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Chapter 8

Earth-Abundant D-Block Metal Nanocatalysis for Coupling Reactions in Polyols



Marc Camats, Daniel Pla, and Montserrat Gómez

Abstract Green Chemistry concepts have directed chemists to conceive and develop sustainable procedures, from the starting materials choice through reaction and analysis conditions, including suitable engineering aspects, to the impact of products, comprising recycling, and waste management. Industrial processes in Fine and Pharmaceutical Chemistry sector have high E factors compared to oil and bulk chemicals industry. Thus, the development of catalytic methods leading to high added value products is crucial, as well as waste minimization through selective transformations. Catalysts from 3d metals, compared to “heavy” metals, are greener, although a combination of different approaches is needed for efficient and viable processes. In contrast to 4d and 5d metals, catalysis with earth-abundant metals is less developed, even less concerning nanocatalysts. Metal nanoparticles, due to their unique electronic and structural properties, induce original reactivities allowing a plethora of transformations. Besides, solvents, present in most steps, represent a major economic and environmental concern. In addition, they can have a dramatic influence on the stabilization of MNP and hence, a huge impact on catalytic activity and recycling. This chapter gives a perspective on 3d metal-based nanocatalysts in polyols applied in couplings, reactions present in many methodologies to produce fine chemicals in a sustainable fashion.

Keywords 3d metals · Metal nanoparticles · Catalysis · Couplings · Polyols

Dedicated to Prof. Guillermo Muller for his thorough contributions in Organometallic Chemistry and Homogeneous Catalysis.

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20 8.1 Introduction

AQ2

21 In the 1990s, a ground-breaking movement concerning the Earth preservation for
 22 future generations has appeared. In Chemistry, these actions led to the Green Chemistry
 23 concept (“Green Chemistry” by Paul et al. [57], Warner et al. [128] articulated
 24 through the 12 Green Chemistry Principles [6]; shortly after, the Sandestin declara-
 25 tion established the bases of the Green Engineering Principles [8]. Without any doubt,
 26 catalysis is one of the most important pillars of Green approaches [7]. Analyzing the
 27 evolution of metal-based catalysis, involving homogeneous and heterogeneous sys-
 28 tems, it is evident to conclude that definitely the twentieth century has been the
 29 century of “heavy” metal-based catalysts, *i.e.*, catalytic processes concerning 4d and
 30 5d metals (such as Mo, Ru, Rh, Ir, Pd, Pt, Au ...), as internationally acknowledged
 31 by the Nobel Prizes in 2005 (Y. Chauvin, R. H. Grubbs and R. R. Schrock) and
 32 2010 (R. F. Heck, E.-i. Negishi and A. Suzuki) for the development of metathesis
 33 processes (mainly Mo- and Ru-based catalysts) and Pd-catalyzed couplings
 34 in organic synthesis, respectively (www.nobelprize.org/prizes/chemistry/2005/summary; www.nobelprize.org/prizes/chemistry/2010/summary). Nevertheless, nature
 35 has exploited earth abundant 3d metals (Fe, Ni, Cu, Zn ...), leading to metalloenzymes
 36 which exhibit a prominent specificity [15]. In coherence to a sustainable devel-
 37 opment, researches on the design of manufactured catalysts with first-row transition
 38 metals have exponentially grown since the 2000s (see the contributions collected in
 39 the special issue “First row metals and catalysis” of Chemical Reviews, 2019) [2, 4,
 40 46, 48, 64, 78, 100, 123, 129] (Fig. 8.1).

41 On the other hand, solvents represent one of the major concerns for chemical
 42 transformations (employed in synthesis, extractions, purifications, analyses...), in
 43 particular volatile organic compounds which are generally toxic showing different
 44 levels of harmfulness and danger, submitted to severe regulations. Alternative sol-
 45 vents (water, ionic liquids and deep eutectic solvents, alcohols, supercritical fluids,

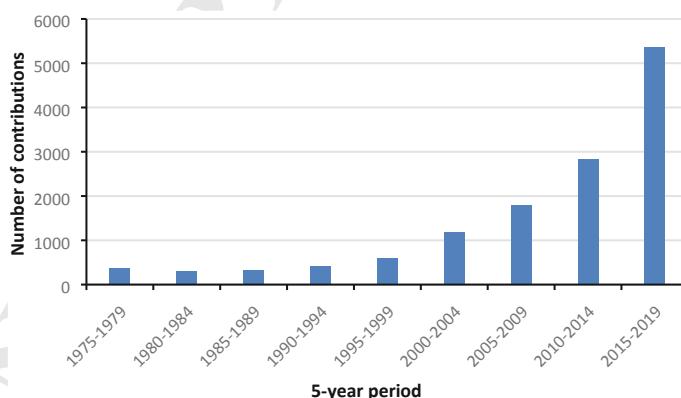


Fig. 8.1 Published contributions per 5-year period for first-row transition metals used in catalysis (data collected from SciFinder Database since 1975 up to July 2019)

47 renewable solvents, combination of different solvents...) and solvent-free chem-
48 istry are useful and efficient approaches for many applications, needing investment
49 and effort to adapt the current processes to the new reaction conditions [68]. In the
50 frame of this chapter, we are interested in polyols, largely used in the industrial
51 sector (highlighting the production of polymers such as polyurethanes, polyvinyl
52 alcohol ...), because they present lower environmental impact than low-weight and
53 volatile organic compounds, and they are particularly attractive for the synthesis and
54 stabilization of nano-sized metal clusters.

55 Focusing on this type of nanomaterials, well-defined metal-based nanoparticles
56 (objects showing dimensions in the range 1–100 nm) have known a huge expan-
57 sion since the 1980s due to their distinctive properties, both physical and chemical,
58 in comparison to molecular and bulk materials. Actually, this is a consequence of
59 their electronic and structural features, making possible a vast number of applica-
60 tions [110, 121, 133], in particular in catalysis [1, 54, 88, 110, 111]. Even though
61 metal nanoparticles (MNPs) have been largely applied in classical heterogeneous
62 catalysis, with crucial participation in industrial processes mainly those related to
63 oil area [136], nanocatalysis, which concerns MNPs dispersed in a solvent have
64 been only developed since the end of the last century. This exponential growth has
65 benefited of the recent advances in characterization techniques (including operando
66 approaches) which has permitted the design of catalysts at nanometric scale by means
67 of controlling morphology and surface state of nanoobjects [5, 9, 62, 89]. Notice-
68 ably, reproducible synthetic methodologies are crucial for their further applications
69 [106, 122]. The chemical strategies (commonly named bottom-up syntheses) often
70 include solvents, from conventional organic compounds to alternative ones (showing
71 a lower environmental impact), such as water [20, 109], ionic liquids [104], scCO₂,
72 [30, 99, 134], polyols [22, 38, 41]. It is important to mention that solvents may be
73 involved in different aspects, for example, as reducing agents, stabilizers, or medium
74 for trapping nanocatalysts preserving their morphology during the catalytic trans-
75 formation and thus facilitating their recycling. This is the case when polyols are
76 present. In 1989, the polyol methodology was for the first time reported by Fiévet
77 and coworkers where metal salts were reduced in ethylene glycol, obtaining well-
78 defined MNPs [42, 43]. In this method, the polyol acts as solvent, reducing agent, and
79 stabilizer when higher polyols are involved (e.g., polyphenols or polysaccharides),
80 which prevents the agglomeration of MNPs in solution [34, 41].

81 These privileged physicochemical properties favor the preparation of tailor-made
82 first-row transition metal nanocatalysts and derived nanocomposites in a controlled
83 manner. Rational catalyst design is essential for the preparation of well-defined clus-
84 ters and nanoparticles with optimal properties in terms of redox control, cooperative
85 effects, and increased surface areas, all of them are key factors for catalysis. Beyond
86 the dual catalytic behavior related to both surface and reservoir of molecular species,
87 nanocatalysis brings novel reaction manifolds due to the unique structural proper-
88 ties of MNPs, particularly their differential electronic structure as compared to bulk
89 metals (e.g., facilitating single electron transfer processes via the Fermi level for
90 electrons [40]).

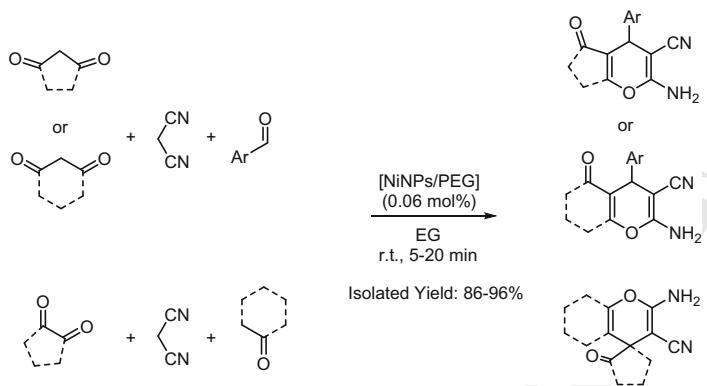
In the present contribution, we focus on the recent advances in 3d metal nanocatalysts (for a recent review, see: [127]), involving polyols acting as stabilizer and/or reaction medium for coupling reactions, Carbon–Carbon and Carbon–Heteroatom bond formation processes, including multicomponent syntheses.

