

# Thermal building control using active ventilated block integrating phase change material

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1	Thermal building control using active ventilated block
2	integrating phase change material
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#### 29 Abstract

In the context of improving energy efficiency and thermal comfort in the building, the use of 30 phase change materials (PCMs) is one of the suggested solutions. The proposed integration 31 solutions concern the building envelope as well as the applications related to its operation. 32 33 The study of the incorporation of PCM in the walls of the building was the subject of numerous works. However, the antisymmetric character of storing/recovering energy 34 35 management in the walls is less controlled and do not fit the optimal conditions. In this study, a solution based on the direct integration of a stabilized PCM (gel) in an envelope 36 37 including ventilation channels, was proposed to overcome this problem of antisymmetry storing/recovering and fitting with different fixed ambient conditions. The final aim is to 38 39 develop the optimization strategy of a wall combining the heavy inertia offered by the PCM, intra-ventilation control and the contribution to air renewal energy demand. 40

41 In this context, an experimental study of a concrete block system is conducted to test the thermal response of this configuration by the application of cyclic solicitations. The 42 comprehension of this integrated constructive solution essentially passes by the possession 43 of validated numerical tools. For this, two models have been developed. The first model 44 using the electrical-thermal analogy, based on an RC equivalence, is distinguished by its 45 46 relative simplicity and weak time computing demand. Each of these two factors, R and C 47 summarise the system properties and has a direct influence on the building transient simulations over a year. The second one is based on direct numerical simulation DNS of the 48 energy and fluid flow equations using commercial code COMSOL Multiphysics. Such DNS is 49 50 time consuming and could not be used to simulate over a year but aims only to validate the first RC circuit approach. A comparison of these two models with the idealised experimental 51 52 data was carried out and allowed the validation of the thermal behaviour of the solution based on the integration of the PCM with core ventilation. 53

54

- 55 Nomenclature
- 56 Latin letters
- 57  $f_v$  Volume fraction

5	8	С	Thermal capacitance (J/K)			
5	9	$C_p$	Specific heat at constant pressure (J/kg K)			
6	0	е	Element thickness (m)			
6	1	h	Convective heat transfer coefficient (W/m <sup>2</sup> K)			
6	2	k	Thermal conductivity (W/m K)			
6	3	L	Length (m)			
6	4	ṁ	Airflow rate (kg/s)			
6	5	Q	Heat flux (W/m²)			
6	6	R	Thermal resistance (K/W)			
6	7	Ra	Rayleigh number			
6	8	S	Surface (m²)			
6	9	Т	Temperature (K, °C)			
7	0	t	Time (s)			
7	1	Tin	Air inlet temperature (K, °C)			
7	2	Tom	Onset temperature of the melting (K, °C)			
7	3	Tou	Air outlet temperature (K, °C)			
7	4	$T_{sl}$	Phase change temperature (K, °C)			
7	5	и	Velocity field (m/s)			
7	6	Greek letters				
7	7	$\Delta L$	Latent heat (J/kg)			
7	8	ε	Emissivity			
7	9	μ	Dynamic viscosity (kg/m s)			
8	0	ρ	Density (kg/m³)			
8	1	σ	Stefan-Boltzmann constant (W/m² K4)			
8	2	φ	Solar radiation heat flux (W/m²)			
8	3	Subscripts				
8	4	amb	Ambient			

- 85 сопу Convection 86 С Concrete *elec Referring to electrical physical quantities* 87 i 88 Internal, indoor 89 l Liquid min Minimum 90 0 91 Outer, outdoor 92 *pcn Phase change material* 93 rad Radiation S 94 Solid t Tube 95 V Ventilation 96 97 W Wall 98 Acronyms *EXP* Referring to experimentation 99 *FEM* Finite element model 100 101 *DSC Differential scanning calorimetry* PCM Phase change material 102
- 103 PVC Polyvinyl chloride
- 104 *RC Referring to resistance and capacitance network model*
- 105

# 106 **1. Introduction**

Energy consumption in the building sector is gaining increasing interest as it is directly 107 related to energy economics and sustainable development. The design and the choice of 108 109 building materials, as well as the energy and thermal systems evolve very rapidly. In the energy challenge, the building is among the largest consumers of energy. Efficiency and 110 optimization of energy systems remain among the main axes studied in order to reduce 111 112 energy consumption and increase system performance. The need to balance available energy with occupant comfort involves the use of new innovative and effective technological 113 solutions. In the area of housing, the cost and optimization of space are the two main 114 reasons that require the decrease of the thickness of walls in new constructions; however, 115

this reduction greatly affects the thermal inertia of the frame and makes it insufficient to effectively damp the oscillations due to the outdoor temperature variation. Moreover, the management of thermal comfort by control systems acting on ventilation poses the problem of increasing the electrical consumption energy and the drawbacks related to the operation of these devices (noise, maintenance, etc.).

121 The integration of phase change materials (PCMs) in the building envelope is an interesting 122 solution to optimize energy consumption. When integrated into building elements, their energy storage capacity using latent heat is manifested. A thermal phase shift is performed 123 during the energy storage phase, then comes the restitution phase with a damping, which 124 reduces the needs according to the outdoor climatic conditions of the considered 125 construction. This topic has been the subject of numerous studies aimed at answering the 126 127 various difficulties that oppose the optimal use of this solution [1-4]. Among these constraints, one can cite the choice of the appropriate method of incorporation of these 128 129 products but also the limits imposed by the use of such a material which changes phase. Direct incorporation, impregnation of building materials, incorporation of capsules filled 130 with PCM are part of the used methodologies. Thus, in order to minimize the risk of leakage 131 during the melting of this type of product, mixtures are used which aim at reinforcing the 132 PCM matrix, for example, the use of polymers which make it possible to have mechanically 133 stable gels during the process liquid phase [5]. Similarly, the efficiency of the systems 134 135 developed requires an optimization study on the types of PCM to be used, the dimensions of the system and the possible combinations in order to correctly manage the energy 136 137 charged/discharged in these products [6,7].

