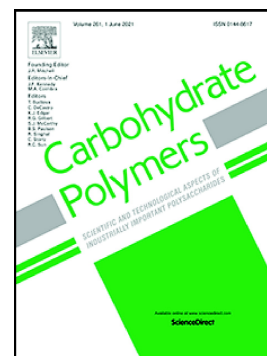


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Production of rayon fibres from cellulosic pulps: state of the art and current developments

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PII: S0144-8617(21)00853-5

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.carbpol.2021.118466>

Reference: CARP 118466

To appear in: *Carbohydrate Polymers*

Received date: 20 April 2021

Revised date: 16 June 2021

Accepted date: 17 July 2021

Please cite this article as: I.S.F. Mendes and D.V. Evtuguin, Production of rayon fibres from cellulosic pulps: state of the art and current developments, *Carbohydrate Polymers* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.carbpol.2021.118466>

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**Production of rayon fibres from cellulosic pulps: state of the art
and current developments**

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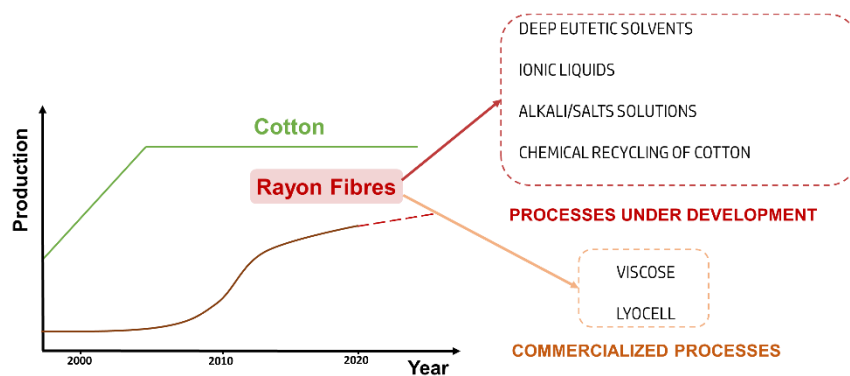
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Abstract

The increasing demand for cellulosic fibres is continuously driven by the growing earth population and requirements of the textile industry. The annual cotton production of *ca.* 25 million tons is no longer enough to meet the market demands. This market gap of cellulosic fibres is progressively filled by regenerated cellulosic fibres derived from the dissolving pulp. The conventional industrial process of viscose production is far from being environmentally friendly due to the use of hazardous reagents. Alternatively, new trends in the production of regenerated fibres are related to the direct dissolution of cellulose in appropriate environmentally sound recyclable solvents, allowing high quality rayon fibres. This article reviews the sources of dissolving pulps used for the production of viscose and its quality parameters related to the performance of viscose production. The prospective cellulose regeneration processes, both commercialized and under development, are reviewed regarding current and future developments in the area.

Keywords: Dissolving pulp; Rayon fibres; Cuprammonium; Viscose; Ionic liquid, Recycling, Textile fibres

Graphical abstract:



Highlights:

- Specific properties of dissolving pulps to produce rayon fibres are summarized
- Drawbacks of the conventional viscose process are highlighted
- Commercialized direct dissolution lyocell process has limitations
- Greener approaches include ionic liquids and deep eutectic solvents
- Chemical recycling of textile fibres is a challenging research topic

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Contents

1. Introduction
 2. Sources of dissolving pulps and quality demands
 3. Industrialized processes for rayon production
 - 3.1 *Cuprammonium process*
 - 3.2 *Viscose process*
 - 3.3 *Modal process*
 - 3.3 *Lyocell process*
 4. Advanced rayon processes under development
 - 4.1 *Processes using alkali and salt solutions*
 - 4.2 *Processes using ionic liquids*
 - 4.3. *Processes using deep eutectic solvents*
 - 4.4. *Cotton waste recycling*
 5. Concluding remarks
 6. References
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1. Introduction

Cellulose, the most abundant natural polymer, is a linear homopolymer composed by β -D-anhydroglucopyranose monomeric units linked by β -(1 \rightarrow 4)-glycosidic bonds, with cellobiose as the repeating stereoregular unit (Fengel & Wegener, 1983; Klemm et al., 1998). Due to the strong inter- and intra-molecular hydrogen bonds and significant van der Waals forces, cellulose molecules are organized in fibrils, possessing an amorphous-crystalline physical structure, affording unique properties required for the construction of plant cells, as it is exemplified for wood in Fig. 1 (Fengel & Wegener, 1983; Klemm et al., 1998). Being a tough fibrous polymer,

cellulose is insoluble in water and in common organic solvents (Feng & Chen, 2008; Luo & Zhang, 2013; Ramamoorthy et al., 2015; Swatloski et al., 2002; H. Wang et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2012). It is the main material of cell wall skeleton in plants, bacteria, algae and even in the animal kingdom (Dunlop et al., 2018; Fengel & Wegener, 1983; Sixta, 2006; Sjöström, 1981). However, the abundance of cellulose in plant kingdom varies widely according to its origin: from up to with 95-99 % in seed-hairs (e.g. cotton) to nearly 20-25 % in grasses (e.g., horse-tails) (Fig. 2).

Depending on the cellulose content and fibre morphology (primary length), these plant species may have direct application in textile fibres; with minimal processing, known as natural fibres (e.g., cotton, ramie and linen) or need deep processing with isolation of cellulose-rich fibres from plant (e.g., cellulosic pulp) that are first dissolved with or without chemical modification in appropriate solvent/solution to be further regenerated by filament precipitation, known as regenerated cellulosic fibres or rayon. Both natural and viscose fibres are the basis of the textile filaments for the production of various types of woven material used for the production of clothing or for technical purposes.

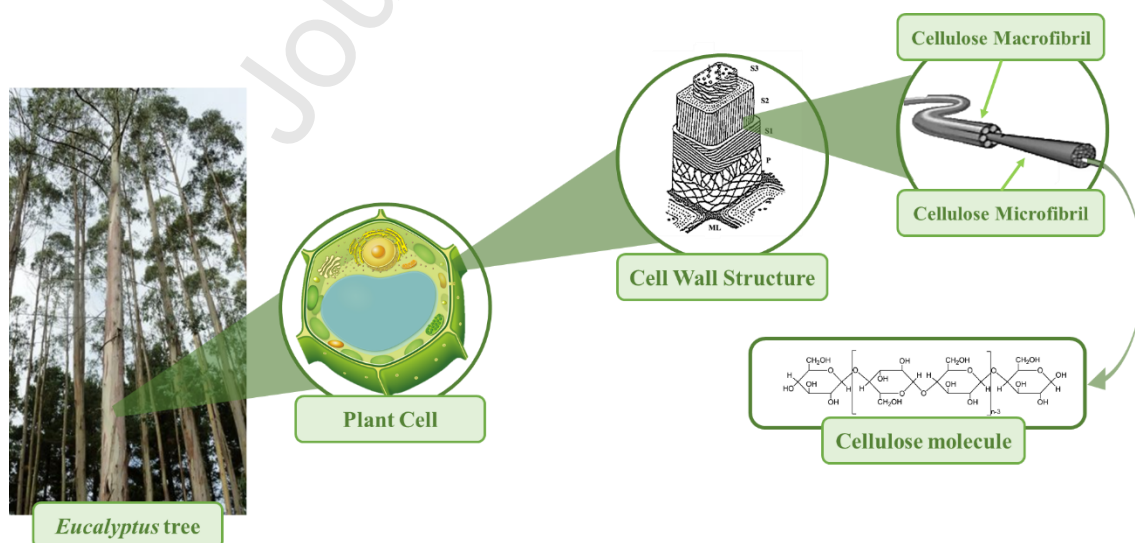


Fig. 1. The structural hierarchy of cellulose from a molecule to a wood tissue.



Fig. 2. Cellulose content in different plant sources (adapted from (Fengel & Wegener, 1983)).

Regarding the textile fibres in general, these can be classified into two main categories – natural and man-made fibres. Natural fibres are divided according to their origin (vegetable, animal, and mineral fibres) whereas man-made fibres can be classified in regenerated cellulose, inorganic and synthetic fibres (Fig. S1, Supplementary data)

Nowadays, synthetic fibres still govern the textile market with around 70 million metric tonnes produced in the year 2019 (Textile Exchange, 2020). However, due to unique absorbency and moisture management, cellulosic fibres are still indispensable for textile applications (Ma, et al., 2019; Michud, et al., 2016). Among the natural fibres, cotton has the highest production, established at 25 million tons per year (Björquist et al., 2018). Despite being the preferred natural fibre, cotton has a highly negative environmental impact, mainly due to the use of excessive amount water and soil depletion, eutrophication and high ecotoxicity impacts (Shen et al., 2010). Accordingly, the significant growth in cotton production in the nearest future seems problematic. For these reasons, it can be expected that the consumption of dissolving pulp for the production of regenerated fibres will continue to grow in the coming years (Fig. 3).

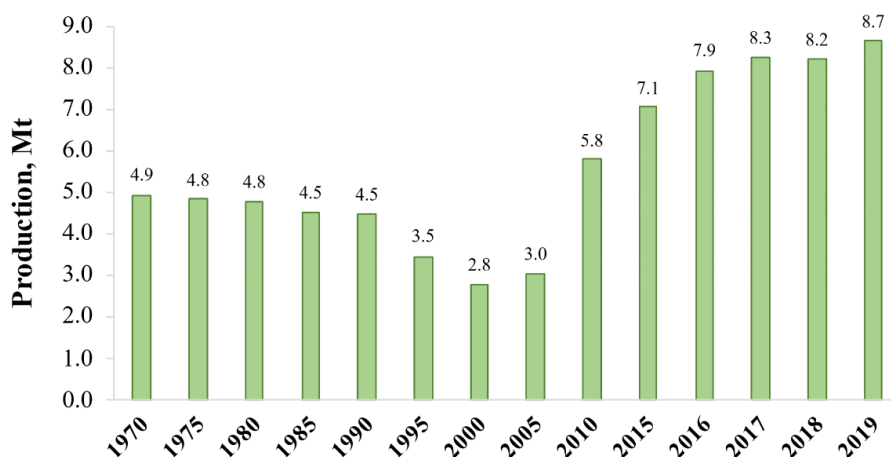


Fig. 3. World production of dissolving pulp from 1970 to 2019 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2019).

