



UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
Technical Faculty in Bor

PROCEEDINGS

32nd International Conference

Ecological Truth & Environmental Research

24-26 June 2026

Editor
Prof. Dr Ana Radojević

*Eco***TER'26**

Hotel Sunce, Sokobanja, Serbia



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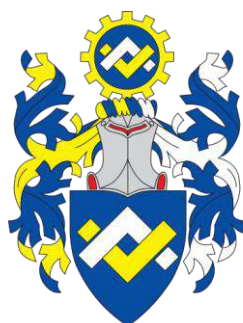
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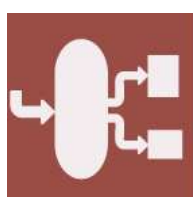


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PREFACE

The 32nd International Conference *Ecological Truth & Environmental Research – EcoTER'26* has been dedicated for more than three decades to presenting the latest scientific achievements, research findings, and innovative approaches in the fields of ecology, environmental protection, and sustainable development. In 2026, the conference was held in Sokobanja, Serbia, at Hotel Sunce, from 24 to 26 June.

The primary aim of the conference is to bring together leading experts, researchers, professionals, and young scientists from diverse fields in order to foster the exchange of knowledge, strengthen scientific collaboration, and promote innovative solutions to contemporary environmental challenges. By connecting science, education, industry, and society, EcoTER'26 seeks to inspire the transformation of attitudes and practices in everyday life, as well as within economic and industrial systems, contributing to a more sustainable future.

The 32nd International Conference *Ecological Truth & Environmental Research – EcoTER'26* is organized by the University of Belgrade, the Technical Faculty in Bor, with the co-organization of the University of Banja Luka, the Faculty of Technology; the University of Montenegro, the Faculty of Technology – Podgorica; the University of Zagreb, the Faculty of Metallurgy – Sisak; the University of Pristina, the Faculty of Technical Sciences – Kosovska Mitrovica; and the Association of Young Researchers – Bor (Serbia).

The Proceedings of EcoTER'26 include 98 scientific papers authored by researchers, academics, and industry representatives from universities, research institutions, and organizations across the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Romania, Slovenia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uzbekistan, and Serbia. It is our great honour and pleasure to welcome all participants and contributors and to express our sincere appreciation for their valuable scientific contributions.

Within this year's conference programme, the 7th Student Section – EcoTERS'26 was also organized. We highly value the contribution of students and their mentors, whose enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication represent an important foundation for the advancement of scientific knowledge. We encourage young researchers to continue exploring, questioning, and expanding the boundaries of knowledge, recognizing that education and scientific discovery are lifelong processes.

The support of our donors, together with their commitment, trust, and willingness to cooperate, has significantly contributed to the successful organization of the conference. The Organizing Committee expresses its deepest gratitude to the Platinum donors of the conference – Serbia Zijin Mining DOO Bor and Serbia Zijin Copper DOO Bor; the Gold donors – HBIS SERBIA, the Serbian Chamber of Engineers, and Elixir Prahovo; and the Silver donor – Rudex Explosives.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all authors who contributed to these Proceedings. Special recognition is given to the members of the Scientific, Organizing, and Honorary Committees, reviewers, invited speakers, session chairs, and all participants whose dedication and support have contributed to the success and continuity of EcoTER.

Our sincere gratitude goes to everyone who has contributed to the organization and delivery of this conference. Your efforts and collaboration continue to strengthen the mission of EcoTER and its role in promoting scientific excellence, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development.



Prof. Dr Ana Radojević

President of the Organizing Committee



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Plenary Lectures

Jay Wadhawan

DROPLET ELECTROCHEMISTRY: FROM LABORATORY TO INDUSTRIAL APPLICATIONS 1

Grozdanka Bogdanović

FROM WASTE TO RESOURCE: A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO LEACHING OF SULFIDIC TAILINGS 2

Invited Lectures

Vesna Vučurović

BIOETHANOL AS A RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCE: EFFICIENCY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT 5

Bojana Bajić, D. Vučurović, S. Dodić

BIOPROCESS ENGINEERING FOR CIRCULAR BIOECONOMY: MODELLING, OPTIMIZATION AND VALORISATION OF AGRO-INDUSTRIAL RESIDUES AND WASTES 12

Ana Simonović

APPLICATION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE INHIBITORS FOR METAL CORROSION PROTECTION 18

Ivan Savić, I. Savić Gajić, T. Palanački Malešević, I. Mihalj Lubašćik, Z. Svirčev, J. Meriluoto

PAN-LIFE-CARPET CONCEPT: INTEGRATING WASTE VALORIZATION AND BIOCRUST ENGINEERING 22

Jovana Bezdan, A. Bezdan

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS UNDER CLIMATE CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE UNSFA PILOT SITE WITHIN THE DALIA AND SWIM PROJECTS 29

Conference Papers

Žarko Radović, N. Tadić

EFFECT OF AIR OXYGEN ENRICHMENT AND EXCESS AIR RATIO ON SOLID FUELS COMBUSTION 40

Nebojša Tadić, I. Nikolić, N. Jovović, A. Drakulović, V. Radmilović STRENGTH AND MICROSTRUCTURE OF FLY ASH BASED GEOPOLYMERS CONTAINING WASTE PLASTIC	46
Aleksandra Papludis, S. Alagić, S. Milić, D. Medić, J. Nikolić, V. Stankov Jovanović, G. Stojanović AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF DIBENZ(a,h)ANTHRACENE, A PROBABLE HUMAN CARCINOGEN, IN THE BOR REGION, ON THE BASIS OF ITS CONTENT IN STEMS AND LEAVES OF COMMON IVY, LILAC, AND FIG	51
Aleksandar Cvetković, Ž. Tasić, M. Petrović Mihajlović, A. Simonović, M. Radovanović, A. Bogdanović, M. Antonijević, S. Stanković ELECTROCHEMICAL SENSING OF CAFFEINE	57
Milutin Stojadinović, V. Marjanović, I. Svrkota FUNDAMENTALS OF WASTE CHARACTERISATION SAMPLING ACCORDING TO CEN/TR 15310	63
Boris Novaković, N. Paskaš, Z. Stojanović, V. Lakušić, I. Živić ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES AFFECT DISTRIBUTIONAL PATTERNS OF THE RIFFLE BEETLE (Coleoptera: Elmidae) SPECIES IN THE SERBIAN STREAMS AND RIVERS	71
Boris Novaković, J. Đuknić, N. Paskaš, M. Raković, V. Lakušić, I. Živić RIFFLE BEETLE <i>Elmis maugetii</i> Latreille, 1802 (Coleoptera: Elmidae): NOTES ON THE SPECIES' MORPHOLOGICAL PLASTICITY IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA	78
Radenka Kolarov, Dj. Petrov, N. Galečić, D. Skočajić, J. Čukanović, S. Đorđević, M. Ocokoljić CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS CONCERNING ALLOCHTHONOUS TREES IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: WINGED ELM	83
Radenka Kolarov, Dj. Petrov, N. Galečić, D. Skočajić, J. Čukanović, S. Đorđević, M. Ocokoljić THE INFLUENCE OF THE URBAN HEAT ISLAND ON <i>Abelia × grandiflora</i> (ROVELLI EX ANDRÉ) REHDER TAXA	85
Radenka Kolarov, Dj. Petrov, N. Galečić, D. Skočajić, J. Čukanović, S. Đorđević, M. Ocokoljić <i>Pyracantha angustifolia</i> (Franch.) C.K.SCHNEID. A NEW EXOTIC SPECIES IN THE DENDROFLORA OF BELGRADE	93
Milena Nikolić, A. Zdravković, D. Marković Nikolić, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić EVALUATION OF ECOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF VETERNICA RIVER BASED ON CHEMICAL QUALITY PARAMETERS	100
Vesna Obradović, M. Perović, T. Vučković MICROBIOLOGICAL QUALITY OF THE VELIKA MORAVA RIVER: ECOLOGICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECTS	106