8.2 Carbon–Carbon Bond Formation

C–C cross-coupling reactions have been largely dominated by palladium-based catalyzed processes due to their efficiency and versatility. In particular, the ability of this metal to stabilize different kinds of species (complexes, nanoparticles, extended surfaces) and its relatively high robustness under many different reaction conditions has permitted the elucidation of the corresponding mechanisms [17, 119, 124]. From a sustainable chemistry point of view, the use of first-row transition metals is obviously preferred and a huge research has been developed in the last years (for instance, see the contributions published in the Accounts of Chemical Research special issue “Earth Abundant Metals in Homogeneous Catalysis,” [26]).

8.2.1 Lewis Acid-Catalyzed Coupling Reactions

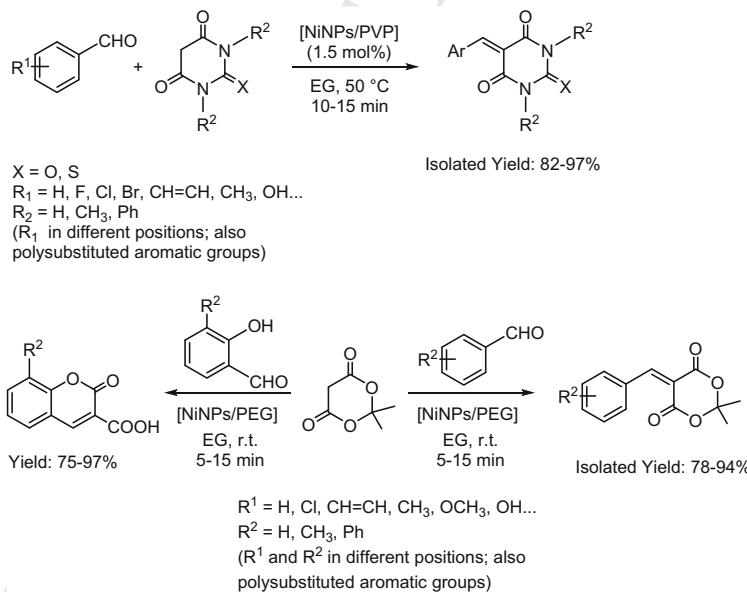
Heterocyclic motifs are present in a large variety of naturally occurring products along with industrial compounds [35, 58, 65, 101]. Multicomponent reactions represent an environmentally friendly approach to prepare polyfunctional compounds, in particular heterocycle derivatives, via one-pot processes involving three or more reactants, with high atom economy and easy implementation [18, 130, 138]. These transformations are often promoted by Lewis acids, which favor the kinetics directing the reaction pathway and in consequence improving the selectivity [49]. In this frame, Khurana and coworkers reported nickel nanoparticles (NiNPs) stabilized by polyethylene glycol (PEG-4000) and prepared by polyol-based methodology using ethylene glycol in the presence of NaBH₄, which was applied in the synthesis of spiropyrans [72], interesting materials particularly due to their unique molecular switch triggering structural isomerization under the effect of different external stimuli (light, mechanical stress, temperature...) [74, 82, 131]. They were synthesized by a multicomponent reaction, constituted of a tandem Knoevenagel-cyclo-condensation involving ninhydrin (or related cyclic dicarbonyl compounds), malonitrile, and dimesrone (or related 1,3-dicarbonyl derivatives) (Scheme 8.1). The role of the nanocatalyst (mean size: ca. 7 nm determined by TEM) was evidenced by different control tests; in the absence of nickel, the reaction was much slower (some hours vs. some minutes) and the use of Ni powder (particle size <150 µm) led to moderate yields after 8 h of reaction. Ethylene glycol was a convenient solvent permitting a straightforward biphasic extraction of products by a biphasic system (using ethyl acetate as immiscible soluble with ethylene glycol), preserving the catalyst dispersed in the



Scheme 8.1 Synthesis of spiropyrans by a multicomponent reaction catalyzed by NiNPs and stabilized by PEG in ethylene glycol [72]

128 diol. NiNPs were efficiently reused up to 3 times. Authors postulated that nickel
129 activates carbonyl and nitrile groups.

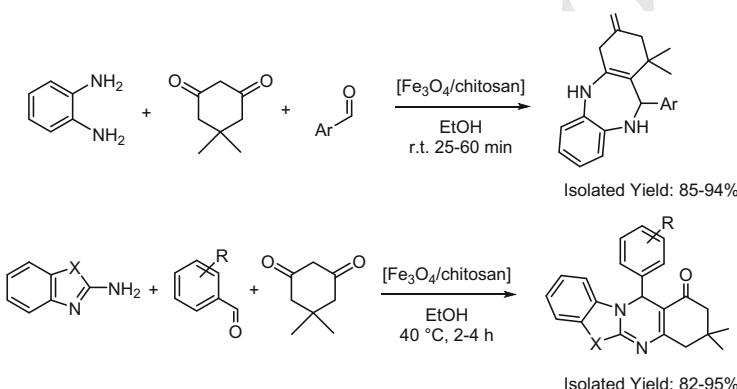
130 The same authors previously reported Knoevenagel condensations of barbituric
131 acid or Meldrum acid and aromatic aldehydes in EG, catalyzed by NiNPs and stabilized
132 by PVP (polyvinylpyrrolidone) [70] and PEG [71], respectively (Scheme 8.2).



Scheme 8.2 NiNPs stabilized by polymers catalyzed Knoevenagel condensations in ethylene glycol [70, 71]

Maleki and coworkers synthesized Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles stabilized by the biopolymer chitosan coming from chitin (polymer of *N*-acetylglucosamine) to be applied in three-component reactions yielding benzodiazepines [85] and benzimidazoloquinazolinones [83] (Scheme 8.3), which present biological and pharmacological activities [24, 56]. For both types of reactions, the catalyst was recycled up to four times preserving its catalytic performance, being ethanol the most appropriate solvent for these catalytic reactions. Authors proposed a similar pathway for both transformations.

In Fig. 8.2, the postulated mechanism for the synthesis of benzimidazolo[2,3-*b*]quinazolinones is illustrated. The reaction most likely starts by a Knoevenagel



Scheme 8.3 Three-component reactions catalyzed by Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles stabilized by chitosan [83, 85]

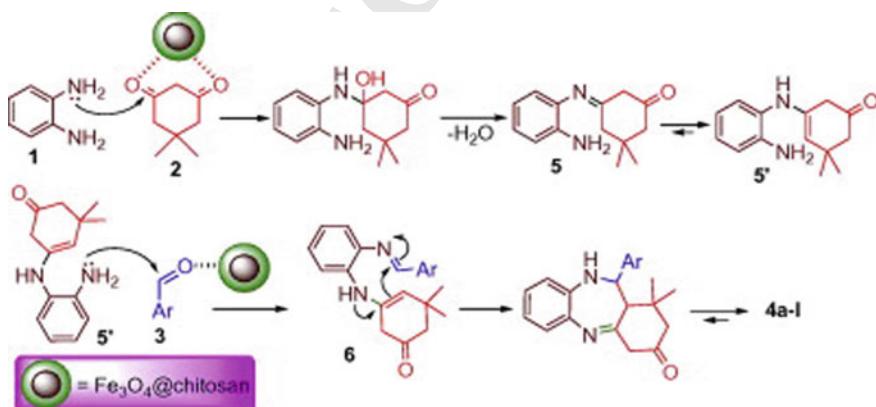


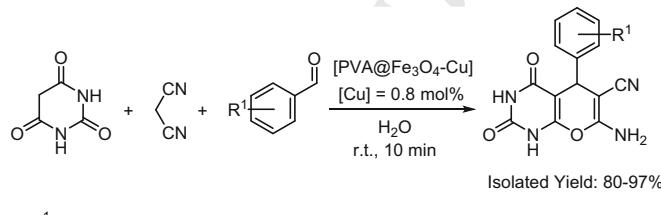
Fig. 8.2 Proposed mechanism for Fe-based catalyzed synthesis of benzimidazolo[2,3-*b*]quinazolinones. Reprinted from [83] with permission from Elsevier 2015, license no. 4639401066332

condensation between the aromatic aldehyde and dimedone; the resulting α,β -unsaturated ketone reacts with the 2-aminobenzimidazole or its corresponding thio-derivative via a Michael addition, giving an acyclic compound which undergoes a further intramolecular cyclization. Similar catalysts were also applied for the synthesis of 2-amino-4H-chromenes [107] and highly substituted pyridines [84].

