



**TELLES CARDOSO SILVA**

**ATIVAÇÃO DA LIGAÇÃO C-H NO METANO POR  
COMPLEXOS NbX<sub>5</sub> (X= F, Cl, Br e I) E ESPÉCIES CoO<sub>m</sub><sup>n+</sup>  
(m= 1, 2; n = 0, 1, 2): MECANISMO DE REAÇÃO,  
PARÂMETROS ESTRUTURAIS E ELETRÔNICOS**

**LAVRAS - MG  
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Tese apresentada à Universidade Federal de Lavras, como parte das exigências do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Agroquímica, área de concentração em Química/Bioquímica, para a obtenção do título de doutor.

Prof. Dr. Teodorico de Castro Ramalho  
Orientador

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 $\text{Cl}$ ,  $\text{Br}$  e  $\text{I}$ ) e espécies  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ): mecanismo de  
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**ACTIVATION OF C-H BOND IN METHANE BY NbX<sub>5</sub> COMPLEXES  
(X= F, Cl, Br and I) AND CoO<sub>m</sub><sup>n+</sup> SPECIES (m = 1, 2; n = 0, 1, 2):  
REACTION MECHANISM, STRUCTURAL AND ELECTRONIC PARAMETERS**

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*A minha família, pelo carinho e apoio incondicional, em todas as minhas decisões,  
nas diferentes etapas da minha vida.*

*A minha noiva, pelo companheirismo e amor.*

*Dedico*

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**“Quando Deus quer, não há quem não queira.”**

Aryton Senna

## RESUMO GERAL

As exigências energéticas atuais e futuras da sociedade demandam recursos duradouros e sustentáveis que não contribuem para a mudança climática global e instabilidade energética. Sendo assim, pesquisas têm sido realizadas no intuito de propiciar a utilização de fontes alternativas para a produção de energia, que sejam mais eficientes do ponto de vista ambiental, econômico e social. A ativação do metano na fase gasosa, por metais de transição, tem atraído grande atenção de pesquisadores, em razão da sua importância científica e industrial. Nesse aspecto, o presente trabalho é um esforço no sentido de avaliar, do ponto de vista computacional, a reatividade dos complexos de Nióbio  $\text{NbX}_5$  X= (F, Cl, Br e I) e dos óxidos de  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ) no processo de ativação da ligação C-H do metano, que corresponde à etapa limitante do processo de conversão do metano a produtos de elevado valor econômico. Essas espécies foram escolhidas, a princípio, em decorrência do fato dos óxidos de cobalto serem candidatos promissores para a conversão de metano a metanol. A motivação principal da escolha dos complexos de nióbio é a grande abundância de reservas naturais desse mineral (98%) no Brasil, particularmente em Minas Gerais. Inicialmente, neste trabalho, uma investigação minuciosa foi realizada utilizando diferentes metodologias teóricas para analisar as propriedades estruturais, eletrônicas e de ligação das espécies em questão. Essas análises tiveram como objetivo avaliar e validar as metodologias empregadas, de modo a perceber as que melhor descrevem essas espécies e suas características químicas. A partir desses resultados, o processo de ativação da ligação C-H do metano foi investigado, considerando todos os possíveis mecanismos de reação conhecidos em fase gasosa. Cabe ressaltar, neste ponto, que não existem na literatura, até o presente momento, trabalhos envolvendo complexos de Nióbio na ativação da ligação C-H. Para os óxidos de cobalto não foram encontrados trabalhos nos quais todos os mecanismos aqui considerados tenham sido investigados e comparados entre si. De modo geral, os resultados indicaram que as energias eletrostáticas  $\Delta E_{\text{elast}}$  e orbitais  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  foram responsáveis para a estabilidade dos complexos de nióbio e óxidos de cobalto. Em relação à reatividade das espécies estudadas, os resultados globais para os complexos de nióbio indicaram melhores condições termodinâmicas e cinéticas para o complexo  $\text{NbF}_5$ . Em relação aos óxidos de cobalto, a baixa densidade eletrônica dessas espécies e os ligantes oxo são importantes para a cinética e termodinâmica da reação e o mecanismo de 4-centros ou Migração Oxidativa do Hidrogênio (OHM) é termodinamicamente mais favorável que o DHA. Entre os óxidos de cobalto investigados,  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  mostrou uma melhor performance cinética e termodinâmica na reação com o metano.

**Palavras-chave:** Ativação da ligação C-H. Metano. Estudo teórico. Óxidos de cobalto. Complexos de nióbio.

## GENERAL ABSTRACT

The current and future energy demands of the society aim for sustainable and durable resources that do not contribute to global climate change and energy instability. Therefore, researches have been carried out in order to promote the use of alternative sources for energy production that are more efficient from the environmental, economic, and social point of view. The methane activation in the gas phase by transition metals has attracted great attention from researchers because of its scientific and industrial importance. In this aspect, the present work is an effort in order to evaluate, from the computational standpoint, the reactivity of the Niobium complexes  $\text{NbX}_5$  X = (F, Cl, Br and I) and  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  oxides ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ) in the methane CH bond activation process, which corresponds to the limiting step of the methane conversion process to high economic value products. These species were chosen, in principle, because cobalt oxides are promising candidates for the methane to methanol conversion. The main motivation for the choice of niobium complexes is the great abundance of natural reserves of this mineral (98%) in Brazil, particularly in Minas Gerais. Initially, in this work, a detailed investigation was carried out by using different theoretical methodologies to analyze the structural, electronic and binding properties of the species in question. The aim of these analyzes was to evaluate and validate the methodologies employed in order to understand the ones that best describe these species and their chemical characteristics. From these results, the methane C-H bond activation process was investigated considering all possible known reaction mechanisms in the gas phase. It should be noticed at this point that there are currently no studies in the literature involving Niobium complexes in the C-H bond activation. As for cobalt oxides, no study was found in which all mechanisms considered here were investigated and compared to each other. In general, the results indicated that the electrostatic  $\Delta E_{\text{elast}}$  and orbital  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  energies were responsible for the stability of the niobium complexes and cobalt oxides. In relation to the reactivity of the species studied, the overall results for the niobium complexes indicated better thermodynamic and kinetic conditions for the  $\text{NbF}_5$  complex. Regarding the cobalt oxides, the low electron density of these species and the oxo ligands are important for the kinetics and thermodynamics of the reaction, and the OHM mechanism is thermodynamically more favorable than the DHA. Among the investigated cobalt oxides,  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  showed better kinetic and thermodynamic performance in the reaction with methane.

**Keywords:** C-H bond activation. Methane. Theoretical study. Cobalt oxides. Niobium complexes.

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## LISTA DE SIGLAS

ADF	Amsterdam Density Functional
BCP	Ponto Crítico da Ligação
BLYP	Funcional GGA de Combinação do Funcional de Troca Beck com de correlação de Lee, Yang e Parr.
BP	Funcional GGA de Perdew e Beck
CCD	Coupled Cluster Doubles
CCSD (T)	Coupled Cluster com excitações simples, duplas e triplas
C-H	Ligação Carbono-Hidrogênio
CH <sub>3</sub> OH	Metanol
CH <sub>4</sub>	Metano
CMD	Metalação Desprotonação Concertada
Co	Cobalto
CO <sub>2</sub>	Dióxido de carbono
C-X	Ligação Carbono Átomo Funcional
DHA	Abstração Direta de Hidrogênio
DZ	Duplo Zeta
EDA	Análise de Decomposição de Energia
E <sub>xc</sub>	Funcional de Correlação e Troca
GGA	Aproximação de Gradiente Generalizado
GN	Gás Natural
HF	Hartree Fock
HOMO	Orbital Molecular Ocupado de Mais Alta Energia
IRC	Coordenadas de Reações Intrísecas
LDA	Aproximação de Densidade Local
LUMO	Orbital Molecular Desocupado de Mais Baixa Energia
M	Metais de Transição
MBPT	Teoria de perturbação de muitos corpos
Ml <sub>n</sub>	Complexos Metálicos
MO	Óxidos de Metais de Transição
MOs	Orbitais Moleculares
Nb	Níobio
NbX <sub>5</sub>	Complexos de Níobio

OHM	Migração Oxidativa do Hidrogênio
OMH	Oxidative Hydrogen Migration
PC	Produto Complexo
PM	Precursor Molecular
PW91	Funcional GGA de Perdew/Wang 1991
QC	Química Computacional
QTAIM	Teoria Quântica de Átomos e Moléculas
STO	Orbitais do tipo Slater
TS	Estado de Transição
TZ	Triple Zeta
TZ2P	Função Triple Zeta Duplo Polarizada
X	Halogênios (F, Cl, Br e I)
ZORA	Aproximação de Ordem Regular Zero
ZORA-SO	Cálculos Spin Órbita

## LISTA DE SÍMBOLOS

$\nabla^2\rho$	Laplaciano da densidade eletrônica
$\rho(r)$	Densidade eletrônica
$\sigma$	Orbital molecular ligante
$\sigma^*$	Orbital molecular antiligante
$\zeta$	Expoente orbital zeta

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## PRIMEIRA PARTE

### **1 INTRODUÇÃO**

Energia é um insumo de grande importância para a sociedade, pois desempenha papel fundamental no seu desenvolvimento socioeconômico. Dessa forma, a busca por fontes de energia sempre foi uma preocupação da humanidade. Ao longo da sua história, diversos sistemas energéticos têm sido selecionados em função de alguns parâmetros fundamentais, tais como: disponibilidade, viabilidade econômica, tensões geopolíticas e, principalmente, os impactos ambientais causados pelos combustíveis fósseis (GUR, 2016; HOLLAND et al., 2018; NGUYEN et al., 2015; SHAHSAVARI; AKBARI, 2018; THIRUVENGADAM et al., 2018; VICH, 2009).

