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4

## 5 **Heuristic Shape Optimization of Baffled Fluid Distributor for** 6 **Uniform Flow Distribution**

7 Lingai LUO<sup>a\*</sup>, Min WEI<sup>a</sup>, Yilin FAN<sup>a</sup> and Gilles FLAMANT<sup>b</sup>

8 <sup>a</sup> *Laboratoire de Thermocinétique de Nantes, UMR CNRS 6607, Polytech' Nantes – Université de*  
9 *Nantes, La Chantrerie, Rue Christian Pauc, BP 50609, 44306 Nantes Cedex 03, France*

10 <sup>b</sup> *Laboratoire Matériaux, Procédés et Energie Solaire (PROMES), UPR CNRS 8521, 7 rue du Four*  
11 *Solaire, 66120 Font-Romeu Odeillo, France*

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### 12 **Abstract**

13 This paper presents a CFD-based, heuristic evolutionary algorithm for shape design and optimization  
14 of baffled fluid distributor. In this algorithm, the baffle surface is firstly divided with numerous  
15 identical control areas (volumes), each control area having an orifice in the middle. Under the  
16 constraint of constant global porosity of the baffle, the algorithm adjusts the size distribution of  
17 orifices so as to approach identical mass flowrate passing through every control area. An automatic  
18 program is processed iteratively so that the baffle configuration evolves toward the optimized shape,  
19 providing a uniform flow distribution among parallel outlet channels.

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +33 240683167; Fax: +33 240683141. E-mail address: [lingai.luo@univ-nantes.fr](mailto:lingai.luo@univ-nantes.fr)

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1 To illustrate the principles and procedure of this algorithm, a 2D example of baffled fluid distributor  
2 is introduced and tested. Numerical results show that this algorithm can successfully reach uniform  
3 flow distribution with a small pressure drop increase. Sensibility analysis also shows that this  
4 algorithm is robust, effective, general and flexible compared to traditional arbitrary or empirical  
5 propositions. A parametric study of influencing design parameters on the performance of the  
6 algorithm is carried out in order to provide some design guidelines. Finally, the theoretical basis and  
7 essential steps for the extension of the current algorithm to tackle 3D problem are established. The  
8 easy implementation of this simply solution for the general fluid maldistribution problem  
9 demonstrates its promising application in real engineering field.

10 **Keywords:** Flow maldistribution; Perforated baffle; Distributor; Shape optimization; CFD

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## 1 **1. Introduction**

2 Delivering and distributing precise and controlled flows of one or more fluids into a bundle of parallel  
3 channels of multi-tubular equipment is a great challenge for many unit operations of process  
4 engineering. Single phase fluid flow maldistribution is an important cause of globally poor  
5 performance of heat exchangers, fluidized beds and catalytic monoliths. When mixing of different  
6 fluids is involved, such as in chemical reactors, in combustors and in absorption columns, the impact  
7 of flow maldistribution might be more disastrous because it may change dramatically the proportion  
8 between reactants.

9 Flow maldistribution can be classified into two categories: gross maldistribution and  
10 passage-to-passage maldistribution (Mueller and Chiou, 1988). The latter usually occurs in highly  
11 compact devices mainly caused by manufacturing tolerances among passages, fouling, blockage due  
12 to condensable impurities, etc. If properly operated, such differences can be less than 5% (Rebrov et  
13 al., 2011). On the other hand, the gross maldistribution is mainly associated with improper design of  
14 fluid distributor and/or collector configurations (also referred to as headers or manifolds). The  
15 maximum to minimum flowrate ratio among parallel channels, though depending on various factors  
16 (eg. inlet velocity, drag coefficient of the distributor, number of parallel channels, etc.), can vary from  
17 several tens of percent just up to factors of tens to hundreds (Saber et al., 2009; Tondeur et al.,  
18 2011a). Therefore, many studies have been accomplished and attempted on design and optimization  
19 of fluid distributor with the purpose of improving the flow distribution uniformity.

20 Many studies have been devoted to improve the flow uniformity, as summarized in the review of  
21 Rebrov et al. (2011) and an earlier book of Idelchik (1991). One of the effective solutions is to

1 optimize the geometrical parameters of fluid distributor, such as the diffuser angle (eg. Commenge et  
2 al., 2002; Jiao et al., 2003a; Tondeur et al., 2011b; Kumaran et al., 2013; Midoux and Tondeur, 2014a,  
3 2014b), the ratio of distributor area to channel area (Jiao et al., 2003b) and the locations of  
4 inlet/outlet tubes (Chein and Chen, 2009; Dang and Teng, 2011). The general idea is to provide  
5 sufficient distance between the inlet tube of the distributor and the parallel channels for the  
6 development of a regular flow profile. This usually implies that the fluid distributor occupies a large  
7 space which is unfavorable regarding volume compactness.

8 Some researchers also proposed to use nature-inspired tree-like structures as fluid distributing  
9 network. Various tree-like (or arborescent) distributors were designed to deliver a certain quantity of  
10 fluid from a single inlet to a series of parallel channels evenly spaced on a line (point-to-line problem,  
11 Ajmera et al., 2002; Barber and Emerson, 2008; Wang and Wang, 2007; Yue et al., 2010; Liu and Li,  
12 2013; Tarlet et al., 2014), on a surface (point-to-surface problem, Tondeur and Luo, 2004, Fan et al.,  
13 2008b; Chen et al., 2010; Tondeur and Menetrieux, 2011; Tesař, 2011; Guo et al., 2013), or to a  
14 volume to be drained (point-to-volume problem, Gheorghiu et al., 2005; Tondeur et al., 2009). It is  
15 known that multi-scale tree-like distributor could provide better flow distribution uniformity  
16 preferentially for laminar flow (Luo et al., 2007; Luo et al., 2008). When the flowrate increases,  
17 tree-like distributors become less efficient mainly due to the influence of inertial force. A slight  
18 asymmetry velocity profile at one bifurcation would lead to significant maldistribution after  
19 successive bifurcations (Fan et al., 2008a). Worse still is the drastic increase of pressure drop due to  
20 singular losses in numerous bifurcations, elbows or downcomers in complex tree-like structures (Fan  
21 et al., 2008a; Tondeur et al., 2009). Other researchers focused on the multi-scale network based on  
22 ladder-type structures (Saber et al., 2009, 2010; Commenge et al., 2011). An equivalent hydraulic

1 resistance method is presented to calculate the flow characteristics of multi-scale microchannel  
2 reactors, under laminar and isothermal conditions.

3 Another common solution to the flow maldistribution problem is adding “packings” as additional  
4 hydraulic resistance inside the distributor. Packings could be either thick wall screens (Rebrov et al.,  
5 2007a, 2007b), or thin wall screens like meshes or gauzes. In particular, a *thin perforated baffle* is  
6 widely introduced in the inlet distributor to improve the flow distribution uniformity. Table 1  
7 summarizes various studies in the literature on fluid distributors with insertion of perforated baffle. It  
8 is generally reported that the baffled fluid distributor could effectively improve the flow distribution  
9 uniformity with an acceptable pressure drop increase. Moreover, they can be easily fabricated and  
10 installed with less cost compared to tree-like distributors.

11 Nevertheless, by exploring in more detail the perforated baffle, we may find out that the  
12 configurations proposed could be very different, even arbitrary, as illustrated in Fig. 1. The orifices  
13 drilled in the plate could have identical or different diameters (usually small orifices at the centre of  
14 baffle and big orifices on the edge), and be arranged in single line or in multiple lines. In any case, the  
15 topology of the orifices' distribution, more specifically, the arrangement of the orifices on the plate  
16 and their size distribution are either *empirical* or *intuitive*. To the best of our knowledge, neither  
17 theoretical guidelines nor basic principles were proposed or established for the design and  
18 optimization of the baffle configuration. This will result in two consequences since the equidistribution  
19 effect of perforated baffle is generally restricted to a certain range of flow circuit geometry (eg.  
20 number of parallel channels) and working condition (eg. inlet velocity). Firstly, the best topology  
21 configuration of the perforated baffle can not be determined for one specific circuit geometry and

1 under certain working condition. Secondly, once the circuit geometry or working condition changes,  
2 the equidistribution effect would probably be no longer in force. Then trial-and-error tests are  
3 inevitable until finding a non-optimal but acceptable new configuration. As a result, the development  
4 of a general method for the design and optimization of baffled fluid distributor is of great interests in  
5 fields wherever the flow maldistribution problem exists.

6 In this study, a *heuristic evolutionary algorithm* (Luo et al., 2014) is proposed for the design and  
7 shape optimization of baffled fluid distributor for uniform flow distribution. The algorithm is  
8 CFD-based, and can be considered as a small extension in the general framework of *Cellular*  
9 *Automata* (CA) (Wolfram, 2002). With this algorithm, we try to automatically evolve the size and  
10 distribution of orifices on the perforated baffle in order to determine the optimal topology  
11 configuration subject to each particular case. Compared to traditional arbitrary or empirical  
12 propositions, this algorithm is more general, precise and flexible, and can be easily applied to  
13 different distributor geometries and different working conditions.

14 We shall first present the heuristic algorithm with a general 2D case, appropriate for introducing basic  
15 principles and for describing in detail each step of the algorithm. A numerical benchmark will then be  
16 developed and optimization results will be presented. The influences of various design and  
17 operational parameters will be analyzed and discussed. The theoretical basis for the extension of the  
18 current algorithm to tackle 3D problem are also established. Finally, remarks and main conclusions  
19 will be summarized.

20 **Fig. 1.** Different baffle configurations proposed in the literature. (a) Adapted from Lalot et al. (1999). (b) Adapted  
21 from Jiao et al. (2003b). (c) Adapted from Wen et al. (2006). (d) Adapted from Ismail et al. (2009). (e) Adapted

1 from Wang et al. (2011). (f) Adapted from Krichnavaruk and Pavasant (2002). (g) Adapted from Maharaj et al.  
2 (2007).

3 **Table 1** Selected studies on fluid distributor with insertion of perforated baffle.

## 4 **2. Heuristic evolutionary algorithm**

5 The basic idea of this study is to homogenize the velocity profile in the distributor by the insertion of  
6 a perforated baffle instead of natural development, as shown in Fig. 2. The size and distribution of  
7 orifices should be arranged in such a way that a *regular velocity profile on the whole surface* could be  
8 achieved at the downstream of the baffle (before the inlets of parallel channels). To do that, we first  
9 divide the baffle into numerous small sections, each section having an orifice in the middle. The  
10 objective of the algorithm is to obtain *identical fluid flux in every section* by modulating the size of  
11 every orifice. Locally uniform velocity profiles will then merge into a global regular one. We will  
12 describe in detail in this section the basic principles and steps of this heuristic algorithm with a 2D  
13 example. To simplify the numerical algorithm, we assume steady Newtonian fluid flow in this study.