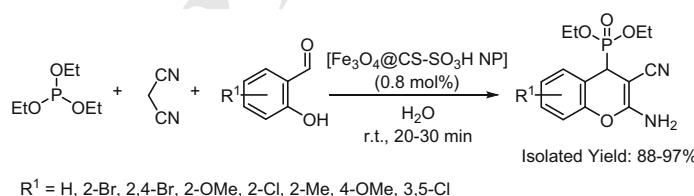
Although the Lewis acid properties of Fe_3O_4 have proven to be useful for the synthesis of heterocycles, these properties seem to be enhanced in the presence of Cu(II) (Scheme 8.4) [86]. This catalytic system was reused 6 times with slight yield loss (first run: 98%; sixth run: 91%).

An interesting variant of this reactivity was reported by Kassanee, showing that chromenylphosphonates could also be prepared in a similar manner in water with high yields and short reaction times (20–30 min), using functionalized magnetite with modified sulfo-chitosan (Scheme 8.5) [92].

Authors propose a mechanism catalyzed by hydrogen–heteroatom (nitrogen or oxygen) interactions, where water is not an innocent solvent (Fig. 8.3). Similar behavior has been observed with magnetite functionalized with sulfo-PEG, $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{PEG-SO}_3\text{H}$ [87].



Scheme 8.4 Synthesis of pyrano[2,3-d]pyrimidines catalyzed by Fe_3O_4 modified with polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) and doped with Cu(II) salts [86]



Scheme 8.5 Synthesis of 2-amino-4H-chromen-4-ylphosphonates catalyzed by $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{CS-SO}_3\text{H}$ nanoparticles [92]

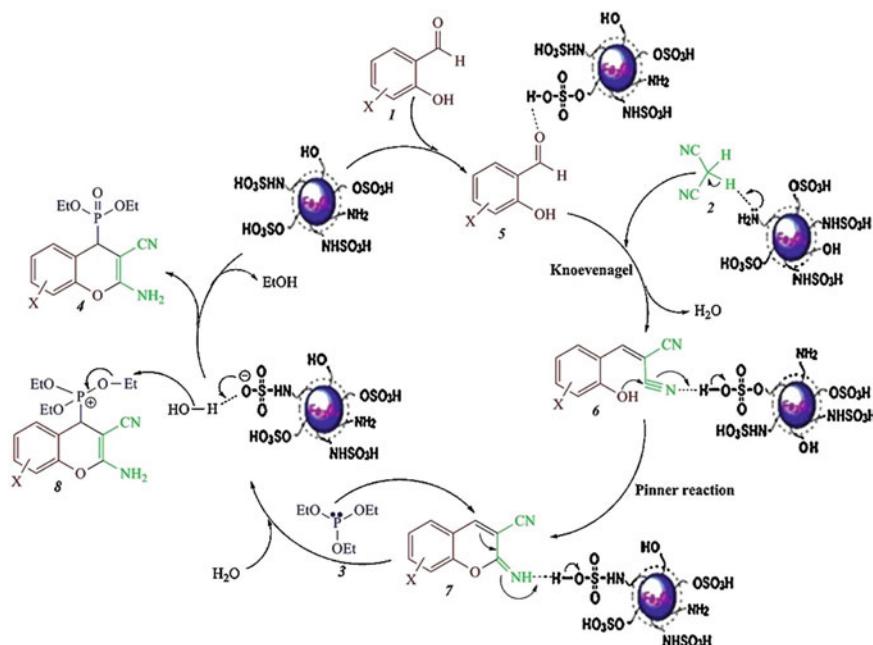


Fig. 8.3 Plausible mechanism for the synthesis of 2-amino-4*H*-chromen-4-ylphosphonates catalyzed by functionalized magnetite, $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{CS}-\text{SO}_3\text{H}$ nanoparticles. Reprinted from [92], Copyright 2013, with permission from Elsevier, license no. 4640241387630

159 8.2.2 Cross-Coupling Reactions

160 The upbringing of d-block transition metals in catalyzed cross-coupling reactions
 161 is gaining ground against palladium thanks to their larger abundance than noble
 162 metals. The Sonogashira–Hagihara cross-coupling reaction enables the formation
 163 of a C–C bond between an sp^2 -carbon halide (aryl or vinyl) and a terminal alkyne
 164 [116]. This transformation was initially described with a $\text{Pd}(0)$ catalyst and a $\text{Cu}(\text{I})$
 165 co-catalyst, but Cu alone [75, 79, 120] or other transition metals have been reported
 166 as efficient catalysts for this transformation (Ni [14, 102, 103], Fe [66], Co [115]),
 167 fueling the important role of abundant metals in C–C bond forming reactions. Gaining
 168 a better understanding on the physicochemical processes leading to the formation
 169 of MNPs is key for the design of nanocatalysts with defined morphology [50, 96],
 170 notably when catalyst heterogenization with solid supports such as zeolites, titania,
 171 montmorillonite and carbonaceous materials is required. Robustness and catalytic
 172 activity of tailor-made nanostructured catalysts outperform in many cases classical
 173 ones [90].

174 **C(sp²)-C(sp²) Sonogashira cross-coupling** Since synthesis of copper(I) acetyllide,
 175 the first organometallic copper complex described in 1859 [19], the reactivity of
 176 copper toward the activation of terminal alkyne groups has yielded a number of

interesting transformations for the synthesis of propargylic compounds [33]. The search of catalytic versions is key for exploiting the privileged reactivity of this metal from the point of view of sustainability [36]. Recent reports on the singular π -activation of alkynes leveraged by zero-valent CuNPs reveal the importance of this coordination in catalysis [31, 96].

In this context, the cross-coupling of terminal alkynes and acyl chlorides has been reported by Bhosale et al. using a Cu/Cu₂O catalyst prepared from Cu(OAc)₂ in one-step under microwave irradiation (3 min, 600 W) in 1,3-propanediol. The as-prepared catalytic material exhibited an irregular morphology that combines tubular domains and spherical particles ranging from 70 to 110 nm in size (Fig. 8.4) of a mixture of Cu(0) and Cu₂O as confirmed by high-resolution XPS analysis [16].

Taking into account the paramount importance that metal traces might have in catalysis, it is crucial to determine their contribution and potential cooperative effects. Firouzabadi et al. described the use of spherical paramagnetic Fe₃O₄ NPs (<30 nm in diameter) in ethylene glycol under ligand-free conditions for the Sonogashira–Hagihara reaction for the synthesis of (hetero)aryl alkynes from terminal alkynes and haloarenes (e.g., heteroaryl bromides, aryl iodides, Scheme 8.6) [44, 45]. In order to ascertain the role of Fe₃O₄ NPs as catalyst, the authors determined the traces of Pd, Ni, Cu, and Co present both in the reagents and solvent. Thus, the contamination concerning the above-mentioned metals was found to be 130 ppb Pd, 45 ppb Ni, 24 ppb Cu, and 21 ppb Co for K₂CO₃; as well as 20 ppb Pd, 33 ppb Cu, 27 ppb Ni,

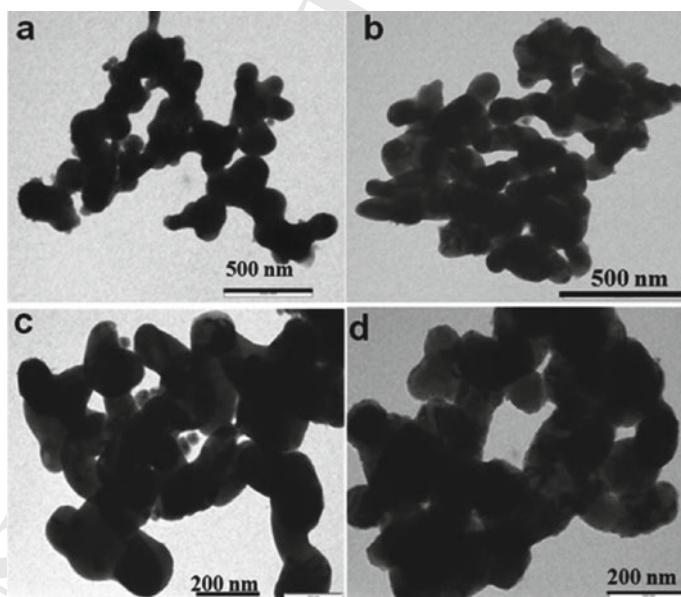
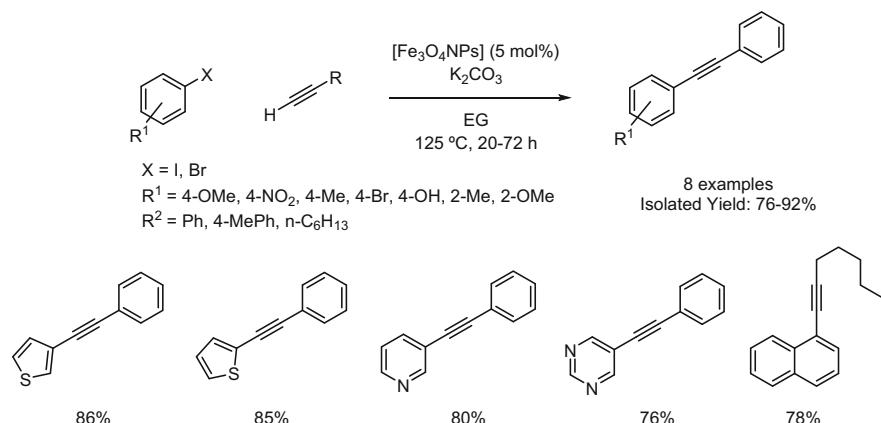


Fig. 8.4 TEM micrographs of Cu/Cu₂O NPs. Reproduced with permission from Royal Society of Chemistry 2014, license no. 4639380035278



Scheme 8.6 Fe₃O₄ NPs catalyzed Sonogashira-Hagihara coupling reaction in EG [44]

and 24 ppb Co for ethylene glycol by ICP analyses. As catalyst controls, different metal salts [e.g., Pd(OAc)₂, CuCl, NiCl₂ CoCl₂] at concentrations ranging from 200 to 1500 ppb were tested, but the catalytic activity of Fe₃O₄ NPs at 5 mol% loadings proved to be superior [44]. The magnetic properties of Fe₃O₄ NPs allowed an easy catalyst recycling with only an overall 2% yield decrease after five consecutive runs.