Milan Đorđević, B. Stojanović, A. Zdravković, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić, Đ. Miltenović	
ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL HAZARDS IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON HUMAN HEALTH: CASE STUDY OF THE CITY OF NIŠ, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	112
Milan Đorđević, B. Stojanović, A. Zdravković, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić, M. Nikolić	
IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF NON-IONIZING ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT: CASE STUDY OF LESKOVAC CITY, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	119
Sanja Pavlović	
COMBINED METEOROLOGICAL MEASUREMENTS OF URBAN AND RURAL THERMAL ENVIRONMENTS IN BELGRADE	126
Jovana Galjak, M. Krstić, S. Milojević, G. Milentijević	
HEAVY METAL DISTRIBUTION AND CHEMICAL SPECIATION IN SOILS NEAR THE GORNJE POLJE FLOTATION TAILINGS	135
Ivana Kostić Kokić, D. Bogdanović, N. Stanković, T. Anđelković	
AMMONIUM HYDROXIDE AND MILK FAT CONTENT EFFECT ON BENZYL BUTYL PHTHALATE EXTRACTION	142
Viša Tasić, V. Kamenović, B. Radović, R. Kovačević, N. Ristić, Z. Damnjanović, M. Cocić	
INDOOR PM ₁₀ AND PM _{2.5} IN RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS IN BOR, SERBIA: NON-HEATING SEASON ANALYSIS	146
Biljana Budzakoska Gjoreska, S. Trajanovski, S. Trajanovska	
INFLUENCE OF LITTORAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS ON MACROINVERTEBRATE COMMUNITIES IN LAKE OHRID	153
Vesna Marjanović, Z. Štirbanović, R. Marković	
PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MINING WASTE SAMPLING: STANDARDS AND LEGAL REGULATIONS	162
Miljan Vilimonović, J. Vesković, A. Okolišan, M. Vesković, M. Lučić, A. Onjia	
MULTIVARIATE ASSESSMENT OF HEAVY METALS IN RIVER WATER FROM NOVI PAZAR AREA	169
Branislava Matić, V. Vukmanović, S. Živković Perišić	
URBAN AIR QUALITY MEASURED CLOSE TO SCHOOLS AND KINDERGARTENS WITHIN THE LOCAL MONITORING NETWORK IN SERBIA	175
Tamara Mitić, A. Marić, K. Jovičić, V. Đikanović, N. Marinković, S. Anđus, J. Čanak Atlagić	
UNCOVERING HIDDEN DIVERSITY OF <i>Sabanejewia balcanica</i> IN SERBIA: THE DISCOVERY OF NOVEL HAPLOTYPES	181

<i>Olga Jakovljević, S. Popović, M. Pečić, D. Jerinkić</i>	
DIATOMS FROM LUDAŠ LAKE AND THEIR APPLICATION IN BIOINDICATION	187
<i>Predrag Pajic, Ž. Rudic, N. Rakonjac</i>	
ASSESSMENT OF GROUNDWATER SUITABILITY FOR IRRIGATING URBAN GREEN SPACES IN ALLUVIAL AQUIFERS	194
<i>Predrag Pajic, Ž. Rudic, N. Rakonjac</i>	
LONG-TERM PERSISTENCE OF FLUORIDE CONTAMINATION IN ALLUVIAL GROUNDWATER: A CASE STUDY OF THE CARINA WELLFIELD IN KLADOVO (SERBIA)	201
<i>Željko Ćirović, D. Kleut, D. B. Stojanović, M. Jovašević-Stojanović</i>	
COMPARISON OF SATELLITE DATA WITH LOW-COST SENSOR NETWORK PM DATA IN FOUR CITIES IN SERBIA	210
<i>Madalina Zot, F. Popescu</i>	
ASSESSMENT OF SEDIMENTABLE PARTICULATE MATTER IN TIMISOARA	217
<i>Ivana Kostić Kokić, N. Stanković, D. Bogdanović, T. Petronijević, M. Dudić, T. Anđelković</i>	
IMPACT OF DIMETHYL PHTHALATE ON THE GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF CYANOBACTERIA (<i>Microcystis</i> sp.)	222
<i>Ivana Kostić Kokić, N. Stanković, D. Bogdanović, T. Petronijević, M. Dudić, T. Anđelković</i>	
IMPACT OF DIMETHYL PHTHALATE ON THE GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF GREEN ALGAE (<i>Chlorella</i> sp.)	228
<i>Anđelija Bogdanović, Ž. Tasić, M. Petrović Mihajlović, A. Simonović, M. Radovanović, M. Antonijević, A. Cvetković</i>	
ELECTROCHEMICAL DETERMINATION OF CEFTRIAXONE USING A GRAPHITE ROD ELECTRODE	233
<i>Milan Gorgievski, M. Marković, V. Grekulović, N. Štrbac, M. Marković, M. Zdravković, K. Božinović</i>	
SEM-EDS AND DTA-TGA ANALYSIS OF CORN STALKS USED FOR THE BIOSORPTION OF COPPER IONS FROM SYNTHETIC SOLUTIONS	239
<i>Dubravka Nikolovski, S. Đurić, D. Mičić, G. Trajkovska, Lj. Lazić, T. Stajić, D. Stošić, K. Kralj, J. Zec</i>	
LONG-TERM TRENDS OF AIRBORNE POLLEN IN PANČEVO	243
<i>Milena Nikolić, A. Zdravković, D. Marković Nikolić, G. Petković, T. Nikolić</i>	
REMOVAL OF SYNTHETIC DYE FROM AQUEOUS SOLUTIONS USING <i>Qercus cerris</i> ACORN CUPS	250
<i>Milena Nikolić, A. Zdravković, D. Marković Nikolić, N. Ristić, I. Ristić</i>	
KINETIC AND THERMODYNAMIC ASPECTS OF PESTICIDE SORPTION ONTO HORSE CHESTNUT SEED SORBENT	256