The commonly used for the rayon fibre production viscose process involves the chemical modification of cellulose with hazardous CS_2 under strong alkaline conditions, followed by its dissolution and regeneration under strong acidic conditions (Ciechańska et al., 2009). Due to technical and environmental concerns, this process needs to be replaced with a more ecologically appropriate one. Over time, new prospective cellulose solvent systems have been developed, also considering environmental issues. In general, the approaches for the manufacturing of regenerated fibres can be divided into processes that include cellulose dissolution after its derivatization (e.g., the conventional viscose process) or direct dissolution of cellulose without its chemical derivatization (e.g., Lyocell[®] process) (Fig. S2, Supplementary data). The latter approach implies the use of specific solvents like *N*-methyl morpholine-*N*-oxide (NMMO) (Jedvert & Heinze, 2017; Wang et al., 2016), aqueous solutions combined with ZnO, urea and/or thiourea (Chen et al., 2007; Li et al., 2015; Luo & Zhang, 2013; Väisänen et al., 2021), lithium chloride solution in *N,N*-dimethylacetamide (DMAc/LiCl) (Hong et al., 1998; Matsumoto et al., 2001; C. Zhang et al., 2014), ammonia/ammonium thiocyanate ($\text{NH}_3/\text{NH}_4\text{SCN}$) (Cuculo et al., 1994), dimethyl sulfoxide/ tetrabutylammonium fluoride (DMSO/TBAF) (Köhler & Heinze, 2007; Wang et al., 2016), dimethyl sulfoxide/benzyl trimethylammonium

fluoride (DMSO/BTMAF) (Köhler & Heinze, 2007), molten inorganic salt hydrates (e.g., $\text{LiClO}_4 \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$) (Fischer et al., 1999; Fischer & Thümmel, 2010; Leipner et al., 2000); second generation ionic liquids (Mohd et al., 2017; Morais et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2012; Xu & Wang, 2020), among others. Among direct cellulose solvents, only NMMO is currently commercialized in the Lyocell[®] process and for the production of Tencel[®] fibres by the Lenzing AG company (Wang et al., 2016). However, the conventional viscose process still dominates the industrial production of regenerated cellulose fibres with around 91% contribution, lyocell fibres (*ca.* 5 %), modal fibres (*ca.* 3 %) and *cupro* fibres (*ca.* 1%) (Textile Exchange, 2020).

Table 1 summarises the properties of cotton and different regenerated cellulose fibres used for the textile purposes. Physical properties of regenerated fibres are largely dependent on the rheological properties of cellulose solutions. There are a number of parameters that influence the rheological properties of the resulting cellulose solutions to spin, which includes the type of dissolution process and the solvent used, time and temperature to dissolve, coagulation medium, raw material, among others (El Seoud et al., 2020; Wawro et al., 2017).

Table 1 Properties of cotton and different regenerated cellulose fibres (Bartsch & Kling, 2001; Chavan & Patra, 2004; Cook, 2001; El Seoud et al., 2020; Fink et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2020; Kamide & Nishiyama, 2001; Krejčí & Májek, 2003; Yibo Ma et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2010; S. Wang et al., 2016; Wardman, 2018; Wooding, 1995; S. Zhang et al., 2018).

	Cotton	Viscose	Modal	Lyocell	Cuprammonium
Density (g/cm^3)	1.50-1.54	1.52-1.54	1.52-1.54	1.50	1.54
Tenacity (cN/tex)					
Wet	26-40	10-15	15-22	26-38	9-12
Dry	24-36	20-27	30-36	35-42	15-20
Tensile strength (cN/tex)					
Wet	25-40	10-15	19-24	34-38	18-22
Dry	20-36	22-26	34-36	38-42	26-30
Elongation (%)					
Wet	12-14	21-23	13-20	17-19	17-33
Dry	7-10	17-25	12-18	10-17	10-17
Water retention (%)	38-55	85-100	60-80	60-75	100
Moisture regain (%)	7-8 ^a	12-14 ^a	n.d.	n.d.	12.5 ^b
DP value	2000-3000	235-350	300-650	500-640	450-550

^a at 20 °C and 65 % of relative humidity; ^b at standard conditions; n.d. not defined.

Comparing the data in Table 1, only lyocell fibres have a high enough tenacity and tensile strength comparable with cotton fibres. However, none of the regenerated fibres has a higher degree of polymerization (DP) than cotton. Taking into account that DP is directly related to the mechanical properties of fibres, further studies are needed to improve this parameter of regenerated fibres in order to approach cotton in all aspects of its application (De Silva & Byrne, 2017). Lyocell fibres are stronger and stiffer than conventional viscose fibres, because of both their higher degree of chains orientation and higher cellulose crystallinity (Gindl et al., 2006). The lyocell fibres also possess thinner and longer cellulose crystallites than the viscose fibres (Gindl et al., 2006). Modal fibres, exhibiting intermediate cellulose DP and structural order, shows intermediate strength properties between viscose and lyocell fibres (Table 1). Due to the lower tenacity and tensile strength, not to mention the hazardous auxiliary chemicals used in this expensive manufacturing process, cuprammonium rayon fibres find much less applicability in recent years than other regenerated fibres (Sayyed et al., 2019).

The main goal of this review was the overviewing of conventional commercialized processes of regenerated cellulose fibres manufacturing, such as cuprammonium, viscose, modal and lyocell, highlighting the quality of obtained rayon fibres and the environmental friendliness of the technologies involved. In addition, the prospective regeneration cellulose processes under development are listed regarding future developments in the area. These trends include the utilization of ionic liquids and the recycling of cotton/textile wastes.

2. Sources of dissolving pulps and quality demands

The major sources for the regenerated cellulosic fibres are cotton linters and high-grade cellulosic pulps called dissolving pulps, the latter being predominant

(Kvarnlöf et al., 2006; Sayyed et al., 2019; Wilkes, 2001). The quality parameters of dissolving pulps are greatly related to their processability to viscose in such operations as steeping, mercerization, pre-aging, xanthation, dissolution processes, filtration, ripening and also the fibre formability (Kvarnlöf et al., 2006; Wilkes, 2001). Dissolving pulps have usually low process yields, relatively uniform molecular weight distributions, high brightness ($\geq 90\%$ ISO) and α -cellulose content ($> 91\%$), low hemicelluloses ($< 5\%$) and lignin contents ($< 0.1\%$) (Bajpai, 2018; Gehmayr et al., 2011; Uddin et al., 2019). This type of pulps is commonly produced by acid sulphite (ASP) and pre-hydrolysis kraft (PHK) pulping contributing respectively to 42 % and 56 % of the worldwide production (Arce et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018). Typical pulping conditions of ASP and PHK and associated bleaching sequences are summarised in Table 2. Nevertheless, other processes such as Mlox and Acetosolv organosolv pulping are shown to be suitable for the production of dissolving pulp (Bajpai, 2018; Dapía et al., 2003; Johansson et al., 1987). In addition, numerous attempts were made to transform conventional paper-grade sulphite/kraft pulps to high-purity dissolving pulps, by applying different purification steps such as cold/hot caustic extraction and enzymatic treatments (e.g., with endoglucanases) or the combination thereof (Carrillo-Varela et al., 2019; Llerena et al., 2009; Li et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019).

Table 2 Typical pulping conditions and bleaching sequences used for the production of acid sulphite (ASP) and pre-hydrolysis kraft (PHK) pulps (Arce, Llano, García, et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2016; Evtuguin, 2016; J. C. Ferreira et al., 2020; Llano et al., 2018; Magina et al., 2015; Sixta, 2006; Vieira et al., 2019; C.-J. Wu et al., 2018).

	ASP	PHK
Temperature (°C)	140-145	160-180
pH	1-2	13-14
Chemicals	H ₂ SO ₃ + HSO ₃ ⁻ with Na ⁺ , Ca ²⁺ , Mg ²⁺ and NH ₄ ⁺ bases	NaOH + Na ₂ S
Bleaching sequences	E _{op} -P Z-E _{op} -P _o E-O-Z-P O-D-E-D-P E-O-P	D ₀ -Eop-D ₁ D ₀ -E-H-Ep-D ₁ O-D-E-H-D-P-Q O-H-P

Both hardwoods and softwoods are involved in the production of dissolving pulp. Hardwoods differ from softwoods in density, fibre morphology and chemical composition, which affect their cooking/bleaching conditions to be applied and the processability of the final dissolving pulp (Li et al., 2018). Hardwoods are easier to cook and bleach than softwoods, and the former allow higher yields of dissolving pulps, although they have also a higher pentosan content than dissolving softwood pulps (Li et al., 2018). These facts are attributed to lower lignin content in hardwoods (18-24%) than in softwoods (25-32%) and its different chemical structure (Bajpai, 2018; Evtuguin, 2016; Fengel & Wegener, 1983; Sixta, 2006). Hardwood lignin is built mainly with syringyl-type structural units (S) and is easier to degrade during pulping than softwood lignin, which built essentially by guaiacyl units (G), and have a more recalcitrant network to be cooked. In addition, softwoods have some lower cellulose content than hardwoods, which implies lower yields of the dissolving pulp. Moreover, the main softwood hemicellulose (β -D-galactoglucomanan) retains easier in ASP than in PHK pulp, which affects negatively the quality of the pulp for the production of rayon fibre (Bajpai, 2018; Evtuguin, 2016; Fengel & Wegener, 1983; Sixta, 2006). At the same time, several studies demonstrated the possibility to produce lyocell fibres with paper-grade pulp containing a high hemicellulose content resulting in fibres even with better resistance to fibrillation than those obtained with dissolving pulp (Zhang et al., 2008). Hence, the pulp quality prerequisites for the production of lyocell fibre could be less demanding than for viscose fibres.