An example of bimetallic nanocatalyst for Sonogashira cross-coupling reaction featuring PdCo NPs supported on graphene has been described by Dabiri et al. [29]. The synthesis of this nanocomposite was carried out following the polyol methodology. In particular, the co-reduction of PdCl₂ and CoCl₂ was performed in ethylene glycol, which acted as reducing and stabilizing agent for the immobilization of NPs on the 3D graphene support (Fig. 8.5). XPS analysis of the as-prepared nanocomposite revealed the presence of zero-valent Pd and Co (binding energies at 335.67 and 341.49 eV corresponding to Pd 3d_{5/2} and Pd 3d_{3/2}; as well as 781.53 and 798.16 eV corresponding to Co 2p_{3/2} and Co 2p_{1/2}), which match the literature values for PdCo alloys. Higher oxidation states, namely Pd(II), Co(II), and Co(III) were also detected, the latter arising from an oxidation on the NPs surface [29]. The prepared PdCo nanocomposite exhibited high catalytic activity for Sonogashira and Suzuki cross-coupling reactions of aryl halides with terminal alkynes and boronic acids, respectively, in water. Moreover, the catalyst was recycled up to seven times without loss in catalytic activity.

Aluminosilicate-based materials such as montmorillonite are largely used as catalyst supports. Liu et al. have recently described the co-immobilization of Cu and Pd on a montmorillonite-chitosan matrix. According to the authors, the resulting bimetallic CuPd nanocomposite features Pd coexisting in both Pd(0) and Pd(II) valence states, as well as Cu mainly in its Cu(II) as determined by XPS. However, the presence of Cu(0) and Cu(I) cannot be excluded relying solely on this technique. The as-prepared



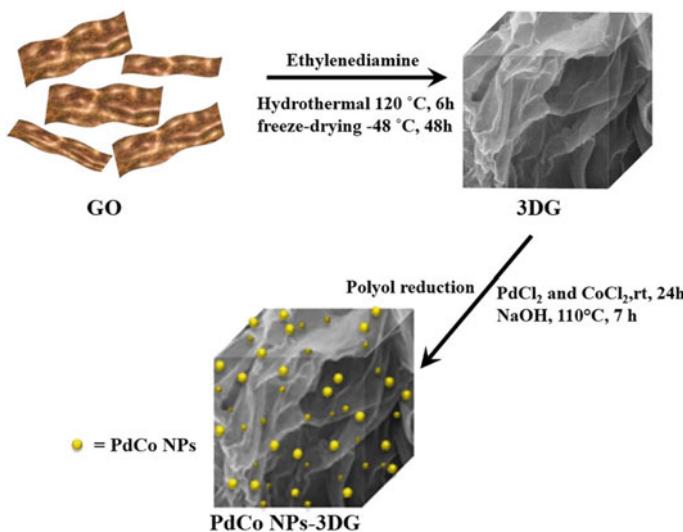


Fig. 8.5 Synthesis of PdCo NPs supported on graphene. Reproduced with permission from Ref. [29]. Copyright 2016 Wiley, license no. 4639270206261

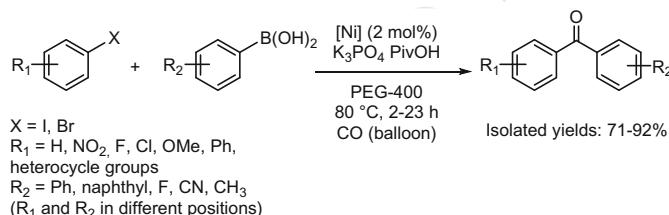
nanocomposite containing spherical PdNPs below 3 nm in diameter catalyzed Sonogashira couplings of haloarenes and alkynes in 1,2-dimethoxyethane/H₂O, although Cu leaching resulted in an activity decrease upon recycling [80].

Alternatively, the stabilization of Pd at higher oxidation states could be achieved via the formation of stable Pd–N-heterocyclic carbene complexes. Yavuz et al. have recently reported Sonogashira cross-coupling reaction catalyzed by *in situ* generated Pd–1H-benzo[*d*]imidazolium complexes [from Pd(OAc)₂ and Cs₂CO₃], and CuNPs in PEG300 [132]. However, authors did not characterize the catalyst employed.

Suzuki–Miyaura-type cross-coupling During the last years, the controlled synthesis of NiNPs has drawn attention to several research groups, the main challenge being the exclusive preparation of zero-valent nickel nanomaterials due to the facile oxidation of Ni(0) species. Consequently, the lack of control of nickel oxidation in preformed nanoparticles is a persistent issue, as shown by several authors. Among them, one finds Tilley and coworkers in the synthesis of nickel nanocubes from Ni(acac)₂ under H₂ [77]; Hyeon's group in the preparation of NiNPs under thermal decomposition [98]; and Zarbin and coworkers in the synthesis of NiNPs following the polyol approach [97]. Chaudret and coworkers published an efficient method for the synthesis of nickel(0) nanorods, from [Ni(COD)₂] under hydrogen atmosphere [27]. More recently, zero-valent NiNPs were successfully prepared in neat glycerol, without exhibiting any oxide shell on their surface thanks to the low solubility of molecular oxygen in glycerol; these nanocatalysts were, in particular, highly efficient for the semi-hydrogenation of alkynes [105]. However, Ni-based nanoparticles have been scarcely applied in C–C cross-coupling reactions. Their efficiency is particularly remarkable when they are formed *in situ*, as proven by Lipshutz and coworkers using

NiNPs generated in water in the presence of appropriate surfactants (acting as stabilizers) and the Grignard reagent MeMgBr to activate the pre-catalyst ($[\text{NiCl}_2\text{L}_n]$, where L is a (di)phosphine and $n = 1$ or 2), which were successfully applied in Suzuki–Miyaura couplings [61]. Simultaneously, Han and coworkers reported Ni-catalyzed carbonylative Suzuki-based reactions in PEG (Scheme 8.7) [135], process leading to biaryl ketones, motif present in different types of compounds (drugs, photosensitizers ...). They compared the reactivity between preformed and in situ generated NiNPs, evidencing that those formed in situ were more active, probably because the latter are smaller, showing less aggregation than the preformed ones. Authors carried out control tests (with Hg and CS_2) in order to prove the nature of the catalytically active species (in the presence of both additives, the reaction did not work), concluding that the activity observed agrees with a surface-like reactivity.

Preformed NiNPs stabilized by triazole-modified chitosan were active nanocatalysts for Suzuki–Miyaura reactions between aryl halides and phenyl boronic acid derivatives (Scheme 8.8) [59].