Jovana Perendija, V. Ljubić, D. Milošević, S. Cvetković, M. Đuriš, Ž. Milovanović	COMPARATIVE KINETIC ANALYSIS OF CATIONIC DYES ADSORPTION ONTO SUSTAINABLE LIGNOCELLULOSIC BIOSORBENTS	261
Verica Ljubić, J. Perendija, D. Milošević, Ž. Milovanović, S. Cvetković, K. Trivunac	MECHANISMS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING Ni(II) BIOSORPTION BY BACTERIAL EXOPOLYSACCHARIDES: A REVIEW	266
Dunja Bandur, R. Prodanović, M. Spasojević Savković, M. Stanković, D. Bartolić, O. Prodanović, N. Surudžić	ENZYMATIC DEGRADATION OF PHENOL VIA HRP PERIODATELY IMMOBILIZED ONTO GMA-CO-EGDMA MACROPOROUS CARRIERS	273
Nena Velinov Georgiev, M. Radović Vučić, M. Petrović, M. Kostić, M. Momčilović, J. Mitrović, A. Bojić	SORPTION OF TEXTILE DYES ONTO BISMUTH-MODIFIED WOOD WASTE SORBENT: KINETIC AND EQUILIBRIUM ANALYSIS	279
Saša Rančev, M. Petrović, S. Najdanović, N. Velinov Georgiev, J. Mitrović, M. Radović Vučić, A. Bojić	SELF-MADE PULSATING ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE CORONA PLASMA REACTOR FOR DEGRADATION OF A TEXTILE DYE IN SYNTHETIC TEXTILE EFFLUENT	284
Jelena Mitrović, N. Velinov Georgiev, M. Momčilović, M. Petrović, M. Kostić, S. Najdanović, A. Bojić	THERMALLY ACTIVATED PEROXYDISULFATE DEGRADATION OF REACTIVE TEXTILE DYES	290
Darko Anđelković, M. Branković	DIRECT INFUSION MS AS A PROMISING TOOL FOR PESTICIDES QUALITATIVE SCREENING IN APPLES	297
Darko Anđelković, M. Branković	CALIBRATION PERFORMANCES OF A MULTIRESIDUE PESTICIDES ANALYSIS IN LEMON AND LETTUCE ON QqQ AND ION TRAP MASS SPECTROMETERS	304
Darko Anđelković, M. Branković	THE NATURE OF THE MATRIX EFFECT IN GC/MS PESTICIDES ANALYSIS IN APPLES AND ITS RELATION TO EXTRACT DILUTION	310
Isidora Santrač, F. Sekereš, M. Živković, J. Korać Jačić, M. Milenković, J. Danilović Luković	DEGRADATION OF PONCEAU S DYE BY ADVANCED OXIDATION PROCESSES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND TOXICITY OF TRANSFORMATION PRODUCTS	316

Isidora Santrač, F. Sekereš, M. Živković, J. Korać Jačić, M. Milenković, J. Danilović Luković	
BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF EVANS BLUE AND ITS DEGRADATION PRODUCTS ON GROWTH AND VIABILITY OF THE GREEN MICROALGA <i>Chlamydomonas cccidophila</i> PM01	324
Irina Vasić, I. Čeliković, A. Samolov, T. Milanović, A. Kandić, M. Đurašević	
ANNUAL EFFECTIVE DOSE DUE TO INGESTION OF HERBAL INFUSIONS FROM ASTERACEAE MEDICINAL PLANTS	330
Dušan Nikolić, S. Marjanović, M. Dimitrijević, Z. Marković, A. Dobričić, M. Stanković, B. Rašković	
CONCENTRATIONS OF METALS AND METALLOIDS IN MEAT OF THE COMMON CARP (<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>) FARMED USING FEED BASED ON INVERTEBRATE ANIMAL PROTEIN ORIGIN	336
Dunja Bandur, D. Bartolić, M. Stanković, M. Prokopijević, N. Surudžić, S. Stanković, M. Mičić	
LABEL-FREE FLUORESCENCE-BASED OPTICAL BIOSENSOR FOR RAPID DETECTION OF FUNGAL PATHOGENS	343
Katarina Jovičić, V. Đikanović, J. S. Vranković	
REDOX BIOMARKERS IN SEMINAL PLASMA OF CULTURED RAINBOW TROUT: TOS, TAS, AND OSI	348
Petar Petrov	
UTILIZATION OF A PRODUCT FROM SULFURIC ACID PRODUCTION, POLLUTING THE ENVIRONMENT, WITH APPLICATION IN FERROUS METALLURGY	353
Despina Kostadinova Jankovski, M. Arizanova, B. Ristovski, E. Velickova, D. Doneva-Shapcheska	
VALORIZATION OF BREWERY SPENT GRAIN INTO BIOPLASTIC FILMS: INFLUENCE OF BIOMASS LOADING ON BARRIER AND ANTIOXIDANT PROPERTIES	360
Boris Novaković, M. Raković	
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN BLACKBIRD <i>Turdus merula aterrimus</i> (MADARÁSZ, 1903) IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA	368
Pasquale Napoletano, E. Vitale, A. De Marco, C. Arena	
PROPERTIES OF PLANT AND SOIL SHAPING FRUIT AND OIL TRAITS IN DIFFERENT CULTIVARS OF <i>Olea europaea</i> L.	374
Dragana Randelović, S. Valiyev, M. Nasirov, J. Amirov	
GERMINATION OF <i>Artemisia diffusa</i> Krasch. ex. Poljakov SEEDS ORIGINATED FROM RANGELAND SITES OF DIFFERENT GRAZING INTENSITIES	381
Mihajlo Stanković, N. Beslac, D. Romčević	
NEW FINDING SPECIES ABLEPHARUS KITAIBELII BIBRON & BORY, 1833 (<i>Reptilia: Squamata: Scincidae</i>) IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	386

Mihajlo Stanković

CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SPECIES *Ricciocarpos natans* (L.) CORDA 1829 IN THE SNR ZASAVICA AND MAČVA WITH THE ANALYSIS OF THE HABITAT

394

Sonja Stanković, M. Radovanović, A. Simonović, Ž. Tasić, A. Cvetković, V. Nedelkovski, D. Medić

PROCESS OPTIMIZATION OF ZnO-ASSISTED PHOTOCATALYTIC DEGRADATION OF METHYL ORANGE USING RESPONSE SURFACE METHODOLOGY

403

Uroš Stamenković, I. Marković, D. Manasijević, K. Božinović, M. Nedeljković, A. Kovačević

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE Sn78Bi22 ALLOY AS AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY LEAD-FREE SOLDER

410

Miljan Marković, M. Gorgievski, V. Grekulović, N. Štrbac, M. Marković, K. Božinović, M. Zdravković

CHANGE IN METAL REMOVAL DEGREE DURING COPPER ION BIOSORPTION ONTO RAW AND CALCINED CHICKEN EGGSHELLS

417

Ivana Marković, U. Stamenković, M. Nedeljković, D. Manasijević, Lj. Balanović

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS AND EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF SAC/GNS COMPOSITE LEAD-FREE SOLDER

422

Katarina Stojanović, M. Simić, D. Aćimović, B. Savić Rosić, M. Ječmenica Dučić, T. Brdarić

THERMAL TRANSFORMATION OF NSAID-DERIVED MATERIALS: MORPHOLOGICAL AND COMPOSITIONAL INSIGHTS

427

Katarina Stojanović, M. Simić, D. Aćimović, B. Savić Rosić, M. Ječmenica Dučić, T. Brdarić

PRODUCTION COST ASSESSMENT OF SnO₂-MWCNT@SS ELECTRODE FOR WASTEWATER TREATMENT

432

Natalija Nedić, S. Bulatović, T. Tadić, B. Marković, A. Nastasović

AMBROSIA-BASED BIOSORBENTS FOR REMOVAL OF RHODAMINE B FROM AQUATIC SOLUTION

438

Ljubiša Balanović, U. Stamenković, I. Marković, K. Božinović, M. Gorgievski, V. Grekulović, T. Jogrić

EFFECT OF Ni AND Si ADDITIONS ON FUNCTIONAL PROPERTIES OF Cu-30Zn BRASS

443

Katarina Stojanović, M. Simić, D. Aćimović, B. Savić Rosić, M. Ječmenica Dučić, D. Maksin, T. Brdarić (SERBIA)

