Morphologically disordered pore model for characterization of micro-mesoporous carbons

Piotr Kowalczyka,*, Piotr A. Gaudenb, Sylwester Furmaniakb, Artur P. Terzykb, Marek Wiśniewskib, Anna Ilnickac, Jerzy Łukaszewiczc, Andrzej Burian d, e, Jerzy Wlöch c, Alexander V. Neimarkf

a School of Engineering and Information Technology, Murdoch University, Murdoch, 6150 Western Australia, Australia
b Faculty of Chemistry, Physicochemistry of Carbon Materials Research Group, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Gagarin Street 7, 87-100 Toruń, Poland
c Faculty of Chemistry, Synthesis and Modification of Carbon Materials Research Group, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Gagarin Street 7, 87-100 Toruń, Poland
d A. Ciepliński Institute of Physics, University of Silesia, Uniwersytecka Street 4, 40-007 Katowice, Poland
e Silesian Center for Education and Interdisciplinary Research, 75 Pułka Piekoty Street, 41-500 Chorzów, Poland
f Department of Chemical and Biochemical Engineering, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 98 Brett Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8058, United States

1. Introduction

The morphological structure of nanoporous carbons is usually visualized as an assembly of graphitic planes arranged in a near-parallel fashion embedded in disordered carbon matrix, thus creating a highly porous solid having slit-shaped pores of molecular dimensions [1–4]. One of the experimental justifications for using idealized slit-shaped pores is that the pore walls in activated carbons appear to be graphite basal planes, which present nearly flat surfaces for adsorption [5,6]. Non-local density functional theory (NLDFT) and the grand canonical Monte Carlo simulation (GCMC) have implemented the independent slit-shaped pore model with smooth graphitic walls for pore size analysis of complex micro-mesoporous carbons [7–13]. The use of NLDFT kernels of theoretical nitrogen isotherms (77.4 K) generated in crystalline graphitic slit-shaped pores has greatly improved the realism of pore size analysis in the micropore region (pore size <2 nm [14]) compared to the traditional phenomenological methods. However, neglecting the effect of pore wall morphology has prominent drawbacks and, consequently, generates prominent artifacts in the NLDFT pore size distribution (PSD), such as the gap at ca. 1 nm, which is characteristic of many micro-mesoporous carbons [15–19].

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: P.Kowalczyk@murdoch.edu.au (P. Kowalczyk).
Real physicochemical conditions of carbonization and activation processes, used in preparation of micro-mesoporous carbonaceous materials from natural and synthetic precursors, often lead to relatively high energetic heterogeneity of internal surfaces [20–24]. Therefore, it is expected that spatial disorder of carbon atoms within pore walls controls the pore morphology and respectively the surface heterogeneity. Crystallographic defects (e.g., Stone-Wales defects, cluster defects, dislocations, and vacancies), functional groups, and heteroatoms change the curvature of graphene sheets locally or globally [25–30]. Approximation of the complex pore morphology by a simplified pore geometry (e.g., slits, cylinders, spheres, squares, etc.) affects the adsorbate behavior, especially in carbon ultramicropores where the small pore dimensions is ~1–2 times the molecular size of the adsorbate [31,32]. Several approaches were suggested to account for the structural disorder of pore walls in micro-mesoporous carbons. Hybrid reverse Monte Carlo (HRMC) simulation allows for direct structural disorder of pore walls in micro-mesoporous carbons. This graphitic crystal model serves as a base for generating atomistic models of micro- and mesopores in disordered carbons. In the second perturbation step, we generate a series of morphologically disordered carbon surfaces by heating the graphitic HRMC structure using canonical quenching of the graphitic HRMC structure using canonical and recommended the LMA10 nitrogen adsorption data as a standard for a more accurate pore size analysis of carbonaceous materials [48]. Despite the insights from this experimental work, relatively little is known about the surface structure of LMA10 material at the atomistic level and its impact on the mechanism of physical adsorption. Consequently, how the atomistic-scale morphology of the reference carbon surface affects the PSD analysis of micro-mesoporous carbons remain an open question in fundamental-adsorption science. Unfortunately, disordered carbon surfaces, such as LMA10 one, cannot at present be completely characterized experimentally. Methods such as X-ray and neutron scattering, stereo high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (S-HRTEM), scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM), electron energy loss spectroscopy (EELS), Raman spectroscopy (RS) give valuable partial structural information, but are not yet able to provide an atomistic structural model of disordered carbon surface that is consistent with the porosimetry measurements [49–53]. It should be also noted that gas adsorption experiment provides averaged pore structure information at different length scales, being quite different from other experimental techniques counted above.