14 **Fig. 2.** Schematic view of the effect of perforated baffle on the homogenization of velocity profile.

### 15 *2.1. Introduction of notations*

16 Fig. 3 shows a representative 2D baffled fluid distributor with single inlet tube (width  $w$ ) and certain  
17 amount of outlet channels ( $M$ ) corresponding to the downstream equipment. The total inlet mass  
18 flowrate equals to  $Q$ . A perforated baffle with thickness ( $e$ ) is installed inside of the distributor. The  
19 length of the baffle ( $L$ ) is equal to the width of the distributor chamber and the location of baffle inside  
20 the distributor ( $h/H$ ) is a parameter subject to study. The baffle with length  $L$  is uniformly divided into



1  $N$  control areas of same length  $l$ . Each control area  $i$  has one orifice of size  $d_i$  arranged in the middle,  
 2 and the flowrate passing through is  $q_i$ . Then following relations could be derived based on geometric  
 3 considerations and mass conservation.

$$4 \quad l = \frac{L}{N} \quad (1)$$

$$5 \quad \varepsilon_i = \frac{d_i}{l} \quad (2)$$

$$6 \quad \phi = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N d_i}{L} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N \varepsilon_i}{N} \quad (3)$$

7 where  $\varepsilon_i$  is the local porosity in the  $i$ th control area,  $\phi$  the global porosity of the baffle.

8 **Fig. 3.** Representative example of a fluid distributor with insertion of perforated baffle.

9 The mean flowrate among orifices  $\bar{q}$  can be calculated as:

$$10 \quad \bar{q} = \frac{Q}{N} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N q_i}{N} \quad (4)$$

11 Note that the departure of  $q_i$  from  $\bar{q}$  depends on the location of the  $i$ th control area on the baffle and  
 12 the size of the orifice  $d_i$ .

### 13 2.2. Basic principles

14 The objective of the evolutionary algorithm is to determine the optimal size distribution of orifices so  
 15 that the flowrate in every control area is identical.

$$\frac{q_i}{l} = \frac{q_j}{l} = \frac{\bar{q}}{l} \quad (5)$$

Practically, the diameter of each orifice  $d_i$  will be modulated by comparing  $q_i$  and  $\bar{q}$ , as explained in Fig. 4. More precisely, if the flowrate in the  $i$ th control area  $q_i$  is larger than the mean value, then the size of the orifice  $d_i$  should be reduced (Fig. 4a). Vice versa if  $q_i$  is smaller than  $\bar{q}$ ,  $d_i$  should be enlarged so that it could receive higher amount of fluid flux (Fig. 4b). The variation of different  $d_i$  according to the difference between  $q_i$  and  $\bar{q}$  repeats literally until the optimality criterion Eq. (5) is achieved. To realize this evolutionary procedure, a cellular automata based iterative program is developed and will be described in next subsection.

**Fig. 4.** Basic principles of the optimization algorithm. (a) Reduction of the orifice. (b) Enlargement of the orifice.

Ideally, the increment or decrement of  $d_i$  from one optimization step to another should be as small as possible (usually elemental cell length). However, that will by far lengthen the calculation time thus it is not highly efficient. Therefore, we introduce a variation rule as presented in Eq. (6). Precisely from  $t$  to  $t+1$  step, the variation of  $d_i$  is proportional to the departure of  $q_{i,t}$  from the mean value:

$$\Delta d_{i,t} = d_{i,t+1} - d_{i,t} = \gamma \left( 1 - \frac{q_{i,t}}{\bar{q}} \right) \quad (6)$$

$\gamma$  is a relaxation factor to control the variation amplitude. Following this rule, the global porosity of the baffle is kept constant during the optimization procedure:

$$\sum_{i=1}^N \Delta d_{i,t} = \gamma \sum_{i=1}^N \left( 1 - \frac{q_{i,t}}{\bar{q}} \right) = \gamma \left( N - \frac{Q}{\bar{q}} \right) = 0 \quad (7)$$

$$\phi_{t+1} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N d_{i,t+1}}{L} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N d_{i,t} + \sum_{i=1}^N \Delta d_{i,t}}{L} = \phi_t \quad (8)$$

We also restrict that the boundary of the control area does not move during optimization ( $l$  is constant and uniform) and that the boundary of orifice can not overstep the boundary of control area:

$$\varepsilon_{i,t} = \frac{d_{i,t}}{l} \leq 1 \quad (9)$$

### 2.3. Implementation of optimization procedure

The optimization procedure is described in detail using the flow chart shown in Fig. 5.

1. Definition of the geometry of fluid distributor (width of inlet tube, number of channels, etc.) as well as the general operational conditions such as the ambient temperature, operational pressure, amount of heat exchange, etc.
2. Input the initial data relative to working fluid, such as the nature of fluid, the viscosity, compressibility and density of the fluid (temperature and/or pressure dependent or independent), gravity effect and viscous heating effect. The total inlet mass flowrate  $Q$  should also be specified.
3. Definition of the parameters relative to the perforated baffle, such as the location and thickness of baffle, number of control area  $N$  and the initial distribution of  $d_i$ .
4. Mesh generation of the whole simulation domain, thus the baffled fluid distributor. Structured mesh is preferable for easy modification of fluid-solid interfaces.

- 1        5.        Calculation of the exact flow field at steady state, by solving the Navier-Stokes equations.
- 2        6.        Calculation of the mass flowrate  $q_i$  passing through each control area and the mean value
- 3        of flowrate  $\bar{q}$  ; modification of the baffle configuration by comparing  $q_i$  to  $\bar{q}$  , according
- 4        to the rule presented in Eq. (6).
- 5        7.        Regeneration of the mesh for updated simulation domain; recalculation of the exact flow
- 6        field.
- 7        8.        Check the stable tolerance of the algorithm. If the tolerance is satisfied, then the heuristic
- 8        procedure is terminated. If not, the procedure goes back to Step 4 for recurrence. The
- 9        result is considered to be stable when the size variation at  $t$  step  $\Delta d_{i,t}$  is smaller than
- 10       elemental cell size of the mesh. This also implies that the values of  $q_{i,t}$  and  $\bar{q}$  are very
- 11       close.
- 12       9.        Exportation of results, including the final configuration of perforated baffle, the flow
- 13       distribution uniformity among parallel outlet channels and the pressure drop of the
- 14       baffled distributor.

15    The flow maldistribution is quantified by two parameters: the relative flow rate deviation  $D_i$  and the  
 16    maldistribution factor MF.

$$17 \quad D_i = \frac{f_i - \bar{f}}{\bar{f}} \quad (10)$$

$$18 \quad MF = \sqrt{\frac{1}{M-1} \sum_{i=1}^M \left( \frac{f_i - \bar{f}}{\bar{f}} \right)^2} \quad (11)$$

1 where  $M$  stands for the number of parallel outlet channels.  $f_i$  is the local mass flow rate in  $i$ th outlet  
 2 channel and  $\bar{f}$  is the mean flowrate between parallel outlet channels. Uniform flow distribution is  
 3 achieved when values of  $D_i$  and MF approach 0.

$$\bar{f} = \frac{Q}{M} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^M f_i}{M} \quad (12)$$

5 **Fig. 5.** Flow chart of the algorithm.

#### 6 2.4. Calculation of flow field by CFD method

7 One important step in the algorithm is the calculation of exact flow field in the baffled fluid distributor.  
 8 This generally involves solving Navier-Stokes equations by finite volume methods. The equation for  
 9 conservation of mass or continuity is:

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot (\rho \vec{u}) = 0 \quad (13)$$

11 The momentum conservation equation is described by:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial t} (\rho \vec{u}) + \nabla \cdot (\rho \vec{u} \vec{u}) = -\nabla p + \nabla \cdot (\Pi) + \rho \vec{g} + \vec{F} \quad (14)$$

13 where  $\vec{u}$  is the velocity,  $p$  is the static pressure,  $\rho \vec{g}$  and  $\vec{F}$  are the gravitational body force and  
 14 external body forces,  $\Pi$  is the stress tensor which is given by:

$$\Pi = \mu \left[ (\nabla \vec{u} + \nabla \vec{u}^T) - \frac{2}{3} \nabla \cdot \vec{u} I \right] \quad (15)$$

16 where  $\mu$  is the molecular viscosity,  $I$  is the unit tensor.

1 The energy equation is:

$$2 \quad \frac{\partial}{\partial t}(\rho E) + \nabla \cdot (\bar{u}(\rho E + p)) = \nabla \cdot (\lambda \nabla T) + \Pi : \nabla \bar{u} + \rho Q_H \quad (16)$$

3 where  $E$  is the internal energy,  $\lambda$  is the thermal conductivity, and  $Q_H$  includes the heat of chemical  
4 reaction, radiation and any other volumetric heat sources.

5 To predict turbulent flow pattern, additional turbulence models should be employed. It is worth noting  
6 that besides the traditional CFD methods, new simulation techniques such as the Lattice Boltzmann  
7 Method (LBM) can also be used in this regard for more complex fluid domains (Chen and Doolen, 1998;  
8 Wang et al., 2010; 2014).

9 Having described the heuristic algorithm developed for uniform flow distribution, its effectiveness and  
10 sensibility will be tested with an actual example in the next section.

### 11 **3. Simulation and results**

#### 12 *3.1. Numerical benchmark*

13 Here a simple example of baffled fluid distributor restricted in a two-dimensional domain is  
14 considered. Fig. 6 shows the schematic view of the case with main geometrical characteristics  
15 indicated. The inlet tube is 10 mm ( $w$ ) in width and 40 mm in length while the distributor chamber is  
16 100 mm in width ( $L$ ) and 25 mm in length ( $H$ ). Ten parallel outlet channels ( $M=10$ ) with identical  
17 dimension of 2 mm in width and 40 mm in length are connected to the distributor chamber, spaced 10  
18 mm from each other. Note that the inlet tube is located in the middle so that the whole geometry is  
19 symmetrical.

1 In this study, the “sudden expansion configuration” of fluid distributor is selected as example because  
2 it is the most compact but most difficult to realize the uniform flow distribution. However, the  
3 proposed algorithm is not limited to this configuration but suitable for various geometries such as  
4 distributors with 30° or 45° diffuser angle. The geometry of distributor may vary from case to case,  
5 but the optimization procedure remains the same.