Two categories of integration can be distinguished, when incorporated into the building 138 envelope or in applications related to the thermal comfort regulation during the occupation 139 140 of the building. In the first type of integration, the following cases can be mentioned: integration in floors [8–10], walls [11–13], masonry elements [14–16] and roofs [17–19]. This 141 integration category of PCM also includes its use in windows and glazing [20–22] as well as in 142 shading systems [23–25]. Concerning the use of PCMs in comfort conditioning systems 143 within the building, the free cooling method based on heat exchangers was developed 144 according to several approaches [26-29]. These different studies have shown that the 145 contribution of PCMs increases the thermal inertia and on the other hand improves the air 146 147 quality in buildings.

The vertical elements of the building are the most studied, the wall panels that can be fixed on the base walls are among the solutions proposed. In this context, many products have been tested and marketed because this solution makes it possible to minimize the level of the peak temperature during hot periods and to save energy. The damping of the peaks of temperature obtained can go up to 4°C [30–32]. Concrete and coatings PCM based are part of the solutions applied to the walls. They are found under several compositions with different percentages of PCM. The tests carried out in a real scale on cells, show the increase of the storage capacity as a function of the volume ratio of the PCMs, as well as the difference in indoor surface temperature with respect to a reference cell [12,33,34].

The solutions applied to the walls also include integration into the masonry elements. In this 157 configuration Alawdhi et al. [7] conducted an optimization study of the amount of PCM to be 158 introduced into bricks containing cylindrical cavities. By means of a 2D finite element model, 159 they show that the best configuration reduces the inward heat flux on the wall by 17.55%. 160 161 Zhang et al. [14] numerically studied the filling of holes in traditional bricks. As results, the study shows a 10% decrease in the amplitude of the surface temperature of the wall. Principi 162 et al. [15] presented an experimental and theoretical study of the impact of a brick wall with 163 PCM. As result, they showed that the presence of PCM affects the peak of heat and it 164 generates a phase shift of 6 hours with a decrease of 25% of temperature amplitude. 165

In all these works on construction materials, the interest is on the behaviour of the PCM 166 mainly in relation to the quantity used and the different combinations of filling in order to 167 obtain the best possible configuration [35]. However, these applications do not allow the 168 control and management of the stored/recovered energy in the PCM other than the change 169 in quantities or the type of PCM. The PCM imposes its behaviour on the output indicators, 170 which reflect the response of the system. A wall containing PCM is solicited from the outside 171 by an oscillating temperature between two, maximum and minimum values influenced by 172 the solar heat flux, while the interior is restricted by a comfort temperature generally set by 173 conditioning systems that operate for compensating or eliminate the heat flux crossing the 174 walls. In summer, the heat loads crossing the wall can be considered negligible if compared 175 176 to the internal heat gains. Such heat loads are shifted during the night hours. The increase in apparent heat capacity and a fast discharge will act and enhance the indoor comfort as it is 177 equivalent to efficient free cooling. 178

Often, the chosen phase change temperature is generally close to the comfort set point, this remains valid as long as the PCM part is close to the inner side. Depending on the season and weather conditions, charging and discharging a PCM-based wall does not occur at the same time. In this situation, a rebalancing is necessary in order to accelerate or slow down the charging period or to shift the discharge.

184 As part of this study, a new strategy is proposed for using a wall with PCM, adding internal 185 ventilation through tubes located within the PCM contained in the wall. Fig. 1 shows the wall 186 which consists of concrete blocks filled with PCM and ventilated channels. This solution 187 allows both increasing the thermal inertia thanks to the inertial capacity of the PCM and to 188 control the charge/discharge while enhancing the exchanges by injecting the air from the 189 outside to the inside. It thus allows contributing to the conditioning of the renewal of the 190 local air and the temperature change. The diagram presented in Fig. 1 also shows the utility 191 of such a system in the management of energy needs. It allows, for example, the storage of 192 the energy released during the night from heating [36]. Ventilation control through the 193 system helps to meet some of the morning's energy needs when occupants wake up.

Fig. 1. Principle and utility of the tubes in the developed solution.

194

The study of thermal solutions in the building usually goes through an experimental study which serves as a basis for validation of the models and optimization on the numerical level. The development of the numerical model is essential to show the usefulness of the solutions and quantify the thermal behaviour of the systems. However, the resolution of the studied physical system requires techniques based on equations describing the physical behaviour of heat transfer. Generally, three main thermal building models are currently used in modelling: multi-zone, zonal and CFD (Computational Fluid Dynamics) methods [37].

In the multi-zone or nodal approach, modelling by electrical analogy is a technique often 202 203 used. It simplifies the physical problem by linearizing the equations and thus reduces the 204 calculation time. The equivalent electric circuit, formed of resistances and capacitances (RC), 205 represents the fundamental physical relations which translate the studied thermal 206 phenomena. It is based on the combination of a thermal resistance R and a thermal capacity 207 C for each studied thermal element. The RC model is distinguished by its speed, which is an 208 important factor in simulations related to the building where the heat exchanges require substantial time intervals where calculations generally become very heavy [38-43]. In 209 addition to the phenomena often modelled, namely conduction and convection, a modelling 210 of the phase change of paraffin with integrated ventilation system will be presented in this 211 study. The features of the Simscape library integrated in the Matlab/Simulink environment 212 are used. The method of resolution, thus adopted makes it possible to work on a circuit 213 constituted of variable resistances and capacitances. 214

This article is part of the studies on the direct integration of a phase change material into a concrete block [44,45]. In this context, a structural element of "hollow concrete block" filled with a polymer-paraffin composite and provided with ventilation tubes allowing the circulation of air will be studied. The used mixture of PCM is mechanically stable and that avoids the problem of leakage. This study will be presented in four main axes:

- The first one is developed in approaching the actual operating conditions of the system and represents the experimental study which is used to compare the effect of PCM filling and the influence of tube condition (open, closed and ventilated).
- The second part is dedicated to modelling of the system under COMSOL
   Multiphysics.
- After validating the used model, the third part will be devoted to reducing the time
   calculation request by using the electrical analogy modelling and the equivalent RC
   model.
- Finally, a validation was performed by comparing the two models with the experimental data.