In this work, we present a novel morphologically disordered slit-shaped pore (MDSP) model for characterization of micro-mesoporous carbonaceous materials by nitrogen adsorption. Pore walls in MDSP model are constructed using an atomistic structural model of LMA10 reference material. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Two-stage optimization approach with experimental and simulation details used for reconstruction of atomistic structural model of LMA10 reference material is described in section 2. We start with the basic idea of the method, followed by the details of the reconstruction of LMA10 carbon surface. Next, we present MDSP model and calculate the kernel of theoretical nitrogen adsorption isotherms for calculations of PSD function from experimental adsorption measurements at 77.4 K. The results of PSD calculations for selected samples of micro-mesoporous carbons are presented in section 3. Final conclusions are given in section 4.

2. Theoretical background, experimental and simulation details

2.1. LMA10 carbon surface: reconstruction methodology

The goal of this work is to develop the atomistic structural model of morphologically disordered slit-shaped carbon pore for characterizations of micro-mesoporous carbons using nitrogen adsorption isotherm measured at 77.4 K. The pore walls in MDSP model are represented by the atomistic structural model of LMA10 reference material, which is reconstructed using a novel heuristic two-step approach. In the first step, we reconstruct the atomistic structural model of highly-graphitized surface using experimental wide-angle X-ray scattering data on Madagascar graphite [54] and HRMC simulation. This graphitic crystal model serves as a base structure for generating atomistic models of micro- and mesopores in disordered carbons. In the second perturbation step, we generate a series of morphologically disordered carbon surfaces by heating and quenching of the graphitic HRMC structure using canonical (NVT) Monte Carlo method. For each generated disordered carbon surface, we determined theoretical nitrogen adsorption isotherm from GCMC simulations. Those theoretical adsorption isotherms are compared against the experimental nitrogen adsorption isotherm on LMA10 carbon material to select the most representative atomistic replica of morphologically disordered surface of LMA10 reference material.

2.2. Highly-graphitized carbon surface: wide-angle X-ray scattering experiment

Wide-angle X-ray scattering measurements were performed on Madagascar graphite at ambient temperature on a Rigaku-Denki D/MAX RAPID II-R diffractometer equipped with a rotating anode Ag Kα tube (λ = 0.05608 nm), an incident beam (002) graphite monochromator, and an image plate in the Deby-Scherrer geometry as a two-dimensional detector [55–57]. The pixel size was 100 µm × 100 µm. The investigated sample was placed inside a glass capillary (1.5 mm in diameter and 0.01 mm wall thickness), and measurements were carried out for the sample in the capillary and...
for the empty capillary, with the intensity for the empty capillary then subtracted. The beam width at the sample was 0.3 mm. The recorded two-dimensional diffraction patterns were integrated over the azimuthal angle to obtain one-dimensional intensity data expressed as a function of the scattering vector \( Q \) using suitable software. The scattering vector is defined as \( Q = 4\pi \sin(\theta)/\lambda \), where \( 2\theta \) is the scattering angle and \( \lambda \) is the wavelength. The intensity was then corrected for polarization and absorption and normalized using data processing procedure developed for high-energy X-rays.

The structure factor \( S(Q) \) was then determined using the procedure developed for high-energy X-rays and adopted for the Debye-Schererr cylinderical geometry. \( I(Q) \) denotes the corrected intensity normalized to electron units, and \( f \) indicates the atomic scattering factor of carbon. The intensity data were then converted to a real space representation in the form of the radial distribution function (RDF) via the sine Fourier transform according to \([58]\):

\[
g(r) = 1 + \frac{1}{2\pi^2 \rho_0} \int_0^{Q_{\text{max}}} Q[S(Q) - 1]\sin(Qr)\,dr
\]

where \( \rho_0 = 112 \text{ atoms/nm}^3 \) denotes the number density of Madagascar graphite.