Among hardwoods, the *Eucalyptus*, *Fagus*, *Betula*, *Populus*, *Acacia*, *Quercus* and *Acer* genus and among softwoods the *Pinus*, *Picea*, *Larix*, *Cedrus* and *Tsuga* genus are the most employed in the production of dissolving pulp. Although wood is the main source to produce dissolving pulp (85 %, hardwoods being predominant), cotton linters

(10 %) and non-woody plants (5 %) like hemp (Paulitz et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2006), bamboo (Basit et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2014), bagasse (Andrade & Colodette, 2014; Helmy & Abou-State, 1991), jute (Nayeem et al., 2017; Sarkar et al., 2018), alfa (Bouiri & Amrani, 2010), corn stalk (Behin et al., 2008; Reddy & Yang, 2005), among others, are suitable raw-materials for the same purpose.

The properties of the dissolving pulps used have a direct influence on the quality of the regenerated fibres produced. The suitability of a dissolving pulp for its processing to viscose by the conventional process involving xanthogenation is usually assessed by reactivity and filterability tests (Sixta, 2006; Strunk et al., 2011; Testova et al., 2014). The reactivity of the dissolving pulp refers to its ability to react with carbon disulphide under predefined alkaline conditions and is commonly determined by a Fock test (Fock, 1959; Tian et al., 2014). The reactivity relates to the accessibility of OH groups in the pulp and is affected by the structural characteristics of cellulose and the presence of non-cellulosic components hampering the xanthation (Sixta, 2006; Strunk et al., 2011). Thus, high reactivity of dissolving pulps avoid many operational problems during the production of viscose (Chen et al., 2016). In addition, the greater the reactivity, the lower the consumption of reagents (CS_2 and NaOH) during cellulose xanthogenation and the easier its dissolution in aqueous alkaline solution called dope (Arce, et al., 2020; Gondhalekar, Pawar, & Dhumal, 2019; Ibarra et al., 2010).

The reactivity depends on cellulose supramolecular structure and decreases with the increasing on the degree of crystallinity, the dimensions of the crystallites and the fibril aggregates (Engström et al., 2006; Ferreira et al., 2020; Strunk et al., 2011). Other factors that affect reactivity are related to the chemical composition of the pulps and the production history (e.g., sulphite dissolving pulps have higher reactivity than the pre-hydrolysis kraft dissolving pulps) (Gondhalekar, Pawar, & Dhumal, 2019; Li et al.,

2018; Tian et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2019). Numerous attempts were done studying the possibility to increase the dissolving pulp reactivity, for example, by modification with electron beam irradiation (Gondhalekar, Pawar, & Dhumal, 2019), enzymes (Duan et al., 2016; Ibarra et al., 2010; Miao et al., 2014), a post-treatment with pulp beating (Wu et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2018), ultrasonic treatment (Zhou et al., 2019), treatment with an inorganic acid (Wang et al., 2018), mechanical treatment (Duan et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2014), pre-treatment with deep eutectic solvents (DES) (Arce, Llano, González, et al., 2020), by the addition of new stage after bleaching (e.g. cold caustic extraction and dilute acid hydrolysis) (Carrillo-Varela et al., 2019), or even by a combination of the methods described above (Qin et al., 2021). It is generally considered that Fock reactivity should be as high as 50 %, however, steady good results in viscose production appear when Fock reactivity is as high as 60 %.

Besides the reactivity, the filterability parameter of the dope is another important parameter of dissolving pulps to consider (Sixta, 2006; Strunk et al., 2011; Testova et al., 2014). In the industry, the filterability of the pulp is determined by the Treiber test (Treiber et al., 1962), which simulate the steps involved in the real conversion of pulp into viscose dope. However, this analysis is extremely complex, time-consuming and requires special equipment and substantial amounts of pulp. Therefore, this analysis is exceedingly difficult to perform on a laboratory scale. An alternative method was proposed by Chinese Technical and Engineering Association that omits several intermediate dope preparation steps (Chinese filterability, CF) and is commonly used in China (Chen et al., 2016). The CF reflects the efflux time of target volume of filtrated dope prepared under controlled procedure, e.g., 25 mL to 50 mL (t_1) and from 125 ml to 150 ml (t_2) ($\Delta t=t_2-t_1$). The last test is widely used both by academic and industrial communities. The Δt values below 30 s are suitable to produce viscose, but steady

satisfactory results appear when CF is as lower as 10 s, at least for the hardwood dissolving pulps. The relationships between the Fock reactivity and CF looks contradictory, when clear correlation found for one set of ASP and PHK dissolving pulps (Duan et al., 2015) was not confirmed for another set of sulphite dissolving pulps (Ferreira et al., 2020).

Typical characteristics of dissolving pulps obtained by acid sulphite and pre-hydrolysis kraft processes are depicted in Table 3. Both reactivity and filterability are sensitive to the purity of dissolving pulps and the degree of cellulose polymerization. Thus, reactivity and filterability are vulnerable to intrinsic viscosity, which should vary approximately between 400 and 600 cm³/g to meet the dissolving pulp prerequisites to produce viscose (Asaadi et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2018; Duan et al., 2015; Ferreira et al., 2020; Sixta, 2000, 2006; Strunk et al., 2011; Testova et al., 2014). The uniform molecular weight distribution (MWD) usually favours the homogeneous cellulose mercerization and xanthation and provides improved mechanical properties of final viscose fibres. The polydispersity index (PDI) is normally larger for ASP than for PHK dissolving

Table 3 Typical characteristics of dissolving pulps (Duan et al., 2015; J. C. Ferreira et al., 2020; Köpcke et al., 2010; Sango et al., 2018; Sixta, 2000, 2006; Peter Strunk et al., 2011).

Cooking Process	ASP		PHK
Raw Material	Hardwood	Softwood	Hardwood
Brightness (% ISO)	91.0-92.9	90.2-90.8	90.6-98.1
α -cellulose (%)	91.8-93.5	92.4-94.8	94.2-96.3
Hemicelluloses (%)	2-4	3-5	2-3
Residual lignin (%)	<0.1	<0.2	<0.2
Extractives (%)*	<0.4	<0.3	<0.3
Ash (%)	0.1-0.2	0.1-0.2	0.1-0.2
Viscosity (cm ³ /g)	500-600	420-780	430-600
R ₁₈ content (%)	93.4-97.8	95.1-95.2	96.4-98.2
R ₁₀ content (%)	86.8-91.4	87.3-93.8	92.9-97.7
Fock reactivity (%)	40-70	40-60	20-50
Chinese filterability (s)	2-10	n.d.	20-40
DP _w	1790-2390	4750	1400-2100
DP _n	277	450	460-650
PDI	6.5-7.6	10.6	3.0-4.5
DP<100 (wt. %)	9.0	0.5	2.5-2.0
DP>2000 (wt. %)	26.8	61.0	19.9-35.0

Degree of crystallinity (%)	54	n.d.	56
n.d. not defined; *extractives in acetone.			

pulps (Chen et al., 2016; Duan et al., 2015; Strunk et al., 2011; Testova et al., 2014). This explains the lower yield of viscose fibres from ASP than PHK due to the loss of low- molecular weight cellulose fraction in the dope preparation.

The purity of dissolving pulps, expressed as α -cellulose content, normally exceed of 91 % and may reach up to 94-96 % for the PHK hardwood pulps (Table 3). Accordingly, unlike to ASP, PHK pulps can be used in the applications which require high content of α -cellulose (e.g., in cellulose esters, carboxymethyl cellulose, etc.). Other advantages of PHK over the ASP process is the recovery of hemicelluloses in the pre-extraction stage, the efficient extractives removal and also the tolerance for wood species (Gehmayr et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2016). Although PHK may seem a better process, some drawbacks as low reactivity and the formation of highly reactive degradation intermediates (which could undergo condensation reactions and produce sticky precipitates during drainage) make the ASP process preferable in some situations (Gehmayr et al., 2011; Li et al., 2018). The greater reactivity of ASP pulps is related to the acid conditions used during pulping, which are preferable to the alkaline conditions used by the PHK process (Li et al., 2018). It is worth mentioning that in addition to the α -cellulose content, the purity of the dissolved pulps can be expressed as the amount of cellulose resistant to dissolving in 10% NaOH (R_{10}), which is commonly used in industry.

It is generally assumed that the presence of extractives in the dissolving pulp negatively affects the viscose process, and its content should be kept at low levels (≤ 0.1 %) (Sixta, 2006). The negative effects of extractives are mostly related to the pitch formation that clods holes of spinnerets rather than hampering the cellulose xanthation. In fact, the increase of extractives to values as higher as 0.3-0.4 % did not affected the

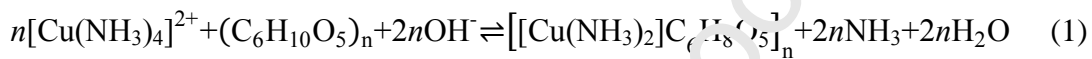
reactivity of dissolving pulps with carbon disulphide (Rodrigues et al., 2018; Strunk et al., 2011). Similar to the extractives, the presence of certain inorganic compounds (usually between 0.08 and 0.1 %), such as ferric ions, could have a negative effect in the processing of viscose (Cao et al., 2014; Sixta, 2006; Testova et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2018).

Depending on the type of wood and pulping process used, the hemicellulose content in dissolving wood pulps varies within 2-5% (Arce et al., 2020; Buurman, 1953). The amount of hemicelluloses in the dissolving pulps can be inferred based on the analysis of sugars or by the analysis of the pentosans content (valid for hardwood pulps). In the industry, the hemicellulose content is also commonly expressed by detecting a portion of polysaccharides resistant to dissolving in 18% NaOH (R_{18}), taking into account the predominant removal of hemicelluloses in these conditions (that is, the greater the R_{18} the lower the hemicellulose content). The content of hemicelluloses in the pulps as higher as 5% impairs the production of viscose by competing with cellulose to react with Na_2S and consuming NaOH (Arce et al., 2020; Sixta, 2006). The yield of viscose drops drastically at higher content of hemicelluloses in dissolving pulps. Despite the removal of these non-cellulosic polysaccharides through the viscose process (mostly in a steeping step), a certain amount remains in viscose and could affect the mechanical properties (e.g., tensile strength) of the final product (Buurman, 1953; Cao et al., 2014; Jahan et al., 2016; Mitchell, 1949). It is recognized that a high residual xylan content could (i) reduce the fibre swelling during the steeping stage and (ii) affect the xanthation due to the preferably reaction with carbon disulphide (CS_2) and, consequently, deteriorates the viscose filterability (Arce, Llano, García, et al., 2020; Sixta, 2006). In addition, hemicelluloses cause discoloration of the viscose products (Sixta, 2006).