6 **Fig. 6.** Geometry and dimension of the numerical benchmark (unit: mm).

7 The 5 mm-thickness ( $e$ ) perforated baffle is inserted at the middle of the distributor chamber  
8 ( $h/H=0.5$ ). The baffle is divided into 10 control areas ( $N=10$ ), the length ( $l$ ) of each being 10 mm. The  
9 initial diameters of orifices are identical and equal to 2 mm ( $d_{i,0}=d_{j,0}=2$  mm), the global porosity ( $\Phi$ )  
10 being 20%. Note that the initial diameter distribution can be non-uniform, which will be discussed in  
11 later subsections. The distribution of  $d_i$  evolves along with optimization steps while the global porosity  
12 of the baffle is kept constant.

13 Liquid water is used as working fluid. The operation pressure is set at 101325 Pa. Simulations are  
14 performed under steady state, isothermal condition without heat transfer. Gravity effect and viscous  
15 heating are neglected for simplification. The physical properties of water used in the computation are  
16 constant (density  $\rho=998.2$  kg·m<sup>-3</sup>; viscosity  $\mu=1.003\times 10^{-3}$  kg·m<sup>-1</sup>·s<sup>-1</sup>).

17 Structured mesh is generated using software ICEM™ (version 12.1) to build up the geometry model.  
18 Note that half of the real object is adopted for the purpose of lessening the computational burden  
19 because of the symmetric feature of the simulation domain. Generally, one millimeter is divided into  
20 ten segments to create square elemental cells. The influence of mesh density on the optimization  
21 results is also tested and will be discussed later.

1 Navier-Stokes equations are resolved by a commercial code ANSYS FLUENT™ (version 12.1.4) to  
2 calculate the flow field. Standard  $k-\varepsilon$  model is used to simulate the turbulent flow. For the  
3 pressure-velocity coupling, COUPLED method is used. For discretization, standard method is chosen  
4 for pressure and second-order upwind differentiation for momentum. Boundary conditions are set as  
5 velocity inlet ( $1.0 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ ) normal to the inlet boundary. Outlets are set to be static pressure boundary,  
6 with pressure value being the same as ambient pressure. Adiabatic wall condition is applied and no  
7 slip occurs at the wall. The solution is considered to be converged when (i) the mass flow-rate at each  
8 outlet channel and the inlet static pressure are constant from one iteration to the next (less than  
9 0.5% variation) and (ii) sums of the normalized residuals for control equations are all less than  
10  $1 \times 10^{-6}$ .

11 The optimization algorithm is written in MATLAB™. At each optimization step, it takes the computed  
12 flow field results from FLUENT™, performs calculations of the displacement according to the variation  
13 rule and updates the coordinates of simulation domain. Then, it passes the data required to ICEM™  
14 to regenerate the mesh for the updated geometry.

### 15 *3.2. Optimization results*

16 Fig. 7a shows the evolution of shape and flow field of different optimization steps at three sections of  
17 the distributor. The locations of three sections are under the inlet tube, above the baffle and above the  
18 parallel channels. Note that *step -1* represents the empty distributor without baffle insertion as a  
19 reference case while *step 0* stands for the initial configuration of the baffle with identical size of  
20 orifices. It can be seen that at *step -1*, the fluid tends to go preferentially into the channels that face  
21 the inlet tube. The flow distribution among parallel outlet channels is obviously not uniform. The



1 insertion of uniformly perforated baffle (step 0) serves as an additional flow resistance (a second  
2 header). Thus fluid flow is firstly distributed on the baffle plate before reaching the inlets of parallel  
3 channels. The flow distribution is homogenized to some extent, but maldistribution still exists, as  
4 indicated by the relative flowrate deviation curves shown on Fig. 7b. When the optimization algorithm  
5 proceeds, the size distribution of orifices on the baffle evolves in such a way that the same fluid  
6 flowrate passing through each orifice is approached. Finally, it reaches a relative steady-state, i.e. the  
7 baffle configuration hardly changes as time step increases. In that case, each outlet channel has  
8 almost the equal chance to receive the coming fluid, indicating a relatively homogenized flow  
9 distribution.

10 **Fig. 7.** Shape and flow field evolution of different optimization steps at three sections (a); Relative flowrate  
11 deviation of outlet channels for different optimization steps (b).  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1$   
12  $\text{m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

13 Examining the evolution of diameter distribution of orifices along with optimization time steps (Fig. 8),  
14 we observe that the sizes of orifices at the centre (No. 5; 6) and at the edge (No. 1, 10) of the baffle  
15 decrease while those at intermediate zone (No. 2-4; 7-9) increase. This observation differs from the  
16 conventional proposition of a monotonously increasing size distribution from centre to the edge of the  
17 baffle (eg. Jiao et al., 2003a; Wen and Li, 2004). In fact, the size reduction of central orifices is logical  
18 since fluid should be guided toward the edge. As to the size reduction of peripheral orifices, it is a bit  
19 counterintuitive owing to the backflow from the distributor walls (boundary effect). Anyway, the  
20 optimal configuration of baffle is closely related to the geometry of fluid distributor.

21 **Fig. 8.** Evolution of size distribution of orifices on the baffle along with optimization steps.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;

1  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

2 Fig. 9 shows the evolution of flow maldistribution among parallel outlet channels as a function of  
3 optimization time steps. It can be observed that the value of maldistribution factor MF reduces from  
4 0.28 (empty distributor as reference) to 0.16 (initial configuration), and finally reaches 0.07  
5 (optimized configuration). Although only several optimization steps are executed (7 steps for this  
6 case, little change of flow distribution after the 4<sup>th</sup> step), the improvement of flow distribution  
7 uniformity (optimized with respect to the initial configuration) is significant.

8 **Fig. 9.** Maldistribution factor (MF) and pressure drop ( $\Delta p$ ) as a function of optimization steps.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;

9  $\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

10 The improved flow distribution uniformity is along with the increased pressure drop, as shown also in  
11 Fig. 9. The value of pressure drop increases from 467 Pa (empty) to 676 Pa (initial configuration), and  
12 finally reaches 730 Pa (optimized configuration). It can be observed that 79.5% of pressure drop  
13 increase is caused by installing the baffle (step -1 to step 0). The pressure drop increase caused by  
14 the optimization process is relatively small (20.5%). The heuristic algorithm realizes the *optimal*  
15 *allocation* of pressure drop, which is the driving force to achieve flow equidistribution.

### 16 3.3. Sensibility analysis

17 Having presented the efficiency of proposed heuristic algorithm for uniform flow distribution, the  
18 robustness of the algorithm regarding different influencing factors is now examined.

19 The choice of initial shape is usually important, especially for numerical optimization problems. In  
20 order to investigate the sensibility of the algorithm to the choice of initial configuration, a comparative

1 test is carried out. This time a non-uniform size distribution of orifices is provided as initial  
2 configuration of perforated baffle. All the boundary conditions and physical properties for fluid flow  
3 are kept the same. It can be observed from Fig. 10 that by executing the optimization algorithm,  
4 different initial configurations lead to a *definite* and *unique* optimized configuration. This justifies the  
5 robustness of the proposed algorithm to the choice of the initial shape.

6 **Fig. 10.** Evolution of size distribution for different initial shapes.

7 Since in our algorithm the minimum size variation is defined as one cell of mesh, it is necessary to  
8 assess the sensibility of the optimized results relative to mesh density. A comparative test regarding  
9 the "resolution" of the simulated domain has been carried out. We have refined the mesh (20  
10 segments instead of 10 for 1 mm) for the above distributor case, while keeping other numerical  
11 parameters unchanged. Results on the improvement of flow distribution uniformity are presented in  
12 Fig. 11. It may be observed that the flow distribution uniformity may be further improved when the  
13 mesh density increases. This may be attributed to two reasons. On one hand, the calculation of flow  
14 field is usually more accurate when more mesh nodes are available. On the other hand, the size  
15 variation of orifices could be more precise with a smaller size of elemental cell. However, this further  
16 improvement is at the cost of much longer computational time, since more computational time will be  
17 consumed to calculate the flow field at each optimization step. For practical applications of the  
18 algorithm in real engineering, the mesh density could be determined considering the fabrication  
19 precisions and tolerance of maldistribution.

20 A "progressive refinement technique" may be considered to further improve the efficiency of our  
21 algorithm. That is to use firstly coarse mesh and then progressively refine the flow domain in order to

1 reach the necessary density. This will be the subject of our future work.

2 **Fig. 11.** Influence of mesh density on the performance of optimization algorithm.

### 3 **4. Effect of design parameters**

4 In this section, the effects of design and operational parameters on the efficiency of the proposed  
5 heuristic algorithm will be systematically evaluated. These parameters include the total inlet flowrate  
6 ( $Q$ ), the baffle location ( $h/H$ ), the number of outlet tubes ( $M$ ) and the global porosity ( $\Phi$ ).

#### 7 *4.1. Total inlet flowrate*

8 Total inlet flowrate of a fluid distributor is one of the key operational parameters which is associated  
9 with the throughput or capacity of processes. Meanwhile, it is also an influencing factor for flow  
10 maldistribution since it is closely related to the flow patterns (laminar, transitional or turbulent) and  
11 velocity profiles in the distributor. A parametric study is carried out by varying the inlet velocity from  
12  $0.1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  to  $2.0 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  in order to test the efficiency of our optimization algorithm within a wide range  
13 of inlet flow rate. The corresponding  $Re$  number at inlet tube varies from 1000 to 20 000 while the  
14 mean  $Re$  number at outlet channel changes from 100 to 2000.

15 Fig. 12a shows the evolution of flow distribution uniformity as a function of optimization time steps for  
16 different values of inlet velocity. It can be easily observed that flow maldistribution augments with  
17 increasing inlet velocity when no baffle is inserted in the distributor (step -1). This is mainly due to the  
18 stronger inertial force at higher velocity so that the fluid enters the central outlet channels more  
19 preferentially. The insertion of a uniformly perforated baffle (step 0) can reduce the maldistribution to  
20 some extent, indicated by the reduction of maldistribution factor MF from 0.128 to 0.044 for  $0.1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$

1 inlet velocity and from 0.324 to 0.189 for  $2.0 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  inlet velocity. However, it is clear that the initial  
2 configuration of baffle is not efficient enough to achieve uniform flow distribution under high inlet  
3 flowrate conditions.

4 By applying the heuristic algorithm, the flow maldistribution can be further reduced. For the  
5 optimized configurations, the MF value is 0.012 for  $0.1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  inlet velocity and 0.096 for  $2.0 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$   
6 inlet velocity. The improvement of distribution uniformity is always significant with respect to the  
7 initial configuration.