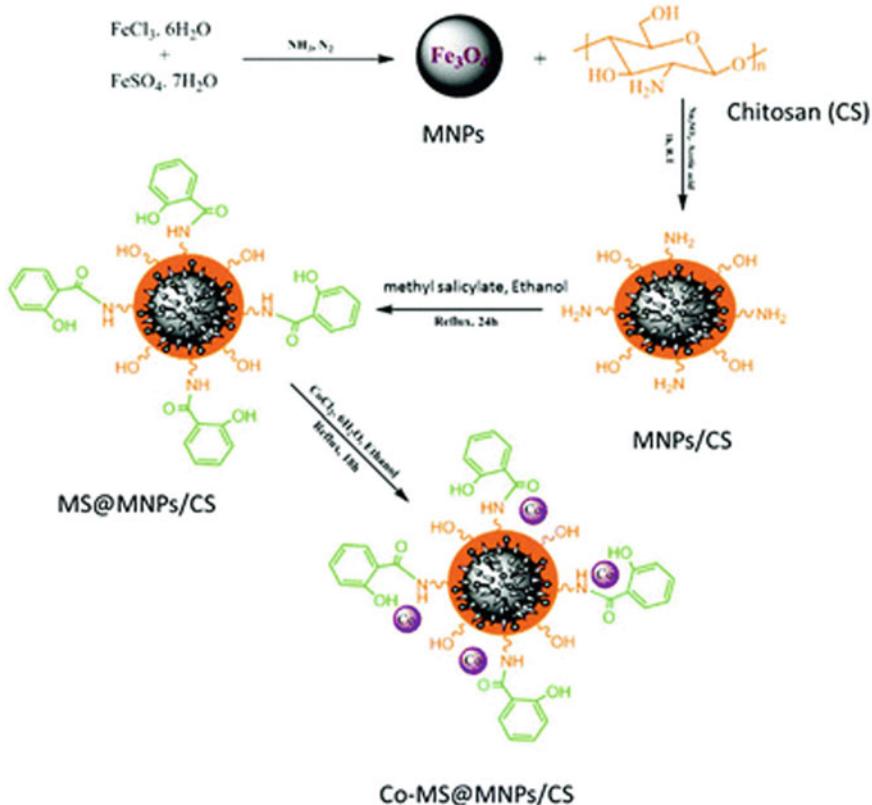


Scheme 8.7 In situ generated NiNPs in PEG-400 applied in carbonylative Suzuki coupling reactions [135]



Scheme 8.8 Synthetic path for the synthesis of NiNPs stabilized by modified chitosan: **a** thiophene-2-carbaldehyde, MeOH , reflux, 3 h; **b** propargyl bromide, K_2CO_3 , acetone, 50°C , 24 h; **c** triflyl azide, aqueous $\text{HCl} \cdot \text{NaHCO}_3$, $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$, MeOH , r.t., 5 d; **d** 2, CuI , DMF/THF (1 : 1), r.t., 72 h; **e** $\text{NiCl}_2/\text{EtOH}$ solution, 12 h, r.t., then hydrazine hydrate, r.t., 2 h. New journal of chemistry by Center national de la recherche scientifique (France); Royal Society of Chemistry (Great Britain) Reproduced with permission of ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY in the format Book via Copyright Clearance Center, license no. 4639350882762 [59]

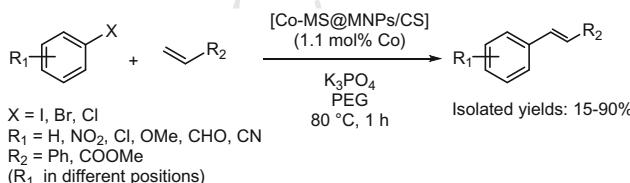
Heck–Mizoroki-type cross-coupling Since the pioneering and independent works from Gilman and Lichtenwalter [55], and Kharasch [69] in the 1930s and 1940s, concerning the homocoupling reaction of Grignard reagents promoted by cobalt(II) salts, scarce works were carried out up to the 1990s [21] and references therein. Cobalt complexes have proven their efficiency for the formation of C(sp²)–C(sp²) bonds; particularly, Co-based catalysts are interesting for cross-couplings where alkyl halides are involved, because β -hydrogen elimination of alkyl intermediates is not favored in contrast to the analogous Pd and Ni organometallic species. In the frame of the present contribution, Co(II) anchored to chitosan-functionalized Fe₃O₄ NPs has found applications in Heck- and Sonogashira-type couplings [60]. Fe₃O₄ NPs containing chitosan were modified by reaction with methyl salicylate to give amide-phenol groups at their surface, which coordinate CoCl₂ (Scheme 8.9).



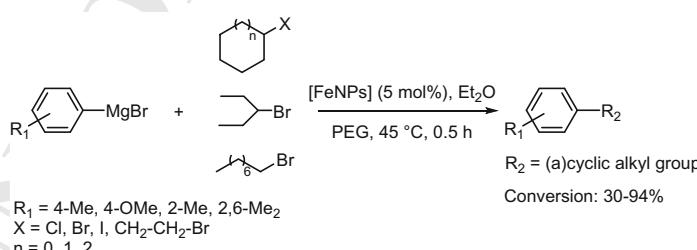
Scheme 8.9 Preparation of co-based nanocatalyst immobilized on Fe₃O₄ nanoparticles modified by chitosan. Green Chemistry by Royal Society of Chemistry (Great Britain) Reproduced with permission of ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY in the format Book via Copyright Clearance Center, license no. 4639360400827 [60]

This represents an example of molecular-like catalytic reactivity using functionalized nanoparticles as support. For the Heck-type reaction, the catalyst was efficient for the coupling of aryl halides (chloro, bromo, iodo) with styrene or methyl acrylate using PEG as solvent (Scheme 8.10). In contrast to the non-functionalized Fe_3O_4 NPs, the functionalized ones were more active and could be recycled up to five times preserving their efficiency, without metal leaching. The Sonogashira-type coupling between aryl halides (bromo, iodo) and phenylacetylene derivatives gave moderate yields under harsher conditions than those used for the Heck couplings.

Kumada-type cross-coupling Kumada–Tamao–Corriu reaction, coupling between a Grignard reagent and an organic halide, was initially reported using Ni-based catalysts [28, 118]; other efficient systems such as those based on palladium and iron, have proven their efficacy, the main part of them involving molecular catalysts, but more recently copper, nickel, and palladium nanoparticles have been used as well ([63, 91] and references therein). Iron, representing the second more abundant metal in the Earth's crust, has found interesting applications in C–C couplings [3, 12, 95]. The main part of reported works assumes the contribution of molecular intermediate species in the catalytic transformation, but also nanoparticles have been identified for low oxidation states (zero-valent FeNPs should be more stable under catalytic conditions than organometallic $\text{Fe}(0)$ complexes) and it has been postulated that they act as a reservoir of molecular species exhibiting higher oxidation state [10]. Bedford and coworkers studied the reaction of alkyl halides with aryl Grignard compounds catalyzed by *in situ* generated FeNPs from FeCl_3 in the presence of PEG-14000 (Scheme 8.11 and Fig. 8.6) [11]. Authors proved that the Grignard reagent acted as



Scheme 8.10 Heck–Mizoroki-type couplings catalyzed by Co(II) supported on functionalized Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles (see Scheme 8.9) [60]



Scheme 8.11 C(sp²)–C(sp³) cross-coupling catalyzed by FeNPs stabilized by PEG [11]

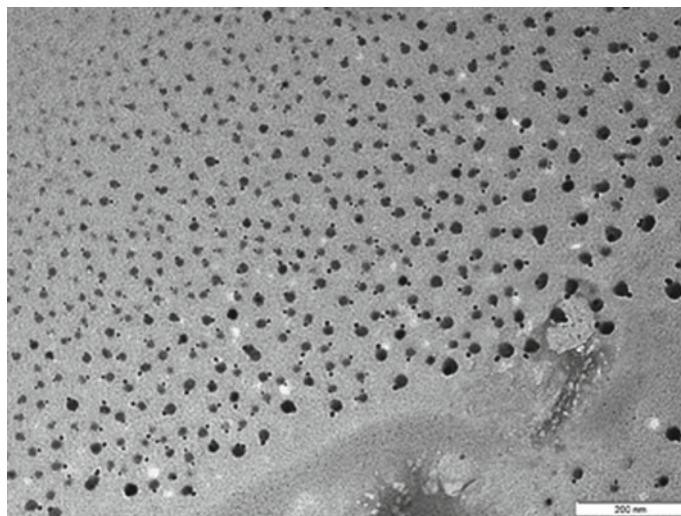


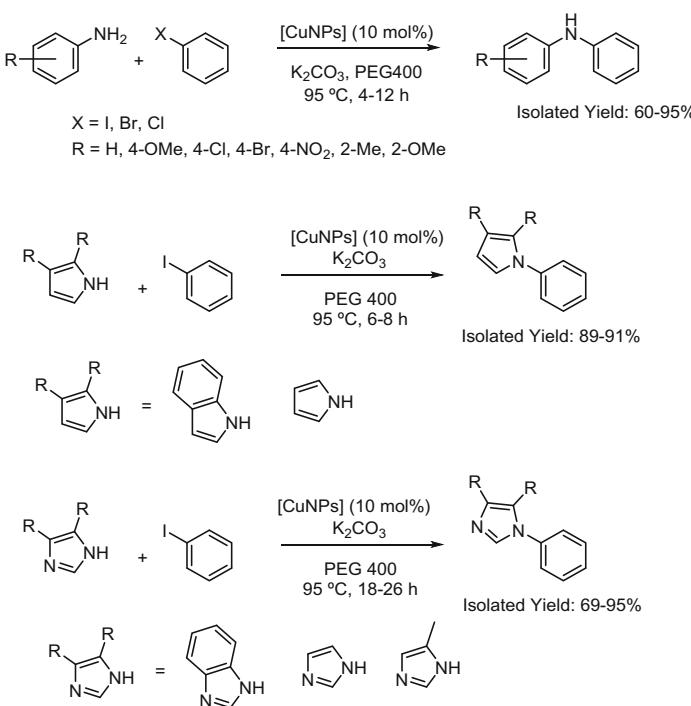
Fig. 8.6 TEM image corresponding to FeNPs generated *in situ* from FeCl_3 in the presence of 1,6-bis(diphenylphosphino)hexane with $4\text{-MeC}_6\text{H}_4\text{MgBr}$. Reproduced with permission of ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY in the format Book via Copyright Clearance Center, license no. 4640081165587 [11].