### 230 2. System description

Fig. 2(a) presents a diagram and an illustration of the developed system which is based on a commercial hollow Concrete Block having the following length x height x width dimensions: 50 cm x 20 cm x 9.5 cm. The concrete block consists of 3 parallelepiped cavities. A PVC tubes are used, with a diameter of 2 cm and a thickness of 1 mm. Two holes are carried out in the base of each cavity to place the six tubes. The PCM is incorporated directly in the molten state in the cavities (temperature higher than the temperature of the solid gel).

237 238 Fig. 2. Description of the developed system: (a) Schematic of the ventilated hollow concrete block integrating PCM (b) Schematic diagram of the experimental setup.

The used PCM is a mixture of paraffin and a styrene-type polymer. The choice of paraffin 239 240 removed both hydrated salts, known by their corrosive tendency, as well as unsuitable fatty acids because in our case the PCM is directly put in contact with the concrete having a basic 241 242 pH. The use of a percentage of polymers in solution makes it possible to obtain a gel with acceptable stability in order to avoid problems of leakage in the liquid state. Currently, 243 paraffin manufacturers offer a wide range that varies with melting temperature as well as 244 latent heat. Normally, the choice will have to take into consideration the antisymmetry 245 between the external conditions and the temperature of comfort fixed indoor. The melting 246 247 temperature chosen is important to create a wall temperature stabilization bearing close to 248 that of comfort and also offer a sufficient storage that allows the incoming air to be conditioned through the tubes. The realized mixture has the same characteristics as that 249 250 used in the work of Royon et al. [5]. Base paraffin is a commercial product having a melting 251 temperature of 27 °C and a latent heat of 179 kJ/kg. This choice is also based on 252 experimental laboratory manipulation conditions, which requires a difference between the melting temperature and the ambient temperature to avoid the onset of melting. The 253 254 percentage of the used polymer is of 15%. The latent heat after mixing is equal to 110 kJ/kg. 255 Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the mixture as well as the materials constituting the used system. 256

257

**Table 1.** Thermo-physical properties of the materials constituting the system.

- 258 **3. Experimental study**
- This part is devoted to the description of the used experimental device as well as the procedure explaining the progress of the realized tests.
- The obtained results of the experimental study are presented and a comparative study of the different mounting configurations chosen is carried out to show the system behaviour.
- 263 **3.1.** Experimental device and procedure

Using a real scale system imposes constraints to fully adapt the experimental study and the actual operation of the considered element as a representative part of a sunny wall. The 266 experimental device consists of an electrical resistance which allows imposing a power heat on the side surface of the concrete block. K-type thermocouples are arranged on both side 267 268 surfaces, they are placed at mid-height and on the same horizontal plane (Fig. 2(b)). Linked 269 to the acquisition system, they make it possible to follow the evolution of the temperature. 270 Small fans are used to inject air through the tubes. The speed and temperature of the air are checked with a hot-wire anemometer. In order to avoid thermal losses at the edges of the 271 272 system, a layer of polyurethane foam surrounds the other surfaces is used. The second face of the block is in contact with the ambient air of the laboratory room which varies slightly 273 around 21 °C. 274

275 A preliminary study of thermal stresses allowed choosing an adequate heating power so as not to exceed a temperature of 50 °C on the heated surface. This maximum temperature is 276 277 chosen relative to the limit of the stability of the used gel. The solicitation chosen has three cycles with a duration of 24 hours for each one. Each cycle consists of applying a constant 278 279 heat power for 5 to 6 hours, except for the concrete block without PCM which its inertia is 280 too low and this duration of cycle is reduced in this case. After stopping the thermal solicitations, a normal cooling is applied for the rest of the cycle for all configurations, except 281 in the case with forced ventilation; the air injection is activated directly after halting. The 282 experimental device as presented in Fig. 3, allows simulation the operating principle of each 283 studied element. Also, this installation would serve as a basis for the development and 284 285 validation of a complete numerical tool.

286

# Fig. 3. Photography of the experimental bench.

287 **3.2**.

**3.2.** Experimental results

The adopted experimental methodology makes it possible to follow the evolution of the 288 289 temperatures by the application of three identical cycles of heat fluxes. The use of cyclic 290 stresses allows testing the thermal behaviour of the PCM over a more prolonged period. The 291 finding of each configuration is presented in Fig. 4. The curves show the temperature evolutions recorded on the lateral surface in contact with the ambient air. The heat flux is 292 293 imposed in the same way for all configurations. However, the experimental protocol makes that the operating intervals are different according to the configuration tested. The 294 threshold temperature of 50 °C is the basis for the control of the electrical resistance which 295 simulates the sunshine and not the duration of application of the thermal stresses, which is 296 the result of the inertia and the thermal behaviour of each configuration. Two systems are 297 studied here; empty concrete block without PCM and system with PCM and tubes. For the 298 299 second system, three cases can be distinguished according to the state of the tubes which can be, closed, opened or ventilated. 300

# Fig. 4. Evolution of the temperature on the lateral surface of the concrete block for different configurations.

The analysis of temperature evolution from the third cycle as represented in Fig. 5, shows the effect of PCM filling. On the one hand, it contributes to the increase in the phase shift from 0.5 hour in the case without PCM to 3.8 hours; on the other hand, the PCM allows the reduction of recorded temperature peaks of about 3.4 °C. The study of the state of the tubes on the response of the wall shows that the decrease in the recorded maximum temperature is a function of the transfer mode imposed through the tubes.

309 In the case where tubes are closed, the response of the system is explained by the predominance of conduction due to the diameter of the tubes that does not promote the 310 311 establishment of the convection heat transfer. When the tubes are open, in this case, they favour a convective heat exchange thanks to the difference in density of the air between the 312 313 inside and the outside of the tubes; this small contribution explains the decrease in the 314 temperature evolution. Forced convection induces by the air injection further enhances 315 system response. The ventilation allows lowering the temperature level quickly on the inner 316 surface; a decrease of temperature from 3.4 to 4.7 °C compared to the case without PCM. 317 This gain in temperature is accompanied by a decrease in phase shift time from 3.8 to 2.9 318 hours which is a normal result because the application of ventilation improves the 319 discharging by a withdrawal of energy and thus induces a cooling of the system too. This 320 behaviour also explains the ability of the ventilated system to store more energy, which 321 therefore increases the necessary time to reach the threshold temperature on the heated 322 surface. The curves show (Fig. 5) that it takes 6.5 instead of 4.5 hours for the system without 323 ventilation, while only 2.4 hours are needed for the concrete block without PCM.