3. Industrialized processes for rayon production

3.1. Cuprammonium process

The discovery of cuprammonium process remotes to the 1850's, when Matthias Eduard Schweizer found that cellulose could be dissolved in an aqueous solution of ammonia and copper (II) hydroxide generally described by Eq. 1 (Kamide & Nishiyama, 2001; Kauffman & Karbassi, 1985; Sayyed et al., 2019):



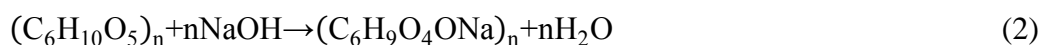
The cuprammonium process consists on the dissolution of cellulose (concentration *ca.* 10 %) in a mixed solution of copper salts and ammonia at low temperature, followed by the extrusion of the solution into a coagulation bath (consisting of a dilute acid, an alcohol and a concentrated cresol solution) through small holes in a spinneret, allowing cellulose to regenerate in the shape of multifilament yarn (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Cook, 2001; Kamide & Nishiyama, 2001; Sayyed et al., 2019). This process allows the use of either wood pulp (with a α -cellulose content ≥ 96 %) or cotton linters as raw material (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Cook, 2001).

With extremely fine filaments, cuprammonium fibres (also known as *cupro* fibres) exhibit higher tensile strength and lower tensile elongation than viscose fibres (Cook, 2001; Kamide & Nishiyama, 2001; Sayyed et al., 2019). *Cupro* fibres could be used to produce a great variety of products, like chiffons, satins, and all manner of very sheer fabrics (usually used to produce underwear, dress fabrics and linings) (Cook, 2001; Wang et al., 2016). The obtained yarns are used to produce weft, dresswear, sportswear and fine drapery fabrics, whereas the yarn-dyed fabrics are addressed to

produce high quality silk-like linings, dress and upholstery fabrics (Cook, 2001). Despite all the valuable applications, this process is becoming less used due to environmental issues, mainly related to the hazardous chemicals used in the dissolution process, and also because of the high costs of the entire process (Sayyed et al., 2019).

3.2. Viscose process

Viscose rayon, or simply viscose, is the most important and versatile artificial fibre existing, with the first patent appearing in the year of the 1892 granted to Cross, Bevan and Beadle (Germgård, 2007; Wilkes, 2001). The conventional viscose manufacturing process, schematically represented in Fig. 4, have four important operations, namely the steeping (has the dual function of purifying and mercerizing cellulose, under appropriate conditions), gelling, xanthation and spinning (Germgård, 2007; Mitchell, 1949). The mercerization of cellulose in an aqueous solution of sodium hydroxide (17-19 %) and temperature ranging between 20 and 30 °C results in alkali cellulose (Eq. 2), which is subsequently pressed out and drained off (i) for recovery and re-use of the excess of soda, and (ii) to provide an adequate surface areas for uniform reactions in the succeeding steps (Germgård, 2007; Wilkes, 2001). In order to improve the soda penetration and the swelling of the pulp, a small amount of a synthetic resin can be added to the dissolving pulp (Wilkes, 2001). Despite the well-known fact that increasing the mercerization temperature affects the quality of the alkali cellulose obtained, there are studies that proves that increasing temperature up to 105 °C originate even better high-quality viscose solution (Pavlov et al., 1991).



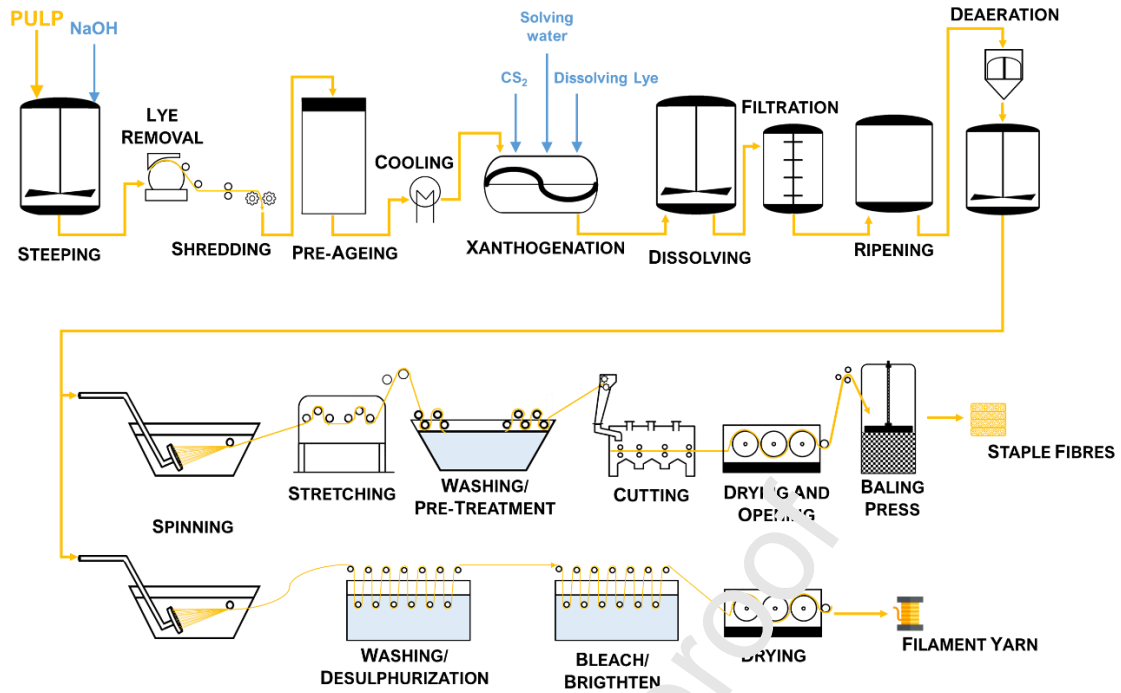


Fig. 4. Production of staple fibres and filament yarn through the viscose process.

The shredded alkali cellulose is then stored for 4-5h in air around 40 °C to depolymerise the cellulose (dissolving pulps suitable for viscose process usually have a DP varying between 750 and 850), until the desired DP (pre-ageing step) (Germgård, 2007; Kvarnlöf et al., 2006; Mitchell, 1949; Wilkes, 2001). High hemicelluloses content and low fibre porosity hampers the pre-ageing process (Strunk et al., 2012). The next step, the most critical one, consists in the reaction of the degraded alkali cellulose with CS₂ at low temperature and pressure, to form cellulose xanthate according to the Eq. 3 (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Germgård, 2007; Gondhalekar et al., 2019; S. Wang et al., 2016; Wilkes, 2001). However, the yield of this reaction is inferior than expected due to the significant fraction of CS₂ lost in secondary reactions (Eqs 4 and 5), resulting in a degree of substitution (DS) between 0.5 and 0.7 (Germgård, 2007; Gondhalekar et al., 2019; Wilkes, 2001):





In this step, the product is still in a fibre state (consistency around 10 %) which, when dissolved in a dilute sodium hydroxide solution under mechanical treatment forms a viscous solution called viscose dope (Germgård, 2007; Wilkes, 2001). The resulting solution is ripening for *ca.* 15h where the solution is slowly stirred, aiming the uniform distribution of the xanthate groups in cellulose (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Germgård, 2007). After that, viscose dope is filtrated to remove undissolved particles that could clog holes in the spinning jet and is deaerated to remove air bubbles (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Wilkes, 2001). Interestingly, adding a small amount of softwood pulp can improve dope drainage. Although, the use of either softwood or softwood pulp blends results in different reaction rates throughout the viscose process (Wilkes, 2001).

In the final stage, the viscose solution is extruded through small holes of a spinneret into a coagulation bath consisting in a mixture of acid and salts (sulfuric acid, sodium sulphate, zinc sulphate and water) at 45-55 °C, being cellulose regenerated by the liberation of xanthate groups from the cellulose backbone (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Germgård, 2007; Mitchell, 1949; Shen et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016; Wilkes, 2001). Besides the composition of the coagulation bath, many other manufacturing factors, such as a viscose dope feeding rate and a draw ratio (ratio of the take-up and extrusion velocities during the fibre spinning) have a crucial effect on the orientation and physical structure of regenerated cellulose in rayon fibres (Wilkes, 2001). Finally, the filaments formed are washed, desulfurized, and bleached, followed by a final washing and the finishing process (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Germgård, 2007; Wilkes, 2001).

Viscose fibres differ from natural cellulosic fibres, by being a polymorph of cellulose II, and not have an organized structure in fibrils as in native cellulose due to the lack of orientation of the rayon fibre and a lower degree of crystallinity (Compton, 1939; Mitchell, 1949; Wardman, 2018). Viscose fibres are hydrophilic, and their high water retention is an advantage during wet processing, which is related to the quick liquid absorption of the final product (Ramamoorthy et al., 2015).

When compared to cotton fibres, viscose fibres are weaker, especially when wet, and tend to shrink more easily (Ramamoorthy et al., 2015; Wardman, 2018). In the same way, when compared to lyocell fibres, viscose fibres exhibit lower crystallinity, tensile strength, Young modulus, and thermal stability (Ramamoorthy et al., 2015). These fibres are widely used in textile industry for the production of clothes, linings, furnishing fabrics and household fabrics (Ciechańska et al., 2009). Viscose dope also can be used to produce cellophane films (Wawro et al., 2014), tyre cords (Ramamoorthy et al., 2015), synthetic sponges and hygienic materials with high absorption properties (Ciechańska et al., 2009).