### 2.3. Highly-graphitized carbon surface: hybrid reverse Monte Carlo simulations

We used the HRMC simulation method, the experimental density and radial distribution function measured for Madagascar graphite from WAXS, to reconstruct the atomistic structural model of highly-graphitized surfaces (including thermal effects and possible crystal defects and imperfections) \([59,60]\). At fixed temperature \( T \), we performed Monte Carlo simulation in the canonical ensemble with the transition probability to move from configuration \( o \) to \( n \) given by:

\[
\text{acc}(o \rightarrow n) = \min \left\{ 1, \exp \left[ -\Delta \chi^2/2 \right] \exp[-\beta U] \right\}
\]

where \( \beta = (kT)^{-1} \) is the inverse temperature, \( \Delta U = U(n) - U(o) \) denotes the difference in potential energy, \( \Delta \chi^2 = \chi^2(n) - \chi^2(o) \), and \( \chi^2 \) is given by:

\[
\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{M} \frac{[g_{\text{th}}(r_i) - g_{\text{ex}}(r_i)]^2}{\sigma_{\text{ex}}^2(r_i)}
\]

Here, \( M \) is the number of experimental data points, \( \sigma(r) \) is the standard deviations of experimental WAXS data, and \( g(r) \) denotes experimental (subscript ‘exp’) and theoretical (subscript ‘theor’) RDF.

Theoretical RDF is computed on the fly during the HRMC simulation run from the following expression:

\[
g_{\text{theor}}(r) = \frac{dN_v V}{4\pi r^2 N dr}
\]

where \( dN_v \) is the number of carbon atoms in the shell of thickness \( dr \), \( N \) denotes total number of carbon atoms, and \( V \) is the volume of the simulation box.

The HRMC algorithm developed by Snook and co-workers \([61,62]\) with experimental RDF measured for Madagascar graphite from WAXS was used for reconstruction of highly-graphitized carbon surface. We start from ground-state electron configuration of carbon atoms in graphite crystal consisting of 9702 carbon atoms in a periodic cubic simulation cell of side length of 4.396 nm (i.e., 2.27 g/cm³). We assume the error \( \sigma(r) = 0.05 \) in eq. (3) for each experimental point on RDF. In our HRMC temperature program, we used three stages with linear temperature ramp. In stage 1, all carbon atoms were heated to 5000 K. Next, the temperature was continuously decreased to 800 K. In stage 2, the temperature was dropped from 800 to 500 K. Finally, in stage 3, the temperature was further decreased to 300 K. For temperature quench, we used a total of \( 10^8 \) HRMC steps, and each step consisted of attempting displacement of carbon atom. An additional \( 10^6 \) HRMC steps at 300 K were performed to compute the theoretical RDF. The surface of Madagascar graphite is similar in nature to the surfaces of other highly-graphitized carbons like Sterling FT carbon black, which is considered as one of the reference carbons for adsorption studies \([8]\). The slit pore model with HRMC reconstructed walls is shown on Fig. 1 (upper panel). We will further refer to this model as Sterling FT model.

### 2.4. LMA10 carbon surface: temperature-quenched Monte Carlo simulations

We assume that LMA10 surface can be generated by the perturbation of the graphitic crystal structure of reconstructed highly-graphitized surface of Madagascar graphite. Thus, we temperature-quench the atomistic model of the base structure using Monte Carlo (MC) method \([63,64]\) with implemented 3-body environment-dependent interaction potential (EDIP) parameterized for carbon-carbon interactions to generate a series of model disordered carbon surfaces \([65]\). To make the problem computationally efficient, we constructed a smaller graphitic crystal consisting of 3650 carbon atoms by cutting the reconstructed graphitic crystal from Madagascar (bottom panel, Fig. 1). In temperature-quench MC simulation, the graphitic crystal was first heated to 5000 K. Next, the temperature was continuously decreased to 300 K. From the temperature-quench Monte Carlo simulations, we collected 100 atomistic configurations of morphologically disordered carbon surfaces.

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**Fig. 1.** Atomic structure models used for GCMC simulations of nitrogen adsorption (77.4 K) on highly-graphitized Sterling FT and LMA10 reference carbon surfaces. Note that external surface and intrawall ultramicropores at LMA10 surface are accessible to nitrogen molecules. GCMC sampling regions are displayed by blue rectangular boxes. The smaller red rectangular box refers to a minimal distance between two identical LMA10 carbon walls. The graphics in this figure were created using the VMD program \([64]\). (A colour version of this figure can be viewed online.)
2.5. LMA10 and highly-graphitized Sterling FT carbon surfaces: simulated nitrogen adsorption isotherm, isosteric enthalpy and entropy

Adsorption isotherms of nitrogen (77.4 K) on LMA10 (heterogeneous) and highly-graphitized Sterling FT (homogenous) carbon surfaces are simulated from the GCMC method [66,67]. Both nitrogen molecules and carbon atoms were modeled by single-site (12,6) Lennard-Jones particles. The fluid-fluid and solid-fluid parameters were taken from the work of Ravikovitch et al. [68]. These parameters correctly reproduce the bulk properties of nitrogen (including: vapor-liquid coexistence, liquid-vapor surface tension, and equation of state) and the adsorption of nitrogen on graphitic carbon surface [68].