A compreensão desses parâmetros, aliada à redução das reservas de petróleo em torno do mundo, tem sido a força motriz para a investigação e desenvolvimento de fontes alternativas de energia que sejam compatíveis com o meio ambiente, altamente eficientes e mais seguras (GUR, 2016; LAVEZZO, 2016; NGUYEN et al., 2015; PETERSON; HUSTRULID, 1998; SHAY, 1993; SILVA, 2012; THIRUVENGADAM et al., 2018; WENDT; GÖTZ; LINARDI, 2000).

Nesse contexto, o gás natural (GN) tem sido apontado como uma alternativa interessante ao petróleo, em razão da sua disponibilidade no mercado industrial resultante da descoberta de vastas reservas que contribuíram para reduzir o seu preço, além de ser um combustível fóssil menos poluente (GIODA, 2018; GUR, 2016; HORN; SCHLOGL, 2015; SHAHSAVARI; AKBARI, 2018; SLOAN, 2003). Sua composição é, principalmente, de hidrocarbonetos leves, sendo o metano ( $\text{CH}_4$ ) o seu principal constituinte (90%). Normalmente, o gás natural apresenta baixos teores de contaminantes (alto grau de pureza), e por esse motivo, é considerado um combustível limpo, além de ser mais econômico e eficiente em relação a outros tipos de combustíveis (GUNSAUS et al., 2017; GUR, 2016; SANTOS et al., 2002; SHAHSAVARI; AKBARI, 2018).

O metano, como um dos principais constituintes do gás natural, é uma fonte abundante de matéria-prima de alto valor (GUNSAUS et al., 2017; GUO; LOU; ZHENG, 2009; HAN et al., 2016; TSUJI; YOSHIZAWA, 2018). No entanto, existem alguns empecilhos relacionados à sua utilização, como, por exemplo, a dificuldade de aproveitá-lo quimicamente, e além do mais, a maior parte das reservas de gás natural localizam-se em

áreas remotas de difícil acesso. Dessa maneira, seu transporte e armazenamento se tornam inconvenientes e economicamente inviáveis. Consequentemente, esses problemas têm proporcionado o avanço das tecnologias designadas em monetizar as opções de conversão do gás natural para produtos químicos líquidos de maior valor agregado (como álcoois, aldeídos, cetona) de uma maneira limpa, econômica e ambientalmente correta (CABALLERO; PÉREZ, 2013; CRABTREE, 1995; GUNSAULUS et al., 2017; HAN et al., 2016).

Um tema central de pesquisa em química moderna, que tem despertado a atenção de diversos pesquisadores, é a ativação da ligação C-H do metano em fase gasosa por metais de transição. Os estudos dessas reações têm proporcionado uma riqueza de conhecimentos sobre as interações intrínsecas entre o sítio ativo de catalisadores e substratos orgânicos (ALMEIDA et al., 2015; CABARELERO; PÉREZ, 2013; SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; SILVA et al., 2016; SUN; HULL; CUNDARI, 2018).

O desafio principal dessa área de pesquisa é a ativação do metano em condições ambiente para, posteriormente, permitir uma transformação seletiva dos produtos intermediários a úteis, como o metanol. Para isso, vários estudos estão sendo realizados em busca de catalisadores que possam ativar a ligação C-H de forma eficiente e seletiva, viabilizando, dessa maneira, a sua aplicação em grande escala (ALMEIDA et al., 2015; DAVIES et al., 2001; GUNSAULUS et al., 2017; HALL; PERUTZ, 1996; SCHRÖDER; SCHWARZ, 2008; SHILOV; SHUL'PIN, 1997; SILVA et al., 2016; TSUJI; YOSHIZAWA, 2018). Os metais de transição surgem como uma alternativa, por se tratar de um sistema de modelo interessante, passível de estudos experimentais e teóricos detalhados (AGUIRRE, 2002; CABARELERO; PÉREZ, 2013), sendo que as reações catalisadas por esses metais podem prosseguir em mais de uma superfície de energia potencial (ROITHOVA; SCHRODER, 2010; SCHAWARZ, 2011; SCHRODER; SHAIK; SCHWARZ, 2000).

Dentre os metais de transição que podem ser empregados no processo de ativação do metano, os complexos de Nióbio ( $\text{NbX}_5$ , X= F, Cl, Br e I) e os protótipos de óxidos de cobalto  $\text{CoO}^{n+}_m$  ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ) despertam um interesse especial, em razão da facilidade de obtenção e abundância na crosta terrestre, e por serem promissores para a ativação da ligação C-H, dentre outros fatores (BONDI et al., 2015; BRESCIANI et al., 2018; MOSELAGE et al., 2015; OLIVEIRA; FABRIS; FERREIRA, 2013; YANG; HU; QUIN, 2006; YOSHIDA et al., 1996).

Nesse contexto, foi realizado um estudo teórico detalhado das características geométricas, eletrônicas e de ligação das espécies em estudo, utilizando diferentes

metodologias teóricas, além da análise termodinâmica e cinética de cada aspecto dos mecanismos de ativação da ligação C-H do metano por complexos de Nióbio ( $\text{NbX}_5$  X= F, Cl, Br e I) e os protótipos de óxidos de cobalto  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ).

## 2 OBJETIVOS

Como visto, é de grande importância a busca de utilizações mais eficientes dos recursos potenciais e inexplorados de gás natural. Nesse sentido, o objetivo geral do presente estudo é utilizar metodologias de cálculos baseadas na mecânica quântica para obter informações termodinâmicas e cinéticas sobre os mecanismos de reação envolvidos no processo de ativação da ligação C-H do metano utilizando complexos de Nióbio NbX<sub>5</sub> (X= F, Cl, Br e I) e a série de óxidos de CoO<sub>m</sub><sup>n+</sup> e (m= 1, 2; n= 0, 1, 2).

Os objetivos específicos podem ser descritos da seguinte forma:

- a) Estudar as características geométricas, eletrônicas e a natureza das ligações químicas das espécies. Para isso, serão utilizados cálculos de Teoria quântica de átomos em moléculas (QTAIM) e Análise de decomposição de energia (EDA), que são considerados métodos mais novos e eficientes para esse tipo de simulação;
- b) Investigar a reatividade química dos complexos de nióbio e óxidos de cobalto frente a ativação do metano. Além disso, pretende-se correlacionar as propriedades geométricas e de ligação com os parâmetros termodinâmicos e cinéticos obtidos nos mecanismos analisados;
- c) Utilizar o método de Coordenadas de Reações Intrínsecas (IRC), para a determinação das energias potenciais e coordenadas da reação.

Com base nesse contexto, o presente trabalho está dividido em duas partes: a primeira está centralizada em uma abordagem geral do assunto estudado; a segunda consiste na descrição dos resultados na forma de artigos. O primeiro artigo aborda o estudo das propriedades eletrônicas e de ligação dos complexos de Nióbio e o mecanismo da ativação da ligação C-H. O segundo, aborda a reatividade dos óxidos de cobalto na conversão do metano a metanol.

### **3 REFERENCIAL TEÓRICO**

#### **3.1 Necessidade de substituição da energia dominante**

A utilização de energia tem sido crucial para o desenvolvimento econômico, industrial e do padrão de vida da sociedade humana, e esse desenvolvimento sempre esteve associado às formas de obtenção de energia (INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY- IEA, 2017; NGUYEN et al., 2015; SHAHSAVARI; AKBARI, 2018). A busca por diversas fontes energéticas tem sido realizada ao longo do tempo e, na medida em que iam sendo descobertas e utilizadas, tais fontes imprimiam novos rumos para a evolução da sociedade humana (CARVALHO, 2009, 2014; LAVEZZO, 2016). No período pré-industrial, a lenha e o carvão vegetal eram praticamente os únicos meios energéticos utilizados pela humanidade. A partir da revolução industrial, a matriz energética foi alterada e o carvão mineral passou a ter um papel importante na economia (FARIAS; SELLITO, 2011; GOLDEMBERG; LUCON, 2007; RICARDO; CLÁUDIA, 2005).