298 reducing agent. Preformed FeNPs/PEG (diameter in the range 7–13 nm, determined
299 by TEM) afforded the same reactivity as those formed *in situ*.

300 8.3 Carbon–Heteroatom Bond Formation

301 The activation of C–halogen bonds has been overwhelmingly used in the function-
302 alization of arenes. Since the discovery of Ullmann’s coupling in 1901, copper has
303 been one of the most used earth-abundant metals in both C–C and C–heteroatom
304 couplings (original paper of Ullmann: [125]; recent reviews: [13, 94, 108]). How-
305 ever, many applications of this reactivity are especially limited due to the use of
306 hazardous solvents such as DMF and DMSO. A lot of interest has been put into
307 transforming this reactivity into greener approaches. In this context, considerable
308 efforts have been recently developed in nanocatalytic systems capable of working
309 in friendly environmental conditions [67, 127], polyols being alternative solvents of
310 interest [39].

311 This strategy has been successfully applied in a wide range of C–N couplings using
312 many different nitrogen-based reagents. Kidwai and coworkers applied preformed
313 unsupported CuNPs in the *N*-arylation of aryl halides with anilines using PEG400
314 as solvent (Scheme 8.12) [73]. A large scope of aniline derivatives and also NH
315 heterocycles was carried out.



Scheme 8.12 CuNPs catalyzed C–N cross-couplings of anilines and NH heterocycles with aryl halides in PEG400 [73]

Graphene oxide functionalized with carboxamide groups (f-GO) was an efficient support to coordinate Cu(II) salts and further reducing them to give CuNPs immobilized on the solid. This CuNPs on f-GO were then treated with Fe₃O₄ nanoparticles leading to a magnetic catalytic material, which enhanced the catalyst recyclability (Fig. 8.7) [112].

The as-prepared heterogenized nanocatalyst was applied to Ullmann-type coupling for the synthesis of *N*-aryl amines using a deep eutectic solvent (choline chloride:glycerol = 1:2) (Scheme 8.13). Authors compared the efficiency of this catalytic system with other CuNPs, both supported and unsupported, concluding that their catalyst led to higher yields under smoother conditions. However, the recycling was moderate (up to 3 times without loss of activity).

The work of our group on the preparation of small CuNPs ($d_{\text{mean}} = 1.7\text{--}2.4 \text{ nm}$) in glycerol from the reduction of Cu(II) and Cu(I) precursors with PVP as stabilizer and under low pressure of H₂ (3 bar) avoided the formation of oxidized by-products coming from the solvent (Fig. 8.8). This approach represents the first report toward the synthesis of well-defined and stable CuNPs by a bottom-up strategy thanks to the low solubility of O₂ in this medium, circumventing the formation of oxide shells [31].

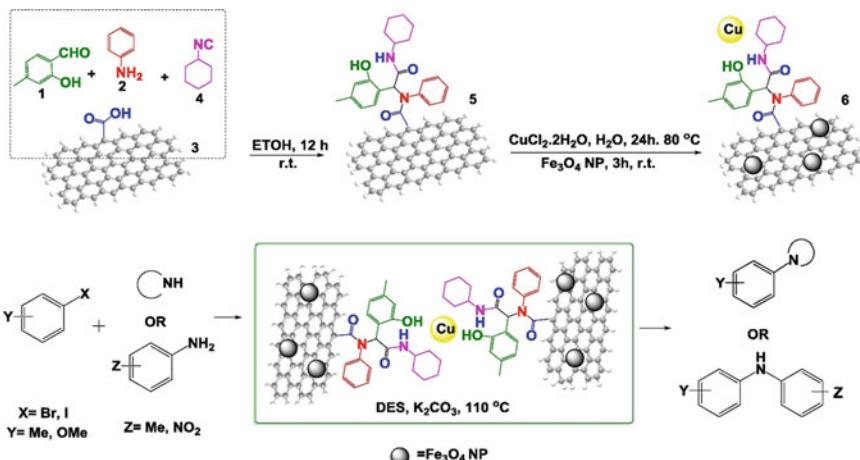
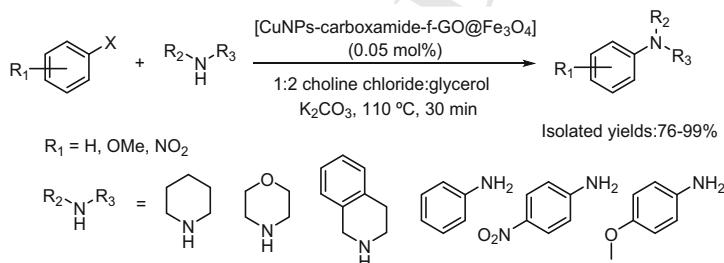


Fig. 8.7 Illustration of the synthesis of CuNPs immobilized on f-GO containing Fe₃O₄ NPs (top) with the application in C–N bond formation processes (bottom). Reprinted from [112], Copyright 2018, with permission from Elsevier, license no. 4640121432056



Scheme 8.13 CuNPs immobilized on a magnetic-modified graphene oxide (see Fig. 8.7) catalyzed C–N couplings of secondary amines and anilines [112]

334 **CuA** nanoparticles were successfully applied in C–N couplings and in the synthesis
 335 of propargyl amines through different strategies, such as cross-dehydrogenative
 336 couplings and multicomponent reactions, both A³ (aldehyde–alkyne–amine) and
 337 KA² (ketone–alkyne–amine) (Scheme 8.14). Authors carried out spectroscopic
 338 monitoring (UV-vis and FTIR analyses) concluding that the C–N coupling follows
 339 a surface reactivity, without formation of Cu(I) molecular species, like
 340 phenylethynylcopper(I), which would be poisoned by the presence of amines.

341 The selection of alternative aldehydes bearing heteroatoms in position 2 of the ring
 342 (e.g., 2-aminobenzaldehyde, 2-hydroxybenzaldehyde and 2-pyridinecarbaldehyde)
 343 provided a direct entry to the synthesis of heterocycles, namely indolizines, benzo-
 344 furans and quinolines via a **CuA**-catalyzed A³-cycloisomerization tandem processes
 345 (Scheme 8.15).

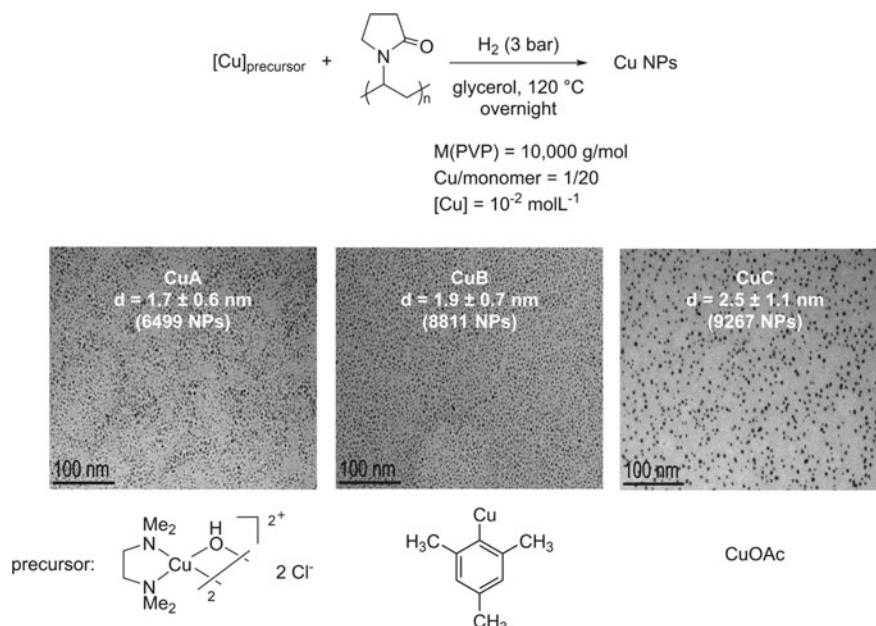


Fig. 8.8 Synthesis of CuNPs in glycerol from different copper precursors stabilized by the polymer PVP (top) and the corresponding TEM images of the different nanoparticles (bottom). Adapted with permission from [31], Copyright 2017 Wiley, license no. 4640130742799