8 **Fig. 12.** Influence of inlet flowrate on the performance of optimization algorithm.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$   
9 (a); Velocity of actual flow fields at three sections of the distributor. Inlet velocity= $0.5 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  (b).

10 It should also be noted that the absolute distribution uniformity of the optimized configuration  
11 decreases when total flowrate increases. This is mainly due to the higher inertial forces and locally  
12 irregular and chaotic turbulences. Higher mesh density and more subtle size variation rule may be  
13 useful to achieve a more uniform flow distribution under high flowrate conditions.

14 Fig. 12b shows the velocity of actual flow fields under  $0.5 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  inlet velocity at three sections of the  
15 distributor. The flow fields are changed when the flow passes the perforated baffle. Five uniform  
16 peaks correspond to five channels which make identical flow flux in each channel.

17 Fig. 13 shows that the total pressure drop in the distributor increases along with the increase of the  
18 inlet velocity and higher pressure drop is inevitable to improve the distribution uniformity. As  
19 mentioned above, the main pressure drop increase is caused by installing the baffle (Step -1 to Step  
20 0), and the proportion caused by the optimization procedure is relatively small.

1 **Fig. 13.** Influence of inlet flowrate on the pressure drop in the baffled fluid distributor.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;

2  $h/H=0.5$ .

### 3 4.2. Location of the baffle

4 It is reported that location of the perforated baffle in the distributor chamber may influence the flow  
5 distribution uniformity and the best location suggested is in the midway (Lalot et al., 1999). To verify  
6 this influence, we have tested two additional cases with the baffle located at the upper-middle  
7 ( $h/H=0.25$ ) or at the bottom-middle ( $h/H=0.75$ ) of the distributor chamber, to compare with the  
8 midway case. Other numerical parameters are kept the same as the benchmark.

9 Fig. 14 shows the optimized flow distribution among parallel outlet channels for three different baffle  
10 locations. It can be observed that the upper-middle case provides the most uniform optimized  
11 distribution with maximum flowrate deviation  $D_i$  less than 0.085. The optimized distribution of  
12 bottom-middle case is relatively the least uniform, the maximum  $D_i$  being 0.180. This implies that  
13 under the circumstances of our example, longer distance between the baffle and parallel outlet  
14 channels is beneficial for the remixing and redevelopment of flow profile at the downstream of the  
15 perforated baffle. However, the shorter the distance between the inlet tube and the baffle, the higher  
16 pressure drop will be generated, as shown in Fig. 15. The value of total pressure drop at optimized  
17 configuration is 590.97 Pa, 730.46 Pa and 1213.57 Pa for the bottom-middle, midway and  
18 upper-middle case, respectively. As a result, the best baffle location should be determined by a  
19 trade-off between flow distribution uniformity and pressure drop increase.

20 **Fig. 14.** Relative flowrate deviation for optimized configurations with different baffle locations.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;

21  $\Phi=20\%$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

1 **Fig. 15.** Pressure drop as a function of optimization step, for different baffle locations.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;

2 inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

### 3 4.3. Number of outlet channels $M$

4 The number of parallel outlet channels has certainly a great impact on the flow maldistribution, since  
5 it is by far more difficult to evenly divide one stream into dozens of small streams than into two or  
6 three sub-streams. In order to test the efficiency of the heuristic algorithm within a wide range of  
7 number of outlet channels ( $M$ ), we studied two extra cases with  $M$  being 5 or 20. Other numerical  
8 parameters are kept the same as the benchmark except that the distance between two neighboring  
9 outlet channels is adjusted accordingly.

10 Fig. 16 shows the evolution of flow distribution uniformity as a function of optimization time steps for  
11 different numbers of outlet channels. It can be observed that the larger the number of outlet channels,  
12 the poorer the flow distribution uniformity will be. The value of maldistribution factor (MF) for the  
13 empty distributor augments from 0.153 to 0.736 when  $M$  increases from 5 to 20. It is worth noting  
14 that the optimized configuration obtained by the heuristic algorithm can always maintain the flow  
15 maldistribution at a relatively low level, especially when the number of channels is large. It can also  
16 be observed that the optimized distribution becomes relatively less uniform when  $M$  increases.

17 **Fig. 16.** Influence of number of outlet channels on the distribution uniformity.  $N=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet

18 velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

19 A factor defined as the ratio of number of control areas to the number of outlet channels ( $N/M$ ) is  
20 introduced to explain these observations. Theoretically speaking, the insertion of perforated baffle

1 changes the “topological connectedness” from  $1-M$  to  $1-N-M$ . The heuristic optimization algorithm  
2 could guarantee an equidistribution for the stage  $1-N$ . For the stage  $N-M$ , it can be roughly analogized  
3 as  $N$  empty distributors with topological connectedness of  $1-M/N$ . The distribution uniformity in this  
4 stage thus depends on the value of  $M/N$ . Specifically for the three cases tested, the distribution  
5 uniformity is significantly improved compared to the reference case ( $1-M$ ). Examining in more detail  
6 the topological connectedness for each case, as schematically illustrated in Fig. 17, we notice that it  
7 corresponds to 1-2 (bifurcation,  $M=20$ ), 1-1 (straight,  $M=10$ ) and 2-1 (merging,  $M=5$ ) with internal  
8 flow remixing, respectively. It will be easier to achieve equidistribution when fewer sub-streams  
9 should be formed. Further discussion could be found in next subsection.

10 **Fig. 17.** Schematic view of the topological connectedness between the number of orifices and the number of  
11 parallel outlet channels.

#### 12 4.4. Global porosity $\Phi$

13 A series of comparative tests were performed to study the effect of global porosity  $\Phi$  on the  
14 performance of the optimization algorithm. The control parameters for different cases are listed in  
15 Table 2. It can be noticed that the tested global porosity ( $\Phi$ ) ranges from 10%, 20% to 40%. Higher  
16 values of porosity may not be accepted since it may violate the constraint of Eq. (9) during the  
17 evolution procedure (the boundary of the orifice may overstep the boundary of the control area). For  
18 each value of global porosity, different numbers of control areas ( $N=10, 20, 40, 50$ ) with  
19 corresponding initial size of orifices are tested. Other parameters are kept identical, i.e.  $M=10$ ,  
20  $h/H=0.5$ , inlet velocity at  $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

21 **Table 2** Control parameters for different tested cases.



1 **Fig. 18.** Influences of global porosity and number of orifices on the optimized flow distribution uniformity.  $M=10$ ;

2  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

3 **Fig. 19.** Influences of global porosity and number of orifices on the pressure drop increase.  $M=10$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet

4 velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

5 Fig. 18 presents the values of MF for optimized configurations of tested different cases. For a given

6 value of global porosity, larger number of orifices ( $N$ ) is favorable for more uniform flow distribution.

7 This is coherent to the issue of “topological connectedness” discussed earlier. It seems that when the

8 number of orifices is large, the optimal distribution uniformity that can be achieved for different

9 porosities is very close. However, it should be noted that the absolute values of MF for these cases are

10 so small (less than 0.01) that they might be easily influenced by calculation errors or by the mesh

11 flaw.

12 Examining the pressure drop of the distributor for different cases as shown in Fig. 19, one may

13 observe that the increase of pressure drop due to the insertion of perforated baffle is inversely related

14 to the global porosity of the baffle. The higher the global porosity, the smaller the pressure drop

15 increase will be caused. This analysis indicates that higher global porosity with larger number of

16 orifices (while always keeping local porosity below 1) is beneficial to achieve both uniform flow

17 distribution and minimal pressure drop increase.

## 18 **5. Extension to 3D**

19 This problem will be addressed briefly in order to indicate how it can be handled, but without going

20 into details. In fact, the extension of current 2D algorithm to 3D geometry is astonishingly simple and

1 requires practically no rewriting. Let us merely illustrate the general cases of this point-to-surface  
 2 problem: a bundle of parallel channels evenly distributed on a rectangular or an oval surface to be  
 3 irrigated. Uniform flow distribution is required by a proper design of baffled fluid distributor, whose  
 4 inlet tube is located facing the centre of the surface.

5 The most delicate part of the exercise is actually to divide the surface (rectangular or oval) by control  
 6 volumes (instead of control areas for 2D cases), as shown in Fig. 20. Equations (1-3) can then be  
 7 easily rewritten by replacing linear parameters with surface parameters.

$$8 \quad s = \frac{S}{N} \quad (17)$$

$$9 \quad \varepsilon_i = \frac{a_i}{s} \quad (18)$$

$$10 \quad \phi = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N a_i}{S} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N \varepsilon_i}{N} \quad (19)$$

11 where  $S$  is the surface area of the baffle,  $s$  the surface area of the control volume and  $a_i$  the size of the  
 12 orifice in  $i$ th control volume. The basic principles of the optimization algorithm and evolution rules for  
 13 the 3D case are:

$$14 \quad \frac{q_i}{s} = \frac{q_j}{s} = \frac{\bar{q}}{s} \quad (20)$$

$$15 \quad \Delta a_{i,t} = a_{i,t+1} - a_{i,t} = \gamma \left( 1 - \frac{q_{i,t}}{\bar{q}} \right) \quad (21)$$

16 It can be easily verified that the global porosity does not change along with the optimization steps.  
 17 Implementing the same optimization procedure as for 2D cases, uniform flow distribution may be

1 expected using our heuristic algorithm. Of course, more computational time is also needed for the  
2 calculation of flow field at each optimization step by CFD code.

3 Note that the shape of control volumes may be rectangular, regular hexagon or those may uniformly  
4 pave the entire baffle surface. As to the orifices, the simplest shape is circular or square since the area  
5 variation at each optimization step can be realized by modulating single variable (diameter or side  
6 length). Of course, other shapes are also realizable regarding different geometries, with the  
7 constraint that the boundary of orifice does not overstep the boundary of the control volume during  
8 optimization.

9 **Fig. 20.** Division of a baffle surface by numerous control volumes for 3D application.

## 10 **6. Discussion**

11 In the current algorithm, uniform and identical value of pressure is assigned as boundary condition  
12 for outlet channels. This approximation is appropriate for the shape optimization of inlet fluid  
13 distributor as an individual device. However, in compact systems where inlet distributor, parallel  
14 channels for unit process operation and outlet collector are highly integrated and closely connected,  
15 the configuration of the downstream collector may have a noticeable impact on the upstream flow  
16 distribution uniformity between parallel channels. In this case, the algorithm should be modified so  
17 that the simulation domain covers the entire geometry from the single inlet to the single outlet. The  
18 optimization rule should be updated accordingly as well.