SYNERGISTIC INTERACTION BETWEEN Sb AND RARE-EARTH OXIDES IN SnO₂ ELECTROCATALYSTS

452

Milan Đorđević, B. Stojanović, A. Zdravković, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić, S. Stojanović	
QUANTITATIVE DETERMINATION OF ESSENTIAL AND TOXIC ELEMENTS CONTENT IN PEACH FRUITS BY ICP-OES METHOD	456
Sofija Banković, M. Lj. Petrović, A. Janković, M. Rakin, M. Vukašinović Sekulić	
ANTIOXIDANT ACTIVITY OF CLOVE ESSENTIAL OIL	463
Dragana Randjelović, V. Savić, V. Topalović, M. Koprivica, J. Nikolić	
GROWTH PARAMETERS RESPONSE OF <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> 'Genovese' TO PHOSPHATE GLASS AS AN ALTERNATIVE FERTILIZER	471
Milan Grozdanović, M. Mančić, J. Đoković, D. Tanikić, A. Đorđević	
INTEGRATED HYBRID SYSTEMS FOR RESIDENTIAL ENERGY AUTONOMY: A LITERATURE REVIEW	478
Milan Nedeljković, S. Mladenović, V. Čosović, I. Marković, J. Petrović, U. Stamenković	
GREEN ENGINEERING APPROACH TO Sn-0.7Cu/xGNS COMPOSITES PRODUCED BY POWDER METALLURGY: MICROSTRUCTURAL AND MECHANICAL PROPERTIES FOR SUSTAINABLE ELECTRONICS	485
Snežana Urošević, M. Vuković	
TEXTILE WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND ITS SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS	490
Danijela Voza, M. Veličković, M. Panić, A. Fedajev, S. Arsić, D. Mladenović	
GREEN PURCHASING DETERMINANTS AMONG GENERATION Z: AN EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS	497
Marija Ivanović, S. Knežević, Lj. Kljajević, N. Mladenović Nikolić, I. Maksimović, K. Cmiljanović, S. Nenadović	
GREEN METAKAOLIN GEOPOLYMERS: SYNTHESIS AND CHARACTERIZATION DURING AGEING	503
Dragi Peltechki	
DIAGNOSING CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS SECTOR READINESS IN CANDIDATE COUNTRIES: A PESTLE-BASED ASSESSMENT OF NORTH MACEDONIA	509
Marija Stojanoska, V. Atanasova	
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND FIGHT AGAINST POLLUTION, CASE STUDY	516
Luka Grbović, O. Jakovljević, J. Krizmanić, B. Tubić, M. Kračun Kolarević, S. Andus, B. Vasiljević	
ADDITIONAL RECORDS ON BENTHIC DIATOM <i>Encyonema Bonapartei</i> Heudre, C.E. Wetzel & Ector (Cymbellales, Bacillariophyceae) IN WATER BODIES OF THE UVAC SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE (SERBIA)	523

Bojana Tubić, J. Đuknić, N. Marinković, N. Popović, L. Grbović, M. Raković, M. Paunović	
AQUATIC MACROINVERTEBRATE FAUNA AT SELECTED SAMPLING SITES IN THE GRADAC RIVER	530
Olga Jakovljević, A. Božić, S. Popović	
DIATOM ASSEMBLAGES IN BIOFILMS OF FRUŠKA GORA WATERFALLS (SERBIA)	536
Sladana Popović, Z. Krantić, O. Jakovljević, A. Anđelković, A. Milićević	
pH-DEPENDENT GROWTH RESPONSES OF <i>Chlorella</i> STRAINS IN BG11 MEDIUM	541
Nataša Kojadinović, S. Đuretanović, M. Radenković, A. Milošković, T. Veličković, M. Jakovljević, V. Simić	
ASSESSMENT OF THE LENGTH-WEIGHT RELATIONSHIP AND RELATIVE CONDITION FACTOR OF SCADAR BLEAK IN THREE WESTERN BALKAN LAKES	546
Vesna Obradović, M. Perović, T. Vučković	
QUANTIFYING SAMPLING CONTRIBUTION TO MEASUREMENT UNCERTAINTY IN MICROBIOLOGICAL GROUNDWATER ANALYSIS	551
Vesna Obradović, M. Perović, J. Lekić	
MEASUREMENT UNCERTAINTY OF WASTEWATER SAMPLING FOR MICROBIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS USING DUPLICATE SAMPLING AND ANOVA APPROACH	556
Maja Nujkić, Ž. Tasić, T. Kalinović, D. Medić, A. Radojević, J. Kalinović, J. Jordanović, S. Đorđievski, N. Apostolov	
PREPARATION AND APPLICATION OF MODIFIED ZEOLITE FROM INDUSTRIAL WASTE	561
Vanja Trifunović, S. Milić, Lj. Avramović, S. Vasiljević, D. Medić, V. Nedelkovski, D. Božić	
TRANSFORMATION OF WASTE FROM HAZARDOUS TO NON-HAZARDOUS: STABILIZATION OF SOLID RESIDUE OBTAINED AFTER TWO-STEP HYDROMETALLURGICAL TREATMENT OF EAF DUST	568
Isidora Santrač, J. Korać Jačić, M. Milenković, M. Živković	
HOW STRUCTURAL MODIFICATIONS INFLUENCE ENVIRONMENTAL RISK: A CASE STUDY OF STEROIDAL DERIVATIVES	576
Jelena Janjić, M. Ćurić	
IMPACT OF FOG DISPERSION ON AVIATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY	582
Vesna Djikanović, J. Vranković, K. Jovičić	
MICRO AND MESOPLASTIC PARTICLES IN WATER AND SEDIMENT IN SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE “OBEDSKA BARA”	590

Marko Pezdevšek, A. Roger, M. Fike, K. Sredenšek

NUMERICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF FLOATING PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS ON LAKE THERMAL REGIME 595

Bojana Petrović, M. Jovanović, B. Radović, R. Kovačević, M. Jovašević-Stojanović

SOURCE-ASSOCIATED HEALTH RISKS RELATED TO METALLIC AND CARBONACEOUS PM₁₀ FRACTION AT TWO URBAN SITES IN SERBIA 602

Usama Bin Moazzam, H. Nawab, K. Nasir, I. Batool

CLIMATE-INDUCED PROJECT SCOPE CREEP AND COST OVERRUNS IN LONG-HORIZON INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ADAPTIVE RISK RE-ASSESSMENT 610

Student Section – EcoTERS'26

Student: Dragana Kerkez

Mentors: Svetlana Nešović, Kristina Filipović, Jovana Krstić

HEALTH IMPACTS AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES OF URBAN AIR POLLUTION 620

Student: Jelena Zec

Mentors: Milena Rikalović, Dubravka Nikolovski

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF FINE SUSPENDED PARTICLES PM₁₀ AND LEAD ABSORBED ONTO THEM IN AMBIENT AIR OF PANČEVO ON PUBLIC HEALTH 622

Student: Minja Stojadinović

Mentor: Maja Nujkić

PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE OF PHARMACEUTICAL POLLUTANTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT 624