Despite being one of the few alternatives available to cotton, viscose fibres are produced by a process that is far from being ecologically sound and has some drawbacks, namely: (i) the large quantities of hazardous carbon disulphide, sodium hydroxide, sulfuric acid and water used in this process; (ii) the formation of side highly toxic chemicals and gases and (iii) the strong degradation of cellulose backbone (Chavan & Patra, 2004; Gondhalekar et al., 2019; Ingildeev et al., 2013; Michud, Tantt, et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2012). Several approaches, like thermal oxidation or activated carbon adsorption with steam regeneration, have been developed to avoid the CS₂ emissions. However, these processes are still associated with high operating costs (Enneking, 2002).

In an attempt to reduce the CS₂ consumption, Butkova and co-workers proposed the activation of cellulose with liquid ammonia (Butkova et al., 1979), while few years later Abramova and co-workers suggested the activation of cellulose prior to xanthation with urea (Abramova et al., 1982). Kraft & Schelosky (2000) proposed the electron beam treatment of dissolving pulps to facilitate their xanthation. Recently, Gondhalekar and collaborators reported a kinetic study for the formation of cellulose xanthate and formed by-products, aiming to reduce the consumption of CS₂ and, consequently, to reduce the by-products emitted (Gondhalekar et al., 2019).

3.3. Modal process

Modal fibres, also known as high wet modulus rayon, are manufactured by a modified viscose process (e.g., using an increased load of CS₂ in dope preparation, spinning solutions with higher DP values, different spinning bath composition and with addition of modifiers), and currently commercialized by Lenzing AG with the brand name of Modal® (Albrecht, 1981; Ciechańska et al., 2009; Röder, 2017; Schaumann, 1996; Shen et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016). The resulting rayon fibres are characterized for having a higher wet modulus, tenacity and strength (in both wet and conditioned state), a lower water retention capacity, and a higher resistance towards alkalinity than conventional viscose fibres (Albrecht, 1981; Llaudet, 1990; Schaumann, 1996). In addition, when compared to conventional viscose fibres, modal fibres have a higher ratio of wet to dry breaking tenacity, better washability, less swelling, a higher degree of cellulose polymerization and a more developed fibrillary structure (Albrecht, 1981; Ciechańska et al., 2009; Röder, 2017; Shen et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016). At the same time, modal fibres exhibit a lower crystallinity when compared with lyocell fibres and also have both a higher moisture absorption and a lower thermal stability than lyocell and viscose fibres (Ramamoorthy et al., 2015). Due to the good mechanical and comfort

properties of the modal fabrics, this type of fibres is widely used in the production of different woven fabrics, underwear, sportswear, terry products (towels) and knit material (Latif et al., 2019; Llaudet, 1990; Röder, 2017).

3.4. Lyocell process

Concerning the environmental issues and to improve the cost/performance profile, Lyocell[®] process emerges in 1939 with the first patent published by Charles Graenacher. In the earlier studies, Graenacher and Sallmann used an amine oxide to dissolve cellulose (Graenacher & Sallmann, 1939; Moe, 2001). Later, in 1969 D.L. Johnson described the use of cyclic mono (*N*-methylamine-*N*-oxide) compounds, which include NMMO, as solvents that partially dissolve cellulose fibres and other natural polymers such as wool, silk and hair (Johnson, 1959a, 1969b).

Lyocell is a direct dissolution-type process (Fig. 5) without the formation of any intermediate cellulose derivative, that started to be commercialized in the 90's and consists mainly of three steps (Carriello et al., 2004; Chavan & Patra, 2004; Ciechańska et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012). The first step consists in the direct dissolution of cellulose in NMMO (suspension of *ca.* 13 % cellulose, 20 % water and 67 % NMMO) at 120 °C with reduced pressure, resulting in an extremely viscous solution – the spinning dope (cellulose concentration between 8 and 20 %) (Chavan & Patra, 2004; Ciechańska et al., 2009; Hummel et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2020; Sayyed, Mohite, et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). Temperature plays an important role in the process, as low temperatures can result in undissolved particles, while high temperatures (≥ 120 °C) can lead to cellulose degradation (Sayyed et al., 2020). In the next step, the solution is filtered and extruded via an air gap into a coagulation bath (water with a small NMMO content), being the fibres formed collected as a tow (Chavan & Patra, 2004; Ciechańska

et al., 2009; Hummel et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). Fibres are then washed and proceed to the finishing process that includes bleaching, finishing and drying (Zhang et al., 2018). Finally, NMMO is recovered by evaporation of water from the regenerating and washing bath to 99.5 % purity and is reused in the process (Ciechańska et al., 2009; Hummel et al., 2016). NMMO effectively dissolves cellulose with moderate formation of adducts and with minimal degradation, being 99% recyclable (Haule et al., 2016b; Jiang et al., 2020).

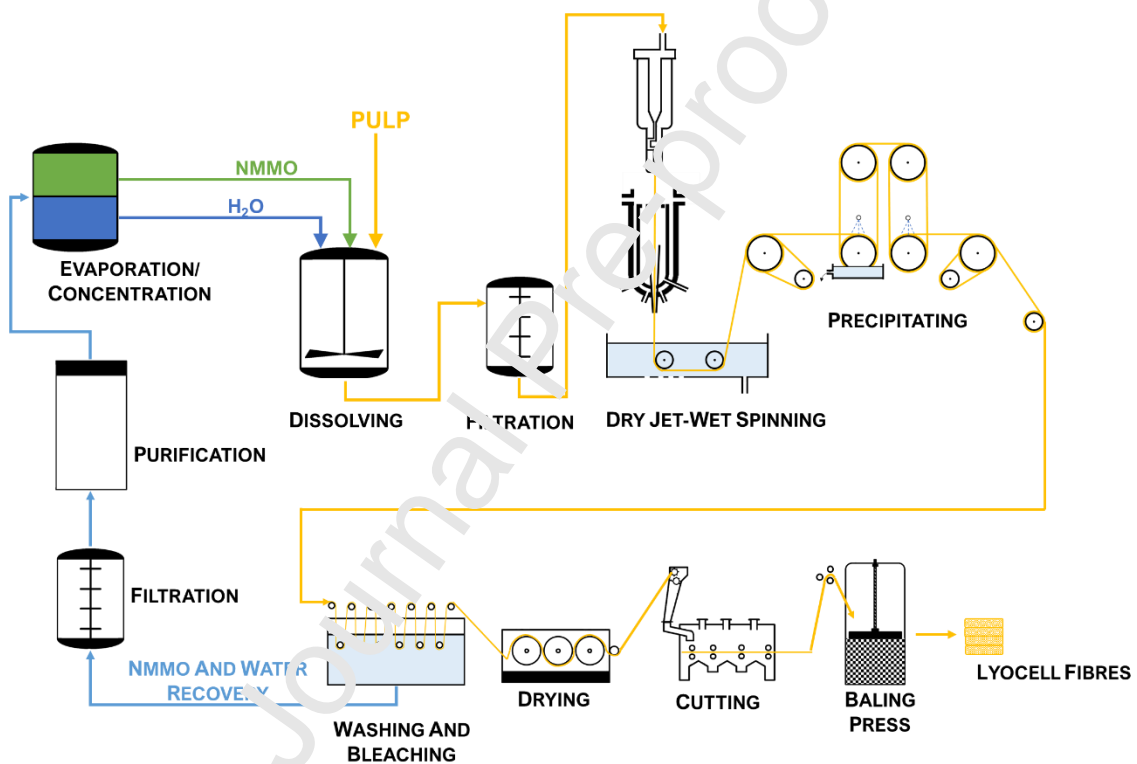


Fig. 5. Production of rayon fibres through the lyocell process.

As the lyocell process uses wood pulp as raw material, the chemical composition of lyocell fibres varies largely with the type of wood used (Ramamoorthy et al., 2015). Usually, hardwood dissolving pulps with high α -cellulose content are used to produce lyocell fibres. Typically, the dissolving pulp characteristics required to use in the lyocell process are a DP of 650-750 and a α -cellulose content of 96 %, which gives a high

crystallinity lyocell fibres (Chavan & Patra, 2004; Jiang et al., 2020; Ramamoorthy et al., 2015). The intrinsic viscosity values ranging between 280 and 350 cm³/g and brightness as higher than 90 %ISO are preferred (Jiang et al., 2020). Studies using pre-swelled pulps are already been developed, showing an intensification of the dissolution process by the reduction in energy and time consumed (Sayyed, Gupta, et al., 2020; Sayyed et al., 2020). In addition, studies using deep eutectic solvents as co-solvents have already been carried out, showing an improvement on the cellulose dissolution even at room temperature (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Lyocell fibres exhibit a relatively high crystallinity, a high degree of orientation of the fibrils, a low lateral holds within fibres, a quite large pore volume, a weak intrafibrillar hydrogen bonds and a high tenacity value ranging from 35 to 42 cN/tex (Carrillo et al., 2004; Chavan & Patra, 2004; Ciechańska et al., 2009; Haule et al., 2016b; Ingildeev et al., 2013). Lyocell fibres also reveal some unique features such as softness and absorption, as well as possess good textile properties (Edgar & Zhang, 2020; Ramamoorthy et al., 2015; Woodings, 1995). The highly crystalline structure of lyocell fibres plays an important role on fibrillation, the last occurring generally under stress along the long axis in wet condition (Chavan & Patra, 2004). Lyocell fibres show smooth surface, quasi-round cross-section as well as a homogeneous, dense fibre bundle structure (Hummel et al., 2016).

In terms of applications, lyocell fibres are suitable to produce an extensively range of products, since textile clothes, to wipes or filters, among others (Bartsch & Kling, 2001; Cafuta et al., 2019; Chavan & Patra, 2004; Wang et al., 2016). Being a direct dissolution process, lyocell has as an advantage the fact of avoiding toxic chemicals (Zhang et al., 2018). Another main advantage of this process consists on the recycling of NMMO (as higher as 99 % of the solvent can be recycled), which reduces

the effluent produced, and make the process more environmental-friendly (Chavan & Patra, 2004; Ingildeev et al., 2013; Ramamoorthy et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018). However, it could not replace the conventional viscose process yet, mainly due to the costs of the process and the nature of the fibrillating fibre produced (strong tendency of fibres to undergo wet fibrillation, that could result in partial damage of the fibres during rope finishing/dyeing) (Ingildeev et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2020; Ramamoorthy et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2012). Lyocell process also have as drawbacks the side reactions in the cellulose-NMMO-water system (radical decomposition and degradation; deoxygenation; and the Polonovski reaction) and the formation of by-products that can affect the final properties of the fibres (Asaadi et al., 2016; Ingildeev et al., 2013; Michud, Tantt, et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018).