Diante da expansão tecnológica e com a descoberta dos derivados de petróleo, no final do século XIX, o carvão mineral perdeu o seu espaço na matriz energética e o petróleo tornou-se a principal fonte de energia do mundo moderno (FARIAS; SELLITTO, 2011; GOLDEMBERG; LUCON, 2007; RICARDO; CLÁUDIA, 2005).

Por ser um combustível de extrema necessidade para o funcionamento da economia mundial, a expansão do consumo de petróleo aconteceu, inicialmente, graças à indústria automobilística, naval e ferroviária. Em decorrência desse consumo acelerado, grandes indústrias petrolíferas buscaram capitanear a exploração desse recurso, principalmente na região do Oriente Médio, detentora das maiores reservas conhecidas e a principal região exportadora de petróleo. Dessa forma, o petróleo passou a ser utilizado como elemento de influência nas relações geopolíticas contemporâneas, em decorrência da não distribuição uniforme das suas reservas sob a superfície terrestre (AGÊNCIA NACIONAL DO PETRÓLEO, GÁS NATURAL E BIOCOMBUSTÍVEIS, 2014; BARROS, 2007).

Por causa da grande dependência da sociedade moderna em relação aos combustíveis fósseis, o consumo do petróleo passou a ser superior às descobertas, como pode ser visto na Tabela 1. Por ser uma fonte de energia não renovável, e segundo estudos geológicos, o pico da produção mundial de petróleo ocorrerá nos próximos cem anos (BARROS, 2007; SCHUCHARDT; RIBEIRO, 2001). Entretanto, antes de declinar abruptamente, o consumo

deverá oscilar sob crescentes dificuldades na exploração, implicando um comportamento errático da demanda (CARVALHO, 2009; LAVEZZO, 2016).

Tabela 1 - Novas descobertas de petróleo *versus* consumo (em Gbep/ano).

Ano	Descobertas	Consumo
1930	10,82	1,72
1940	26,36	2,54
1950	31,82	4,53
1960	49,27	8,90
1970	33,45	18,18
1980	27,27	22,72
1990	14,54	24,09
2000	10,09	28,18
2010	6,82*	34,10 <sup>x</sup>
2020	4,55*	40,45 <sup>x</sup>
2030	2,82*	46,30 <sup>x</sup>

\*Extrapolações, não incluídas as reservas do pré-sal <sup>x</sup> Previsões (CARVALHO, 2009).

Além do eventual esgotamento das reservas de petróleo e os seus reflexos na economia, os combustíveis fósseis são um dos grandes responsáveis pelo aumento das emissões de CO<sub>2</sub>, um dos principais gases responsáveis pelo efeito estufa (LI et al., 2018; SHAHSAVARI; AKBARI, 2018). Em razão desse aumento de gases do efeito estufa, a temperatura média da Terra aumentará entre 1,8 e 4°C, até o ano de 2100, e isso deverá acelerar o derretimento das geleiras, elevar o nível do mar (que podem impactar zonas costeiras), além de provocar alterações no equilíbrio do planeta (CORDEIRO et al., 2011; GIODA, 2018; LAVEZZO, 2016). Esses impactos ambientais aliados à perda e degradação da biodiversidade são reconhecidos como estando entre os desafios mais substanciais que a humanidade enfrenta no século XXI (HOLLAND et al., 2018).

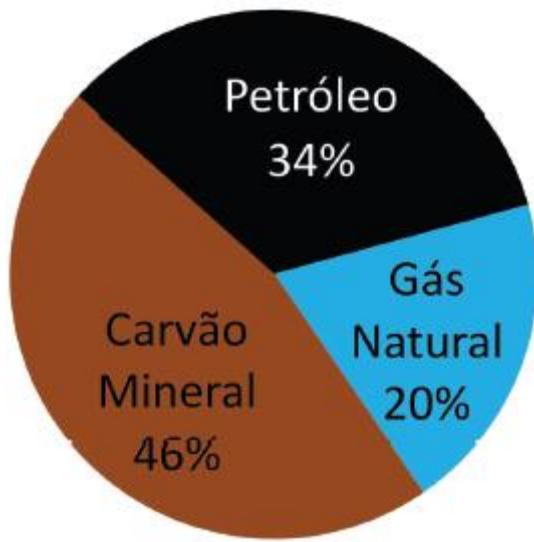
Tendo em vista a redução das reservas mundiais de petróleo, aliada às preocupações atuais para se desenvolver tecnologias menos agressivas ao meio ambiente, com o objetivo de mitigar o impacto ambiental das emissões de CO<sub>2</sub>, a pesquisa por fontes alternativas de energia tem sido impulsionada, despertando interesse na comunidade científica, na busca por novas matrizes energéticas (COUTTENYE; VILA; SUIB, 2005; IEA, 2017; LAVEZZO, 2016; NGUYEN et al., 2015; SILVA, 2012).

Esse interesse deve-se não apenas à conscientização das preocupações ambientais e às mudanças políticas associadas, mas também a medidas externas, vinculadas a compromissos internacionais para estabelecer metas e criar formas de desenvolvimento que não sejam

prejudiciais ao Planeta, como o Protocolo de Kyoto, criado em 1997, no Japão (GIODA, 2018; SILVA, 2012). Esse protocolo estabelece um limite para as emissões de gases do efeito de estufa, nomeadamente o dióxido de carbono ( $\text{CO}_2$ ), para os países industrializados (GIODA, 2018; SILVA, 2012). Essas questões devem impulsionar a dinâmica do mercado para encontrar recursos alternativos e promissores.

Nesse contexto, o gás natural, atualmente surge como um recurso promissor para o suprimento de energia e como a melhor alternativa para realizar, de forma ordenada e segura, a transição da sociedade industrial atual para uma nova sociedade tecnológica (GUR, 2016; HORN; SCHLOGL, 2015; RAVI; RANOCCHIARI; VAN BOCKHOVEN, 2017; SANTOS et al., 2002; SCHMAL, 2005; SLOAN, 2003). No campo econômico, o uso do gás natural é extremamente viável, pois é um combustível mais barato e, ambientalmente, menos poluidor que outros derivados de fontes de energia não renováveis (FIGURA 1) (GIODA, 2018; SCHMAL, 2005; SANTOS et al., 2002).

Figura 1 - Perfil de emissões de  $\text{CO}_2$  no mundo pela queima de combustíveis provenientes de fonte primária de energia.



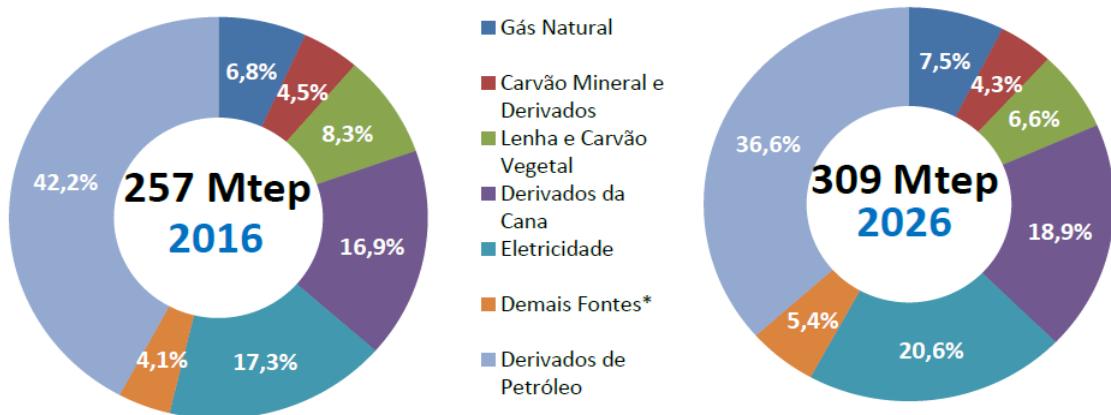
Fonte: Instituto de Energia e Meio Ambiente – IEMA (2017).

Sob a perspectiva do consumo por fonte, o gás natural é a única fonte fóssil que ganha espaço na indústria brasileira e estima-se que o setor industrial se consolide como principal consumidor de gás natural em 2026 (EMPRESA DE PESQUISA ENERGÉTICA - EPE, 2017). As demais fontes fósseis, notadamente o carvão mineral e os derivados de petróleo,

têm redução de importância, no período de 2016 a 2026, como relatada na Figura 2 (EPE, 2017).

Essa penetração do gás natural na indústria consiste nas suas diversas aplicabilidades e vantagens com relação à logística, ao rendimento e manutenção dos equipamentos e, também, por ser um substituto direto de grande parte dos combustíveis industriais (EPE, 2017; TOLMASQUIM; GUERREIRO; GORINI, 2007).

Figura 2 - Consumo de energia por fonte.



Notas: Dados preliminares para 2016.