For GCMC simulations of nitrogen adsorption on highly-graphitized Sterling FT carbon surface, the simulation box of 4.396 x 4.396 x 6.0 nm with periodic boundary conditions and minimum image convention for computing fluid-fluid interactions in x and y directions (upper panel, Fig. 1). Two identical carbon walls consisting of 13 graphene sheets separated by a distance of 6.0 nm were kept rigid in GCMC simulations. This setup allowed us to get better estimations of GCMC averages because we simulated nitogen adsorption isotherm on two identical carbon surfaces. The size of the simulation box in direction parallel to pore walls was previously verified in order to eliminate finite size effects [11,68].

For GCMC simulations of nitrogen adsorption on morphologically disordered surface of LMA10 material, the simulation box of 4.0 x 4.0 x 7.6226 nm with periodic boundary conditions and minimum image convention for computing fluid-fluid interactions in x and y directions (bottom panel, Fig. 1). Two identical LMA10 carbon walls consisting of 6 protruding graphene sheets generated from temperature-quench MC and separated by a minimal distance of 6.0 nm were kept rigid in GCMC simulations. As seen from the snapshot (bottom panel, Fig. 1), intrawall ultramicropores at LMA10 surface are generated using temperature-quench Monte Carlo simulations. We assumed that nitrogen molecules are able to adsorb on both the pore wall surface and also in the intrawall ultramicropores. It is tempting to speculate that nitrogen molecules can diffuse from the pore to the intrawall ultramicropores through surface defects; other diffusion paths might be possible as well. In GCMC modeling it is implicitly assumed that intrawall ultramicropores are accessible to nitrogen molecules. Next, we verified this assumption by comparing theoretical GCMC nitrogen isotherms with the experimental one measured on LMA10 reference material [48].

For both GCMC simulation setups, fluid-fluid interactions were truncated at 1.81 nm. Interactions of nitrogen molecules with all carbon atoms in our molecular models were computed before simulations and stored into a grid. During GCMC simulations, solid-fluid interactions were computed using linear approximation. At each point along the N2 adsorption isotherm, the simulations were equilibrated using 3 x 10^7 Monte Carlo steps. The ensemble averages were computed from the additional 5 x 10^7 Monte Carlo steps. We used the final configuration from the previous adsorption point as a starting configuration for the simulation of the next one.

For nitrogen at 77.4 K, the bulk phase was assumed to be ideal gas and the differences between the absolute and Gibbs excess adsorption was neglected. The absolute value of nitrogen adsorption per surface area was computed using [66]:

\[ n_{abs} = \frac{\langle N \rangle}{2S} \]

\[ \langle . \rangle \] is the ensemble average, \( N_A \) is the Avogadro constant, \( N \) is the number of nitrogen molecules in the simulation box, and \( S \) denotes the surface area of one wall accessible to nitrogen molecules. We used the method of Pfeifer et al. [69] to evaluate \( S \).

The isosteric heat of adsorption was computed from the fluctuation theory [66]:

\[ q_{st} = RT + \left( \frac{U(N) - \langle UN \rangle}{\langle N^2 \rangle - \langle N \rangle^2} \right) = q_{diff} + RT \]  

\[ (6) \]

where \( U \) is the configuration energy of the system, \( T \) is the temperature, and \( R \) denotes the universal gas constant.

To characterize the ordering of nitrogen molecules in a course of adsorption we computed the differential entropy of adsorption from the following expression [70–72]:

\[ S_{diff} = S_{gas} - \frac{q_{diff}}{T} - R \ln \left( \frac{p}{p_0} \right) + R \]  

\[ (7) \]

where \( S_{gas} \) (=151.9 J/mol/K) [73] is the molar entropy of the nitrogen gas at 77.4 K. \( q_{diff} = q_{st} - RT \) is the differential enthalpy of nitrogen adsorption, and \( p \) denotes the equilibrium pressure of nitrogen, and \( p_0 \) is the standard-state pressure (=101.325 kPa).

2.6. MDSP model: minimal and average pore size

We implemented the independent slit-shaped carbon pore model with morphologically disordered walls using the atomistic structural model of LMA10 reference carbon material for characterization of micro-mesoporous carbons by nitrogen adsorption (Fig. 2).