4. Advanced rayon processes under development

Despite being the predominant approach for the production of regenerated cellulose, and all attempts to reduce CS₂ consumption, the viscose process continues to be an environmental concern. Therefore, new alternative processes are challenging and described in the following sections. These approaches include the use of ionic liquids, deep eutectic solvents, aqueous NaOH-based solvents, and the cotton waste recycling systems. Among all these processes, the use of advanced ionic liquids has already reached the pilot scale (e.g. Ioncell-F[®] process) and is close to reaching the industrial exploitation.

4.1. Processes using alkali and salt solutions

Considering the problems existing in the viscose process, numerous attempts have been made to find a direct solvent capable of dissolving cellulose and, at the same

time, being environmentally friendly. In particular, these studies involve aqueous NaOH-, LiOH-based solutions, and molten inorganic salt hydrates.

The first report related to the dissolution of cellulose with aqueous NaOH system remotes to the 1930's by Davidson (Budtova & Navard, 2016). Later in the 1980's, Kamide and co-workers presented the dissolution of a steam pre-treated pulp in an aqueous 9 wt.% NaOH solution, followed by wet spinning and an aqueous H₂SO₄ coagulation bath (Kamide et al., 1984). However, this process results in fibres with inferior properties to those of viscose fibres.

Aqueous NaOH systems have a limited solubility power and, in order to facilitate the cellulose dissolution in these systems numerous attempts were made to activate cellulose prior to its dissolution, namely by mechanical, physical, chemical and enzymatic methods (Budtova & Navard, 2016; Sixta et al., 2015). One of the alternatives to improve cellulose dissolution in aqueous NaOH systems lies in the addition of some auxiliary additives like poly(ethylene glycol) (PEG), urea, thiourea or ZnO (Cuissinat & Navard, 2006; El Seoud et al., 2020; Harlin, 2019; Jedvert & Heinze, 2017; Sixta et al., 2015). However the addition of additives complicates the recovery system and, consequently, increases the solvent recovery costs (Sixta et al., 2015).

Studies using NaOH/urea aqueous solutions have been developed in the 1980th (Cai et al., 2004; Cai & Zhang, 2005; Cuissinat & Navard, 2006; Ekman et al., 1984; Sixta et al., 2015). The dissolution of cellulose in NaOH/urea is similar to the viscose conventional process, and could be a cheaper and also a non-toxic process that can recycle the by-products formed (Ekman et al., 1984; Harlin, 2019; Jedvert & Heinze, 2017; Luo & Zhang, 2013). Cellulose, even in high concentrations, can be dissolved quickly at room temperature (below 20°C) using a pre-cooled 7 % NaOH/12 % urea aqueous solution system (Cai et al., 2007; Cai & Zhang, 2005). Cellulose

multifilament's prepared by wet-spinning process at a pilot scale have already been performed, revealing to be quicker, cheaper and greener than the viscose process (Cai et al., 2007; R. Li et al., 2010). The resulting fibres reveal lower mechanical properties than viscose fibres, and simultaneously a larger crystallinity index and a higher DP than viscose fibres (Cai et al., 2007; R. Li et al., 2010). It is claimed that despite being similar to the viscose process, it differs from the latter by having a shorter production cycle, being a non-polluting process and also by having lower process costs (Cai et al., 2007). This process developed by Cai et al. (2007) also differs from the carbamate process. Although the NaOH/urea process is greener than the viscose, the resulting weak fibre properties limits its commercial application. To improve the fibre strength, studies introducing a lower percentage of ZnO (0.8 %) and a different composition of coagulation bath (15 wt.% citric acid/5 wt.% sodium citrate/40 wt.% glycol instead of H₂SO₄/Na₂SO₄) have been proposed, revealing an increase in the cellulose solubility and in the solution stability (Tu et al., 2020).

The carbamate process, also known as CarbaCell, differs little from the viscose process and consists on a reaction between cellulose and urea carried out at temperature ranging between 135 and 180 °C, that results in the intermediate cellulose carbamate (El Seoud et al., 2020; Fink et al., 2014; Harlin, 2019). This intermediate is easily and readily dissolved in a dilute NaOH solution, with cellulose concentrations lower than 10 % (depending on the DP), and at low temperatures (around or below 0 °C) (El Seoud et al., 2020; Fink et al., 2014; Harlin, 2019). The major advantages of the CarbaCell process over the viscose process are the (i) prolonged chemical stability of the cellulose carbamate either in wet or in dry states; (ii) faster dissolution of carbamate in NaOH; (iii) omission of heavy metals in the coagulation bath composition (it is only composed by H₂SO₄ and Na₂SO₄); (iv) absence of sulphur in the whole process and (v) spinning

process is performed at room temperature (Fink et al., 2014). Combining these advantages with the good strength properties of the resulting fibres (tenacities as high as 26 cN/tex and elongation reaching 27 %), the carbamate process has potential to compete with the viscose process (El Seoud et al., 2020; Fink et al., 2014; Harlin, 2019; Sixta et al., 2015).

Cellulose dissolution studies using pre-cooled NaOH/thiourea aqueous solutions have been carried out and reached the pilot scale (Ruan et al., 2004, 2006). The resulting fibres revealed to be similar to lyocell fibres, exhibiting a tensile strength closer to the obtained by the viscose process and also a higher degree of crystallinity and more regular cross-section order than viscose fibres (Ruan et al., 2004, 2006).

In the 2000's, the cellulose carbonate process was proposed and consisted on the reaction of CO₂ with alkali cellulose in ethyl acetate (or ZnCl₂ and acetone) at -5 °C and pressure around 40-50 bar (El Seoud et al., 2020; Sixta et al., 2015). The derivative formed is readily dissolved in a 8.5 wt.% NaOH/ZnO solution at 0 °C and the solution is wet spun into continuous filaments in a coagulation bath using acid/water or acid/salt/water system (El Seoud et al., 2020; Sixta et al., 2015). However, the resulting fibres appeared to be weaker than viscose fibres (Sixta et al., 2015).

Studies using NaOH/urea aqueous solutions showed a higher dissolution power over the NaOH/urea aqueous solutions (Cai et al., 2006; Cai & Zhang, 2005). The dissolution of cellulose in this solvent system has as advantages being a non-toxic solvent and having substantially higher stability when compared with the cuprammonium solution (Cai et al., 2006). Although there are few studies using this solvent.

Molten salt hydrates are concentrated inorganic salt solutions that have a water-salt ratio near to the coordination number of the strongest hydrated ion (usually a

cation) (Huang et al., 2020; Leipner et al., 2000; Sen et al., 2013). These liquids are able to dissolve cellulose without any activation or pre-treatment, resulting in significantly different regenerated cellulose (Leipner et al., 2000). The molten salt hydrates can be divided into five groups, according to their interaction with cellulose: (i) with no dissolution (e.g., $\text{CaCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$; $\text{LiNO}_3 \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$); (ii) fine dispersion (e.g., $\text{NaCH}_3\text{COO} \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$); (iii) partial decomposition (e.g., $\text{Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$); (iv) strong swelling (e.g., $\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$; $\text{NaClO}_4 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$) and (v) dissolution (e.g., $\text{ZnCl}_2 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$; $\text{LiClO}_4 \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$) (Fischer et al., 2003; Fischer et al., 1999; Fischer et al., 1999; Fischer & Thümmel, 2010; Fischer et al., 2002; Leipner et al., 2000; Sen et al., 2013).

The dissolution ability of molten salt hydrates is influenced by water content of the melt, acidity, composition/species, and also by the hydration deficiency of the coordination sphere (Fischer et al., 2003; S. Fischer & Thümmel, 2010; Steffen Fischer et al., 2002; Leipner et al., 2000; Sen et al., 2013). These inorganic molten salts are both an effective and efficient media for cellulose dissolution. They also have as advantages their excellent solvation ability and electrochemical performance, high thermal and chemical stability, a negligible vapour pressure, and they are also cheap and easy to prepare (Huang et al., 2020; Sen et al., 2013). Like other solvents (e.g., NMMO), the inorganic salts can be recovered by the evaporation of water, and further reuse (Huang et al., 2020; Sen et al., 2013).

Despite all studies using alkali/salt solutions, including those that have reached the pilot scale, none can overcome the properties of viscose fibres. Thus, further studies related to these or similar solvent systems are needed.

4.2. Processes using ionic liquids

Ionic liquids (ILs) are a combination of bulky organic cations with mostly inorganic anions, resulting in salts that are liquids at low temperatures (melting points below 100 °C) (Brandt et al., 2013; Cao et al., 2017; Chiappe & Pieraccini, 2005; Hermanutz et al., 2019; Hummel et al., 2016; Verma et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016). Due to their low melting point, low vapour pressure and relative thermal stability, ionic liquids become interesting to apply in industrial processes for the biomass processing (Cao et al., 2017; Chiappe & Pieraccini, 2005; Y. Li et al., 2018; Michud et al., 2016). A large number of ILs have been studied as cellulose solvents, which are briefly reviewed in Table S1 (Supplementary data). Among nearly 230 different IL systems, imidazolium ionic liquids with chloride anion have been found to be particularly suitable for cellulose spinning (the first generation of ionic spinning liquids) (Hummel et al., 2016; Michud, Tantu, et al., 2016). This type of ILs is effective in dissolving cellulose, however can induce cellulose degradation at temperatures above 90 °C, their regeneration causes problems, and the resulting fibres need to be purified due to the contamination with residual IL (Bodachivskyi et al., 2020; Hummel et al., 2016; Michud et al., 2016; Wawro et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2020).