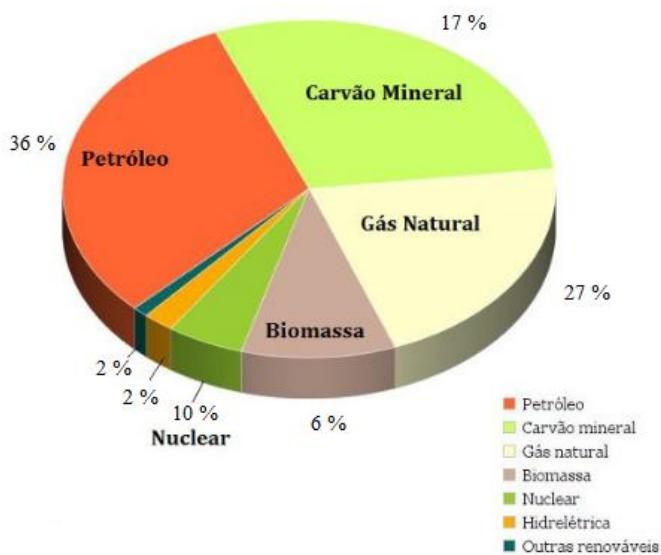
\*Inclui biodiesel, outras renováveis e outras não renováveis.

Fonte: EPE (2017).

### 3.2 Gás Natural

O gás natural (GN) é um dos combustíveis mais utilizados no mundo (FIGURA 3), por ser menos poluente que outros combustíveis fósseis e em razão de seu potencial energético e disponibilidade, que o torna propício para investimentos e utilização em indústrias (BP DISTRIBUTION SERVICES, 2017; GUNSALUS et al., 2017; SANTOS et al., 2002; THIRUVENGADAM et al., 2018;). Outro ponto interessante para a utilização do gás natural como um importante recurso energético foi a descoberta de vastas reservas não convencionais de gás de xisto que aumentaram, enormemente, sua abundância, ao mesmo tempo em que diminuíram seu custo (GUR, 2016; THIRUVENGADAM et al., 2018). Dessa forma, o GN pode servir como combustível ponte, durante as próximas décadas, para fazer a transição para uma economia de energia de carbono (GUR, 2016; WEO, 2017).

Figura 3 - Matriz energética mundial.



Fonte: BP Distribution Services (2017).

Sua utilização começou no Irã entre 6000 e 2000 a.C, mas só foi introduzido no mercado europeu em 1659, como primeiro combustível responsável pela iluminação de casas e ruas, decorrente da descoberta do seu potencial energético (FRIOEREZE et al., 2013; SANTOS et al., 2002). Já nos Estados Unidos, a sua utilização deu início nos anos de 1659 e, no Brasil, a sua utilização começou, modestamente, por volta de 1940, com as descobertas de óleo e gás na Bahia, atendendo a indústrias localizadas no Recôncavo Baiano. (FRIOEREZE et al., 2013). Atualmente, esse recurso energético vem ganhando cada vez mais espaço, como fonte energética global, em razão principalmente, das exigências ambientais e das suas grandes descobertas.

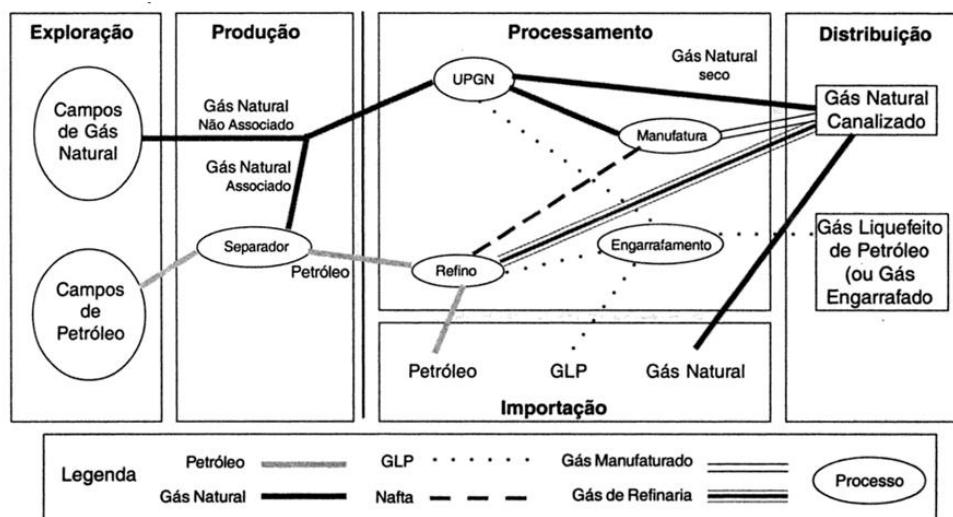
O GN é um combustível fóssil, constituído por uma mistura de hidrocarbonetos que permaneça em estado gasoso, ou associados ao petróleo em jazidas ou depósitos subterrâneos, e que se mantenha no estado gasoso nas condições atmosféricas normais com base na definição estabelecida na Lei nº 9.478/97. É extraído diretamente de reservatórios petrolíferos ou gaseíferos (ANP, 2014; SANTOS et al., 2002; SANTOS; RIBEIRO; MIRANDA, 2012).

A maior parte do gás natural origina-se de processos termogênicos, biogênicos e abiógênicos que utilizam pressão, temperatura e microrganismos para a sua formação (ASSOCIAÇÃO BRASILEIRA DE GRANDE CONSUMIDORES INDUSTRIAIS DE ENERGIA E DE CONSUMIDORES LIVRES - ABRACE, 2015; CRABTREE, 1995; FARAMAWY; ZAKI; SAKR, 2016). Os processos termogênicos envolvem a decomposição relativamente lenta de material orgânico sob a influência da temperatura e pressão e os

biogênicos formam o metano pela ação de organismos vivos em materiais orgânicos durante a deposição dos sedimentos. Os processos abiógênicos utilizam gases vulcânicos como material de partida para a produção do metano (FARAMAWY; ZAKI; SAKR, 2016).

O modo de extração do GN é dividido em três segmentos com atividades interligadas de exploração, produção, processamentos, transportes e distribuição (FIGURA 4) (SANTOS et al., 2002). O primeiro segmento consiste em um conjunto de atividades de exploração tanto em bacias terrestres (onshore) quanto em bacias marítimas (offshore) e produção. Esse segmento é tipicamente caracterizado por alto grau de risco e custos operacionais. Os outros dois segmentos estão relacionados ao processamento, transporte e distribuição para os consumidores finais (ABRACE, 2015; FARAMAWY; ZAKI; SAKR, 2016; GÁS..., 2014; SANTOS et al., 2002). O processamento do gás é realizado nas Unidades de Processamento de Gás Natural (UPGNs) para secagem e remoção de impurezas e contaminantes (tais como enxofre, dióxido de carbono e metais pesados) e também para adequar o gás à regulamentação dos mercados consumidores quanto às suas propriedades físico-químicas (GÁS..., 2014).

Figura 4 - Cadeia do gás natural.



Fonte: Santos et al. (2002).

Sua composição e qualidade variam bastante, de campo para campo, o que depende de estar associado ou não ao óleo, ao tipo de matéria orgânica que lhe deu origem, condições geológicas, e também, pelo fato de ter sido ou não processado em indústrias. Em geral, é composto por uma mistura de hidrocarbonetos gasosos, tendo o metano o seu maior constituinte (TABELA 2). Apresenta também pequenas quantidades de componentes

diluentes, como o nitrogênio e o vapor d`água, e baixos teores de contaminantes (gás sulfídrico e dióxido de carbono) em seu estado bruto (BAKER; LOKHANDWALA, 2008; FRIOREZE et al., 2013; GUNSAULUS et al., 2017; SANTOS et al., 2002; THIRUVENGADAM et al., 2018).

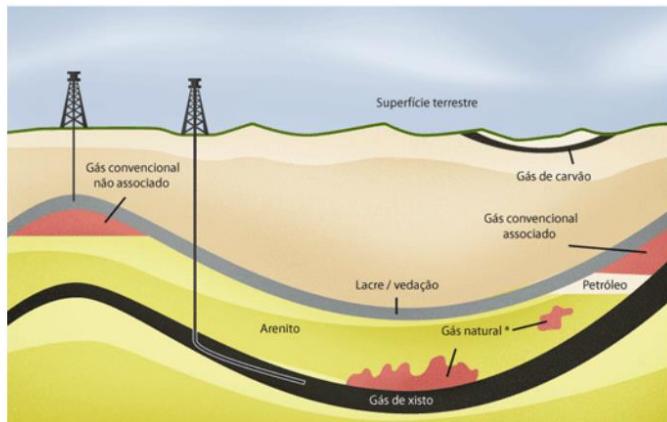
Tabela 2 - Composições químicas do gás natural.

Elementos	Gás Associado	Gás Não Associado	Gás Processado
Metano	78,74	87,12	88,56
Etano	5,66	6,35	9,17
Propano	3,97	2,91	0,42
I-Butano	1,44	0,52	-
N-Butano	3,06	0,87	-
I-Pentano	1,09	0,25	-
N-Pentano	1,84	0,23	-
Hexano	1,80	0,18	-
Superiores	1,70	0,20	-
Nitrogênio	0,28	1,13	1,20
Dióxido de Carbono	0,43	0,24	0,65
Total	100	100	100

Fonte: Frioreze et al. (2013).