Student: Nataša Janjić

Mentor: Žaklina Tasić

COPPER CORROSION INHIBITORS IN CHLORIDE ENVIRONMENTS 626

Student: Saška Dumitrašković

Mentors: Milan Gorgievski, Vesna Grekulović

ADSORPTION ISOTHERMS FOR COPPER IONS BIOSORPTION ONTO GRAPE STALKS 628

Student: Veljko Jovanović

Mentor: Maja Nujkić

THE IMPACT OF BIODEGRADABLE PLASTICS ON THE ENVIRONMENT 630

Student: Marina Karabašević

Mentors: Vesna Grekulović, Milan Gorgievski

ELECTROCHEMICAL BEHAVIOR OF COPPER IN PRESENCE OF OAK BARK MACERATE 632

<i>Student: Snežana Nikolić</i> <i>Mentor: Maja Nujkić</i>	
PHOTOCATALYTIC NANOMATERIAL FOR HEAVY METAL REMEDIATION	634
<i>Student: Nataša Apostolov</i> <i>Mentor: Maja Nujkić</i>	
MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES OF PHOTOCATALYTIC NANOMATERIALS IN HEAVY METAL REMOVAL	636
<i>Students: Nebojša Radović, Aleksa Vizi, Željka Nikolić</i> <i>Mentors: Ivan Kojić, Ksenija Stojanović</i>	
BIODIESEL PRODUCTION FROM SUNFLOWER OIL USING CALCINED CIGARETTE ASH AS A WASTE-DERIVED CATALYST	638
<i>Student: Marija Vesković</i> <i>Mentor: Antonije Onjia</i>	
IDENTIFICATION OF HEAVY METAL SOURCES IN RIVER SEDIMENT IN THE KRUPANJ AREA	640
<i>Student: Aleksandra Jović</i> <i>Mentor: Maja Nujkić</i>	
RECYCLING OF ERDITE AND KFES ₂ FROM WASTE SLUDGE AS FUNCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION	642
<i>Student: Teodora Jogrić</i> <i>Mentor: Ljubiša Balanović</i>	
INFLUENCE OF Ni AND Si ADDITIONS ON THE MICROSTRUCTURE, MECHANICAL PROPERTIES AND CONDUCTIVITY OF CuZn ₃₀ ALLOY	644
<i>Student: Jovana Levkić</i> <i>Mentors: Tanja Kalinović, Jelena Kalinović</i>	
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND EMISSION CONTROL IN PYROMETALLURGICAL COPPER PRODUCTION	646
<i>Student: Mladen Radić</i> <i>Mentors: Jelena Kalinović, Ana Radojević</i>	
IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE ON AIR POLLUTION	648
<i>Student: Nataša Đorđević</i> <i>Mentors: Jelena Kalinović, Tanja Kalinović</i>	
PLANTS AS BIOINDICATORS OF AIR POLLUTION	650
Author index	652

Review

**PREPARATION AND APPLICATION OF MODIFIED ZEOLITE FROM
INDUSTRIAL WASTE**

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Abstract

Organic compounds, heavy metals and other pollutants reach the soil, groundwater and surface water, then enter the human body through the food chain, representing a significant environmental and health problem. To develop sustainable and efficient methods for pollutant removal, increasing attention is being paid to the application of zeolites synthesised from industrial waste. Various industrial solid wastes are rich in silicates, crystalline and amorphous silicon, as well as aluminium, making them suitable raw materials for zeolite synthesis. Among the most commonly used waste materials are fly ash from coal, red mud, lithium and steel slag, coal tailings and other by-products of the metallurgical industry. This paper presents an overview of previous researches on the synthesis of zeolites from different types of industrial waste, with particular focus on the advantages and limitations of existing preparation procedures. The application of synthesised zeolites in gas purification, wastewater treatment and soil remediation is also analysed. The results of previous researches indicate the significant potential of these materials in environmental protection and the circular economy.

Keywords: zeolites, industrial solid waste, synthesis methods, environmental protection.

INTRODUCTION

Zeolites are porous, crystalline aluminosilicate materials with a three-dimensional skeletal structure. They occur naturally as a result of volcanic activity (natural zeolites) or are synthesised under controlled laboratory conditions (synthetic zeolites). Their structure is based on the spatial arrangement of TO₄ tetrahedra, where T represents atoms in tetrahedral coordination, most commonly silicon (Si) and aluminium (Al), but also other heteroatoms. The connection of these tetrahedra forms a three-dimensional network of channels and cavities, resulting in significant structural diversity among zeolites. The general structural

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formula of zeolite is $M_{x/n}[(AlO_2)_x(SiO_2)_y] \cdot \omega H_2O$, where M denotes compensating cations outside the aluminosilicate skeleton, n their valence, and x and y the numbers of aluminium and silicon tetrahedra in the structure. The parameter ω indicates the number of water molecules present in the pores of the crystal lattice [1]. Due to their large specific surface area, developed microporous structure, and ion exchange capacity, zeolites are widely used in various fields, including catalysis, adsorption, gas and liquid separation, filtration, and energy storage [2]. However, compared to synthetic zeolites, natural zeolites often show lower performance due to the complex conditions of their formation, variable chemical composition, and the presence of various impurities. These factors may limit their application in demanding industrial processes. Industrial solid wastes are often rich in silicates, as well as crystalline and amorphous silicon, and may contain various types of slag, including slag from the production of yellow phosphorus, iron and steel, and slag from the smelting of non-ferrous metals. The presence of silicon and aluminum in these materials makes them suitable raw materials for the synthesis of zeolite-type molecular sieves [3].

Current research shows recent scientific results about using of various types of industrial solid waste, such as coal fly ash, red mud, lithium slag, coal tailings, and steel slag, as low-cost alternative raw materials for synthesizing artificial zeolites [2]. This work summarizes and analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of different zeolite preparation methods, based on a literature review. It also presents the applications of various modified zeolites in gas purification, wastewater treatment, and soil remediation.

SYNTHESIS METHODS OF ZEOLITES

The zeolite crystallization process involves the dispersion, recombination, and polymerization of silicate and aluminate species. Industrial solid wastes are complex, heterogeneous systems containing a significant proportion of inert components, which affect the kinetics and mechanism of zeolite formation from these raw materials. Zeolite synthesis from solid waste typically proceeds through four consecutive stages [3].

In the first phase, chemical pretreatment of the raw material is performed, most often using an HCl solution, to remove impurities such as Fe_2O_3 and CaO. This step increases the reactivity of the precursor and homogenizes the system. The second phase involves alkaline decomposition or alkaline fusion, during which amorphous silicon and aluminium phases dissolve. Stable crystalline components, such as corundum, have significantly lower solubility. The presence of OH^- ions in alkaline solutions or melts is crucial for increasing the solubility of Si and Al species. In this phase, the aluminosilicate structure breaks down, and Si–O and Al–O tetrahedra dissociate and form in the alkaline medium.

The third phase involves restructuring the aluminosilicate gel, during which the TO_4 tetrahedra are reorganized to form short-range structures. When the concentration of these structural units reaches a critical value, nucleation and the formation of ordered nanocrystalline cores occur. This process initiates further polymerization and recombination of tetrahedra on the surface of the cores.

In the final stage, crystal growth occurs as TO_4 tetrahedra are incorporated onto the surface of the cores according to specific crystallographic rules. Continuous growth leads to the formation of a stable zeolite structure with defined porosity and morphology [4–6].