# Fig. 5. Temperature analysis on the lateral surface of the concrete block for the different configurations starting from the third cycle.

The temperature of the outgoing air measured by the hot-wire anemometer shows that the 326 maximum increase thereof reaches about 10 °C during the exchange of the discharged 327 energy through the tubes. This operating scenario makes it possible to heat the incoming air 328 from the outdoor by supplying the energy recovered on the PCMs during the renewal of air. 329 The response of the complete system with ventilated tubes shows that the discharging of 330 331 the energy is not sufficient to reach the same temperature at the end of the cycle in the case 332 without PCM. These results clearly demonstrate the role of PCMs in energy storage and the efficiency of the recovery system by the ventilated tubes. However, an optimization study on 333 the quantity of PCM and the characteristics of the tubes will allow finding the best 334 configuration with the experimental used conditions. 335

# 336 **4. Numerical simulation**

As part of phase change problems solving, the use of COMSOL Multiphysics has demonstrated good correlations with experimental results [46–48]. It allows the solving of problems governed by partial differential equations by the finite element method. The formulation using apparent specific heat approach is used to model the phase change [49]. Three-dimensional modelling (3D) has been developed in this study. The partial differential equation that governs heat transfer in the model is given by Eq. (1).

343 
$$(\rho C_P)(\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} + u\nabla T) = \nabla(k\nabla T)$$
(1)

where  $\rho$ ,  $C_p$  and k are the intrinsic characteristics of the concerned material, u is the velocity field. The main characteristics of the PCM are evaluated experimentally. The different thermo-physical properties of the materials (Table 1) are introduced into the modelling. The thermo-physical properties of the PCM are governed by Eqs. (2)–(6).

348 
$$k_{pcm} = f_v k_s + (1 - f_v) k_l$$
 (2)

349 
$$\rho_{pcm} = f_{\nu} \rho_s + (1 - f_{\nu}) \rho_l$$
 (3)

350 
$$C_{ppcm} = \frac{f_{v}(\rho C_{p})_{s} + (1 - f_{v})(\rho C_{p})_{l}}{\rho_{pcm}} + \frac{\partial \alpha_{m}}{\partial T} \times \Delta L$$
(4)

351  

$$\theta = \begin{cases}
1 ; T < T_{sl} - \Delta T/2 \\
\frac{T - T_{sl}}{\Delta T} + 0.5 ; T_{sl} - \frac{\Delta T}{2} \le T \le T_{sl} + \frac{\Delta T}{2} \\
0 ; T > T_{sl} + \Delta T/2
\end{cases}$$
(5)

352 
$$\alpha_{m} = \begin{cases} -1/2 & ; T < T_{sl} - \Delta T/2 \\ \frac{(1 - f_{v})\rho_{l} - f_{v}\rho_{s}}{2 \times \rho_{pcm}} & ; T_{sl} - \frac{\Delta T}{2} \le T \le T_{sl} + \frac{\Delta T}{2} \\ \frac{1/2}{2} & ; T_{sl} + \Delta T/2 \end{cases}$$
(6)

where  $f_v$  is the volume fraction of the PCM solid phase,  $\Delta T$  is the phase transition interval,  $T_{sl}$  is the phase change temperature and  $\alpha_m$  is the mass fraction defined from  $\rho_s$ ,  $\rho_l$  and  $f_v$ .

The considered boundary conditions are as follows: on the heated side surface, a homogeneous temperature corresponding to the average temperature recorded experimentally was imposed. On the other side surface, a convective exchange with the ambient environment was used. The convective transfer coefficient,  $h_{on}$  between the lateral surface of the block and the ambient air, is calculated by Eq. (7).

$$h_{conv} = \frac{Nu \, k_{air}}{L_w} \tag{7}$$

where Nu is the Nusselt number,  $k_{air}$  is the air thermal conductivity and  $L_w$  is the characteristic length of the surface of the concrete block. In our case, the flow is laminar and Nu is calculated from the correlation on a vertical plane [50] as:

365 
$$Nu = 0.59 \times Ra^{1/4}$$
 (8)

The convection coefficient  $h_{on}$  calculated with the correlation is equal to 3.3  $W/m^2$ .K. In addition to the convective effects, the lateral surface is subject to the phenomenon of radiation where the radiation heat flux is written as:

$$Q_{rad} = \mathcal{E}\mathcal{O}\left(T_w^4 - T_{amb}^4\right) \tag{9}$$

where  $\mathcal{E}$  is the emissivity of the concrete block which takes as value 0.9.

For modelling the case without ventilation, it is considered that the diameters of the tubes do not allow the appearance of a significant convective mode. However, the injection of ambient air, with the fans through the tubes, is activated with a measured speed of 1.3 m/s. The calculation of the Reynolds number Re shows that the regime is laminar. The studied model has short diameter pipes; which imposes to take into account the effects of the inlet region, the correlation of Seider and Tate [51] is used to calculate the Nusselt number Nuinside the tube:

378 
$$N_{ut} = 1.86 \times \left( Re \times Pr \frac{D_i}{L_t} \right)^{0.33} \left( \frac{\mu}{\mu_{wt}} \right)^{0.14}$$
(10)

379 Dynamic viscosity  $\mu$  and the Prandtl number  $P_r$  are evaluated at the average temperature 380 of the air between the inlet and the outlet of the tube. Thus,  $\mu_{v_l}$  is the viscosity of the air 381 determined for the wall temperature of the tube  $T_{wt}$ .  $D_i$  and L represent respectively 382 the inside diameter and the length of the pipe. As of the correlation, the forced convection 383 coefficient through the tube is set equal to 11.7 ( $W/m^2$ .K). On the other surfaces of the 384 concrete block; a zero heat flow condition is used (adiabatic surface).

#### 385 5. Modelling by electrical analogy

386 It becomes a classical approach in order to simplify a thermal system and predict the 387 temperature evolution over time under the control-command strategy. First, the principle of 388 thermo-electric analogy and the decomposition of the system into a unitary element will be 389 presented. After that, the modelling of the system will be detailed.

