

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Accessible clean water is among the highest priorities for sustainable economic growth and societal wellbeing. Water supports life and is a crucial resource for humanity; it is also at the core of natural ecosystems and climate regulation. Water stress is primarily a water quantity issue, but it also occurs as a consequence of a deterioration of water quality and a lack of appropriate water management. Environmental problems that are associated with water pollution have been a persistently important issue over recent decades, correlated negatively with the health and ecosystem. The occurrence of trace amounts of antibiotics in various bodies of water was directly linked to the development of antibiotic resistant pathogens. Over the last two decades, penicillins have been widely prescribed and used across Europe. Recently, Amoxicillin (AMX) was added on the second EU “watch list” based on the proposed European Decision 2018/840/EU. Its presence in wastewater effluents is related to limited removal by common municipal wastewater treatment plants (WWTP's) based on primary (physical) and secondary (biological) treatment. Therefore, the new remediation techniques must be applied to remove such recalcitrant substances.

Recently, advanced oxidation processes (AOPs) have gained much research attention due to their innate ability to provide effective oxidation of a wide variety of organic pollutants persistent to conventional WW treatment methods. AOPs effectiveness rely on highly reactive and non-selective species, primarily based on hydroxyl radicals ( $\text{HO}\cdot$ ). Among various AOPs, semiconductor photocatalysis greatly attracts attention due to stability of the semiconductor material and potential to use abundant solar energy to degrade organic pollutants.

The most widely investigated and employed photocatalyst in water purification is  $\text{TiO}_2$ . However,  $\text{TiO}_2$  suffers from the fast recombination of photogenerated charges (i.e. electron/hole pairs;  $e^-/h^+$ ) and is only active under UV light due its wide band gap (3.0-3.2 eV), thus hindering its potential for solar-driven applications. These deficiencies can be improved by the following strategies: doping with metals and/or non-metals, dye sensitization, incorporation with carbon nanotubes, reduced graphene oxide and coupling with other semiconductors with narrow band gaps. Coupling of  $\text{TiO}_2$  with narrow band gap semiconductors with visible light response may promote synergistic effects between two semiconducting materials leading to more efficient charge separation and high photocatalytic activity under visible light irradiation.

Iron oxide ( $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ , also known as hematite) is a promising candidate for coupling

with TiO<sub>2</sub>, due to its abundance, low cost, stability and visible light activity due to its narrow band gap (2.0–2.2 eV). Most importantly, suitable band-edge positions of hematite promote photogenerated charge separation in TiO<sub>2</sub> via heterojunction transfer. Despite several photocatalytic applications of TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> composites for the removal of contaminants of emerging concern (CECs), all studies investigated their applications in the suspension (i.e. employing a powdered form of photocatalyst), while the application of immobilized TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> composites are scarcely reported. Moreover, treatment of AMX under solar /visible light using TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, as well as ecotoxicity of AMX degradation/transformation by-products is rarely explored.

In this dissertation, removal of AMX was investigated using sandwich-type TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> layered films made of commercially available nanomaterials (Part 1) and using synthesized TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> made of pure chemical precursors (Part 2).

In part 1, sandwich-type composites made of commercial TiO<sub>2</sub>-P25 and  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> are obtained by spin coating thin films with different layer configurations, namely: i) TiO<sub>2</sub> layer over  $\alpha$ - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (TiO<sub>2</sub>@ $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>), ii)  $\alpha$ - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> layer over TiO<sub>2</sub> ( $\alpha$ - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>@ TiO<sub>2</sub>), and iii) physically mixed 50% (w/w) of TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>. Photocatalytic activity under simulated solar irradiation of the aforementioned composites and their pure components is investigated for the degradation of amoxicillin (AMX) in the presence and absence of persulfate (PS). In both cases, TiO<sub>2</sub>@ $\alpha$ - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> sandwich-type achieved the highest degradation rates of AMX and a marked effect of PS addition on the AMX degradation rate is noted. The influence of pH and PS concentration on AMX degradation rate is established by means of experimental design and response surface modeling which revealed optimum conditions of [S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>8</sub><sup>2-</sup>] = 0.334 mM and pH = 4.0. The AMX degradation pathway is studied by means of reactive oxygen species scavenging and identification of intermediates by liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS). Their evolution is directly correlated with an increased toxicity assessed by *Daphnia magna* and *Vibrio fischeri* assays. Furthermore, biodegradability changes are correlated with the mineralization profile of AMX solution. The influence of water matrix constituents (Cl<sup>-</sup>, CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>, NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, PO<sub>4</sub><sup>3-</sup> and Suwannee river natural organic matter) on AMX degradation is established as well.