Two LMA10 walls, each consisting of 6 protruding graphene-like
sheets, periodically imaged in the x and y directions, are placed in
the simulation box. These two walls were kept rigid in GCMC
simulations. The accessible pore space is consisting of two regions.
The space between the protruding graphene-like sheets is simply
called the pore space, and it is characterized by a minimal ($H_{\text{min}}$)
and average ($H_{\text{avg}}$) pore width (Figs. 2–3). The minimum pore size
was varied from 0 to 40 nm. The minimum pore size of $H_{\text{min}} = 0$
corresponds to the contact of most protruded from the opposite
pore walls carbon atoms. The pore width distributions at selected
values of $H_{\text{min}}$ are shown in Fig. 3. Noteworthy, the average pore
widths exceed the minimum and the average pore width at
$H_{\text{min}} = 0$ equals 0.72 nm. Intrawall ultramicropores are also
accessible to nitrogen molecules. Distributions of the effective pore
width ($H_{\text{eff}} = H-0.34$ nm) and the average pore width is computed
using Bhattacharya-Gubbins method [74] (BG) (Fig. 3 and Fig. 15 in
supporting information). We considered only the points on the
middle plane in the pore (i.e. $z = 0$). The total pore volume corre-
sponds to the volume accessible to the nitrogen hard spheres
(collision diameter of 0.3615 nm), and it was determined using
combination of BG method and Monte Carlo integration [75].

The pore size distribution function $f(H_{\text{avg}})$, is determined from
the inversion of the discrete form of the integral equation of
adsorption [76,77]:

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Fig. 3. Histograms of the effective pore widths, $H_{\text{eff}}$, detected by the BG method for points on the middle plane in the pore (i.e. $z = 0$) for selected systems - Fig. 2. Dashed lines
denote the average pore widths ($H_{\text{avg}}$), 0.72, 1.29, 2.84, 5.33, 10.34 and 29.9 nm, respectively. (A colour version of this figure can be viewed online.)
$$N_{\text{exp}}(p) = \sum_i N_{\text{MDSP}}(p, H_{\text{avg}}) f(H_{\text{avg}})$$

subject to  \( f(H_{\text{avg}}) \geq 0 \)  

(8)

where \( N_{\text{exp}}(p) \) is the experimental adsorption isotherm interpolated onto the vector of \( p \) pressure points, \( N_{\text{MDSP}}(p, H_{\text{avg}}) \) denotes a matrix of quantity adsorbed per volume simulated from GCMC with MDSP model. Note that \( f(H_{\text{avg}}) \) is a vector of positive or null values whose terms represent the volume of pore in the sample characterized by an average pore width \( H_{\text{avg}} \). The total pore volume of the sample is given by:

$$V_{\text{theor}} = \sum_i f(H_{\text{avg}})$$

(9)

The numerical solution of a linear discrete ill-posed problem given by eq. (8) is not straightforward and special care needs to be taken to obtain physically meaningful solution. In the examples presented below, eq. (8) was solved by the second order Tikhonov regularization method with the non-negative least-square algorithm [78,79].

3. Results and discussion

3.1. LMA10 and Sterling FT reference carbon surfaces: microscopic mechanism of nitrogen adsorption

Fig. 4a presents the HRMC reconstruction of the experimental RDF function measured on Madagascar graphite from WAXS. The agreement between theoretical and experimental RDF is excellent up to measured carbon-carbon distance of 2.0 nm. We note that peaks on experimental and reconstructed RDF functions are finite and broaden by thermal effects and possible crystal defects and imperfections. The theoretical RDF computed for the ground-state electron configuration of carbon atoms in graphite [80] is characterized by a number of sharp peaks. Their positions are in good agreement with the experimental RDF peaks up to 2.0 nm.

Fig. 5. Comparison between the experimental (dashed and solid line) and theoretical nitrogen adsorption isotherms (77.4 K) on Sterling FT carbon black (open circles) and LMA10 carbon material (open squares). The atomistic configurations of nitrogen-carbon interfacial regions at points 1–5 are displayed in Fig. 7. (A colour version of this figure can be viewed online.)
agreement with experimental RDF measured from WAXS at finite temperature, as shown in Fig. 4b. Fig. 4c displays HRTEM image of the surface of Sterling FT carbon black, which has been used as a reference material in NLDT for pore size analysis of micromesoporous carbons. The surface of the Sterling FT carbon black is highly-graphitized. Therefore, we expected that nitrogen adsorption on Sterling FT carbon black can be reproduced using structural atomistic model of surface of the Madagascar graphite.