#### **5.1.** *Principle of thermal modelling by electrical analogy*

Thermal modelling by electrical analogy is based on the analogy with Ohm's law in electricity. The temperature and the heat flux play respectively in this problem the same role as the potential and the current in electricity. It is, therefore, possible to adopt for the thermal resistances the same representation as for the electrical resistances. As the electrical and thermal systems are similar, going from one system to another is possible while respecting the equivalences existing between the different components (Fig. 6).

# Fig. 6. Equivalent electrical circuit (1R1C) in the unsteady case.

398 Assuming the unidirectional transfer of heat, the conductive heat flux  ${\it Q}$  , through a layer of

a thick wall  $e_w$ , under the influence of a temperature difference  $\Delta T = T_{wo} - T_{wi}$  is written as:

400 
$$Q = \frac{kS}{e_{w}} (T_{wo} - T_{wi})$$
(11)

401 In electricity, the application of a potential difference  $\Delta V$  to a similar element is governed 402 by Ohm's law, the electric current I is equivalent to the heat flux and it is expressed as:

403 
$$I = \frac{\sigma S}{e_w} \Delta V = \frac{1}{R_{elec}} \Delta V \tag{12}$$

According to the two equations (11) and (12), the similarity with the electrical resistance allows to define the thermal resistance of conduction R (K/W):

$$R = \frac{e_w}{kS}$$
(13)

407 It quantifies the resistance that the system opposes to the passage of heat flux. Its 408 expression depends on the considered geometry, k is the thermal conductivity and S is 409 the surface of the layer.

410 In the same way, the stored energy in Joules by a mass M, having a mass capacity  $C_m$  at the 411 temperature T(K) is written:

412 
$$U = \int Q dt = m c_m \Delta T \tag{14}$$

413 
$$Q = mc_m \frac{dT}{dt}$$
(15)

Analogously, the equation of the intensity I which passes through a capacitance  $C_{le_i}$  with a tension V is written:

$$I = C_{elec} \frac{dV}{dt} \tag{16}$$

The thermal capacity C (J/K) represents the storage of the heat in the layer of the wall and it is given by:

419

424

425

 $C = \rho c_m e_w S \tag{17}$ 

The notion of thermal resistance allows the modelling of other phenomena, for example, the convective exchanges between a solid wall of temperature  $T_w$  and a fluid at a temperature T. Indeed, through Newton's law expressed in Eq. (18), a convective resistance  $R_{son}$  is defined by Eq. (19).

$$(T_w - T) = R_{con}Q_{conv}$$
(18)

$$R_{conv} = \frac{1}{h_{conv}S} \tag{19}$$

426  $Q_{on}$  is the convection heat flux and  $h_{on}$  is the convective exchange coefficient between the 427 wall and the fluid.

428 The thermal/electrical equivalence makes it possible to derive the following properties:

- 429 An imposed temperature is identical to a voltage generator.
- 430 A heat flow is identical to an electric power generator.

431 • A body of mass  $\mathcal{M}$  and heat capacity  $\mathcal{G}_m$ ; heated to the temperature T, is identical 432 to a capacitor having a capacity  $\mathcal{M}_m$  related to the mass and the imposed voltage 433 source.

434 **5.2.** *Physical module decomposition* 

The passage from a purely thermal system to a model based on electrical phenomena requires an understanding of the physics that governs the system. In our configuration, there are 3 parts: concrete, phase change material and air tube. The study of the symmetry of the concrete block, in a wall or as an isolated element, allows us to adopt the decomposition of the system into 6 identical elements as represented in (Fig. 7).

440 **Fig. 7.** System decomposition into unitary elements.

Similarly, as a precaution, a study was conducted for the validation of the chosen geometric
layout. Numerical simulations based on the finite element model were carried out in the
case without ventilation.

Fig. 8 represents comparative study between 2D and 3D (configurations (b) and (c)) 444 445 simulations of the lateral surface temperatures of the complete system and the unit element as well as the experimental data. (1) Configuration (a) illustrates a section of the unitary 446 447 element at horizontal level on the tube. (2) Configuration (b) represents 3D unit element. (3) Configuration (c) shows the 3D complete system. It reveals that numerical results obtained 448 449 from the 3D configurations are close to the experimental test then that obtained from 2D configuration. This is can be explained by the effect of the rib of the neglected concrete in 450 451 the geometry (a). In addition, finite element flow modelling with geometry (a) is complicated 452 to transform the outflow into an exchange coefficient. Therefore, configurations (b) and (c) 453 can be considered to perform numerical validation. The configuration (c) has been adopted.

454 Fig. 8. Evolution of the average temperature on the inner surface for different geometric
 455 approaches in the case without ventilation.

According to the analysis carried out, the physical problem to be modelled is presented in 456 Fig. 9; the diagram represents the chosen revealing zone. Physically, the influence of the 457 458 tube is done in three dimensions. The RC circuit approach is based on the average 459 temperatures of each modelled block; the horizontal flow between the two faces represents the main heat exchange in our system, the integration of ventilation adds a second exchange 460 on the vertical. The modelling of these two exchanges with the electrical analogy requires a 461 good understanding of the system from the two geometries (a) and (b) (Fig. 8). Thus, the 462 hypothesis of a unidirectional transfer allows distinguishing three parallel levels that 463 represent the succession of the elements constituting each part. 464

- 465 **Fig. 9.** The configuration of the revealing zone studied according to thermal exchanges.
- 466 **5.3.** System modelling

The RC circuit modelling, proposed in this work, is based on the use of the Matlab Simscape tool. Its library proposes several models for the direct integration of electrical, thermal, mechanical and hydraulic phenomena which allow to quickly creating physical system models in the Simulink environment.

The electrical model enables the creation of the circuit from the physical connections to obtain block diagrams. In the sense of electrical and thermal analogy, every part of our physical model will be replaced by an electrical circuit of resistances and capacitances, as well as for imposed boundary conditions.

475 Before arriving at the equivalent diagram representing the studied element, simple models 476 were used to translate the behaviour of a single block of PCM. Thereafter, the other elements were added progressively; the concrete parts as well as the air tube. The diagramin Fig. 10 represents the equivalent thermal model with its boundary conditions.