Como base na sua origem e composição química, o gás natural pode ser classificado em gás convencional e não convencional (FIGURA 5) (FARAMAWY; ZAKI; SAKR, 2016; KIDNAY; PARRISH, 2006; SANTOS et al., 2002; THIRUVENGADAM et al., 2018). O gás convencional é encontrado no subsolo, em depósitos ou reservatórios profundos, e pode estar associado ao petróleo (gás associado) ou em reservatórios que contêm pouco ou nenhum petróleo (gás não associado). Já o gás não convencional pode ser considerado todo o gás natural cuja extração é mais complexa e encontrado em xisto de baixa permeabilidade, arenitos e calcários (gás de xisto), locado em reservatórios a grande profundidade (deep gas) ou em águas profundas (deep water) (ABRACE, 2015; FARAMAWY; ZAKI; SAKR, 2016; SANTOS et al., 2002). Temos ainda o gás de carvão (coalbed methane) que é formado pela ação da temperatura e pressão na matéria orgânica enterrada que é lentamente transformada em carvão (ABRACE, 2015; FARAMAWY; ZAKI; SAKR, 2016; SANTOS et al., 2002).

Figura 5 - Tipos de recursos do gás natural.



Fonte: ABRACE (2015).

A versatilidade é a principal característica do gás natural, além de outras propriedades importantes: emite menos poluentes se comparado ao petróleo e ao carvão mineral, é mais leve que o ar (densidade 0,6 g/ml), é inodoro, inflamável e asfixiante quando aspirado em altas concentrações. Por ser inodoro, são adicionados compostos à base de enxofre, do tipo mercaptano, ao gás para lhe conferir um cheiro marcante e facilitar, portanto, a sua identificação quando estiver vazando, evitando, assim, riscos de explosões. Por já estar no estado gasoso, o gás natural não precisa ser atomizado para queimar. Isso resulta em uma eficiência na queima superior aos combustíveis líquidos e uma redução na emissão de gases e partículas sólidas e outros produtos tóxicos para a atmosfera (MEDEIROS, 2013; SANTOS et al., 2002, 2007).

Em razão de suas propriedades, o gás natural tem um grande leque de aplicações, tanto em uso industrial quanto em uso doméstico. O GN é utilizado na exploração petrolífera para aumentar a pressão em poços de petróleo facilitando a captação do óleo. É empregado na geração de eletricidade e aquecimento de residências, como matéria-prima na indústria petroquímica e de fertilizantes, e existe ainda a possibilidade de se converter o gás natural diretamente em combustíveis líquidos (ROSTRUP-NIELSEN; SEHESTED; NORSKOV, 2002). O seu uso como combustível automotivo, em motores de combustão interna e turbinas a gás, reduz a emissão de poluentes, além de aumentar a vida do motor, e reduzindo assim os custos de manutenção (GUO; LOU; ZHENG, 2009; PINHEIRO, 1996).

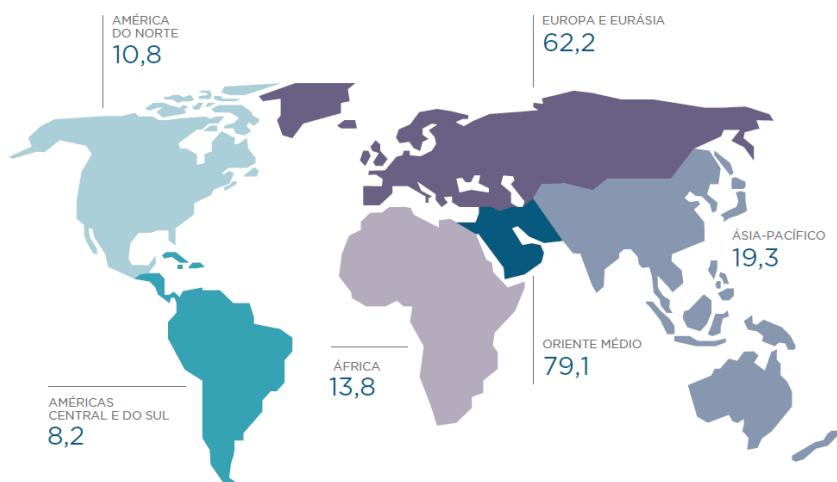
O GN é uma fonte abundante de energia limpa, com reservas mais uniformemente distribuídas e maiores que as de petróleo, possibilitando que este seja um insumo energético

de suprimento mais seguro (BP DISTRIBUTION SERVICES, 2017; GUNSALUS et al., 2017; GUR, 2015; SANTOS et al., 2002).

Em 2017, as reservas provadas mundiais somaram 193,5 trilhões de m<sup>3</sup> (FIGURA 6), concentrando-se a maior parte (40,9%) no Oriente Médio, seguido da Europa e Eurásia com a participação de 32,1% do total. As Américas Central e do Sul registraram 8,2% e, na África, as reservas mantiveram-se estáveis, totalizando 13,8 trilhões de m<sup>3</sup> (AGÊNCIA NACIONAL DO PETRÓLEO, GÁS NATURAL E BIOCOMBUSTÍVEIS - ANP, 2018; BP DISTRIBUTION SERVICES, 2017).

A Rússia, detidora da maior reserva provada de gás natural, responde por 18,1% do total, seguida por Irã com 17,2% e Catar com 12,9%. Juntos, esses três países respondem por 48,1% das reservas globais de gás natural. O Brasil ocupou a 37<sup>a</sup> colocação do ranking das maiores reservas provadas de gás natural do mundo, com 0,38 trilhões de m<sup>3</sup>, dessas, 61% estão localizadas no litoral do estado do Rio de Janeiro (ANP, 2018).

Figura 6 - Reservas provadas de gás natural, segundo regiões geográficas (trilhões m<sup>3</sup>) Ano base – 2017.



Fonte: BP Distribution Services (2018).

Em geral, a maior parte das reservas encontra-se distante dos centros industriais, e muitas delas em regiões oceânicas, o que dificulta a sua utilização (ANP, 2018; EPE, 2015; TSUJI; YOSHIZAWA, 2018). Essas reservas são denominadas “*Stranded gas*”, ou seja, gás natural proveniente de campos que estão demasiadamente distantes dos centros consumidores. As “*Stranded gas*” foram descobertas, porém permanecem não utilizadas, por questões físicas ou razões econômicas, que elevam os custos de produção e consumo, como, por exemplo, a

utilização de dutos e a liquefação para o transporte (CUNNINGHAM, 2004; EPE, 2015; SANTOS et al., 2002).

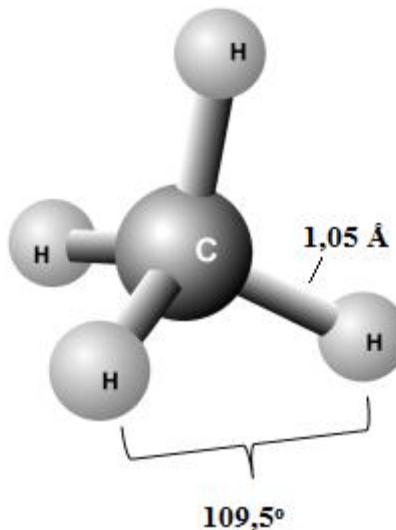
Desse modo, transformar químicamente o gás natural em um líquido de fácil transporte representa uma alternativa para viabilizar a produção de grandes reservas de gás natural localizadas em áreas remotas de difícil acesso (AASBERG-PETERSEN et al., 2001; CRABTREE, 1995; GUO; LOU; ZHENG, 2009; TSUJI; YOSHIZAWA, 2018). Em particular, o metanol, convertido a partir do metano, é de grande interesse como uma fonte de energia importante para o século XXI (LUSTEMBERG et al., 2018; RAVI; RANOCCHIARI, VAN BOKHOVEN, 2017; SILVA et al., 2016; SUN; HULL; CUNDARI, 2018; YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998).

### **3.3 Metano**

O metano ( $\text{CH}_4$ ) é o principal componente da maioria das reservas mundiais de gás natural ou de xisto, sendo considerado um produto abundante de energia primária e fonte de carbono, mais do que o carvão ou óleo (CABALLERO; PÉREZ, 2013; GUNSALUS et al., 2017; NOZAKI; OKAZAKI, 2013). É o composto mais simples dos hidrocarbonetos, e encontra-se como componente principal nas exalações naturais de regiões petrolíferas, além de ser um dos produtos finais da decomposição anaeróbica das plantas. Sua combustão pode fornecer uma quantidade muito maior de energia por molécula de  $\text{CO}_2$ , em razão de sua baixa relação C: H (CRABTREE, 1995). Dessa forma, o metano vem atraindo atenção nos últimos anos como fonte de energia e de produtos químicos de alto valor agregado (CRABTREE, 1995; GUNSALUS et al., 2017; NOZAKI; OKAZAKI, 2013; SANTOS et al., 2002; SUN; HULL; CUNDARI, 2018).