Indeed the experimental nitrogen adsorption isotherm measured on Sterling FT carbon black at 77.4 K is nicely reproduced by the theoretical nitrogen adsorption isotherm simulated from GCMC on the atomistic structural model of highly-graphitized surface of Madagascar graphite (upper panel, Fig. 5). The theoretical GCMC nitrogen adsorption isotherm simulated on the most representative morphologically disordered carbon surface at 77.4 K is in very good agreement with the experimental isotherm reported by Silvestre-Albero et al. [48] (bottom panel, Fig. 5).

We note, however, that there are significant differences between nitrogen adsorption isotherms measured/simulated at 77.4 K on highly-graphitized and morphologically disordered carbon surfaces. Adsorption of nitrogen on LMA10 carbon material begins from an extremely low pressure, i.e. $5 \times 10^{-7}$ p/p$_0$, and it is increases smoothly without any steps and discontinuities over the entire experimental pressure range (bottom panel, Fig. 5). This is a well-known feature of the energetic heterogeneity of the carbon surface, which has been experimentally reported for non-graphitizing carbon blacks [81]. For these materials, the adsorption started on high energetic adsorption centers and proceeds further by gradual filling of less energetic centers by nitrogen molecules. Indeed, the isosteric enthalpy of nitrogen adsorption on LMA10 carbon material at low pressures converges to 17.4 kJ/mol (i.e., twice the value of isosteric enthalpy of nitrogen adsorption on Sterling FT carbon black, see upper panel on Fig. 6 and Fig. 5 in supporting information) and it is smoothly decreasing with further adsorption. Interestingly, we note that the entropy of nitrogen adsorption on LMA10 carbon material at $10^{-5}$ mmol/m$^2$ is not gas-like, as would be expected for two-dimensional nitrogen gas adsorbed on basal plane of graphite (see bottom panel on Fig. 6). We found that gas-like entropy of nitrogen on LAM10 carbon material corresponds to very low surface coverage of $2 \times 10^{-7}$ mmol/m$^2$ (see Fig. 5 in supporting information), indicating the suppression of the local motion of nitrogen molecules adsorbed on LMA10 carbon material at higher surface coverage.

For highly-graphitized sample of Sterling FT carbon black the adsorption of nitrogen is negligible up to $5 \times 10^{-7}$ p/p$_0$, because the basal plane of graphite has no strong adsorption centers. Indeed, the isosteric enthalpy of nitrogen adsorption on Sterling FT carbon black at low pressures converges to 8.96 kJ/mol (see Fig. 5 in supporting information). Furthermore, we found that nitrogen molecules adsorbed on the surface of Sterling FT carbon black behave as two-dimensional gas at low surface coverages, in good agreement with theoretical gas-like entropy of 60 J/mol/K. Observed sharp peak on the enthalpy of adsorption and an explicit step on adsorption isotherm at $10^{-3}$ p/p$_0$ (see point 2, Figs. 5–6) is a further evidence of long-range ordering of nitrogen molecules in contact monolayer film. At higher pressures, nitrogen adsorption on both reference carbon surfaces followed the mechanism of multilayer formation and grows, as is predicted from Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) theory [82].

High isosteric heat of nitrogen adsorption on LMA10 material computed at low pressures indicates that first adsorbed nitrogen molecules experienced some degree of confinement. To make better understanding of theoretical results, equilibrium snapshots of the reconstructed nitrogen-carbon interfacial regions for studied reference carbon surfaces are shown in Fig. 7.

We presented the equilibrium snapshots at one surface only due to symmetry of the slit-shaped pores. It is clear that intrawall ultramicropores on LMA10 carbon surface are generated by the protruding graphene sheets. Narrow carbon ultramicropores with morphologically disordered carbon walls are formed just below the LMA10 external surface. They are responsible for the restriction of translational motion of nitrogen molecules in adsorbed phase and high enthalpic effects observed at low pressures (Figs. 5 and 6). The presence of structural and energetic disorder around LMA10 carbon surface leads to a smoothing of nitrogen–carbon interfacial region and corresponding theoretical nitrogen adsorption isotherm. Interestingly and not trivially, our results show that strong confinement can be induced by the atomic-scale roughness of near-surface region of carbon material. Is worth noting the difference between the calculated heats of adsorption for highly graphitized Sterling FT and morphologically disordered LMA10 surfaces given in Fig. 6. In the first case, the characteristic non-monotonic behavior with the maximum at point 2 is known in the literature [83] and can be explained by solidification of the adsorbed monolayer that is confirmed by the calculated entropy. In the second case, the unusual behavior with a pronounced gradual step between points 1 and 3 is explained by the specifics of the adopted model, which allows for adsorption between the corrugated graphene layers. These most energetically favorable sites ($q_{st} \approx 17.4$ kJ/mol computed at zero coverage, Fig. 5 in supporting information) are filled in the beginning of adsorption. Due the surface corrugation, the
monolayer (point 3) does not solidify and the further behavior of the heat of adsorption after the monolayer formation is similar to that for Sterling FT sample.