ILs have shown promising results in cellulose dissolution due to their ability to break the intermolecular hydrogen bonds present in the biopolymer (Mahadeva & Kim, 2012). The cellulose dissolution in ionic liquids is usually controlled by the anion selected, since its size and geometry plays an important role in cellulose dissolution (Brandt et al., 2013; Erdmenger et al., 2007; Ingildeev et al., 2013). The chloride ion is one of the most promising anions found for IL systems. However, halides, carboxylates or phosphates anions also play an important role in cellulose dissolution, since they can hinder both the intramolecular and intermolecular hydrogen bonds formation between the polymer chains and sheets (Cao et al., 2017; Erdmenger et al., 2007; Ingildeev et al.,

2013). Swatloski et al. (2002) studied seven different ILs on the dissolution of cellulose and found that both tetrafluoroborate and hexafluorophosphate-based ILs cannot dissolve cellulose, whereas chloride containing ILs appear to be the most effective for these purposes. Ohira and co-workers applied ILs with amino acids in cellulose dissolution and, among the ILs studied, [N₂₂₁ME][Ala] (*N,N*-diethyl-*N*-(2-methoxyethyl)-*N*-methylammonium alanine) was the one that had a higher dissolution (12 wt.%). According to the results obtained, the authors proposed that amino acids may have some affinity with a specific part of cellulose, causing its dissolution in ionic liquids based on amino acids (Ohira et al., 2012).

There are some features to take into consideration when using ionic liquids to dissolve cellulose, namely: (i) the presence of water (may have a negative effect in cellulose dissolution) (Brandt et al., 2013; Ohira et al., 2012); (ii) the temperature (the DP has an inverse correlation with dissolution temperature (De Silva et al., 2015)); (iii) the source of cellulose, and (iv) the Kamlet-Taft parameters (α , β and π^* parameters) (Chiappe & Pieraccini, 2005; Morais et al., 2020; Xu & Wang, 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). α and β parameters relates to the hydrogen-bond acidity and basicity of the ILs anions, respectively, having a strong direct correlation with cellulose solubility, while π^* is related to the interactions through bipolarity and polarizability (Brandt et al., 2013; Chiappe & Pieraccini, 2005; Li et al., 2018; Morais et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2010; Xu & Wang, 2020). It is known that the reduction of ILs stability is associated with high hydrogen-bond basicity (Brandt et al., 2013). Moreover, the presence of hydroxyl groups either on the anion or the cation, affects negatively the solubility of cellulose, due to the increase on the hydrogen bond acidity of the IL (Brandt et al., 2013). Accordingly, in order to have a solvent capable of dissolving cellulose, it should has

simultaneously a higher hydrogen-bond basicity and a lower hydrogen-bond acidity (Zhu et al., 2018).

Despite the large amount of ionic liquids studied in cellulose dissolution, only few of them are suitable to produce textile fibres (Table 4). ILs have some advantages over other processes, namely: (i) the ability to dissolve polymers in high concentrations, (ii) recover the solvents used after the regeneration of the cellulose fibre/film (in the case of the [DBNH][OAc] (1,5-diazabicyclo[4.3.0]non-5-ene acetate) ionic liquid, its recovery is higher than 95 % (Parviainen et al., 2015; Jimmy Zhang et al., 2017)); (iii) the moderate water pollution caused and (iv) the higher fibrillation resistance of some fibres obtained with advanced ILs when compared to lyocell fibres (Cao et al., 2017; Ingildeev et al., 2013; Mahadeva & Kim, 2012; Michud et al., 2014; Wawro et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2020). However, ionic liquids also have some drawbacks like slow rate of dissolution, high costs of solvents, some of them are toxic with undetermined end-effects on the environment (Magina et al., 2021) and non-biodegradable (e.g., imidazolium-based ILs), and also have high viscosity cellulose solutions (Chiappe & Pieraccini, 2005; Malaeke et al., 2018; Rinaldi, 2011). The later problem can be overcome by the addition of polar aprotic solvents to ILs (e.g., DMSO or DMF), lithium salts, among others, which increases the cellulose solubility in ILs and reduce the dissolution time (Brandt et al., 2013; Cao et al., 2017; Ferreira et al., 2019; Grøssereid et al., 2019; Lethesh et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018; Ohira et al., 2012; Rinaldi, 2011; Sánchez et al., 2020; Satria et al., 2018; Verma et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2018). It appears that the ideal IL for dissolving cellulose and producing spinnable rayon fibres has not yet been found and is a challenge for the scientific community.

Table 4 Ionic liquids suitable to produce textile fibres, with respective tenacity and elongation values (El Seoud et al., 2020; Elsayed et al., 2020; Hermanutz et al., 2019; Hummel et al., 2016; Michud et al., 2014; Jiaping Zhang, Yamagishi, et al., 2020).

Ionic liquid	IL concentration (wt. %)	Tenacity (cN/tex) ^a	Elongation (%) ^a
[Amim]Cl	10.0-12.5	26.8-41.6	8.4-12.2
[C ₄ mim][OAc]	13.2-18.9	44.0-48.6	12.6-15.5
[C ₄ mim]Cl	5.0-13.6	20.7-56.8	4.3-15.3
[C ₂ mim][OAc]	6.0-19.6	17.6-46.0	3.8-11.2
[C ₂ mim]Cl	15.8	43.0-53.1	9.6-13
[C ₂ mim][(EtO) ₂ PO ₂]	10.0	26.4	4.6-6.5
[DBNH][OAc]	10.0-15.0	45.7-50.7	7.4-12.2
[DBUH][OAc] ^b	n.m.	56.3	9.8
[mTBDH][OAc] ^c	n.m.	49.9	9.8

^a in the conditioned state; ^b 1,8-diazabicyclo[5.4.0]undec-7-ene acetate; ^c 7-methyl-1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-enium acetate; n.m. not mentioned.

Recently, a research group from Aalto University and Helsinki University has been developing a new Ioncell-F[®] process allowing rayon fibres with strength properties equal or even better than those of lyocell (Asaadi et al., 2018; Hummel et al., 2016; *Ioncell*, n.d.; Michud et al., 2014; Michud, Hvan el, et al., 2016; Michud, Tanttu, et al., 2016; Sixta et al., 2015). This new process uses the ionic liquid [DBNH] [OAc] to dissolve the cellulose with high concentrations at moderate temperatures (60-100 °C), while the degradation of the polysaccharides is quite insignificant (Hummel et al., 2016; Michud et al., 2014; Michud et al., 2016). Ioncell-F[®], also identified as a lyocell-type process, uses the ionic liquid as a direct cellulose solvent and the same dry-jet wet spinning method used in the lyocell process to manufacture rayon fibres (Guizani et al., 2020, 2021; Hummel et al., 2016; Michud et al., 2016; Stepan et al., 2016). [DBNH] [OAc] exhibited superior properties in the dissolution of cellulose and also in its subsequent regeneration in filaments than NMMO (Michud et al., 2016). The resulting fibres exhibit a high structural conformity, a dry tenacity superior to 35 cN/tex, and a crystallinity as higher as 45 % (Asaadi et al., 2018; Michud et al., 2014; Sixta et al., 2015). Moreover, studies using blends of different cellulose sources were made, revealing mechanical properties slightly higher than lyocell fibres, with wet tenacity values higher than 40 cN/tex, and Young's modulus values higher than 20 GPa (Michud

et al., 2015; Stepan et al., 2016). The Ioncell[®] process opens new opportunities for fibre engineering while combining cellulose with other natural compounds with specific properties, thus resulting in new functional fibres (Moriam et al., 2021). Currently, the Ioncell-F[®] process is on a pilot scale and aims to be introduced in industrial scale production from 2025 (Ioncell, n.d.).

4.3. Processes using deep eutectic solvents

Deep eutectic solvents (DESs) are formed by a hydrogen bond acceptor (usually an ammonium salt) and a hydrogen bond donor (e.g., amines, carboxylic acids, etc.), linked by hydrogen bonds at a certain molar ratio that emerged to overcome the ILs drawbacks (Chen et al., 2019; Malaeke et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2017; Zdanowicz et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Despite having similar chemical and physical properties with ILs, DESs have lower production costs, higher biodegradability, safety and innocuous nature (Chen et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2017; Zdanowicz et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Also known as “designer solvents”, DESs have the ability to change their physicochemical properties by choosing the best DESs components in terms of chemical nature, ratio, and water content (Chen et al., 2019; Francisco et al., 2012). These solvents can be classified, depending on the components selected to form the solvent, in (i) organic salts and metal chlorides; (ii) organic salts and metal hydrates; (iii) organic salts and organic compounds and (iv) metal chlorides and organic compounds (Arce et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2020).

DES have been already applied to a wide range of steps of the biomass treatment as, for example, in pre-treatment (Arce et al., 2020; Ling et al., 2020), delignification (Jablonský et al., 2015), extraction (Cao et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2019), and many other

purposes (Loow et al., 2017). Despite numerous attempts to dissolve cellulose in DESs (Table 5), the cellulose solubility falls far short from that for ionic liquids (Chen et al., 2019). This can be explained by the strong hydrogen bond network existing in DESs that results in a decrease of opportunities for interactions between cellulose and these solvents (Chen et al., 2019). Chen and co-workers suggest that compounds containing anions of high hydrogen bonding basicity (e.g., Cl^- , OAc^-) are an auspicious alternative to form DESs capable of dissolving cellulose (Chen et al., 2019).

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Table 5 Cellulose solubility (wt. %) in different deep eutectic solvents for different cellulose sources.