Conventional hydrothermal method

The conventional one-step hydrothermal method enables the direct conversion of pretreated raw materials into zeolites. First, the materials are dissolved in an alkaline solution (NaOH or KOH), which dissolves silicates and aluminates. Then, by mixing and controlled aging of the solution – with the possible addition of silicon and aluminium sources to adjust the molar ratio – a silicoaluminate gel forms. The gel is subjected to hydrothermal crystallization, typically at temperatures of 80–200 °C for 12–48 hours, resulting in zeolite crystals. The final product is obtained after drying or calcination [4].

In the study by Constantin *et al.* [7], zeolite was synthesized from fly ash using combined alkaline and hydrothermal methods. The resulting material had an adsorption capacity of approximately 17 mg/g for Cd^{2+} ions, with the adsorption process reaching equilibrium quickly and following the Langmuir model. The adsorbent could be reused for multiple cycles without significant loss of efficiency. These results indicate that hydrothermally synthesized zeolites from fly ash provide a sustainable and effective solution for removing heavy metals from aquatic environments.

Alkaline fusion hydrothermal method

A key aspect of the alkaline fusion method is the calcination of the raw material with a solid alkaline compound at high temperature. During this process, resistant components of crystalline aluminosilicates, such as mullite and quartz in the raw material, are activated and decomposed. This stage produces a reactive precursor for the subsequent synthesis steps. After cooling the calcined material, deionized water is added, and the mixture is stirred at room temperature to form an intermediate gel, rich in silicon and aluminum. The gel is crucial because it ensures proper distribution of the active components and forms the foundation for crystallization. The final zeolite is produced by hydrothermal crystallization, in which the gel is subjected to controlled temperature and environmental conditions, resulting in the formation of the desired crystal structure and porous material. This method combines efficient activation of raw materials with precise control of crystallization, enabling the production of zeolites with high purity and well-defined properties [8].

Buzukashvili *et al.* [9] synthesized zeolite from fly ash using a combination of fusion and hydrothermal methods, producing a material with strong adsorption properties for removing heavy metals from aqueous solutions. The maximum adsorption capacities were 495 mg/g for Pb^{2+} , 248 mg/g for Cu^{2+} , 177 mg/g for Zn^{2+} , and 130 mg/g for Ni^{2+} ions. The adsorption process followed the Langmuir isotherm model and pseudo-second-order kinetics. The developed magnetic zeolite also enables easy extraction of the adsorbent from the solution after treatment, further increasing its practical significance in water purification processes.

Ultrasonic assistance in the hydrothermal synthesis of zeolites

Ultrasonic assistance is an effective method for synthesizing zeolites from raw materials containing inert substances. First, the raw materials are mixed with an alkaline solution, and the mixture undergoes ultrasonic treatment. Ultrasonic waves deliver high energy to

molecules through cavitation and mechanical effects, increasing molecular movement, accelerating chemical reactions, and facilitating the dissolution of silico-alumina oxides from solid waste. Microbubbles generated by ultrasound further promote the formation of zeolite crystals. After ultrasonic treatment, zeolites are produced by hydrothermal crystallization [2]. In recent years, significant progress has been made in this area.

For example, applying ultrasound in the synthesis of zeolite RHO reduced the crystallization time from 7–8 days with the conventional method to about 2 days with ultrasound, while maintaining high crystallinity and characteristic crystal morphology. This demonstrates ultrasound's ability to accelerate nucleation and growth of the crystalline phase [10].

In another case, ultrasound-pretreated hydrothermal synthesis of zeolite CHA enabled the transformation of zeolite T into a less dense CHA phase without the need for an organic template or seeds, and with improved CO₂ adsorption capacity. This highlights the use of ultrasound in manipulating interfacial conversions and enhancing product properties [11].

These examples show that ultrasonic assistance not only accelerates crystallization kinetics and shortens synthesis time, but also improves control over the morphology and properties of zeolite materials. This creates opportunities for broader application of this method in industrial processes such as catalysis, adsorption, and separation, especially when using raw materials with a high content of inert substances.

Microwave- assisted synthesis method

The microwave-assisted synthesis method is among the most advanced techniques for accelerating the hydrothermal crystallization of zeolites, due to the direct interaction of microwave radiation with the reaction mixture. Over the past decade, this method has attracted considerable attention because it can drastically reduce synthesis time, improve control over nucleation and crystal growth, and produce materials with enhanced functional properties. Compared to conventional hydrothermal procedures, microwave heating enables rapid and uniform attainment of the target temperature throughout the entire system, which intensifies crystallization kinetics.

Recent research further confirms the potential of this method for valorizing industrial waste. For example, Zang *et al.* [12] work reported the microwave-assisted synthesis of Na-P1-type zeolites and sodalite from fly ash, with the resulting materials demonstrating high efficiency in removing Pb²⁺ and Cd²⁺ ions from aqueous solutions (adsorption capacities exceeding 100 mg/g, depending on synthesis conditions). Under optimized conditions, zeolite with high crystallinity (~51.7%) and significantly increased ion exchange capacity (CEC ≈ 2.58 meq/g) was obtained, which is more than 100 times higher than that of the starting ash. This approach not only supports the development of efficient adsorbents but also enables sustainable waste management by converting waste into high-value-added materials.

Table 1 presents representative results for the adsorption of various pollutants using zeolites derived from different waste raw materials, with particular reference to adsorption capacity, selectivity, and stability during cyclic use.

Table 1 Representative results of pollutant adsorption by solid waste-based zeolites

Type of pollutant	Synthetic material	Name of zeolite	Adsorption capacity/ Removal efficiency	Synthesis method	Ref.
Toluen	Coal fly ash	Plasma-modified iron-enriched zeolite	98%	Ultrasonic-assisted, double stage fusion-hydrothermal synthesis	[13]
CO ₂	Waste coal fly ash	Na-Ca ²⁺	0.4–0.8 mmol/g	Hydrothermal treatment	[14]
Benzen	Fly ash, natural clinoptilolite (ZN-C) and diatomite	Na-P1	1.40 µmol/g	Alkali hydrothermal method	[15]
Toluen			10.52 µmol/g		
o-ksilen			26.22 µmol/g		
m-ksilen			25.96 µmol/g		
Benzen	Fly ash, natural clinoptilolite (ZN-C) and diatomite	Na-X	383.67 µmol/g	Alkali hydrothermal method	[15]
Toluen			525.03 µmol/g		
o-ksilen			545.26 µmol/g		
m-ksilen			563.82 µmol/g		
NH ₃	Waste fly ash, with vermiculite and unburned coal	NaX–Ver	38.46 mg/g	Hydrothermal syntheses	[16]
		NaX–FA	40.00 mg/g		
		NaX–C	21.05 mg/g		
Hg ⁰	Fly ash, red mud and steel slag	M-8FA2SS	99%	Supercritical hydrothermal synthesis	[17]
		M-4FA4RM2SS	97%		
		M-8RM2SS	92%		
Ni	Hard kaolin and industrial solid waste red mud	MZA	80.71 mg/g	Ultrafast Joule Heating (UJH) combined with Hydrothermal method	[18]
Co			82.73 mg/g		
Mn			85.91 mg/g		
Cu			207.20 mg/g		

APPLICATION OF ZEOLITE FOR GAS PURIFICATION

The purification of volatile organic compounds (VOC_s) is among the most important and dynamic areas of zeolite application, especially given increasingly strict environmental regulations and the need to decarbonize industrial processes.

To address this persistent problem, metal-modified zeolite catalysts have demonstrated exceptional performance due to their high specific surface area, well-developed microporosity, adjustable acidity, and pronounced thermal and chemical stability. These properties enable efficient use in both adsorption and catalytic decomposition of VOC_s, making them key materials in modern emission control technologies.