19 Basic constraints for the proposed algorithm are that the control areas (volumes) are evenly divided  
20 and that the boundary of orifices can not overstep the boundary of control areas during optimization

1 steps (local porosity less than 1). These constraints are useful and necessary to guarantee a uniform  
2 flow distribution among parallel channels evenly spaced between one another on a line or on a surface.  
3 However, when non-uniform but controlled flow distribution is required or unevenly spaced parallel  
4 channels are involved in certain operational equipment, these constraints should be modified  
5 accordingly. In that case, an additional degree of freedom may be added, i.e. the lengths of control  
6 area  $l_i$  (surface areas  $a_i$  for 3D application) can be locally varied ( $l_i \neq l_j$ ;  $l_{i,t} \neq l_{i,t+1}$ ) corresponding to  
7 specified optimization criterion, while keeping the global porosity constant during optimization.

8 The baffle configuration optimization with our algorithm will surely cause a certain increase of  
9 pressure drop in the distributor. However, this pressure drop increase which depends on the  
10 configuration of baffle could be relatively small (higher porosity; smaller thickness but within the limit  
11 of mechanical deformation). Moreover, this increase can be compensated by the reduced pressure  
12 drop of downstream equipment owing to more uniform flow distribution.

13 It should be noted that the efficiency of the heuristic algorithm depends largely on the precision of the  
14 transport phenomena simulation. The more realistic the simulated flow, the more satisfactory results  
15 may be achieved. When more complex flows such as varied fluid composition or more complicated  
16 situations such as fouling or channel blockage are involved, the selection of adaptive and reliable  
17 numerical models is very important. However, the heuristic algorithm is somewhat independent to the  
18 CFD codes used.

## 19 **7. Conclusion and prospects**

20 This paper presents a CFD-based, heuristic evolutionary algorithm for shape design and optimization  
21 of baffled fluid distributor. In this algorithm, the baffle surface is firstly divided with numerous

1 identical control areas (volumes), each control area having an orifice in the middle. Under the  
2 constraint of constant global porosity of the baffle, the algorithm adjusts the size distribution of  
3 orifices so as to approach identical mass flowrate passing through every control area. An automatic  
4 program is processed iteratively so that the baffle configuration evolves toward the optimized shape,  
5 providing a uniform flow distribution among parallel outlet channels.

6 Compared to traditional arbitrary or empirical propositions, the advantages of our optimization  
7 algorithm lie in two main aspects. On the one hand, it leads to an *optimal* baffle configuration for a  
8 given distributor geometry under certain working condition. On the other hand, it may be *easily*  
9 *applied* to different flow circuit geometries (eg. different numbers of outlet channels) and different  
10 working conditions (eg. different total flowrate). In this sense, this algorithm is robust, effective,  
11 general and flexible.

12 The examples presented in this study deal with single phase flow. The extension of the proposed  
13 algorithm for multi-phase flow maldistribution problem is interesting but challenging. This is one  
14 direction of our future work and some guidelines may be followed based on the recent works of  
15 Schouten's group (Al-Rawashdeh et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2014).

16 It should be noted that higher global performances of devices (in terms of higher thermal efficiency,  
17 presence of less hot spots, enhanced mixing, controlled reaction, etc.) for different applications may  
18 need different optimal criterion (Mies et al., 2007; Al-Rawashdeh et al., 2013). The development a  
19 pertinent performance criterion for special unit operation, and the experimental validation of the  
20 optimization algorithm for an actual application are the directions of our ongoing work.

21

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4 support to his PhD study.

## 1 Notations

$a$	size of the orifice in 3D	$m^2$
$d$	diameter of orifices	m
$D$	flow rate ratio	-
$e$	thickness of the perforated baffle	m
$E$	internal energy per unit mass	$J\ kg^{-1}$
$f$	mass flowrate in outlet channels	$kg\ s^{-1}$
$\bar{f}$	mean mass flowrate among outlet channels	$kg\ s^{-1}$
$F$	external body force	$kg\ m\ s^{-2}$
$g$	gravitational acceleration	$m\ s^{-2}$
$h$	length between inlet and baffle	m
$H$	length of distributor	m
$I$	unit tensor	-
$l$	length of control area	m
$L$	length of baffle	m
$M$	number of outlet channels	-
$MF$	maldistribution factor	-
$N$	number of control areas	-
$p$	pressure	Pa
$q$	mass flowrate through orifices	$kg\ s^{-1}$
$\bar{q}$	mean mass flowrate among control areas	$kg\ s^{-1}$

$Q$	total inlet mass flowrate	$\text{kg s}^{-1}$
$Q_H$	external heat transfer flux	$\text{J kg}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$
$Re$	Reynolds number	-
$s$	surface area of control volume in 3D	$\text{m}^2$
$S$	surface area of baffle in 3D	$\text{m}^2$
$t$	time step	-
$T$	temperature	K
$u$	velocity	$\text{m s}^{-1}$
$w$	width of inlet tube	m

1

2 *Greek symbols*

$\gamma$	relaxation factor	-
$\varepsilon$	local porosity	-
$\lambda$	thermal conductivity	$\text{W m}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$
$\mu$	viscosity	$\text{kg m}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$
$\Pi$	stress tensor	-
$\rho$	density	$\text{kg m}^{-3}$
$\Phi$	global porosity	-

3

*Subscripts*

$i, j$	orifice and channel index
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4



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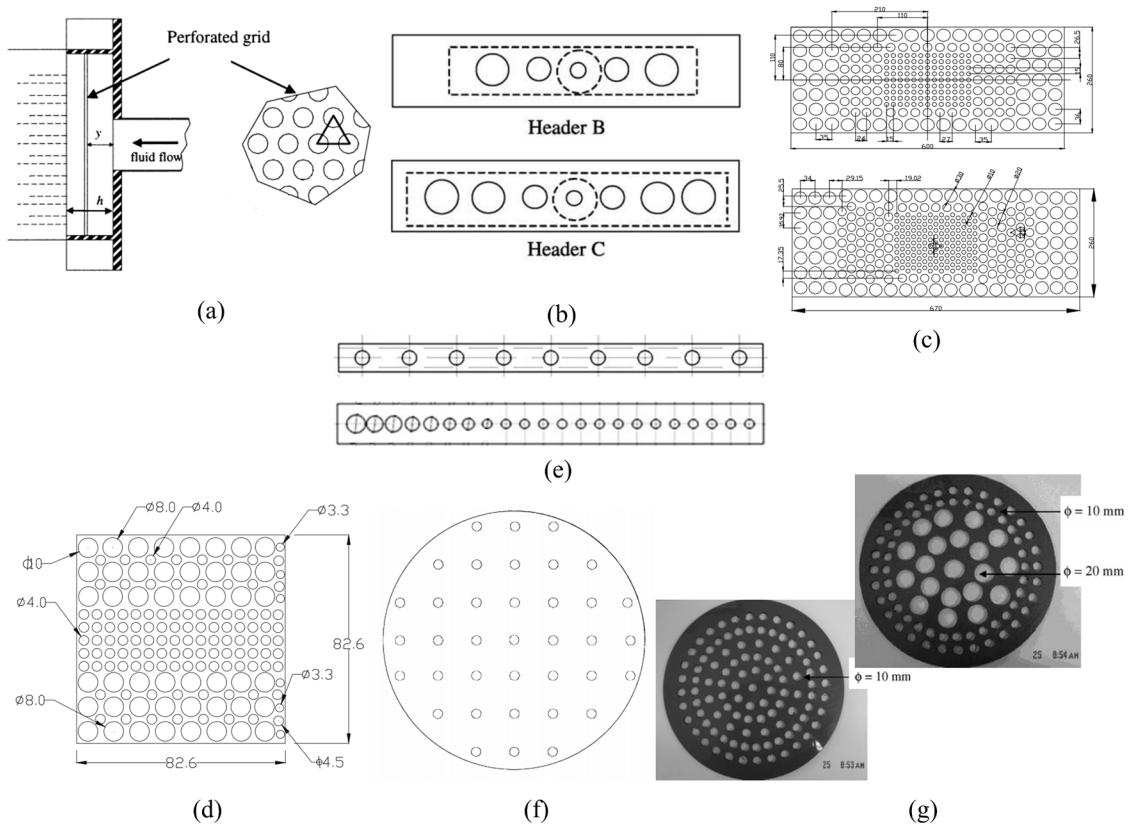
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1 **List of figures**



2

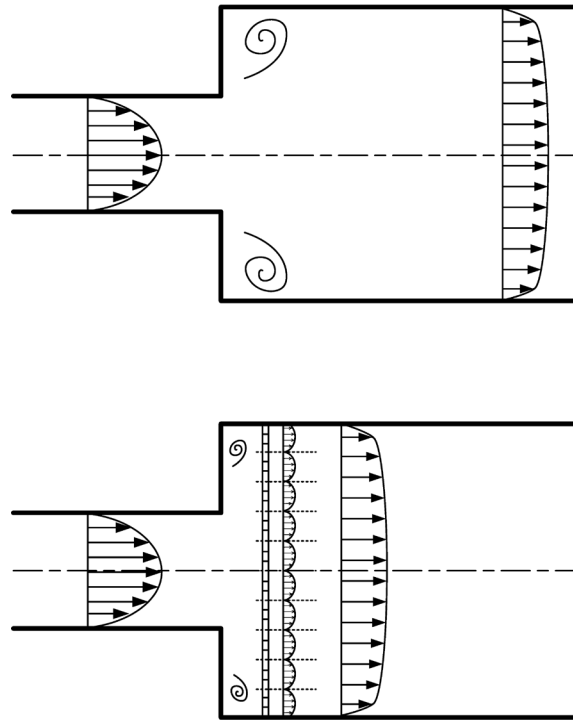
3 **Fig. 1. Different baffle configurations proposed in the literature.** (a) Adapted from Lalot et al. (1999). (b)

4 Adapted from Jiao et al. (2003b). (c) Adapted from Wen et al. (2006). (d) Adapted from Ismail et al. (2009). (e)

5 Adapted from Wang et al. (2011). (f) Adapted from Krichnavaruk and Pavasant (2002). (g) Adapted from Maharaj

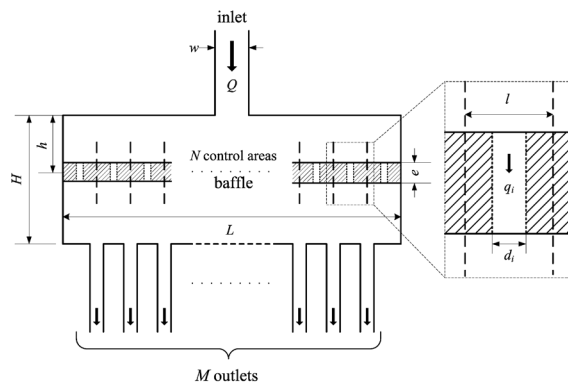
6 et al. (2007).





