of

5. Exploring novel behaviours

DUT-49, moieties grafted to the central strut or changes in the linker backbone are also likely to affect its buckling behaviour. The use of a different metal as the node, has succeeded in changing the mechanical response of MIL-53.⁽⁶⁵⁾ This approach is likely have less impact on DUT-49, as the mechanism of contraction is due to linker flexibility. A common rational design methodology is the so-called isorecticular design, where topologically isomorphous MOFs are synthesised through progressive elongation of the linker. Another path to controlling flexibility is manipulation of crystal size, as it has already been shown by Krause et al.⁽⁴⁾. Finally, structural defects, of which a description was given in chapter 3, are another degree of freedom to consider for NGA tunability. Approaches such as mixed linkers synthesis and vacancy defects may allow for fine-grain influence of framework stiffness.

Behaviour of isorecticular materials

Adsorption

Figure 5.6 shows the dataset recorded on the non-interpenetrated versions of the material.

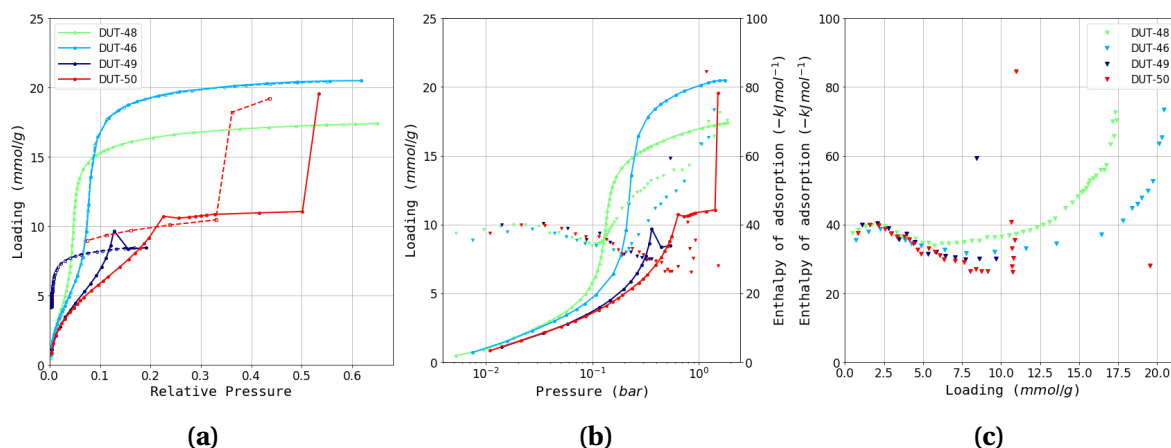


Figure 5.6.: (a) Experimental adsorption isotherms for DUT-48, DUT-46, DUT-49 and DUT-50. Enthalpy points are omitted for clarity. (b) A logarithmic plot of isotherms and enthalpy curves, to highlight the low pressure region. (c) Enthalpy as a function of loading for these materials.

The isotherms in Figure 5.6a show that only DUT-49 and DUT-50 undergo NGA, one around $0.15 p/p_0$ and the other at a higher relative pressure around $0.25 p/p_0$.

Indeed, the results follow a predictable trend. With an increase of linker size, a higher overall capacity is available from the

In DUT-50, the structure is seen to re-open around $0.5 p/p_0$, although the pressure is not high enough to obtain a fully **op** form. The transition to the **cp** phase is

Figure 5.7 presents isotherms and enthalpy on DUT-151 and DUT-152, both interpene-

trated nets.