O  $\text{CH}_4$  apresenta uma geometria molecular tetraédrica com quatro ligações C-H equivalentes (FIGURA 7), é apolar, em razão da geometria tetraédrica e aos valores de eletronegatividade similares de carbono e hidrogênio, além de ser um gás incolor, inodoro, e quando misturado ao ar resulta em uma combinação com alto teor inflamável (CABALLERO; PÉREZ, 2013; GUNSALUS et al., 2017, SANTOS et al., 2002).

Figura 7 - Representação química do metano.



Fonte: Gunsalus et al. (2017).

Além do gás natural, outras fontes naturais do metano são pântanos, áreas alagadas, decomposição de resíduos orgânicos, hidrato de metano no fundo do mar e têm-se também os ruminantes selvagens e a extração de combustíveis minerais, dentre outras. Temos ainda as fontes consideradas antropogênicas relacionadas à agricultura, à pecuária, queima de biomassa e à decomposição de resíduos orgânicos em meios anaeróbios, como aterros sanitários e lagoas de decantação (GUN SALUS et al., 2017; GUO; LUO; ZHENG, 2009; PEER; THORNEOLE; EPPERSON, 1993; VAN AMSTEL, 2012). A maior parte das emissões de gás metano no mundo é produto da ação humana, vindo principalmente da agricultura e pecuária (PEER; THORNEOLE; EPPERSON, 1993; VAN AMSTEL, 2012).

O CH<sub>4</sub> é uma fonte abundante de matéria-prima de alto valor, e em decorrência de sua inércia, existe uma grande dificuldade em aproveitá-lo quimicamente. A inércia química do metano surge a partir dos átomos constituintes de alcanos que são mantidos unidos por ligações localizadas e fortes, C-C e C-H, de modo que as moléculas não têm orbitais vazios de baixa energia ou orbitais cheios de alta energia que poderiam, facilmente, participar de uma reação química, como é o caso dos hidrocarbonetos insaturados. Além disso, o metano apresenta um elevado equilíbrio molecular, em decorrência da sua distribuição geométrica, sendo o número de elétrons de camada de valência igual ao número de ligações, o que não possibilita a presença de centros doadores e receptores de densidade eletrônica, que torna essa molécula a mais inerte de sua classe, denominada parafina, que quer dizer baixa reatividade (CRABTREE, 1995; HOLMEM, 2009; LAMBINGER; BERCAW, 2002).

Com o uso crescente de energia, aliado ao aumento concomitante de reservas de gás natural, começa-se a estudar a utilização do metano como fonte de combustíveis líquidos e produtos químicos, além das aplicações hoje já existentes, como o aquecimento doméstico e geração dos chamados syngas ( $\text{CO}$  e  $\text{H}_2$ ), que são empregados no processo de Fischer-Tropsch para fornecer alcanos superiores e geração de  $\text{H}_2$  para a síntese de amônia. (CABALLERO; PÉREZ, 2013; FERREIRA-APARICIO; RODRIGUEZ-RAMOS; GUERRERO-RUIZ, 1997; GUR, 2015; HORN; SCHLOGL, 2015; ZHANG; SMITH, 2002;). No entanto, a produção de gás de síntese é um processo endergônico, que é operado com 65% de eficiência termodinâmica entre 800 e 1000°C além de acarretar custos significativos de operação e manutenção. (HAN et al., 2016; MARTIN; MIRODATOS, 1995; RAVI; RANOCCHIARI; VAN BOKHOVEN, 2017).

Nesses últimos anos, diferentes processos diretos e indiretos de conversão de metano em produtos químicos líquidos ou intermediários têm sido considerados, motivados pelo alto impacto econômico, político, ambiental e científico (ANDERSON, 1989; GUNSALUS et al., 2017; LUNSFORD, 2000; SILVA, 2014; ROITHOVA; SHOROVER, 2010). No entanto, o alto grau de estabilidade do metano traz uma série de problemas para viabilizar as reações envolvidas, como, por exemplo, o enorme consumo energético para degradar a molécula de  $\text{CH}_4$  (MARTIN; MIRODATOS, 1995). Atualmente, os esforços em pesquisa e desenvolvimento dos processos de conversão direta estão focados na melhoria de catalisadores, na elucidação dos mecanismos de reação e no desenvolvimento de novos equipamentos (ALMEIDA et al., 2015; CHEN; MECCANN; TAIT, 2018; HAN et al., 2016; LI et al., 2015; MARTIN; MIRODATOS, 1995; MOULDER; CUNDARI, 2017; SILVA, 2014; SILVA et al., 2016).

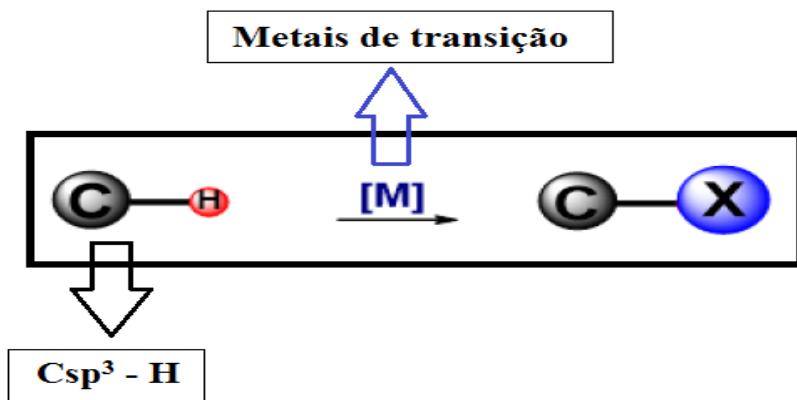
Um maior esforço tem sido aplicado em pesquisa e desenvolvimento em relação às reações de ativação da ligação C-H do metano em fase gasosa envolvendo metais de transição, motivados pela procura de formas para um uso mais eficiente dos grandes recursos inexplorados de metano (ALMEIDA et al., 2015; CABALLERO; PÉREZ, 2013; HARTWIG, 2016; RAVI; RANOCCHIARI; VAN BOKHOVE, 2017; SILVA et al., 2016; SUN; HULL; CUNDARI, 2018; TSUJI; YOSHIZAWA, 2018; YANG; HU; QUIN, 2006). Conhecimento adquirido sobre os mecanismos pelos quais as ligações C–H podem ser clivadas nos permitirá explorar os alcanos de maneira mais direta, eficiente e limpa (HARTWIG, 2016; LAMBINGER; BERCAW, 2002).

### 3.4 Ativação da ligação C-H

Para que uma reação orgânica aconteça, é preciso que haja uma ligação química suscetível a uma reação. Frequentemente, utiliza-se o termo "ativação" para designar o aumento da reatividade de uma molécula pela substituição de uma ligação estável e forte por outra mais fraca e funcionalizada. Esse processo é induzido por alguns fatores, como: reagentes externos, condição reacional e temperatura (AZAMBUJA; CORREIA, 2011, CRABTREE, 2001).

A ativação da ligação C-H do metano refere-se à coordenação desse hidrocarboneto ao centro de metal de transição seguido pela clivagem da ligação C-H para formar uma ligação metal-carbono (RAVI; RANOCCHIARI; VAN BOKHOVE, 2017). Esse termo baseia-se na transformação de ligações C-H inativas em ligações em pontes com C-X (em que X é um grupo funcional desejado) (FIGURA 8) (BAILLIE; LEGZDINS, 2014). Esse processo químico continua a atrair a atenção de químicos orgânicos, químicos organometálicos, biólogos e químicos teóricos de todo o mundo (AZAMBUJA; CORREIA, 2011), por ser uma ferramenta versátil na obtenção de produtos funcionalizados com alto valor agregado.

Figura 8 - Ativação de ligação C-H para a obtenção de produtos funcionalizados.



Fonte: Adaptada de Silva (2014).

As dificuldades relacionadas à utilização dessa ferramenta é decorrente das propriedades químicas inerentes do metano, incluindo baixa acidez, baixa polarizabilidade, alta energia de ionização e estabilidade da ligação C-H, que necessita de uma energia de 435 kJ/mol para a sua clivagem (HOLMEN, 2009; LAMBINGER; BERCAW, 2002; XIE et al., 2018). Essa baixa reatividade dos alcanos em geral significa que tanto em condições severas

quanto reagentes altamente reativos devem ser usados. Em ambos os casos, muitas vezes é possível formar mais de um produto possível, degradando a seletividade (CRABTREE, 2001).