479 **Fig. 10.** Equivalent system diagram with the boundary conditions.

In our model, each concrete element would be replaced by an electrical circuit consisting of a resistance  $R_c$  and a capacitance  $C_c$ . According to the dimensions of each block, the formulas used in the calculation are:

$$R_c = \frac{e_c}{k_c S_c} \tag{20}$$

484 and 
$$C_c = \rho_c c_{p_c} e_c S$$
 (21)

with  $k_c$ ,  $\rho_c$  and  $c_{P_c}$  are respectively, the characteristics of the concrete, the thermal conductivity, the density and the mass capacity,  $e_c$  and  $S_c$  represents the thickness and surface area of each part of the concrete.

In the experimental module, the lateral surface is subjected to convective exchanges; the convection coefficient  $h_{on}$  is calculated in the like in section 4. The convection resistance with the ambient air is written as follows:

$$R_{conv} = \frac{1}{h_{conv}S}$$
(22)

For taking into account the heat transfer by radiation from a surface to inside a building, there are several methods that estimate, in a more or less approximate way, the radiative exchanges between the surfaces. A linear equation expressing the heat flux between a wall of temperature T and all the other walls is used [52]. The radiative heat flux on the lateral face is given by:

$$Q_{ad} = h_{rad} S(T - T_w) \tag{23}$$

498 The expression of  $h_{rad}$  depends on the average temperature of the walls  $T_w$ . This 499 temperature is considered equal to the ambient temperature:

500 
$$h_{rad} = 4 \varepsilon \sigma T_{amb}^3$$
 (24)

501 The radiative resistance  $R_{aa}$  on the lateral surface of our model is:

502 
$$R_{rad} = \frac{1}{h_{rad}S}$$
(25)

The elements containing the paraffin/polymer mixture constitute a system that stores the heat in a sensible and latent form, which results in a storage capacity and a thermal resistance that vary according to the solid and liquid state of the mixture. This is why in order to encompass the entire phenomenon of phase change by electrical analogy; each volume of PCM is replaced by an electrical block consisting of a resistance and a variable capacity depending on the temperature.

509 The variable capacity  $C_{pcn}$  for a PCM block having a volume  $V_{pcm}$  is given by Eq. (26).

510 
$$C_{pcm} = \rho_{pcm} c_{p_{pcm}} V_{pcm}$$
(26)

511 with  $c_{p_{pcm}}$  is the variation of specific capacity of the mixture adopted for thermo-electric 512 modelling.

513 The density of the phase change material is defined by Eq. (27).

514 
$$\rho_{pcm} = \begin{cases} \rho_{s} & ; \ T < T_{om} \\ \frac{(\rho_{s} + \rho_{l})}{2} & ; \ T_{om} \le T \le T_{sl} \\ \rho_{l} & ; \ T > T_{sl} \end{cases}$$
(27)

where  $T_{om}$  is the temperature that marks the start of the fusion obtained from the DSC experimental measurements and  $T_{sl}$  is the solid-liquid phase transition temperature.

517 The specific capacity modelling is based on the experimentally obtained curve, the work of 518 Alisetti and Roy [53] shows that the equivalent function shape  $c_{Peq}(T)$  has only a low 519 influence on heat transfer. Taking into account the phase change in the transition interval 520 which is defined by:

- 521 The melting temperature  $T_{sl}$ 522 • The melting interval  $\Delta T$  determined from the melting curve obtained by DSC 523 (first initiation of the phase change  $T_{om}$  to the peak of transition) 524 • The code latest level (interaction of the phase change  $T_{om}$  to the peak of transition)
- The calculated latent heat (integration of the total surface during the solid liquid transition)
- Specific heats in the solid and liquid state ( $C_{P_s}$  and  $C_{P_l}$ )
- 527 **Fig. 11.** Adopted modelling of the specific capacity of the PCM.

528 The adopted equivalent thermal capacity is, as simple as possible according to the 529 announced indications; it respects the conservation of the amount of involved energy. Fig. 530 11 shows the evolution of the involved thermal capacity; its equation is written as:

531
$$c_{p_{pcm}} = \begin{cases} c_{P_{s}} & ; T < T_{om} \\ c_{p_{eq}} = \frac{\Delta L}{T_{sl} - T_{om}} & ; T_{om} \le T \le T_{sl} \\ c_{p_{1}} & ; T > T_{sl} \end{cases}$$
(28)

Likewise, as given in relation (29), the resistance of each block of the PCM is a variable resistance depending on the liquid or solid conductivity according to the temperature:

534 
$$R_{pcm} = \frac{e_{pcm}}{k_{pcm}S_{pcm}}$$
(29)

where  $e_{pcm}$  is the thickness of each part of the PCM and  $k_{pcm}$  is the variable conductivity according to the state of the PCM solution which is expressed by Eq. (30).

537 
$$k_{pcm} = \begin{cases} k_{s} & ; T < T_{om} \\ (k_{s} + k_{l})/2 & ; T_{om} \le T \le T_{sl} \\ k_{l} & ; T > T_{sl} \end{cases}$$
(30)

538 • Tube and airflow

545

Taking into account the tube in the modelling of the studied thermal system begins with its thermal resistance. The assumption of a unidirectional heat transfer and the behaviour of the module impose the consideration of two heat flows which exchange to the right and to the left of the tube. Subsequently, splitting the thermal resistance in half is necessary to differentiate the total resistance on each side.

# 544 The thermal resistance of the tube R is written as:

$$R_{t} = \frac{\log\left(\frac{D_{o}}{D_{i}}\right)}{2\pi k_{t} L_{t}}$$
(31)

where  $D_i$  and  $D_o$  are the inner and outer diameters of the tube, L is the length of the tube and  $k_t$  is the thermal conductivity of the tube. The modelling of the flow is different according to the state of the tubes: open or ventilated. The dimensions of the tube do not allow the appearance of a significant convective mode in the open configuration case. The air part through the tube is modelled with a thermal resistance of heat conduction expressed by Eq. (32).