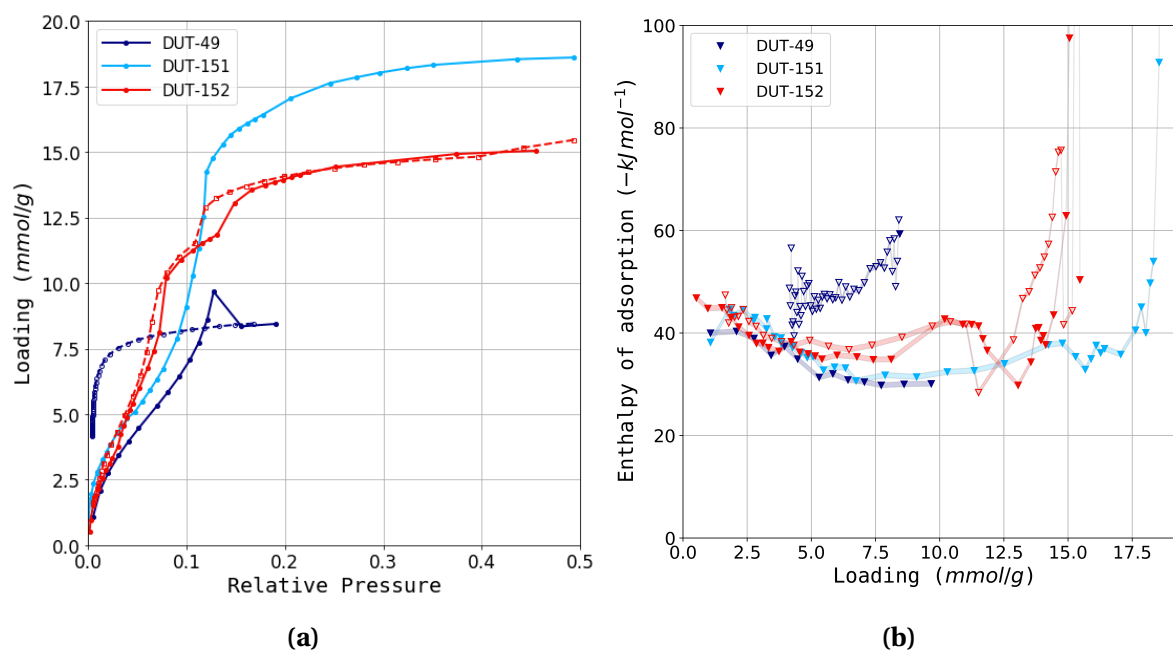


Figure 5.7.: The (a) isotherms and (b) enthalpy curves of the interpenetrated materials DUT-151 and DUT-152. Shaded regions are guides for the eye.

Behaviour of “reinforced” linker analogues

5.4.3. An in-depth look at the NGA mechanism

5.5. Conclusion

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A. Common characterisation techniques

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A.1. Thermogravimetry

Thermogravimetry (TGA) is a standard laboratory technique where the weight of a sample is monitored while ambient temperature is controlled. Changes in sample mass can be correlated to physical events, such as adsorption, desorption, sample decomposition or oxidation, depending on temperature and its rate of change.

TGA experiments are carried out on approximately 15 mg of sample with a TA Instruments Q500 up to 800 °C. The sample is placed on a platinum crucible and sealed in a temperature controlled oven, under gas flow of 40 cm³ min⁻¹. Experiments can use a blanket of either air or argon. The temperature ramp can be specified directly and should be chosen to ensure that the sample is in equilibrium with the oven temperature and no thermal conductivity effects come into play. Alternatively, a dynamic “Hi-Res” mode can be used which allows for automatic cessation of heating rate while the sample undergoes mass loss.

The main purpose of thermogravimetry as used in this thesis is the determination of sample decomposition temperature, to ensure that thermal activation prior to adsorption is complete and that all guest molecules have been removed without loss of structure. To this end, experiments are performed under an inert atmosphere (argon), and the sample activation temperature is chosen as 50 °C to 100 °C lower than the sample decomposition temperature.

A.2. Bulk density determination

Bulk density is a useful metric for the industrial use of adsorbent materials, as their volume plays a critical role in equipment sizing.

Bulk density is determined by weighing 1.5 ml empty glass vessels and settling the MOFs inside. Powder materials are then added in small increments and settled through vibration between each addition. The full vessel is finally weighed, which allowed the bulk density to

be determined. The same cell is used in all experiments, with cleaning through sonication between each experiment.

A.3. Skeletal density determination

True density or skeletal density is determined through gas pycnometry in a MicrotracBEL BELSORP-max apparatus. Helium is chosen as the fluid of choice as it is assumed to be non-adsorbing.