In part 2, TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocomposites were fabricated via a facile impregnation/calcination technique employing different amounts iron (III) nitrate onto commercial TiO<sub>2</sub> (P25 Aeroxide). The as-prepared TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocomposites were characterized by X-ray diffraction (XRD), Raman spectroscopy (RS), scanning electron

microscopy/energy-dispersive spectroscopy (SEM/EDXS), X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), Brunauer–Emmett–Teller analysis (BET), electron impedance spectroscopy (EIS), photoluminescence spectroscopy (PL), and diffuse reflectance spectroscopy (DRS). As a result, 5% (w/w) Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> achieved the highest photocatalytic activity in the slurry system and were successfully immobilized on glass support. Photocatalytic activity under visible-light irradiation was assessed by treating pharmaceutical amoxicillin (AMX) in the presence and absence of additional oxidants: hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) and persulfate salts (PS). The influence of pH and PS concentration on AMX conversion rate was established by means of statistical planning and response surface modeling. Results revealed optimum conditions of [S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>8</sub><sup>2-</sup>] = 1.873 mM and pH = 4.808; these were also utilized in presence of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> instead of PS in long-term tests. The fastest AMX conversion possessing a zero-order rate constant of  $1.51 \times 10^{-7} \text{ M} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$  was achieved with the photocatalysis + PS system. The AMX conversion pathway was established, and the evolution/conversion of formed intermediates was correlated with the changes in toxicity toward *Vibrio fischeri*. Reactive oxygen species (ROS) scavenging was also utilized to investigate the AMX conversion mechanism, revealing the major contribution of photogenerated  $h^+$  in all processes.

**Key words:** Semiconductor solar photocatalysis; TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> composite; amoxicillin; persulfate; transformation products; toxicity

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## PROŠIRENI SAŽETAK NA HRVATSKOM

Dostupna čista voda jedan je od najvećih prioriteta za održivi gospodarski rast i društvenu dobrobit. Voda podržava život i ključni je resurs za čovječanstvo; također je u srži prirodnih ekosustava i regulacije klime. Vodeni stres prvenstveno je problem količine vode, ali se javlja i kao posljedica pogoršanja kvalitete vode i nedostatka odgovarajućeg gospodarenja vodom. Problemi okoliša koji su povezani s onečišćenjem vode uporno su važno pitanje tijekom posljednjih desetljeća, u negativnoj korelaciji sa zdravljem i ekosustavom. Pojava tragova antibiotika u raznim vodnim tijelima izravno je povezana s razvojem patogena otpornih na antibiotike. Tijekom posljednja dva desetljeća penicilini su naširoko propisivani i korišteni diljem Europe. Nedavno je amoksisilin (AMX) dodan na drugu EU „popis za praćenje” na temelju predložene Europske odluke 2018/840/EU. Njegova prisutnost u otpadnim vodama povezana je s ograničenim uklanjanjem uobičajenim komunalnim uređajima za pročišćavanje otpadnih voda (UPOV) koji se temelje na primarnom (fizičkom) i sekundarnom (biološkom) pročišćavanju. Stoga se moraju primijeniti nove tehnike sanacije za uklanjanje takvih neposlušnih tvari.

Nedavno su napredni oksidacijski procesi (AOP) privukli veliku pažnju istraživanja zbog svoje urođene sposobnosti da osiguraju učinkovitu oksidaciju širokog spektra organskih zagađivača koji su otporni na konvencionalne metode obrade vode. Učinkovitost AOP-a oslanja se na visoko reaktivne i neselektivne vrste, prvenstveno temeljene na hidrosilnim radikalima ( $\text{HO}\cdot$ ). Među raznim AOP-ovima, poluvodička fotokataliza uvelike privlači pozornost zbog stabilnosti poluvodičkog materijala i potencijala korištenja obilne sunčeve energije za razgradnju organskih zagađivača.

Najviše istražen i korišten fotokatalizator u pročišćavanju vode je  $\text{TiO}_2$ . Međutim,  $\text{TiO}_2$  pati od brze rekombinacije fotogeneriranih naboja (tj. parova elektron/šupljina;  $e^-/h^+$ ) i aktivan je samo pod UV svjetlom zbog svog širokog zazora (3,0-3,2 eV), čime se smanjuje njegov potencijal za solarne aplikacije. Ovi nedostaci mogu se poboljšati sljedećim strategijama: dopiranjem metalima i/ili nemetalima, senzibilizacijom boje, ugradnjom ugljičnih nanocijevi, reduciranim grafen oksidom i spajanjem s drugim poluvodičima s uskim propusnim pojasima. Spajanje  $\text{TiO}_2$  s poluvodičima s uskim razmakom i odzivom na vidljivo svjetlo može pospješiti sinergističke učinke između dva poluvodička materijala što dovodi do učinkovitijeg odvajanja naboja i visoke fotokatalitičke aktivnosti pod zračenjem vidljivim svjetlom.

Željezni oksid ( $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ , također poznat kao hematit) obećavajući je kandidat za

spajanje s TiO<sub>2</sub>, zbog svoje zastupljenosti, niske cijene, stabilnosti i aktivnosti vidljive svjetlosti zbog svog uskog zabranjenog pojasa (2,0–2,2 eV). Ono što je najvažnije, prikladni rubni položaji hematita promiču fotogenerirano odvajanje naboja u TiO<sub>2</sub> putem prijenosa heterospojnice. Unatoč nekoliko fotokatalitičkih primjena kompozita TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> za uklanjanje kontaminanata koji izazivaju zabrinutost (CEC), sve su studije istraživale njihovu primjenu u suspenziji (tj. upotrebom praškastog oblika fotokatalizatora), dok je primjena imobiliziranih kompozita TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> jedva prijavio. Štoviše, tretman AMX-a pod sunčevim/vidljivim svjetlom pomoću TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, kao i ekotoksičnost nusproizvoda razgradnje/transformacije AMX-a rijetko se istražuje.