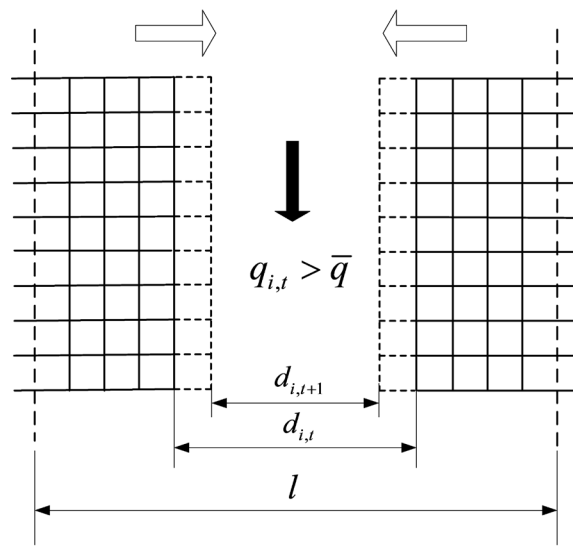
1

2 **Fig. 2. Schematic view of the effect of perforated baffle on the homogenization of velocity profile.**

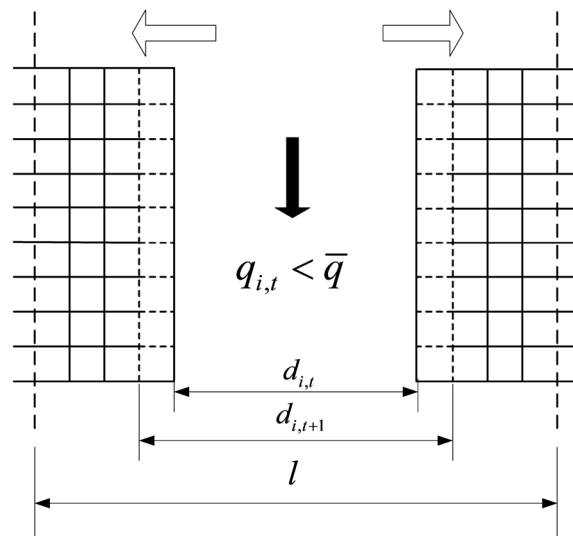


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4 **Fig. 3. Representative example of a fluid distributor with insertion of perforated baffle.**



(a)

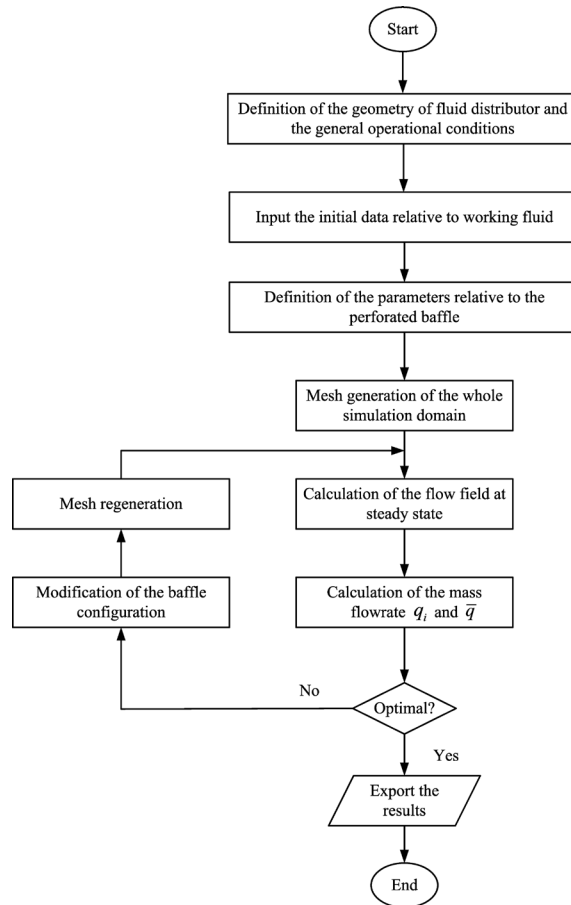


(b)

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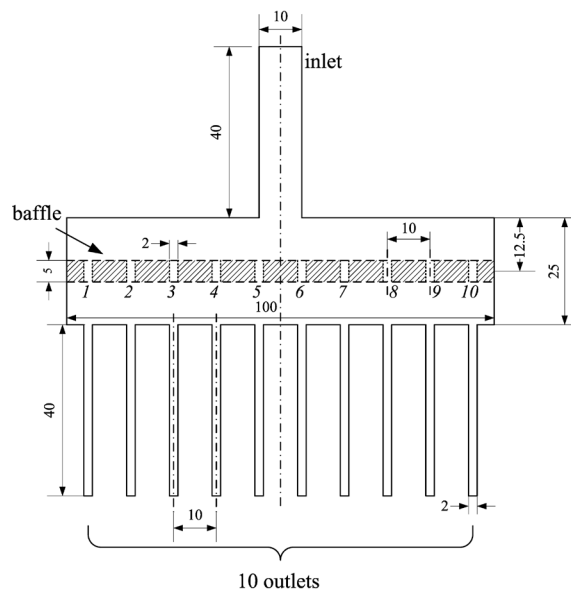
2 **Fig. 4. Basic principles of the optimization algorithm.** (a) Reduction of the orifice; (b) Enlargement of the

3 orifice



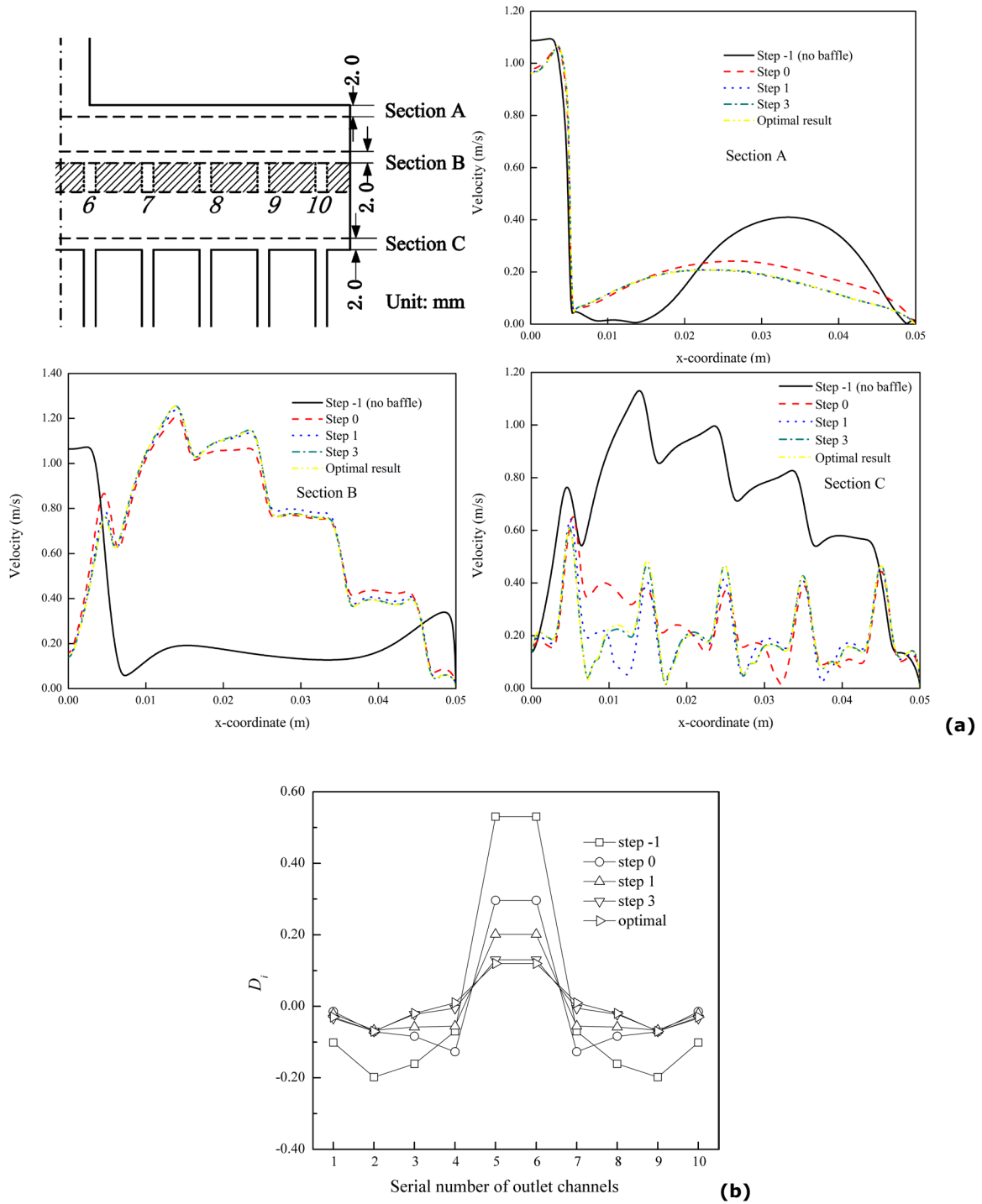
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2 **Fig. 5. Flow chart of the algorithm.**



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4 **Fig. 6. Geometry and dimension of the numerical benchmark (unit: mm).**



1

(a)

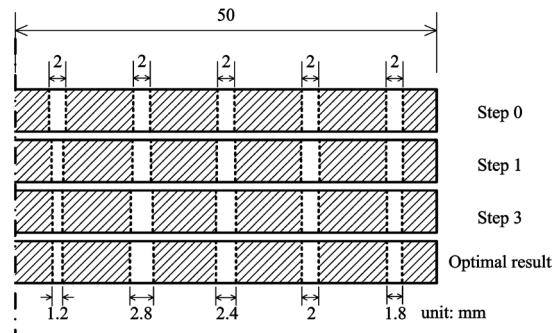
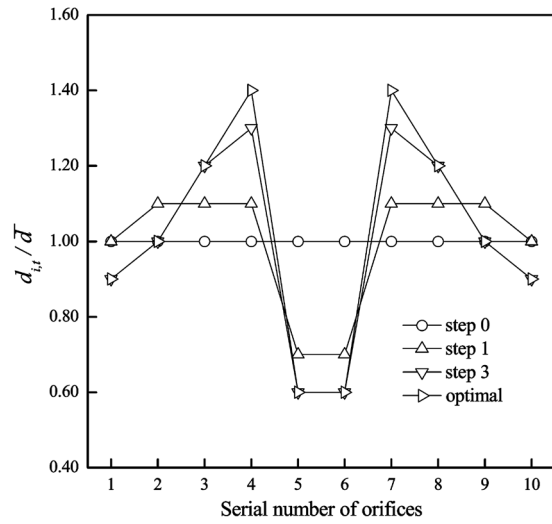
2