The volume of a glass sample cell (V_c) is precisely measured through dosing of the reference volume with helium up to (p_1), then opening the valve connecting the two and allowing the gas to expand up to (p_2). Afterwards approximately 50 mg of sample are weighed and inserted in a glass sample cell. After sample activation using the supplied electric heater to ensure no solvent residue is left in the pores, the same procedure is repeated to determine the volume of the cell and the adsorbent. With the volume of the sample determined, the density can be calculated by.

$$V_s = V_c + \frac{V_r}{1 - \frac{p_1}{p_2}} \quad (\text{A.1})$$

A.4. Nitrogen physisorption at 77 K

Nitrogen adsorption experiments are carried out on a Micromeritics Triflex apparatus. Approximately 60 mg of sample are used for each measurement. Empty glass cells are weighed and filled with the samples, which are then activated in a Micromeritics Smart VacPrep up to their respective activation temperature under vacuum and then back-filled with an inert atmosphere. After sample activation, the cells are re-weighed to determine the precise sample mass. The cells are covered with a porous mantle which allows for a constant temperature gradient during measurement by wicking liquid nitrogen around the cell. Finally, the cells are immersed in a liquid nitrogen bath and the adsorption isotherm is recoded using the volumetric method. A separate cell is used to condense the adsorptive throughout the measurement for accurate determination of its saturation pressure.

A.5. Vapour physisorption at 298 K

Vapour adsorption isotherms throughout this work are measured using a MicrotracBEL BELSORP-max apparatus in vapour mode. Glass cells are first weighed and then filled with

about 50 mg of sample. The vials are then heated under vacuum up to the activation temperature of the material and re-weighed in order to measure the exact sample mass without adsorbed guests. The cells are then immersed in a mineral oil bath kept at 298 K. To ensure that the cold point of the system occurs in the material and to prevent condensation on cell walls, the reference volume, dead space and vapour source are temperature controlled through an insulated enclosure.

A.6. Gravimetric isotherms

The gravimetric isotherms in this thesis are obtained using a commercial Rubotherm GmbH balance. Approximately 1 g of dried sample is used for these experiments. Samples are activated in situ by heating under vacuum. The gas is introduced using a step-by-step method, and equilibrium is assumed to have been reached when the variation of weight remained below 30 µg over a 15 min interval. The volume of the sample is determined from a blank experiment with helium as the non-adsorbing gas and used in combination with the gas density measured by the Rubotherm balance to compensate for buoyancy.

A.7. High throughput isotherm measurement

A high-throughput gas adsorption apparatus is presented for the evaluation of adsorbents of interest in gas storage and separation applications. This instrument is capable of measuring complete adsorption isotherms up to 50 bar on six samples in parallel using as little as 60 mg of material. Multiple adsorption cycles can be carried out and four gases can be used sequentially, giving as many as 24 adsorption isotherms in 24 h.⁽¹⁾

A.8. Powder X-ray diffraction

A.9. Nuclear magnetic resonance

A.10. Adsorption manometry and calorimetry at 303 K

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D. Calculation of uncertainty in adsorption measurements

To obtain the experimental errors, the procedure described in the Guide to the Expression of Uncertainty in Measurement.⁽¹⁾ was used. The quantity, enthalpy or pressure, is first expressed as a function $f(y)$ of other physical measured quantities through a functional relationship (Equation D.1). The standard uncertainty $u_c(y)$ is then calculated on the basis of Equation D.2, where $u_i(x_i)$ is the standard uncertainty in each input quantity. Here it is assumed that the input quantities are independent and uncorrelated. The error margins a_i for each quantity were taken from manufacturer specifications of the equipment used for recording. They were then divided by a value k_i chosen to cover the expected variance in that quantity, as each variable is assumed to be characterized by a probability distribution. The error introduced by the equation of state used (NIST REFPROP⁽²⁾) were assumed to be minor compared to the error introduced by the physical quantities, with the same to be said regarding the error in the calorimetric heat signal, which represents less than 1% of the error in enthalpy. Finally, the expanded uncertainty was calculated by choosing a suitable coverage factor of 1.645, corresponding to a 95% confidence interval.

$$f(y) = f(N_1, N_2 \cdots N_i) \quad (\text{D.1})$$

$$u_c(y) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^N \left(\frac{\partial f(y)}{\partial x_i} u_i x_i \right)^2} \quad (\text{D.2})$$

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