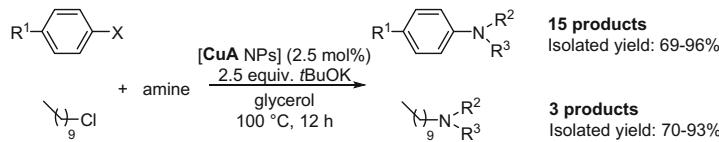
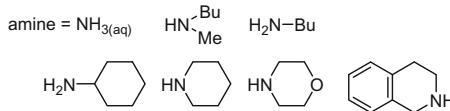
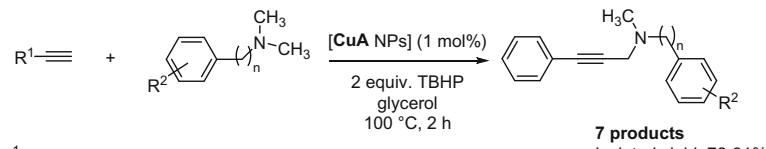
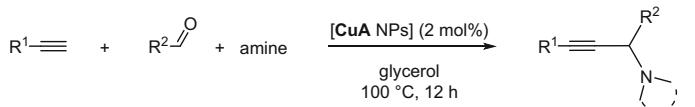
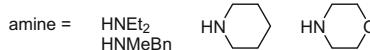
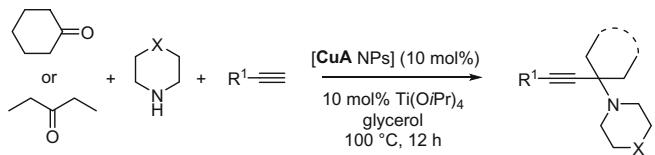
Moreover, Shah et al. have recently reported the A^3 -coupling reaction for the synthesis of propargylamines and pyrrolo[1,2-*a*]quinolines using a heterogenized Cu catalyst (CuNPs@ZnO–polythiophene) at low catalyst loadings (Scheme 8.16). Notably, the cyclization only takes place in an intramolecular fashion and no Cu leaching was detected in the EG reaction medium after catalyst filtration (ICP analyses).

Preformed Cu_2O nanoparticles (mean diameter: ca. 5 nm, Fig. 8.9) were applied in the coupling between iodoaryl derivatives and different nitrogen-based reagents, such as aryl and alkyl amines, but also aqueous ammonia, in glycerol [23]. This nanocatalyst was also efficient for the synthesis of thioethers through C–S couplings.

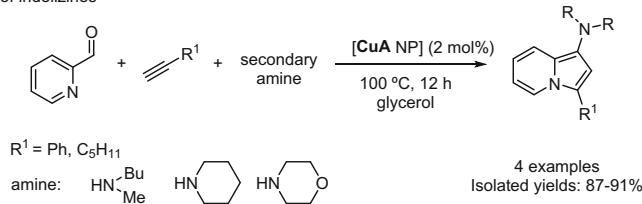
This nanocatalyst has also been applied for the activation of terminal alkyne groups toward azide–alkyne cycloaddition reaction (CuAAC) in glycerol (Scheme 8.17) [23].

Furthermore, Sharghi and Aberi reported the application of Cu_2O NPs in the synthesis of indazole derivatives through a three-component strategy in PEG300 (Scheme 8.18) [114].

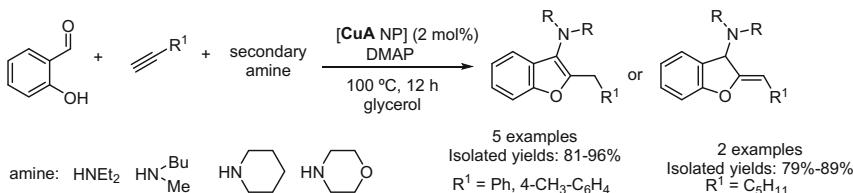
Cu-based catalysts in polyol medium have also found interesting applications in C–S bond formation processes, as proved by our group using Cu_2O nanoparticles [23]. Primo, García, and coworkers reported the synthesis of Cu-based nanoparticles stabilized by chitosan, mainly constituted of $\text{Cu}(0)$ but surrounded by a thin layer

a) Synthesis of amines and anilines $X = \text{I, Br}$ $R^1 = \text{H, OMe, NO}_2, \text{CN}$ *b) Cross-dehydrogenative coupling catalyzed by CuA NPs in glycerol* $R^1 = \text{Ph, 4-CH}_3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_4, 4\text{-COOCH}_3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_4, \text{C}_5\text{H}_{11}$ $R^1 = \text{H, 4-Br, 3-CH}_3$ $n = 0, 1$ *c) A³ coupling catalyzed by CuA NPs in glycerol* $R^1 = \text{Ph, 4-CH}_3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_4, 4\text{-COOCH}_3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_4, \text{C}_5\text{H}_{11}, 4\text{-F-C}_6\text{H}_4$ $R^2 = \text{Ph, 4-CH}_3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_4, 4\text{-Br-C}_6\text{H}_4, 4\text{-CF}_3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_4, \text{Cy}$ *d) CuA-catalyzed KA² multicomponent processes* $X = \text{O, CH}_2$
 $R^1 = \text{Ph, C}_5\text{H}_{11}$ **Scheme 8.14** CuA NPs catalyzed C–N couplings and multicomponent reactions [31]

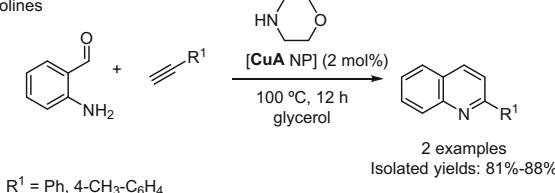
a) Synthesis of indolizines



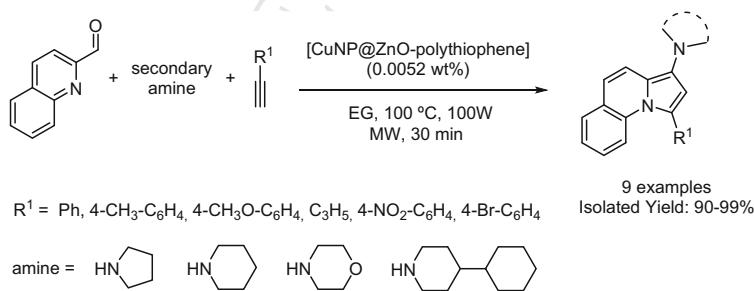
b) Synthesis of benzofurans



c) Synthesis of quinolines



Scheme 8.15 Synthesis of indolizines, benzofurans, and quinolines catalyzed by CuA NPs in glycerol [31]



Scheme 8.16 CuNPs@ZnO-polythiophene catalyzed synthesis of pyrrolo[1,2-a]quinolines in EG under microwave irradiation [113]

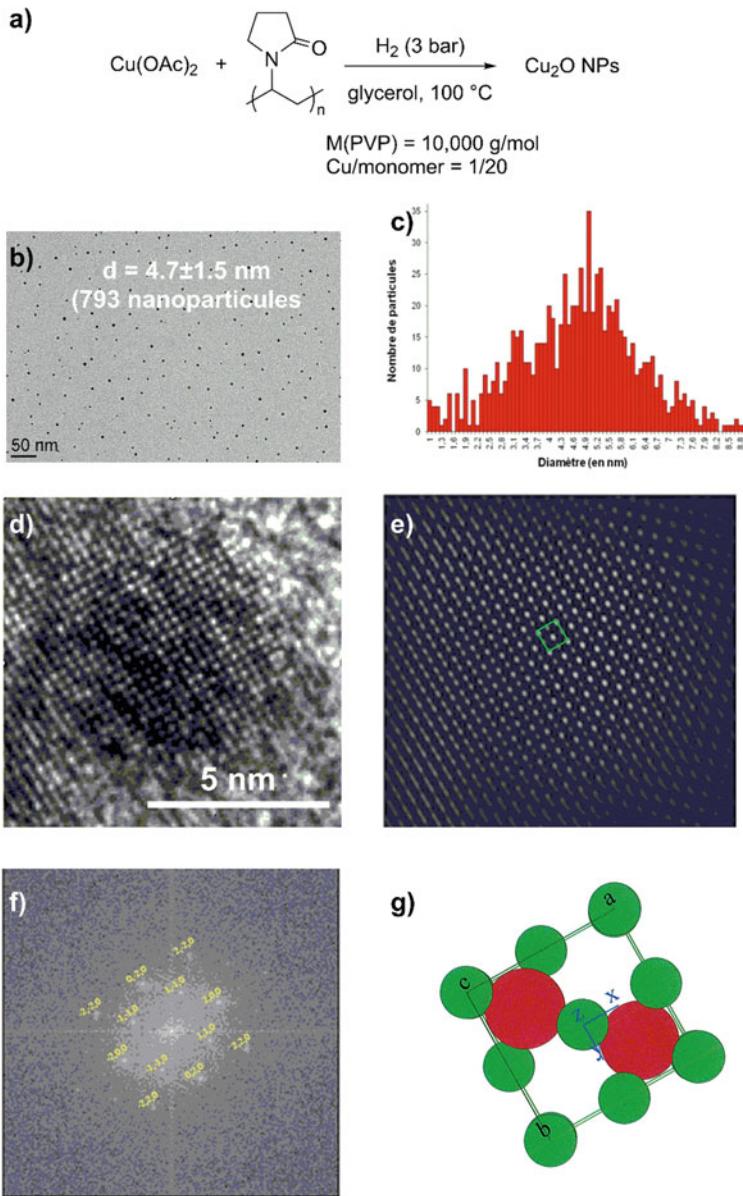
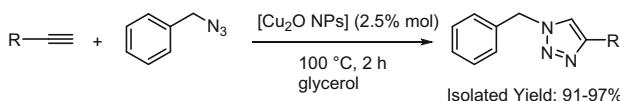
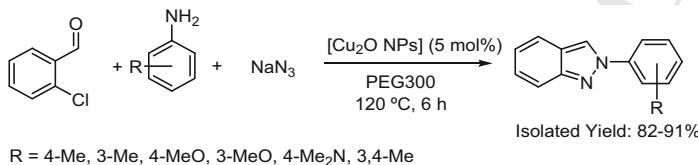