552 
$$R_{air} = \frac{D_i}{k_{air}S_{air}}$$
(32)

where  $k_{air}$  is the thermal conductivity of the air and  $S_{ui}$  is the lateral surface of the air volume.

In the case of forced flow with fans, the problem evolves in the three directions; taking into account the passage of air using the exchange coefficients is not sufficient for modelling electrical-thermal equivalence. The injection of air through the tube is characterized by two elements, the speed and the temperature of the incoming air. In the sense of electrical analogy modelling, a temperature or a voltage will model the interaction of the flow of air entering with the flows exchanged horizontally across the system.

561 In order to identify this temperature, it is necessary to express the heat balance equation at 562 the midpoint of the tube which is the mean temperature over the height. Fig. 12(a) describes 563 the flows exchanged in the horizontal and vertical direction.

Fig. 12. Airflow modelling through the tube: (a) The schematic diagram of modelling
 parameters, (b) Equivalent electrical diagram of the middle part containing the tube.

The heat balance equation (33) can be written and then resolved for the air temperature in the middle of the system  $T_{air}$ :

$$\dot{m}_{air}C_{P_{air}}(T_{in}-T_{out}) = R_{T1}(T_f - T_{air}) + R_{T2}(T_{amb} - T_{air})$$
 (33)

where  $R_{T1}$  and  $R_{T2}$  represent the total thermal resistance respectively on the left between  $T_{wo}$  and  $T_{air}$ , and on the right between  $T_{air}$  and  $T_{aml}$ .  $T_{in}$  and  $T_{out}$  are respectively the inlet and outlet air temperature across the tube.

572 The resolution of the air temperature, as a function of the travelled distance, in the case 573 where the convection coefficients through the tube are equal [54], gives the expression (34).

574 
$$T_{air} = \frac{H_1 T_{wo} + H_2 T_{amb}}{H_1 + H_2} + \exp\left(\frac{-(H_1 + H_2)S}{\dot{m}_{air}C_{p_{air}}}\right) \left(T_{in} - \frac{H_1 T_{wo} + H_2 T_{amb}}{H_1 + H_2}\right)$$
(34)

575 with 
$$H_{1} = \left(\frac{e_{c}}{k_{c}} + \frac{e_{pcm}}{k_{pcm}} + D_{o} \frac{\log(D_{o}/D_{i})}{4\pi k_{t}} + \frac{1}{h_{v}}\right)^{-1}$$
(35)

576 
$$H_2 = \left(H_1^{-1} + \left(h_{rad} + h_{conv}\right)^{-1}\right)^{-1}$$
(36)

where  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are two coefficients that translate the heat transfer by convection and conduction on both sides of the tube. Thus,  $h_v$ ,  $h_{rad}$  and  $h_{con}$  are respectively the coefficient of convection through the tube during ventilation, the coefficient of radiation on

- the lateral surface and the convection coefficient with the ambient air. These coefficients arecalculated previously in the description of the models.
- The expression of the temperature  $T_{air}$  depends on the ambient temperature  $T_{aml}$  and the temperature  $T_{wo}$  that simulates the thermal solicitations on the lateral surface. When integrated into the RC model, this temperature is equivalent to a variable voltage generator according to the temperature of the PCM which reflects the variations of the resistances
- 586 expressed in the coefficients  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ .

Fig. 12(b) shows the equivalent electrical diagram used in the middle part of the model (see 587 588 Fig. 10). The arrows on the components indicate that these elements are variable; it concerns the parts of the PCM as well as the temperature used in the modelling of the 589 590 airflow. In the RC model thus developed, the objective was to evaluate the response of the 591 surface of the system; a 1R1C circuit was used to model each part. The spatial discretization 592 used is fine enough to accurately determine the temperature of the output surfaces. If the objective is to follow the detailed evolution of the temperature in a specific material, a 593 594 discretization with more nodes will be applied to each element [55].

# 595 6. Validation results and discussion

596 Fig. 13 presents the comparison between the results obtained from the FEM/RC simulations 597 and those obtained by experimentation for the two cases without and with ventilation. The 598 FEM was developed primarily as a reference for examining the accuracy of the model with 599 RC network. For this purpose, the first comparison concerns the results of the FEM with the 600 experiment; Table 2 represents the values of the relative errors calculated with respect to 601 the experimental data. The average relative error does not exceed 1.4% and the maximum 602 relative error is about 4.6% in the case without ventilation. This small discrepancy between 603 these data is probably due to three factors: the degree of uniformity of the thermal power 604 given by the heating resistor, the influence of thermal insulation, which is not ideal for 605 eliminating all heat losses. For modelling the PCM, the used effective thermal capacity, only 606 involves the measurement performed during the fusion.

Indeed, during solidification, the curve is slightly different. Taking into account this 607 608 hysteresis between fusion and solidification during numerical validation has been the subject of numerous studies. Baghban et al. [56] indicated that it is essential to use the melting and 609 610 freezing characteristics of PCM to achieve good agreement between experimental and numerical results. Kośny [57] stated that the use of simplified algorithms that do not include 611 612 hysteresis can lead to significant inaccuracies for a large number of non-paraffinic organic 613 and inorganic PCMs. Goia et al. [58] demonstrated that for paraffin organic PCM, the 614 available building energy simulation software is fairly accurate even if the effect of hysteresis 615 is neglected.

Thus, according to these different studies, the fact that hysteresis is not taken into account does not affect significantly our results. Despite the noted slight difference, there is a good agreement between the simulation and the experiment, which makes possible to validate the finite element model used in the simulation.

Fig. 13. Temperature of the surface of the concrete block, comparison of the experimental
 data with the two models RC and FEM: (a) without ventilation, (b) with ventilation.

For comparison of the RC model with the experimental data, Fig. 13 illustrates a similar 622 623 trend of variation between the simulated and measured values, in both cases with and without ventilation. Relative errors calculated with respect to the experiment are acceptable 624 625 for direct validation. The difference between the two numerical models is mainly due to the modelling of the phenomenon of phase change with the electrical analogy which is based on 626 the use of variable resistances and capacitances. Thus, the simplifying assumptions used in 627 628 the RC model do not allow capturing the simulated complexity in 3D with the CFD model. 629 These discrepancies have no significant effect on the accuracy of the obtained simulation results. The temperature on the lateral surface of the system is very well predicted by the RC 630 network model and the maximum relative error is less than 4.0%. It can be concluded that 631 the developed RC model can be directly used to replace a fairly heavy CFD simulation in 632 computing time. 633

634

Table 2. Results of relative error between experimental and numerical data.