3.2. Local adsorption isotherms and isosteric heats of adsorption

The kernel consisting of 105 GCMC nitrogen adsorption isotherms (77.4 K) has been simulated in MDSP model in the range of average pore widths from 0.72 to 40 nm. All simulated isotherms consisted of 85 points and covered the range of relative pressures, $p/p_0$, from $10^{-12}$ to 0.98. Selected excess adsorption and isosteric heat isotherms are presented in Fig. 8. Adsorption in micropores of pore size $<1.46$ nm is characterized by continuous s-shaped isotherms. At saturation, the density of adsorbed nitrogen in narrow micropores with pore size $<1.0$ nm is very high, showing that enhanced surface forces are responsible for solidification and compression of adsorbed nitrogen fluid. In wider micropores of pore size $>1.46$ nm and mesopores, the isotherms develop discontinues step that corresponds to the first-order capillary condensation from the adsorbed films to the pore filling. We note that the formation and growth of the adsorbed film is continuous, which is manifested by the smooth isotherm prior to the capillary condensation transition. At saturation, density of nitrogen fluid adsorbed in wider micropores and mesopores approaches $28.8$ mmol/cm$^3$ (i.e., liquid nitrogen) [73]. Intrawall ultramicropores on LAM10 pore walls are responsible for high values of the isosteric heat of adsorption $-17.8$ kJ/mol simulated at low pore loadings (bottom panel, Fig. 8). With further adsorption of nitrogen, the isosteric heat is continuously decreasing because progressive saturation of energetic sites with higher adsorption energy. Discontinues steps on isosteric heat is a signature of the first-order capillary condensation in wider micropores and mesopores.

3.3. Pore size distribution function: application examples

We applied MDSP model to nitrogen (77.4 K) adsorption isotherms measured for spectrum of nanoporous carbonaceous materials, including bituminous coal based activated carbon (Calgon F-400) [18,84], charcoal based activated carbon (Norit Row Supra 0.8) [18,84], synthetic activated carbons (prepared from phenolic polymeric precursors), petroleum pitch-based activated carbon fiber (Osaka gas, P25) and chitosan based activated carbons. P25 activated carbon fiber sample was obtained from Prof. Katsumi Kaneko (Shinshu University, Japan) [85]. Micro-mesoporous activated carbons prepared from chitosan precursors were synthesized in our laboratory by Linicka et al. [86]. High resolution nitrogen adsorption isotherms on chitosan based activated carbons were measured at 77.4 K using the ASAP 2010 MicroPore System.
(Micromeritics, USA) in the relative pressure range from $1 \times 10^{-6}$ to 0.99. Before measurement all samples were desorbed in vacuum at 383 K for 3 h [18, 84]. A series of nitrogen adsorption isotherms at 77.4 K on synthetic activated carbons prepared from phenolic precursors were obtained from Prof. Mietek Jaroniec (Kent State University, USA) [87].

In Fig. 9, we present the pore size calculations for microporous activated carbon fiber P25 using MDSP model and experimental nitrogen isotherm. Fig. 9 show that MDSP theoretical isotherm fits the experimental data quite-well over the whole range of measured pressures. We recon some deviations of theoretical isotherm at low pressures, which can be explained by the simplicity of the model. P25 is disordered microporous material with a bimodal structure and high theoretical volume of supermicropores ~1.23 cm$^3$/g. The majority of supermicropores has average pore widths around ~2.2 nm but small fraction of narrow supermicropores around effective pore size ~0.8 nm is clearly visible. The pore size ~2.5 nm provided by the Osaka Gas company is in good agreement with the average pore size computed from the MDSP model.

An instructive example of disordered micro-mesoporous activated carbons is presented in Fig. 10. The pore structure of Calgon 400 and Norit Row Supra 0.8 activated carbon is quite similar. MDSP revels a genuine bimodal structure with micropores < ~2.0 nm and narrow mesopores ~2.0–6.0 nm. We note that, due to the morphological disorder of LMA10 pore walls, the PSDs computed from MPSD model are free from artificial sharp minima such as gaps around ~1 nm, as has been previously reported from NLDFT calculations [11, 18, 84]. Instead, peaks on PSDs are Gaussian-type with well-defined average pore size. The theoretical adsorption isotherms have some deviations at low pressures, which are explained by the simplicity of MDSP model, which...
attributes the same level of surface heterogeneity to the pores of different sizes.