U ovoj disertaciji, uklanjanje AMX-a istraženo je korištenjem slojevitih filmova TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> sendvič tipa izrađenih od komercijalno dostupnih nanomaterijala (1. dio) i korištenjem sintetiziranog TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> napravljenog od čistih kemijskih prekursora (2. dio).

U dijelu 1, kompoziti sendvič tipa izrađeni od komercijalnog TiO<sub>2</sub>-P25 i  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> dobiveni su centrifugiranjem tankih filmova s različitim konfiguracijama slojeva, naime: i) sloj TiO<sub>2</sub> preko  $\alpha$ - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (TiO<sub>2</sub>@ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>), ii)  $\alpha$ - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> sloj preko TiO<sub>2</sub> ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> @ TiO<sub>2</sub>), i iii) fizički pomiješano 50% (w/w) TiO<sub>2</sub>/ Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>. Fotokatalitička aktivnost pod simuliranim sunčevim zračenjem gore spomenutih kompozita i njihovih čistih komponenti istražena je na razgradnju amoksicilina (AMX) u prisutnosti i odsutnosti persulfata (PS). U oba slučaja, TiO<sub>2</sub>@  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> sendvič tip postigao je najviše stope razgradnje AMX-a i primjećuje se značajan učinak dodatka PS na stopu razgradnje AMX-a. Utjecaj pH i koncentracije PS na brzinu razgradnje AMX-a utvrđen je pomoću eksperimentalnog dizajna i modeliranja površine odziva koji su otkrili optimalne uvjete [S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>8</sub><sup>2-</sup>] = 0,334 mM i pH = 4,0. Put razgradnje AMX proučava se pomoću uklanjanja reaktivnih kisikovih vrsta i identifikacije međuprodukata tekućinskom kromatografijom s tandemskom spektrometrijom mase (LC-MS/MS). Njihov razvoj je u izravnoj korelaciji s povećanom toksičnošću procijenjenom testovima *Daphnia magna* i *Vibrio fischeri*. Nadalje, promjene biorazgradljivosti povezane su s profilom mineralizacije AMX otopine. Utvrđen je i utjecaj sastojaka vodene matrice (Cl<sup>-</sup>, CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>, NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, PO<sub>4</sub><sup>3-</sup> i prirodne organske tvari rijeke Suwannee) na razgradnju AMX-a.

U 2. dijelu, nanokompoziti TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> proizvedeni su jednostavnom tehnikom impregnacije/kalcinacije korištenjem različitih količina željezovog (III) nitrata na komercijalnom TiO<sub>2</sub> (P25 aeroksid). Pripremljeni nanokompoziti TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> karakterizirani su difrakcijom X-zraka (XRD), Ramanovom spektroskopijom (RS), skenirajućom elektronskom mikroskopijom/energetsko-disperzijom spektroskopije (SEM/EDXS),

fotoelektronskom spektroskopijom X-zraka (XPS), Brunauer– Emmett-Tellerova analiza (BET), spektroskopija elektronske impedancije (EIS), fotoluminiscencijska spektroskopija (PL) i spektroskopija difuzne refleksije (DRS). Kao rezultat toga, 5% (w/w) Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/ TiO<sub>2</sub> postiglo je najveću fotokatalitičku aktivnost u sustavu kaše i uspješno je imobilizirano na staklenoj podlozi. Fotokatalitička aktivnost pod zračenjem vidljivim svjetlom procijenjena je tretiranjem farmaceutskog amoksicilina (AMX) u prisutnosti i odsutnosti dodatnih oksidansa: vodikovog peroksida (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) i persulfatnih soli (PS). Utjecaj pH i koncentracije PS na stopu konverzije AMX utvrđen je pomoću statističkog planiranja i modeliranja površine odziva. Rezultati su otkrili optimalne uvjete [S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>8</sub><sup>2-</sup>] = 1,873 mM i pH = 4,808; oni su također korišteni u prisutnosti H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> umjesto PS u dugoročnim testovima. Najbrža AMX pretvorba s konstantom brzine nultog reda od  $1,51 \times 10^{-7} \text{ M} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$  postignuta je sustavom fotokataliza + PS. Utvrđen je put pretvorbe AMX, a evolucija/pretvorba nastalih međuprodukata povezana je s promjenama toksičnosti prema *Vibrio fischeri*. Uklanjanje reaktivnih kisikovih vrsta (ROS) također je korišteno za istraživanje mehanizma pretvorbe AMX, otkrivajući glavni doprinos fotogeneriranog  $h^+$  u svim procesima.

**Ključne riječi: fotokataliza uz Sunčevo zračenje; TiO<sub>2</sub>/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> kompozit; amoksicilin; persulfat; nusprodukti transformacije; toksičnost**