Following the analysis previously conducted on the experimental results, Fig. 13(b) clearly 635 illustrates that ventilation occurs in the heat transfer and that its influence even acts on the 636 637 heated side surface. The temperature evolution of this face gives more information on the 638 state of the PCM inside. For both cases, a surface can be distinguished, which evolves 639 between the horizontal line that shows the phase change temperature of the mixture  $T_{sl}$ 640 and the ambient temperature  $T_{amb}$ . The temperature variation on the internal face evolves 641 in this surface; it approaches of  $T_{sl}$  in the case without ventilation and tends towards  $T_{amb}$ with ventilation. 642

In order to make a link against a real situation, this difference with respect to the ambient 643 644 temperature defines the heat flux passing through the wall and consequently the energy 645 requirement of air conditioning to reach the comfort temperature replaced here by the 646 ambient temperature. The gradient of the applied thermal heat flux acts progressively, the 647 concrete part rapidly reaches the steady state and all the energy transmitted is stored by 648 PCM. Gradually, the temperature of the internal face exceeds the ambient temperature and 649 a heat flux begins to leave this face towards the ambient environment. After stopping the 650 thermal solicitations, the temperature decreases and the PCM become a source that 651 releases energy. In Fig. 13(a), the stabilization bearing below  $T_{sl}$  marks the solidification 652 with a temperature close and parallel to  $T_{sl}$ . The air injection at  $T_{amb}$  by ventilation after 653 stopping of the thermal power gives rise to a vertical heat transfer which is added to that

established horizontally. The presence of the insulation on the heated side explains that the descent, noted on the heating curve is mainly due to the evacuation of energy through the tubes (Fig. 13(b)), the influence is significant because the average temperature on the internal face goes from 25 to 23.8 °C. Thus, decreasing the energy requirement is also accompanied by a significant capacity to increase the temperature of the air entering through the tubes.

### 660 **7. Conclusions**

In this work, a study of a thermal system developed to regulate the indoor temperature of a building have been proposed. The combination of the inertia effect of PCM introduced in the wall elements coupled to a ventilation system leads to a better use of the energy stored in a building wall. This solution uses building materials as a basic element and aims to improve the thermal response of PCM building walls and to demonstrate the feasibility of such an energy solution.

667 An experimental device was made based on a hollow concrete block filled with mechanically stable paraffin and equipped with ventilation tubes. The results have confirmed that the 668 669 insertion of paraffin with tubes allows the creation of a thermal phase shift and the improvement of the inertial capabilities of the studied element. The ventilated tubes play 670 671 the role of the regulator to unload the system and thus heat the injected air. The operation principle of this type of system is confirmed. However, the small scale of the experiment and 672 673 the influence of the air flow at the entry of the tubes constitute limitations for the generalization of the experimental results in the real scale of a wall. In this framework, it is 674 important to specify that there are many optimization parameters that can be used to 675 operate the system at the wall scale as well as adaptation to climate conditions and desired 676 operation. These parameters are: tube dimensions compared to the amount of PCM, flow 677 velocity, the geometry of the tubes and their arrangement in the cavities, the phase change 678 temperature as well as the type of the PCM and the materials of the constructions used. 679

680 On the numerical section, an RC network model has been developed, it proposes a simplified 681 approach to models the thermal heat transfer by using the Simscape tool under Matlab, it 682 allows both to get closer to the performance of CFD models in taking into account the 683 evolution of the physical phenomena and it offers a great speed of the execution of the 684 simulations, a parameter required in the calculations related to the building. Similarly, the 685 model proposes a new approach to modelling the phase change by using grey boxes with 686 their resistances and varying capacitances. The finite element model is proposed as a 687 reference for comparing the accuracy of the RC model.

The analysis of the obtained results has confirmed the validity of the RC model for predicting the temperature evolutions of the system surface. The model developed in this study will be used to define the quantity of the PCM and the optimal dimensions of the elements of the system according to scenarios closer to reality. This study has made possible to test the

- feasibility and the performance of this proposed solution, and the validation of numericaltools allows the passage from elementary reasoning to a larger scale, this will be the basis
- 694 for achieving the final aim of obtaining an optimal wall based on PCM filled elements and
- 695 controlled by ventilation pipes.

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699

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	Density ρ (kg/m³)	Thermal conductivity $\lambda$ (W/(m K))	Specific heat capacity <i>C<sub>n</sub></i> (J/(kg K))
PCM			P
T < 27.5 °C	850	0.28	2800
T > 27.5 °C	780	0.18	2500
concrete (at T=25	1000	0.9	1000
°C)			
PVC	1400	0.16	1046

**Table 1.** Thermo-physical properties of the materials constituting the system.

		Relative error (average) (%)	Relative error (maximum) (%)
without	RC-model	1.32	2.61
ventilation	FEM	1.14	4.58
with	RC-model	1.37	3.38
ventilation	FEM	1.32	3.03

 Table 2. Results of relative error between experimental and numerical data.









Fig. 3. Photography of the experimental bench.



Fig. 4. Evolution of the temperature on the lateral surface of the concrete block for different
 configurations.



Fig. 5. Temperature analysis on the lateral surface of the concrete block for the different
 configurations starting from the third cycle.





Fig. 6. Equivalent electrical circuit (1R1C) in the unsteady case.





Fig. 7. System decomposition into unitary elements.



Fig. 8. Evolution of the average temperature on the inner surface for different geometric approaches in the case without ventilation. 





Fig. 9. The configuration of the revealing zone studied according to thermal exchanges. 







Fig. 12. Airflow modelling through the tube: (a) The schematic diagram of modelling parameters, (b) Equivalent electrical diagram of the middle part containing the tube.





Fig. 13. Temperature of the surface of the concrete block, comparison of the experimental
data with the two models RC and FEM: (a) without ventilation, (b) with ventilation.