(b)

3 **Fig. 7. Shape and flow field evolution of different optimization steps at three sections (a); Relative**

4 **flowrate deviation of outlet channels for different optimization steps (b).  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;**

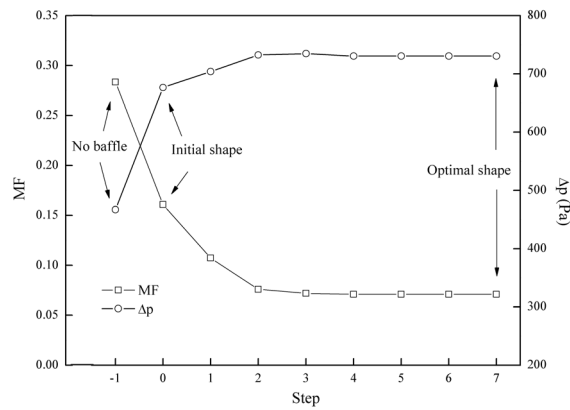
5  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .



1

2 **Fig. 8. Evolution of size distribution of orifices on the baffle along with optimization steps.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;**

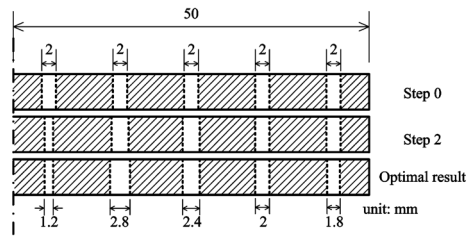
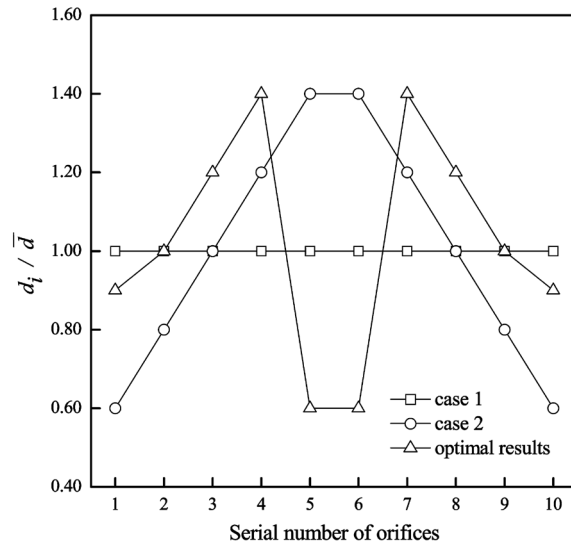
3  $\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .



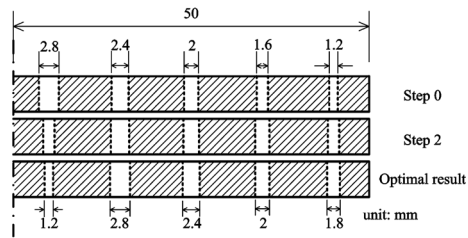
4

5 **Fig. 9. Maldistribution factor (MF) and pressure drop ( $\Delta p$ ) as a function of optimization steps.  $N=10$ ;**

6  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .



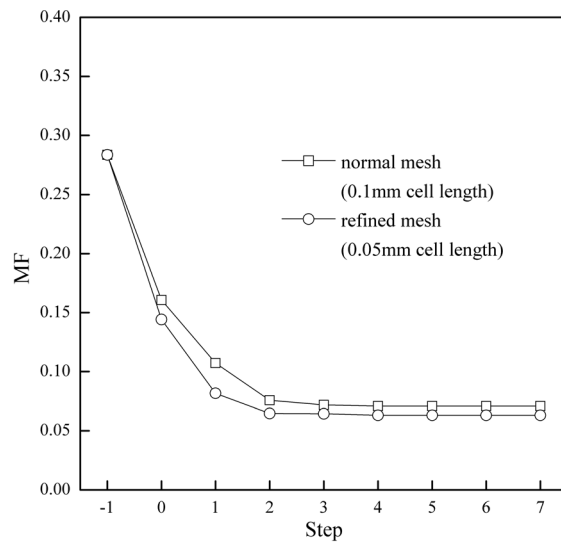
Case 1



Case 2

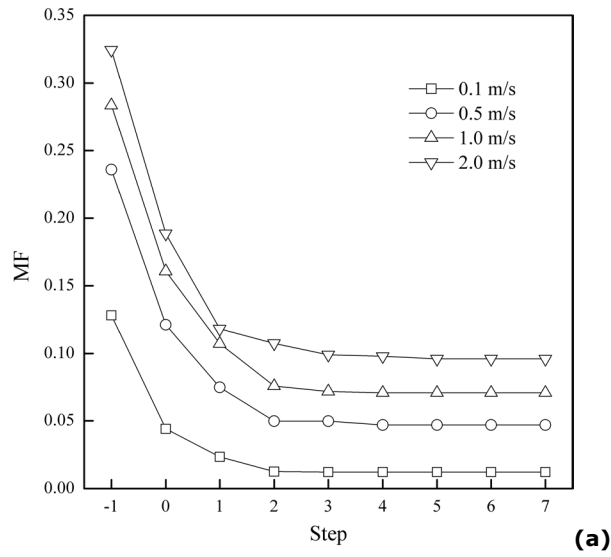
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2 **Fig. 10. Evolution of size distribution for different initial shapes.**

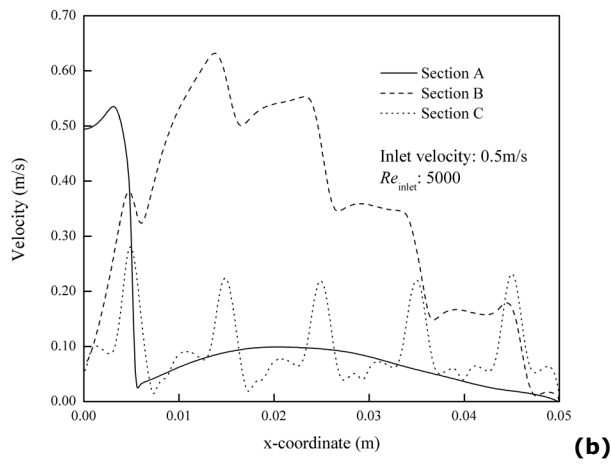


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1 **Fig. 11. Influence of mesh density on the performance of optimization algorithm.**



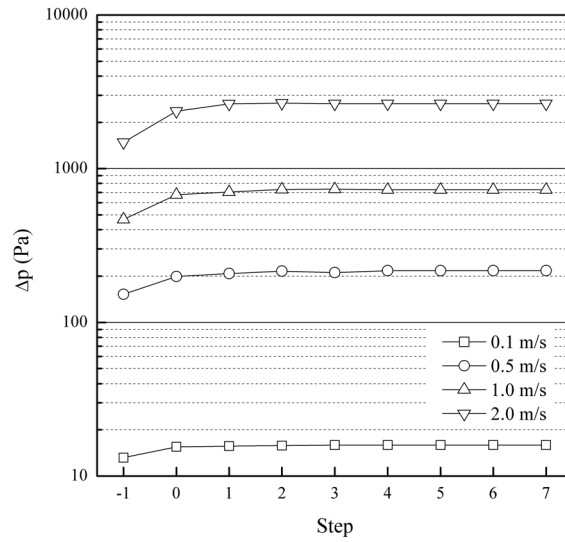
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4 **Fig. 12. Influence of inlet flowrate on the performance of optimization algorithm.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ;**

5  $h/H=0.5$  (a); **Velocity of actual flow fields at three sections of the distributor. Inlet velocity= $0.5 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  (b).**



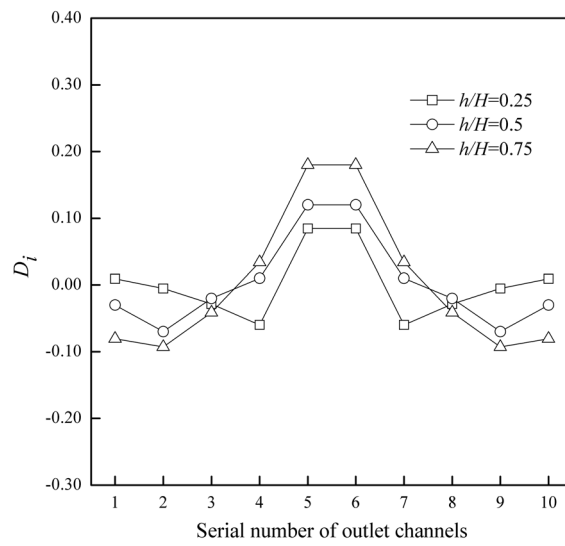
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**Fig. 13. Influence of inlet flowrate on the pressure drop in the baffled fluid distributor.  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;**

3

$\Phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ .