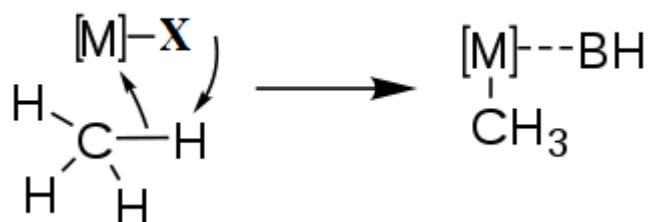
Uma das alternativas que vem sendo utilizada para o aumento da reatividade da ligação C-H é o emprego de metais de transição como catalisadores (catalise organometálica) para uma determinada transformação química homogênea e em fase gasosa (CAO; HALL, 2000; JAZZAR et al., 2010; RAVI; RANOCCHIARI; VAN BOKHOVE, 2017). Esse tipo de cátalise tem sido investigado experimentalmente e teoricamente por vários grupos, sendo um desafio importante nos últimos anos na busca de um método catalítico eficiente que beneficiaria grandemente o setor industrial e teria um grande impacto econômico (ROITHOVA; SCHRODER, 2010; SUN; HULL; CUNDARI, 2018).

Os complexos de metais de transição [M] interagem de várias maneiras com o metano em condições homogêneas (ALMEIDA et al.; 2015; ROITHOVA; SCHRODER, 2010; SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; SILVA et al., 2016). Tais caminhos mecanísticos dependem da posição do metal na tabela periódica, dos seus ligantes, do cátion de metal isolado, de sua carga e dos óxidos de metais formados (LI et al., 2015; SCHRÖDER; SCHWARZ, 2008).

Uma variedade de catalisadores de metais de transição ativa o metano por duas maneiras possíveis: por *via* esfera externa ou *via* esfera interna (DICK; SANFORD, 2006; JAZZAR et al., 2010; SILVA, 2014). No mecanismo *via* esfera externa, o metal presente no complexo metálico não forma uma ligação direta com o átomo de carbono presente na ligação carbono-hidrogênio a ser ativada (SHILOV; SHUL'PIN, 1997). Já o mecanismo *via* esfera interna apresenta, por sua vez, a inserção direta do metal de transição presente no complexo metálico na ligação C-H em questão (BALCELLS; CLOT; EISENSTEIN, 2010).

Mecanismo de ativação da ligação C-H por complexos metálicos ( $ML_n$ ) de alto estado oxidação (*via* esfera interna) com ligantes de camada aberta  $L = (F, Cl, Br \text{ e } I)$  leva à formação de complexos organometálicos  $H_3C-ML_n + HL$  (FIGURA 9) (GORELSKY; LAPOINTE; FAGNOU, 2008; LAPOINTE; FAGNOU, 2010; LI et al., 2015; SCHRÖDER; SCHWARZ, 2008; SHILOV; SHUL'PIN, 1997; SILVA, 2014). Esses ligantes formam ligações covalentes polarizadas com o metal, aumentando, assim, o seu estado de oxidação, reatividade e eletrofilicidade (SCHRÖDER; SCHWARZ, 2008).

Figura 9 - Esquema de reação da ativação do metano *via* metalação-desprotonação concertada (CMD).

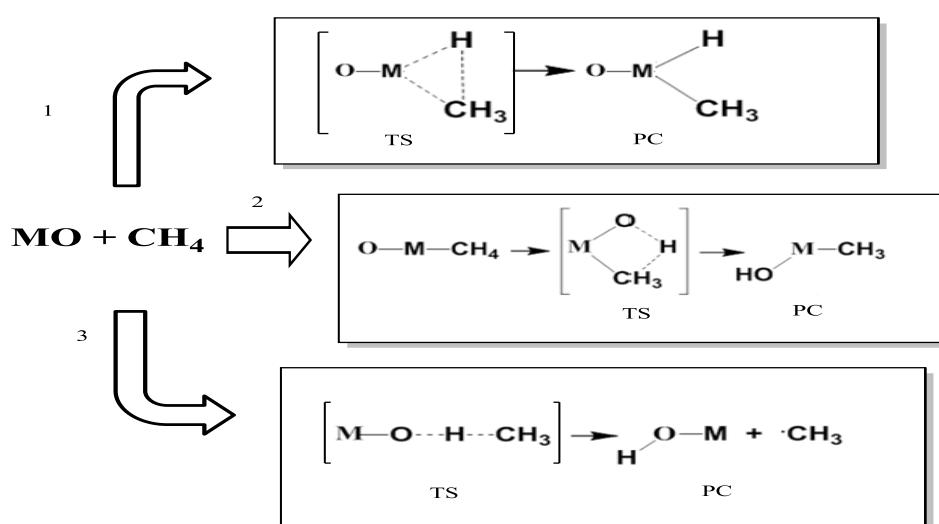


Fonte: (Adaptada de LAPOINJE; FAGNOU, 2010).

O mecanismo de metalação-desprotonação concertada, apresentado na Figura 9, ocorre por meio da funcionalização ácido-base da ligação C-H por metais de transição (M) e seus ligantes (X) (LI, 2015; GORELSKY; LAPOINTE; FAGNOU, 2008; LAPOINJE; FAGNOU, 2010).

A ativação do metano por óxidos de metais de transição MO em fase gasosa, geralmente leva a diferentes mecanismos de reação, conhecidos experimentalmente (FIGURA 10). Essas reacções são convenientemente classificadas de acordo com a sua estequiometria global (LAMBINGER; BERCAW, 2002).

Figura 10 - Esquema de reação da ativação do metano *via* processos de 1) Inserção Oxidativa, 2) abstração de hidrogênio de 4-centros e 3) abstração de hidrogênio de forma direta.



Fonte: (Adaptada de SILVA, 2016).

O mecanismo de inserção oxidativa, rota 1 da Figura 10, inicia-se com a inserção oxidativa de um centro metálico na ligação C-H do metano, com posterior quebra combinada da ligação C-H e formação das ligações M-C e M-H no TS, levando à formação de um primeiro intermediário hidridometil (BALCELLS; CLOT; EISENSTEIN, 2010). Tais reações são típicas para complexos de baixa valência dos metais de transição tardios localizados no lado direito da tabela periódica capazes de mudar facilmente seu estado de valência (LAMINGER; BERCAW, 2002; SCHRODER; SCHWARZ, 2008; SILVA, 2016).

Outros processos relacionados à ativação de metano são os mecanismos de abstração de hidrogênio de forma direta e abstração de hidrogênio de 4-centros, como relatados no trabalho de Roithova e Schroder (2010). No mecanismo de abstração de forma direta (rota 3 da Figura 10), o hidrogênio é abstraído pelo oxigênio do óxido de metal de transição para a formação de um estado de transição com um arranjo linear de C-H-O para posterior formação de um radical alquil (SILVA, 2016; YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998).

Já no mecanismo de abstração de 4-centros, muitas vezes chamado de migração oxidativa do hidrogênio (OHM), rota 2 ilustrado na Figura 10, ocorre à formação de um intermediário hidroximetil (YOSHIZAWA, 2002; ROITHOVA; SCHRODER, 2010). Os mecanismos de abstração de hidrogênio que ocorrem nas fases iniciais da reação são a chave para a compreensão da hidroxilação direta de hidrocarbonetos (SILVA, 2016).

Com o intuito de se beneficiar da flexibilidade atribuída a sistemas homogêneos, a catálise com complexos de metais de transição emergiu como uma estratégia importante (ARMENTROUT; BEAUCHAMP, 1989). A atenção voltada para essa área está relacionada à reatividade dos metais de transição, que mostra ser essencial para o entendimento, assim como, para a determinação dos fatores cinéticos e termodinâmicos que controlam a reação (YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998).

### **3.5 Participação dos metais de transição na catálise**

Os metais de transição (M) que ocupam o bloco *d* da tabela periódica são considerados importantes metais para a sociedade moderna (BROWN; LEMAY; BURSTEN, 2005). Esses metais apresentam utilizações importantes nas indústrias, na tecnologia moderna e como catalisadores na ativação da ligação C-H do metano (ROITHOVA; SCHRODER, 2010).

Os primeiros relatos sobre a interação do metano com metais de transição surgiram em 1979, quando Allison e seus colaboradores descobriram que os cátions de metais de transição

poderiam ativar a ligação C – H (ALISSON; FREAS; RIDGE, 1979; ROITHOVA; SCHRODER, 2010;). Nos anos seguintes, muitos experimentos e cálculos teóricos das reações entre cátions de metais de transição e pequenos grupos alcanos forem realizados e estão relatados no artigo de revisão de Roithova e colaboradores, 2010. Esses estudos de íons de metais de transição e hidrocarbonetos em fase gasosa têm proporcionado uma riqueza de conhecimento sobre as interações intrínsecas entre o sítio ativo de catalisadores e os substratos orgânicos (SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; SILVA et al., 2016).

Segundo Dupuis (2005), a habilidade desses metais para catalisar esse tipo de reação está ligada à sua estrutura eletrônica, pois os metais de transição têm orbitais “d” não preenchidos que são capazes de interagir com as moléculas de metano.

Os compostos de metais dos grupos 3 a 5, referidos como metais de transição precoce, são conhecidos para ativar ligações C-H em hidrocarbonetos (LI et al., 2015). Dentre esses metais, podemos destacar os complexos de Nióbio, em especial, NbX<sub>5</sub> (X= F, Cl, Br e I), que mostraram ser poderosos agentes ativadores para várias reações orgânicas (ANDRADE, 2004).