The removal of VOCs using zeolite catalysts relies primarily on a combination of adsorption and catalytic oxidation processes. The classical mechanism involves three main steps: (i) adsorption of VOC molecules on acidic active sites of the zeolite, (ii) activation of molecular oxygen on metal centers (such as Pt, Pd, Cu, or Mn), and (iii) oxidation of adsorbed organic molecules to end products, mainly CO₂ and H₂O. This synergistic effect between the zeolite support and the active metal phase is essential for achieving high conversion at relatively low temperatures.

A significant trend is the increasing use of zeolites synthesized from solid waste for VOC purification, supporting the principles of the circular economy. These materials not only reduce production costs but also help address waste management challenges [19].

APPLICATION OF ZEOLITE IN WASTEWATER TREATMENT

Water pollution by heavy metals is a serious environmental problem that requires efficient and sustainable solutions. Zeolites have emerged as highly effective adsorbents (Table 1), primarily due to their well-developed porous structure, high ion exchange capacity, and strong electrostatic interactions, which are the main mechanisms for metal ion binding.

Recent research has focused on zeolites synthesized from municipal waste ash under low pH conditions. After appropriate chemical or thermal modification, these materials can exhibit improved stability in acidic media and increased selectivity for certain metal ions. For example, one study found that zeolites produced by alkaline activation of municipal waste ash and subsequent surface modification retain significant adsorption capacity even at pH values below 4. Under these conditions, despite increased competition from H^+ ions, efficient removal of ions such as Pb^{2+} and Cu^{2+} occurs, attributed to the stabilization of active centers and increased specific surface area of the material. These results suggest that properly engineered zeolites from secondary raw materials, such as municipal waste ash, can provide a sustainable and economical solution for treating acidic industrial wastewater, especially where conventional adsorbents are less efficient [20].

APPLICATION OF ZEOLITE IN POLLUTED SOIL TREATMENT

Zeolite adsorbents have exceptional ion exchange and adsorption capacities, making them highly effective for remediating polluted soils. Their stable crystal structure, long-term effectiveness, resistance to pH changes, good permeability, and environmental friendliness make zeolites an increasingly sustainable solution for soil protection without the risk of secondary pollution. Their use in soils contaminated with heavy metals relies primarily on ion exchange, surface adsorption, and chemisorption. These processes bind toxic ions (e.g., Pb^{2+} , Cu^{2+} , Cd^{2+}), reducing their mobility and bioavailability and preventing their accumulation in plants and entry into the food chain. For example, Zhang *et al.* [21] synthesized MnO_2 -modified clinoptilolite, in which the zeolite surface is enriched with manganese oxide phases that have a strong affinity for heavy metals. Applying this material to soil contaminated with Cd^{2+} and Pb^{2+} ions significantly reduced their bioavailability and mobility, decreasing plant accumulation by 42–68%. Additionally, improvements in soil chemical properties were observed, including increased pH and cation exchange capacity, which further contribute to contaminant stabilization. These results confirm the effectiveness of MnO_2 -modified zeolites as promising materials for remediating soils contaminated with heavy metals [21].

CONCLUSION

Previous research shows that zeolites synthesized from solid waste are highly promising green functional materials with broad potential for environmental protection. Their use has demonstrated significant potential in adsorption processes, water and gas purification, and soil remediation. However, despite encouraging results, several challenges still limit their wider industrial application. It is necessary to investigate more thoroughly the mechanisms of interaction between zeolites and soil, and to develop more efficient hydrophobic zeolites and materials for gas and water purification. Another issue is that current methods of zeolite

regeneration mainly rely on thermal treatments or chemical reagents, which increase process costs and may cause secondary pollution. Research on zeolites derived from solid waste is currently mostly limited to the laboratory, while industrial application remains underdeveloped. Therefore, further research is essential to improve their performance, reduce production and regeneration costs, and enable broader commercial and sustainable use of these materials in the future.

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Author index

**A**

Aćimović, D. 427, 432, 452
Alagić, S. 51
Amirov, J. 381
Anđelković, A. 541
Anđelković, D. 297, 304, 310
Anđelković, T. 142, 222, 228
Andus, S. 181, 523
Antonijević, M. 57, 233
Apostolov, N. 561, 636
Arena, C. 374
Arizanova, M. 360
Arsić, S. 497
Atanasova, V. 516
Atlagić, J.Č. 181
Avramović, Lj. 568

B

Bajić, B. 12
Balanović, Lj. 422, 443, 644
Bandur, D. 273, 343
Banković, S. 463
Bartolić, D. 273, 343
Batool, I. 610
Beslac, N. 386
Bezdan, A. 29
Bezdan, J. 29
Bin Moazzam, U. 610
Bogdanović, A. 57, 233
Bogdanović, D. 142, 222, 228
Bogdanović, G. 2
Bojić, A. 279, 284, 290
Božić, A. 536
Božić, D. 568
Božinović, K. 239, 410, 417, 443
Branković, M. 297, 304, 310
Brdarić, T. 427, 432, 452
Bulatović, S. 438
Budzakoska Gjoreska, B. 153

C

Cmiljanović, K. 503
Cocić, M. 146
Cvetković, A. 57, 233, 403
Cvetković, S. 261, 266

Č

Čeliković, I. 330
Čukanović, J. 83, 85, 93

Ć

Ćirović, Ž. 210
Ćosović, V. 485
Ćurić, M. 582

D

Damnjanović, Z. 146
Danilović Luković J. 316, 324
De Marco, A. 374
Dimitrijević, M. 336
Djikanović, V. 590
Dobričić, A. 336

Dodić, S. 12
Doneva-Shapcheska, D. 360
Drakulović, A. 46
Dudić, M. 222, 228
Dumitrašković, S. 628

Đ

Đikanović, V. 181, 348
Đoković, J. 478
Đorđević, A. 478
Đorđević, M. 112, 119, 456
Đorđević, N. 650
Đorđević, S. 83, 85, 93
Đorđievski, S. 561
Đuknić, J. 78, 530
Đurašević, M. 330
Đuretanović, S. 546
Đurić, S. 243
Đuriš, M. 261

F

Fedajev, A. 497
Fike, M. 595
Filipović, K. 620

G

Gajić, I.S. 22
Galečić, N. 83, 85, 93
Galjak, J. 135
Gorgievski, M. 239, 417, 443, 628, 632
Grbović, L. 523, 530
Grekulović, V. 239, 417, 443, 628, 632
Grozdanović, M. 478

I

Ivanović, M. 503

J

Jakovljević, M. 546
Jakovljević, O. 187, 523, 536, 541
Janković, A. 463
Janjić, J. 582
Janjić, N. 626
Ječmenica Dučić, M. 427, 432, 452
Jerinkić, D. 187
Jogrić, T. 443, 644
Jordanović, J. 561, 646
Jovanović, M. 602
Jovanović, V. 630
Jovanović, V.S. 51
Jovičić, K. 181, 348, 590
Jović, A. 642
Jovović, N. 46
Jovašević-Stojanović, M. 210, 602

K

Kalinović, J. 561, 646, 648, 650
Kalinović, T. 561, 646, 650
Kamenović, V. 146
Kandić, A. 330
Karabašević, M. 632
Kerkez, D. 620
Kleut, D. 210