Fig. 8.9 Synthesis of Cu_2O NPs in glycerol and characterization after isolation at solid state and re-dispersion in glycerol. **a** Synthesis scheme; **b** TEM micrograph in glycerol; **c** size distribution histogram; **d** HR-TEM micrograph of one single particle of Cu_2O ; **e** electron diffraction spots by fast Fourier transform of a single particle; **f** filtered image showing the zone axis $[0\ 0\ 1]$; **g** cartoon of Cu_2O cubic structure. Adapted with permission from [23], Copyright 2014 Wiley, license no. 4640200545968



$\text{R} = \text{Ph, Cy, n-Bu, t-Bu, (CH}_2)_3\text{-CH}_2\text{-OH, CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{-OH, (CH}_3)_2\text{C-OH, (CH}_2)_5\text{-CH}_2\text{OH, CH}_2\text{-NMe}_2,$

Scheme 8.17 Cu_2O NPs catalyzed azide–alkyne cycloaddition in glycerol [23]

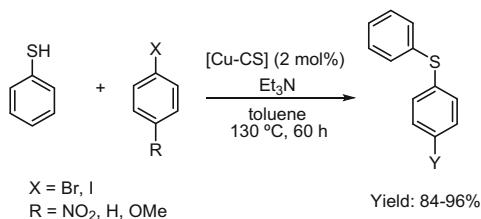


Scheme 8.18 Cu_2O nanoparticles catalyzed the synthesis of 2*H*-indazoles [114]

of copper oxides as proven by XPS [47]. This nanocatalyst was applied in the C–S coupling of aryl halides and thiophenol, being more active for iodo than bromo and chloro arenes, for the latter ones they were only active for aryl halides containing electron withdrawing substituents (Scheme 8.19). Authors observed that halide anions released to the medium during the catalytic reaction can act as poison for CuNPs, in addition to promoting metal leaching.

Generally speaking, C–O couplings are more challenging reactions mainly due to the limited functional compatibilities and the need of activated substrates [76, 117]. Besides, the use of polyol medium adds another difficulty because the solvent can compete with the substrate. In this frame, Biegi and Ghiasbeigi have recently reported the synthesis and full characterization of functionalized magnetite with isonicotinic acid with the aim of coordinating Cu(I) precursors (Fig. 8.10) [51]. The resulting catalytic material was efficiently applied to the synthesis of phenol and aniline derivatives (TOF up to 4494 h^{-1}), using a mixture of PEG and water as solvent ($\text{PEG:H}_2\text{O} = 2:1$) (Scheme 8.20). The catalytic phase was recycled up to 5 times with slight loss of yield, although the 30% copper loss reported by the authors after the fourth run was substantial (Cu content of catalyst before use: 57,037.8 ppm; after 4th run: 40,297.3 ppm).

Scheme 8.19 CuNPs stabilized by chitosan applied in C–S couplings [47]



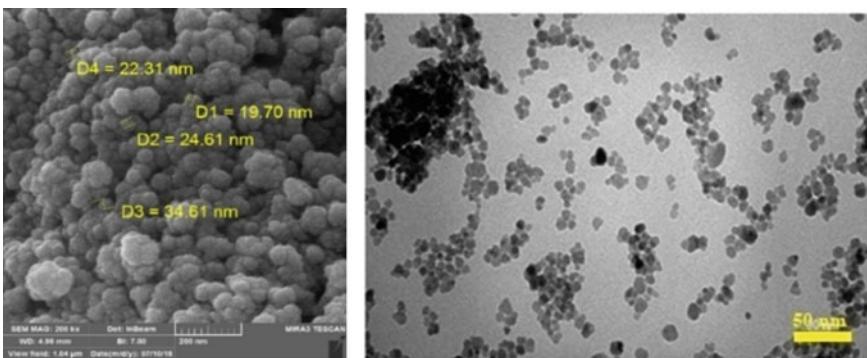
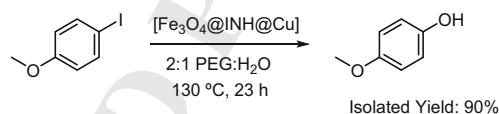


Fig. 8.10 SEM (left) and TEM (right) images of Cu(I) grafted to Fe_3O_4 modified by isonicotinic groups. Reprinted with permission from [51], Copyright 2019 Wiley, license no. 4640160235060

Scheme 8.20 Synthesis of phenols catalyzed by Cu-based catalyst supported on modified Fe_3O_4 [51]



384 8.4 Conclusions and Outlook

385 This chapter describes the use of nanocatalysts from Earth-abundant metals in polyol
 386 media applied in C–C and C–heteroatom coupling reactions. Despite the interesting
 387 reports mentioned in this contribution, nanocatalysis based on d-block transition
 388 metals in polyols is still in its infancy. This is an exponentially growing research
 389 field that exploits the non-innocent physicochemical properties of polyols as reducing,
 390 stabilizing, and dispersing agents in the quest for tailor-made nanocatalysts
 391 and nanocomposites with enhanced properties as compared to classical ones. In the
 392 framework of the development of greener and more sustainable processes, Cu, Ni,
 393 Co, and Fe nanocatalysts in polyol media represent key alternatives to overcome the
 394 dependence on the scarcity of noble metals in use currently for both academic and
 395 industrial purposes.

396 The Lewis acidity properties of 3d-transition metals confer them suitable properties as (co)catalysts to effect new transformations by means of (i) Lewis acid
 397 base-adduct formation, thereby accelerating slow elementary steps, (ii) pKa of the reaction modulation (e.g., release of a Brønsted acid, proton transfer processes), or
 398 (iii) activating the catalyst precursors or off-cycle catalyst species by tuning its coordination sphere by anion abstraction. This chapter describes the reports on Ni, Cu,
 399 and Fe Lewis acid mediated transformations in polyol medium, but contributions from other abundant metals will surely appear in the literature in the years to come.

400 On the other hand, the abundance and redox properties of 3d-metal-oxide-based
 401 materials confer them large applicability as supports for catalysts. In particular, the

406 magnetic properties of Fe_2O_3 and Fe_3O_4 as supports enable the recovery of the pre-
407 prepared composite materials. For instance, the use of such supports for the preparation
408 of heterogenized Pd catalysts for C–C cross-coupling reactions and hydrogenations
409 in polyol medium has been widely reported (for selected articles, see: [37, 52, 53,
410 81, 126, 137]). Other supports based on 3d-transition metals such as TiO_2 [93], CuO
411 [25], and ZnO [113] have also been used for the same purpose. This heterogenization
412 strategy efficiently enables the recoverability of the catalytic materials by magnetic
413 separation, and also in some cases, the enhancement of TON is observed due to the
414 synergy between catalyst and support. Furthermore, polymetallic systems merit fur-
415 ther studies to exploit the cooperative effects between active metal centers in polyol
416 medium [32]. The intrinsic properties of polyols in terms of favoring 3D organization
417 via supramolecular interactions, their suitable oxidation potentials for the reduction
418 of transition metal salts and organometallic complexes, as well as their dispersing
419 abilities via solvation interactions, which often trigger an activity increase, confer
420 them unique properties in nanocatalysis.

421 From a structural point of view, 3d-metals based-species present several oxidation
422 states, often leading to paramagnetic intermediates of challenging elucidation. Given
423 the specificity developed by nature in biocatalyzed transformations involving 3d-
424 transition metals and the demonstrated efficiency of nanocatalysts discussed herein
425 (e.g., Cu NPs for Sonogashira and C–heteroatom couplings, Ni NPs for Suzuki, Co
426 NPs for Heck–Mizoroki, Fe NPs for Kumada-like couplings ...), the fundamental and
427 applied research in this field foresees new reactivities and deep mechanistic insights
428 taking advantage of the cutting-edge in operando techniques available nowadays.

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