DESS	Molar ratio	Cellulose source	Cellulose solubility (wt. %)	Reference
Acetamide/Caprolactam	1:1	Cotton-Ramie pulp	1.79 (T=50 °C)	(E. Zhou & Liu, 2014)
Acetamide/urea	2:1	Cotton-Ramie pulp	1.03 (T=50 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; E. Zhou & Liu, 2014)
Betaine/Lactic acid	1:2	Cellulose, ≥ 90% mass fraction purity Cellulose, fibrous, medium	Insoluble (T=60 °C) <1 (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012; Lynam et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2017)
Caprolactam/Urea	3:1	Cotton-Ramie pulp	2.03 (T=50 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; E. Zhou & Liu, 2014)
ChCl/Acetamide	1:2	Cotton linter pulp	0.22 (T=120 °C after cellulose activation by ultrasound-assisted saturated calcium chloride solution)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Ren, Chen, Wang, et al., 2016)
ChCl/Acetic acid	1:2	Cellulose, fibrous, medium	<1 (T=60 °C)	(Lynam et al., 2017)
ChCl/Ammonium thiocyanate	1:1	Cotton linter pulp	0.85 (T=120 °C after cellulose activation by ultrasound-assisted saturated calcium chloride solution)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Ren, Chen, Wang, et al., 2016)
ChCl/Caprolactam	1:1	Cotton linter pulp	0.16 (T=120 °C after cellulose activation by ultrasound-assisted saturated calcium chloride solution)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Ren, Chen, Wang, et al., 2016)
ChCl/Formic acid	1:2	Cellulose, fibrous, medium	<1 (T=60 °C)	(Lynam et al., 2017)
ChCl/Imidazole	3:1	Cotton linter pulp	2.48 (T=120 °C after cellulose activation by ultrasound-assisted saturated calcium chloride solution)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Ren, Chen, Wang, et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2017)
ChCl/Lactic acid	1:1.3	Cellulose, ≥ 90% mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012; Lynam et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2017)
	1:2	Cellulose, ≥ 90% mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	
	1:5	Cellulose, ≥ 90% mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	
	1:10	Cellulose, ≥ 90% mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	
	1:10	Cellulose, fibrous, medium	<3 (T=60 °C)	
ChCl/L-Lysine	1:2	Wheat straw cellulose (DP>3000)	<5.0 (T=90 °C, with ultrasonic irradiation)	(J. Wang et al., 2020)
		MCC	<8.0 (T=90 °C, with ultrasonic irradiation)	
ChCl/Maleic acid	1:1	Cellulose, ≥ 98% mass fraction purity	2.57 (T=90 °C, with ultrasonic irradiation)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Malaeké et al., 2018)

ChCl/Malic acid	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=100 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2017)
ChCl/ α -naphthol	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 98\%$ mass fraction purity	3.39 (T=90 °C, with ultrasonic irradiation)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Malaeké et al., 2018)
ChCl/Oxalic acid dihydrate	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2017)
ChCl/phenol	2:1	Cellulose, $\geq 98\%$ mass fraction purity	4.70 (T=90 °C, with ultrasonic irradiation)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Malaeké et al., 2018)
ChCl/resorcinol	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 98\%$ mass fraction purity	6.10 (T=90 °C, with ultrasonic irradiation)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Malaeké et al., 2018)
ChCl/urea	1:2	AVICEL Cotton linter pulp	<0.2 (T=110 °C) 1.43 (T=120 °C after cellulose activation by ultrasound-assisted saturated calcium chloride solution)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Ren, Chen, Wang, et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2017; Q. Zhang et al., 2012)
ChCl/ZnCl ₂	1:2	AVICEL	<0.2 (T=110 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2017; Q. Zhang et al., 2012)
Lactic acid/Alanine	9:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Lactic acid/Glycine	9:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Lactic acid/Histidine	9:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Malic acid/Alanine	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	0.11 (T=100 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Francisco et al., 2012)
Malic acid/Betaine	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=100 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Malic acid/Glycine	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	0.14 (T=100 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Francisco et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2017)
Malic acid/Histidine	2:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=85 °C)	(Francisco et al.,

Malic acid/Nicotinic acid	9:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=85 °C)	2012) (Francisco et al., 2012)
Malic acid/Proline	1:1 1:2 1:3	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=100 °C) 0.24 (T=100 °C) 0.78 (T=100 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Francisco et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2017)
Oxalic acid dihydrate/Betaine	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Oxalic acid dihydrate/Glycine	3:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=85 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Oxalic acid dihydrate/Histidine	9:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=85 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Francisco et al., 2012)
Oxalic acid dihydrate/Nicotinic acid	9:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012)
Proline/Lactic acid	1:2 1:3.3	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity Cellulose, fibrous, medium	Insoluble (T=60 °C) <1 (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012; Lynam et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2017)
Proline/Oxalic acid dihydrate	1:1	Cellulose, $\geq 90\%$ mass fraction purity	Insoluble (T=60 °C)	(Francisco et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2017)
Triethyl-allyl ammonia chloride/Oxalic acid	1:1	Cotton linter pulp	6.48 (T=110 °C)	(Y.-L. Chen et al., 2019; Ren, Chen, Guo, et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2017)

ChCl – choline chloride.

4.4. Cotton waste recycling

As already mentioned, cotton production is no longer sufficient to meet the demand for textile fibres, although this problem is mitigated with the appearance of man-made fibres (Asaadi et al., 2016; Björquist et al., 2018). In addition to the production of regenerated cellulose, the shortage of cotton fibre in the market can be compensated, considering that there is an enormous annual waste of textiles and the strategy would involve recycling cotton waste (Asaadi et al., 2016; Björquist et al., 2018). Cotton wastes are mainly mechanically recycled, leading to fibres with poor quality that are commonly blended with virgin cotton (De Silva & Byrne, 2017). In this way, a new approach emerges and consists on the chemical recycling of textile/cotton waste, with or without blending with dissolving wood pulps (Asaadi et al., 2016; Björquist et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2019). Some studies have already been developed in this context, using NMMO (Björquist et al., 2018; Haule et al., 2016a, 2016b) and other ILs as solvents (Asaadi et al., 2016, De Silva & Byrne, 2017; Ma et al., 2019a; Nasri-Nasrabadi et al., 2020). Studies were also carried out using alkaline hydrolysis (Peters et al., 2019), or even trials where cotton waste is used as a raw material in the carbamate process (Paunonen et al., 2019). The studies involving the dissolution of cotton wastes in NMMO showed that the fibres obtained have higher mechanical properties than typical lyocell fibres and similar supramolecular structure (Björquist et al., 2018; Haule et al., 2016a, 2016b).

Among the ILs used in rayon fibres production, only few were used in dissolution of cotton wastes, namely [DBNH][OAc] (Asaadi et al., 2016), [Amim]Cl (De Silva et al., 2014; De Silva & Byrne, 2017; Lv et al., 2015), and [C₄mim][OAc] (Ma et al., 2019a; Ma et al., 2019b; Nasri-Nasrabadi et al., 2020). These studies reveal that the fibres obtained have higher tenacities values than natural cotton fibres and

higher crystallinity index than lyocell fibres (Asaadi et al., 2016). In addition, it was proved that it is possible to dissolve cotton wastes with high DP values in ionic liquids, and that exists a direct relation between the DP value and the mechanical properties of fibres (De Silva & Byrne, 2017). In order to improve the recycling of textile wastes Ma and co-workers proposed a closed loop process using a binary solvent ($[C_4mim][OAc]$ as solvent and DMSO as co-solvent), where the resulting fibres reveal mechanical and morphological properties similar to those of viscose fibres (Ma et al., 2019a; Ma et al., 2019b).

Nowadays, a significant part of textiles comprises blend of fibres which difficult the recycling of these wastes. Accepting this challenge, studies were carried out to separate cotton from the blends with synthetic fibres by taking advantage of the ILs selectivity (De Silva et al., 2014; Haslinger et al., 2019; Lv et al., 2015), by the hydrothermal treatment of cellulose (For et al., 2018), or by the degradation of one of the components (e.g., PET) (Palme et al., 2017). It was also found that the dopes with cotton viscosities out of the $450-550 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ range are not spinnable, observing the formation of breaks and agglomerates that prevent the precise design of the fibres (Asaadi et al., 2016). According to the promising results of these recent works, the chemical recovery of textile waste has become an important path for its recovery, fulfilling the concepts of environmental safety and contributing to the circular economy in agreement with the biorefinery principles. Moreover, these results triggered new promising studies that fit the previous principles, and include the recycling of waste paper and cardboard (Ma et al., 2016), paper sludge (a by-product from paper industry) (Adu et al., 2021), or waste newsprint (Ma et al., 2018) to produce textile fibres.

5. Concluding remarks

Rayon fibres are a suitable substitute for natural textile fibres such as cotton, which are no longer sufficient to meet market demands. This explains the constant trend of increasing rayon fibre production by more than twice over two decades of the 21st century, inducing an annual consumption of dissolving pulp of up to almost 9 million tons. Although wood is the main source for the production dissolving pulp (*ca.* 85 %), the contribution of non-woody plants (e.g., cotton linters, hemp, bamboo, etc.) becomes quite remarkable. Nowadays, almost 95% of rayon fibres are produced by the conventional viscose process, which provide moderate quality rayon fibres and is far from being environmentally friendly. Consequently, alternative approaches are seeking to replace conventional viscose production. Novel processes dealing with the direct dissolution of cellulose in appropriate recyclable solvents have gained especial attention, being the lyocell process the only direct dissolution process currently commercialized. At the same time, high production costs, exploration limitations of lyocell fibers (e.g. excessive fibrillation under wet condition), cellulose and NMMO side reactions and by-products formed along this process have stimulated the development of alternative cost-competitive approaches with better technical performance. Proposed direct cellulose dissolution systems include advanced ionic liquids, deep eutectic solvents, alkali-based and concentrated inorganic salt solutions. Despite all the efforts to obtain rayon fibers using the aforementioned direct cellulose dissolution systems, the most outstanding results from the point of view of the technical and economic feasibility of the process and the strength of rayon fibers were obtained using few classes of ionic liquids. Chemical recycling of cotton waste represents another promising tool to complete the lack of natural fibres on the market, challenging researchers to new solutions.

Credit authorship contribution statement

Inês S. F. Mendes: Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft. **Dmitry V. Evtuguin:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Acknowledgments

The financial support of this work by Caima – Indústria de Celulose S.A. within the scope of the PhD project of Inês S. F. Mendes and by CICECO-Aveiro Institute of Materials, UIDB/50011/2020 & UIDP/50011/2020, financed by national funds through the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology/MCTES, are greatly acknowledged.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.carbpol.2021.xxxxxx>.

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