Kljajević, Lj. 503
 Knežević, S. 503
 Kojadinović, N. 546
 Kojić, I. 638
 Kostić Kokić, I. 142, 222, 228
 Korać Jačić, J. 316, 324, 576
 Kolarov, R. 83, 85, 93
 Koprivica, M. 471
 Kostić, M. 279, 290
 Kostadinova Jankovski, D. 360
 Kovačević, A. 410
 Kovačević, R. 146, 602
 Kralj, K. 243
 Kračun Kolarević, M. 523
 Krantić, Z. 541
 Krizmanić, J. 523
 Krstić, J. 620
 Krstić, M. 135

L

Lakušić, V. 71, 78
 Lazić, Lj. 243
 Lekić, J. 556
 Levkić, J. 646
 Lučić, M. 169

Lj

Ljubić, V. 261, 266

M

Maksimović, I. 503
 Maksin, D. 452
 Manasijević, D. 410, 422
 Mančić, M. 478
 Marić, A. 181
 Marinković, N. 181, 530
 Marjanović, S. 336
 Marjanović, V. 63, 162
 Marković, B. 438
 Marković, I. 410, 422, 443, 485
 Marković, Miljan 239, 417
 Marković, Marina 239, 417
 Marković, R. 162
 Marković, Z. 336
 Marković Nikolić, D. 100, 250, 256
 Matić, B. 175
 Medić, D. 51, 403, 561, 568
 Meriluoto, J. 22
 Mičić, D. 243
 Mihalj Lubašćik, I. 22
 Mičić, M. 343
 Milanović, T. 330
 Milenković, M. 316, 324, 576
 Milentijević, G. 135
 Milićević, A. 541
 Milić, S. 51, 568
 Milojević, S. 135
 Milošević, D. 261, 266
 Milošković, A. 546
 Milovanović, Ž. 261, 266
 Miltenović, Đ. 112
 Mitić, T. 181
 Mitrović, J. 279, 284, 290
 Mladenović, D. 497

Mladenović Nikolić, N. 503
 Mladenović, S. 485
 Momčilović, M. 279, 290

N

Najdanović, S. 284, 290
 Napoletano, P. 374
 Nasirov, M. 381
 Nasir, K. 610
 Nastasović, A. 438
 Nawab, H. 610
 Nedelkovski, V. 403, 568
 Nedeljković, M. 410, 422, 485
 Nedić, N. 438
 Nenadović, S. 503
 Nešović, S. 620
 Nikolić, D. 336
 Nikolić, I. 46
 Nikolić, Jelena S. 51
 Nikolić, Jelena D. 471
 Nikolić, M. 100, 119, 250, 256
 Nikolić, S. 634
 Nikolić, T. 100, 112, 119, 250, 456
 Nikolić, Ž. 638
 Nikolovski, D. 243, 622
 Novaković, B. 71, 78, 368
 Nujkić, M. 561, 624, 630, 634, 636, 642, 646

O

Obradović, V. 106, 551, 556
 Ocokoljić, M. 83, 85, 93
 Okolišan, A. 169
 Onjia, A. 169, 640

P

Pajic, P. 194, 201
 Palanački Malešević, T. 22
 Panić, M. 497
 Papludis, A. 51
 Paskaš, N. 71, 78
 Paunović, M. 530
 Pavlović, S. 126
 Pečić, M. 187
 Peltechki, D. 509
 Perendija, J. 261, 266
 Perović, M. 106, 551, 556
 Petković, G. 250
 Petronijević, T. 222, 228
 Petrović, B. 602
 Petrović Mihajlović, M. 57, 233
 Petrović, J. 485
 Petrović, M. 279, 284, 290
 Petrović, M.Lj. 463
 Petrov, Dj. 83, 85, 93
 Petrov, P. 353
 Pezdevšek, M. 595
 Popescu, F. 217
 Popović, N. 530
 Popović, S. 187, 536, 541
 Prodanović, O. 273
 Prodanović, R. 273
 Prokopijević, M. 343

R

Radenković, M. 546

Radić, M. 648
 Radmilović, V. 46
 Radojević, A. 561, 646, 648
 Radovanović, M. 57, 233, 403
 Radović, B. 146, 602
 Radović, N. 638
 Radović Vučić, M. 279, 284
 Radović, Ž. 40
 Rakin, M. 463
 Rakonjac, N. 194, 201
 Raković, Marko 78, 368,
 Raković, Maja 530
 Rančev, S. 284
 Randjelović, D. 471
 Randelović, D. 381
 Rašković, B. 336
 Rikalović, M. 622
 Ristić, I. 256
 Ristić, N. 146, 256
 Ristovski, B. 360
 Roger, A. 595
 Romčević, D. 386
 Rudic, Ž. 194, 201

S

Samolov, A. 330
 Santrač, I. 316, 324, 576
 Savić, I. 22
 Savić, V. 471
 Savić Rosić, B. 427, 432, 452
 Spasojević Savković, M. 273
 Sekereš, F. 316, 324
 Simić, M. 427, 432, 452
 Simić, V. 546
 Simonović, A. 18, 57, 233, 403
 Skočajić, D. 83, 85, 93
 Sredenšek, K. 595
 Stajić, T. 243
 Stamenković, U. 410, 422, 443, 485
 Stanković, Mira 273, 343
 Stanković, Marko 336
 Stanković, Mihajlo 386, 394
 Stanković, N. 142, 222, 228
 Stanković, Sonja 57, 403
 Stanković, Slavica 343
 Stojadinović, D. 100, 112, 119, 456
 Stojadinović, Milutin 63
 Stojadinović, Minja 624
 Stojanoska, M. 516
 Stojanović, B. 112, 119, 456
 Stojanović, D. 210
 Stojanović, G. 51
 Stojanović, Katarina 427, 432, 452
 Stojanović, Ksenija 638
 Stojanović, S. 456
 Stojanović, Z. 71
 Stošić, D. 243
 Surudžić, N. 273, 343
 Svirčev, Z. 22
 Svrkota, I. 63

Š

Štirbanović, Z. 162
 Štrbac, N. 239, 417

T

Tadić, N. 40, 46
 Tadić, T. 438
 Tanikić, D. 478
 Tasić, V. 146
 Tasić, Ž. 57, 233, 403, 561, 626
 Topalović, V. 471
 Trajanovska, S. 153
 Trajanovski, S. 153
 Trajkovska, G. 243
 Trifunović, V. 568
 Trivunac, K. 266
 Tubić, B. 523, 530

U

Urošević, S. 490

V

Valiyev, S. 381
 Vasić, I. 330
 Vasiljević, B. 523
 Vasiljević, S. 568
 Velinov Georgijev, N. 279, 284, 290
 Velickova, E. 360
 Veličković, M. 497
 Veličković, T. 546
 Vesković, J. 169
 Vesković, M. 169, 640
 Vilimonović, M. 169
 Vitale, E. 374
 Vizi, A. 638
 Voza, D. 497
 Vranković, J. 348, 590
 Vukašinović Sekulić, M. 463
 Vučković, T. 106, 551
 Vučurović, D. 12
 Vučurović, V. 5
 Vukmanović, V. 175
 Vuković, M. 490

W

Wadhawan, J. 1

Z

Zdravković, A. 100, 112, 119, 250, 256, 456
 Zdravković, M. 239, 417
 Zec, J. 243, 622
 Zot, M. 217

Ž

Živić, I. 71, 78
 Živković, M. 316, 324, 576
 Živković Perišić, S. 175

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