It is important to investigate the impact of synthesis conditions on the tailored development of micro-mesopore structure. This is demonstrated in Figs. 11 and 12, which show PSD calculations for a two series of disordered micro-mesoporous activated carbons, e.g., a series of synthetic activated carbons obtained by Kruk et al. [87], and a series of chitosan based activated carbons synthetized by Iinicka et al. [86].

Fig. 10. Pore size distribution calculations for granular activated carbon Calgon F 400 and Norit Row Supra 0.8. Upper panel presents experimental nitrogen isotherms (in semi-logarithmic scale) together with MDSP theoretical isotherms. MDSP cumulative and differential pore volume distributions are presented in the middle and bottom panels, respectively.

Fig. 11. Pore size distribution calculations for a series of synthetic activated carbons synthetized by Kruk et al. [87]. Upper panel presents experimental nitrogen isotherms together with MDSP theoretical isotherms. MDSP cumulative and differential pore volume distributions are presented in the middle and bottom panels, respectively. (A colour version of this figure can be viewed online.)

The average pore size for synthetic carbons D-J is increases smoothly from ~1.42 nm to ~1.72 nm (supermicropore range). We note also an increase of dispersion on PSD functions, which can be explained by a longer activation time. On the other hand, samples K-M have a bimodal structure of micro- and narrow mesopores (~2–4 nm). Interestingly, micropores are narrow with the pore size of about ~0.7–0.8 nm (Fig. 11). Disordered chitosan based activated
carbons are micro-mesoporous solids with a tailored pore size and dispersion on PSD (Fig. 12). The carbon samples produced by treatment with phosphoric (V) acid at concentrations 1.34, 2.46, 3.40, 4.21, 4.91, and 5.53 mol/dm³ were labeled for chitosan as CH_1.34, CH_2.46, CH_3.40, CH_4.21, CH_4.91, and CH_5.53, respectively. CH_1.34 activated carbon is a strictly microporous solid with an average pore size of ~1.5 nm, whereas CH_8.04 activated carbon is a mesoporous solid with a small contribution from supermicropores (i.e., ~13% by pore volume). Controlled development of mesoporosity, which was achieved without an expansive and environmentally concerned hard- or soft-templating method, is favorable for the potential applications of these materials in adsorption of larger molecules from solutions, drug delivery systems, and organic-based supercapacitors.

4. Conclusions

We develop a morphologically disordered slit-shaped pore model for modeling adsorption and characterization of micromesoporous carbonaceous materials. The main feature of MDSP model consists in a qualitative account for the morphological disorder of pore walls in disordered micro-mesoporous carbons using the atomistic structural model of LMA10 reference carbon surface. MDSP model consists of the pore space formed by morphologically disordered graphene layers and intrawall ultramicropores. The energetic heterogeneity of LMA10 reference carbon surface is explained by the presence of intrawall ultramicropores, which existence is an intrinsic structural property of LMA10 surface. Representation of slit-shaped carbon pore walls by morphologically disordered LMA10 surfaces greatly improved the PSD analysis. The MDSP model is demonstrated on various micro-mesoporous carbonaceous materials, including petroleum pitch based activated carbon fiber, bituminous coal and wood based granular activated carbons, polymer and chitosan based micromesoporous activated carbons. It is shown the MDSP model is free of the artificial gaps on PSD functions (~1 nm and ~2 nm) computed from NLDFT and GCMC with smooth graphitic pore walls models. The MDSP model generates smooth Gaussian-type PSD functions with a well-defined average pore size. With additional verification, MDSP may become an alternative model for pore size distribution characterization of porous carbons complementing currently available QSDFT and CGM methods [44–47]. Finally, we demonstrate that the MDSP model can be used for investigations of the tailoring of micro-mesopore structure of activated carbons by synthesis conditions, which is a key element for optimizations of interfacial processes.

It is worth noting that in the proposed MDSP model the LMA10 carbon material was chosen as a reference surface. On principle, it is possible to customize the morphological disorder of carbon pore walls for different classes of carbonaceous materials by choosing relevant reference surfaces. However, further research is needed to shed more light into the relation between the morphological disorder of the surface of the selected reference carbon and the atomistic structure of the pore walls in the disordered carbons to which this model is applied.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.carbon.2016.09.070.
amorphous carbon: distinguishing between competing structures obtained using different modeling protocols, Carbon 83 (2015) 52–70.