4

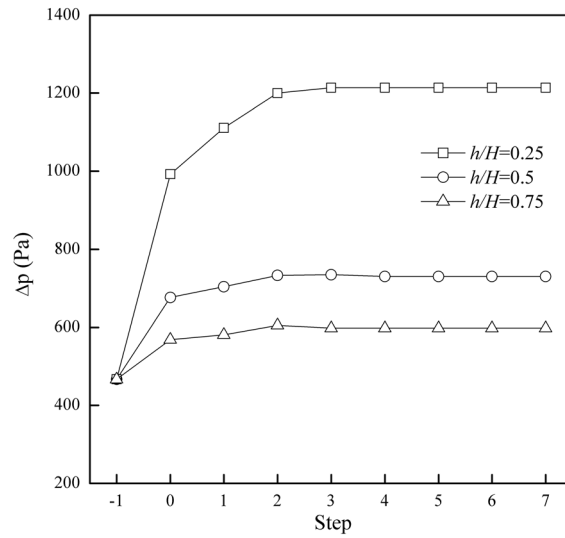
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**Fig. 14. Relative flowrate deviation for optimized configurations with different baffle locations.  $N=10$ ;**

6

$M=10$ ;  $\Phi=20\%$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

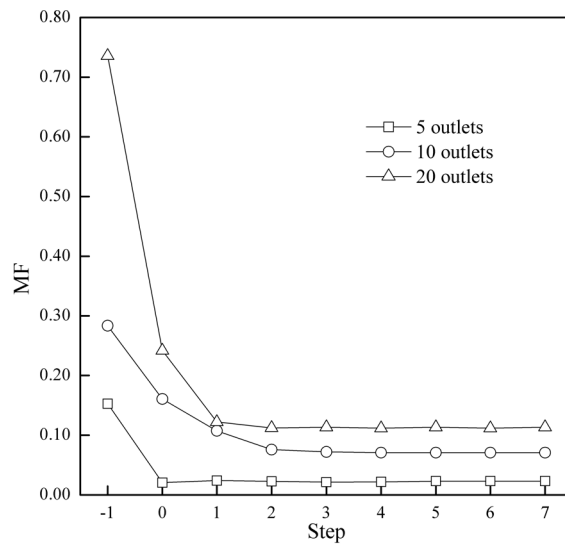




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2 **Fig. 15. Pressure drop as a function of optimization step, for different baffle locations.**  $N=10$ ;  $M=10$ ;

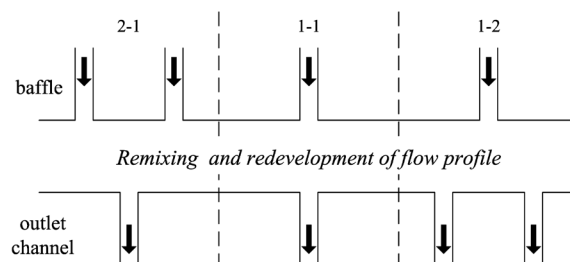
3  $\phi=20\%$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .



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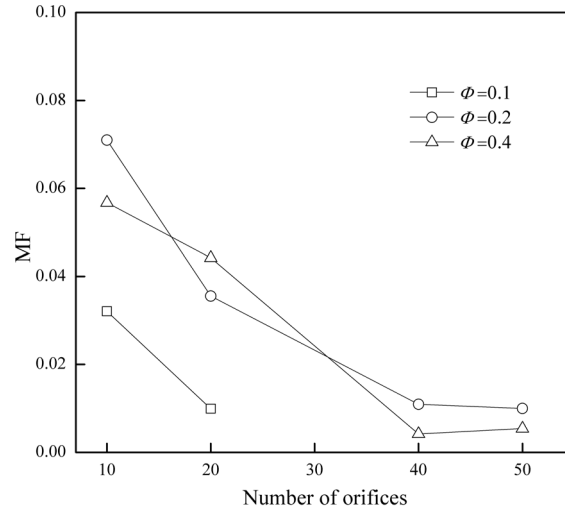
5 **Fig. 16. Influence of number of outlet channels on the distribution uniformity.**  $N=10$ ;  $\phi=20\%$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ;

6 inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .

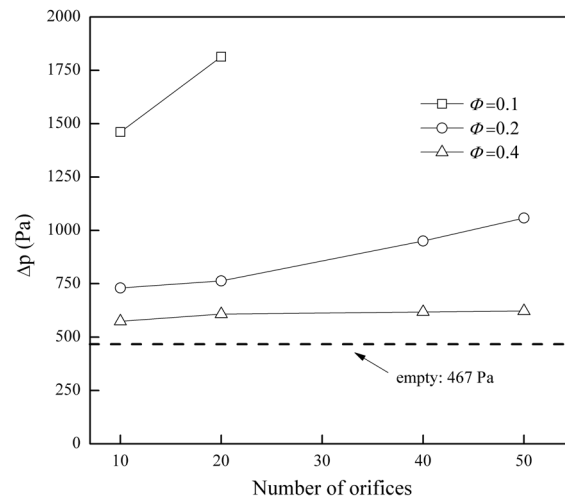


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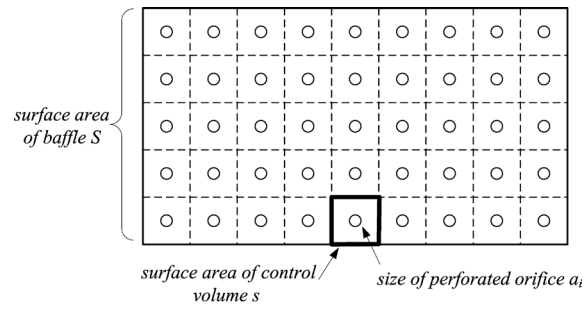
1 **Fig. 17. Schematic view of the topological connectedness between the number of orifices and the**  
 2 **number of parallel outlet channels.**



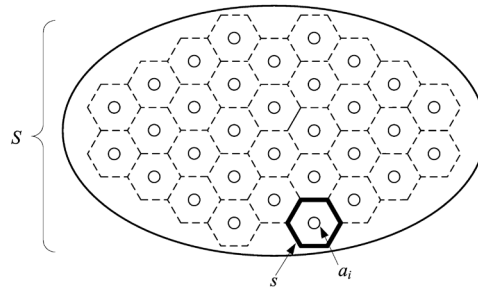
3  
 4 **Fig. 18. Influences of global porosity and number of orifices on the optimized flow distribution**  
 5 **uniformity.  $M=10$ ;  $h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .**



6  
 7 **Fig. 19. Influences of global porosity and number of orifices on the pressure drop increase.  $M=10$ ;**  
 8  **$h/H=0.5$ ; inlet velocity= $1 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ .**



**rectangular surface**



**oval surface**

1

2 **Fig. 20. Division of a baffle surface by numerous control volumes for 3D application.**

# 1 List of tables

## 2 Table 1. Selected studies on fluid distributor with insertion of perforated baffle.

Study	N/E	Device	Geometry	Working medium	Working conditions	Baffle configuration	Distribution uniformity improvement	Global performance improvement
Lalot et al. (1999)	N, E	Heat exchanger	Inlet tube: Diameter=60 mm Header: Width=Length=233 mm, Height=63 mm Number of channel=128 Diameter of channel= 9.52 mm	Air	Re=10000 (mean among channels)	Uniform perforated grid Orifice diameter: 4 mm Distance between orifices: the side of the equilateral triangle varies from 6 to 9 mm (Fig.1(a))	Flowrate ratio: from 4 (initial value) to less than 1.5	No hot spots found; the power input increased by 67%
Jiao et al. (2003b)	E	Heat exchanger	Inlet tube: Diameter=38 mm Header: Radius=30 mm, Length=250 mm Number of channel=30 (actual measurement)	Water	Re=1100 and 3000 (inlet)	A: no baffle B: Diameter=25,20,15,20,25 mm (one row) C: Diameter=25,25,20,15,20,25,25 mm (one row) (Fig.1(b))	Flowrate ratio: from 2.08 (A) to 1.2 (C) (Re=1100); from 2.81 (A) to 1.4 (C) (Re=3000)	Not mentioned
Wen et al. (2006)	N, E	Heat exchanger	Inlet tube: Diameter=200 mm, Length=176 mm Header: Radius=154 mm, Length =905 mm Number of channel=41 Diameter of channel=9.5 mm	Air	Re=60000 (inlet)	A: no baffle B: multi-row, non-uniform, diameter from 10 to 30 mm C: multi-row, non-uniform, staggered arrangement, diameter from 10 to 30 mm (Fig.1(c))	Flowrate ratio: 23.225 (A), 2.554 (B), 1.763 (C); MF: 1.210 (A), 0.307 (B), 0.209 (C)	Heat exchanger efficiency enhanced by about 12%; pressure loss increase less than 5%
Ismail et al. (2009)	N, E	Heat exchanger	Inlet tube: Diameter=25 mm Header: Width=85 mm 5 layers for hot flow, 6 layers for cold flow	Air	Mass flowrate: 0.035 kg·s <sup>-1</sup> (inlet)	Multi-row, non-uniform, diameter from 3.34 to 8 mm (Fig.1(d))	To some extent, not quantified	Total pressure drop decreased by 34%
Wang et al. (2011)	E	Heat exchanger	Inlet tube: Diameter =4 mm Header: Width=Height=9 mm, Length=90 mm Number of channel=9 Length of channel=400 mm Diameter of channel=3 mm	Water	Volume flowrate: 0.5-4 L·min <sup>-1</sup> (inlet)	Uniform and non-uniform, one row Diameter=1.2-4 mm Number of orifice=9-28 (Fig.1(e))	The best non-uniformity reached 0.0017 (Volumn flow rate =0.5 L·min <sup>-1</sup> )	No vortex flow; the pressure drop increased by less than 3%
Krichnavar	E	Airlift	Column	Air	Inlet velocity:	Uniform; Diameter=3-5mm	Not mentioned	Overall volumetric

uk and Pavasant (2002)		contactor	Height=2400 mm Diameter =110 mm		1.8-8.4 cm·s <sup>-1</sup>	Number of orifices=13-37 (Fig.1(f))		mass transfer coefficient doubled
Maharaj et al. (2007)	N, E	Teetered bed separator	Column Height =1250 mm Diameter =200 mm	Water	Inlet volume flowrate: 3 L·min <sup>-1</sup> (A) 6 L·min <sup>-1</sup> (B) 8 L·min <sup>-1</sup> (C)	Uniform and non-uniform, Diameter= 5-29 mm Number of orifices=17-296 (Fig.1(g))	Flowrate ratio: from 13.0 to 2.0 (A) from 10.5 to 1.6 (B) from 20.5 to 2.1 (C)	Ecart probable (Ep) reduced by 45%-70%
Ong et al. (2009)	E	Bubble column	Column Height =2500 mm Diameter =162 mm	Air	Inlet velocity: 2-30 cm·s <sup>-1</sup>	Circular and equilateral distribution Diameter=0.4-5.1 mm Number of orifices=1-163	Not mentioned	The perforated plate sparger produces a higher gas holdup

1

2

1 **Table 2. Control parameters for different tested cases.**

Case	Global porosity $\Phi$ (-)	Number of orifices $N$ (-)	Initial size of orifices $d_{i,0}$ (mm)	Number of outlets $M$ (-)	Inlet velocity ( $\text{m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ )	Baffle location $h/H$
1	10%	10	1			
2	10%	20	0.5			
3	20%	10	2			
4	20%	20	1			
5	20%	40	0.5	10	1.0	0.5
6	20%	50	0.4			
7	40%	10	4			
8	40%	20	2			
9	40%	40	1			
10	40%	50	0.8			

2