### **3.5.1 Complexos de Nióbio (NbX<sub>5</sub>, X= F, Cl, Br e I)**

O nióbio (Nb) é um material metálico de cor prateada, com número atômico 41, massa atômica relativa 92,9064 u e pertence ao grupo 5 (VB) da tabela periódica, juntamente com vanádio e tântalo. Sua química é dominada pela força motriz termodinâmica para atingir seu maior estado de oxidação (+5), além da acidez de Lewis em seus complexos (ANDRADE, 2004; ARPINI et al., 2015).

Esse metal apresenta excelentes propriedades, tais como resistência à alta temperatura, possui alta condutividade elétrica, dúctil, boas propriedades mecânicas, além de características de supercondutor em determinadas ligas com titânio. Tais atribuições conferem a esse material, muitas utilidades e aplicações em diversos ramos econômicos (BRESCIANI et al., 2018; NOWAK; ZIOLIK, 1999).

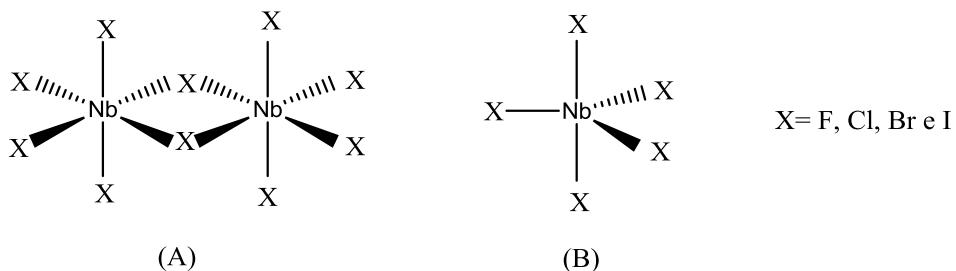
O Nb nunca ocorre no estado livre como metal e sim, presente em minerais como columbita, loparita, euxenita, manganotantalita e samarskita (BRANCO, 2016). Os depósitos de minério comercialmente mais importantes estão no Brasil, Canadá, Nigéria, Zaire e Austrália. No Brasil, encontram-se as principais reservas de nióbio, cerca de 98% das reservas mundiais, o que faz do país o líder mundial na extração do metal, concentrando-se no estado

de Minas Gerais a maior oferta (ANDRADE, 2004; BRANCO, 2016; YOSHIDA et al., 1996).

O niobio é um metal de transição precoce, pode acomodar facilmente um grande número de ligantes apresentando diferentes números de coordenação. Em razão dessa propriedade e pela fácil disponibilidade e não toxicidade dos elementos metálicos a sua química organometálica é muito rica e vem despertando a atenção de pesquisadores na síntese de novos complexos (ANDRADE, 2004; BONDI et al., 2015; BORTOLUZZI et al., 2013; CARDIN, 1995).

Os complexos penta halogenetos de Nióbio,  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $\text{X} = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  e  $\text{I}$ ), possuem estado de oxidação de +5, são oxoffílicos e halofílicos, resistentes à redução, altamente eletrofílicos e todos os halogenetos possíveis do nióbio pentavalente são experimentalmente conhecidos (ANDRADE, 2004; ANDRADE; AZEVEDO; OLIVEIRA, 2002; ARPINI et al., 2015; KOMIYA, 1997). No estado sólido, apresentam uma estrutura dimérica ( $\text{Nb}_2\text{X}_{10}$ ) (FIGURA 11) que é mantida estável em solventes não complexantes, enquanto nos solventes doadores de elétrons são formados os adutos monoméricos. Na fase gasosa, o  $\text{NbX}_5$  é monomérico com uma estrutura bipiramidal trigonal (FIGURA 11) (BONDI et al., 2015; BRESCIANI et al., 2018; KOMIYA, 1997).

Figura 11 - Representação dos complexos de nióbio. (A) estrutura do dímero  $\text{Nb}_2\text{X}_{10}$  e (B) estrutura bipiramidal trigonal do monômero  $\text{NbX}_5$ .



Fonte: Dados do autor (2018).

Em decorrência de disponibilidades, baixo custo e a toxicidade relativamente baixa do nióbio, os complexos  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $\text{X}=\text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  e  $\text{I}$ ) encontraram uma crescente aplicação como um precursor catalítico ácido de Lewis eficaz para várias reações orgânicas (BONDI et al., 2015; BRESCIANI et al., 2018).

Outros compostos usados na ativação da ligação C-H e que têm sido investigados em vários trabalhos, como relatado por ROITHOVA e colaboradores, 2010, são os óxidos de

metais de transição. Informações sobre as interações desses óxidos com metano, adquiridos por meio de investigações em fase gasosa, podem eventualmente levar a modificações significativas na catálise organometálica aplicada (RYAN et al., 1994).

Óxidos de metais de transição são considerados como modelos protótipos de reações envolvendo processos oxidativos, e os óxidos de cobalto vêm sendo investigados como catalisadores promissores na ativação da ligação C-H (ALTINAY et al., 2011; KHOSHANDAM; JAMSHIDI; KUMAR, 2004; MOSELAGE et al., 2015; RYAN et al., 1994; SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000).

### **3.5.2 Óxidos de cobalto**

O cobalto (Co) é um metal lustroso, azul prateado, da primeira série de transição, com número atômico 27 e massa atômica relativa de 58,93 u. O Co é um metal magnético, brilhante e quebradiço, com alto ponto de fusão e resistente à corrosão. Em razão dessas propriedades, este é um material valorizado e com diversas aplicações industriais em ligas magnéticas, vidros e cerâmicas, satélites e imãs. Suas principais aplicações estão no setor químico, pois são utilizados como cátodos metálicos de baterias recarregáveis, na galvanoplastia, bem como em catalisadores petroquímicos (ALVES; DELLA ROSA, 2003; KHOSHANDAM; JAMSHIDI; KUMAR, 2004; MEDEIROS, 2013).

Esse metal apresenta grande importância em sistemas biológicos, pois é essencial para o metabolismo de todos os animais. É o centro ativo das coenzimas denominadas cobalaminas, cujo exemplo mais comum é a vitamina B12. Como tal, é micronutriente essencial para a vida se ingerido em pequenas quantidades (ALVES; DELLA ROSA, 2003; MEDEIROS, 2013).

Os estados de oxidação mais comuns para o cobalto são +2 e +3, e este metal é encontrado nos minerais cobaltita, a esmalta (variedade do mineral skutterita) e eritrita. Os importantes depósitos de minério estão localizados na República Democrática do Congo, Zâmbia, China, Austrália, e no Brasil. Entretanto, a maior fonte de cobalto é como subproduto da refinação de níquel (GEOLOGICAL SURVEY MINERALS YEARBOOK, 2017; MEDEIROS, 2013).

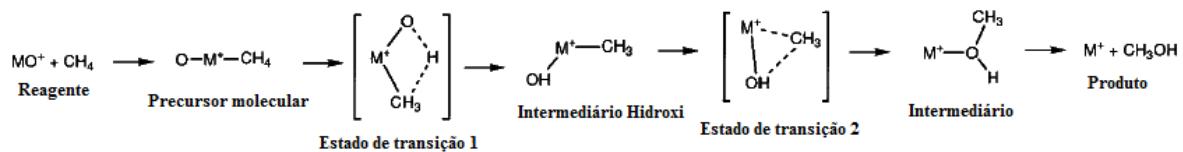
Após os estudos da reatividade de monóxidos de ferro ( $\text{FeO}^+$ ) em fase gasosa com metano, realizados por Schröder e Schwarz em 1990, os óxidos de metais de transição de primeira fila foram estudados de forma mais ampla. Dentre esses metais, o monóxido de

cobalto monovalente ( $\text{CoO}^+$ ) apresenta um índice de ramificação para o metanol de 100% e apresenta eficiências de reação e seletividades muito diferentes do  $\text{FeO}^+$  para a ativação do metano, o que motiva o seu estudo (ALTINAY, 2011; SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000).

De acordo com o trabalho de Chen e colaboradores, 1994, o  $\text{CoO}^+$  é um candidato promissor para a conversão eficiente de metano a metanol ( $\text{CH}_3\text{OH}$ ) (CHEN; CLEMMER; ARMENTROUT, 1994; YANG; HU; QUIN, 2006). Essa reação com protótipos de óxidos de cobalto é termodinamicamente favorecida, pois esses óxidos possuem uma configuração eletrônica adequada para ativar o  $\text{CH}_4$  (CHEN; CLEMMER; ARMENTROUT, 1994; YANG; HU; QUIN, 2006).

A conversão de metano a metanol por esses complexos de  $\text{MO}^+$  é proposta para prosseguir por meio de dois estados de transição, dois intermediários, bem como reagentes e produtos, como ilustrado na Figura 12 (SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998).

Figura 12 - Via reacional de conversão de metano a metanol por óxidos de metais de transição.



Fonte: Adaptada de Shiota e Yoshizawa (2000).

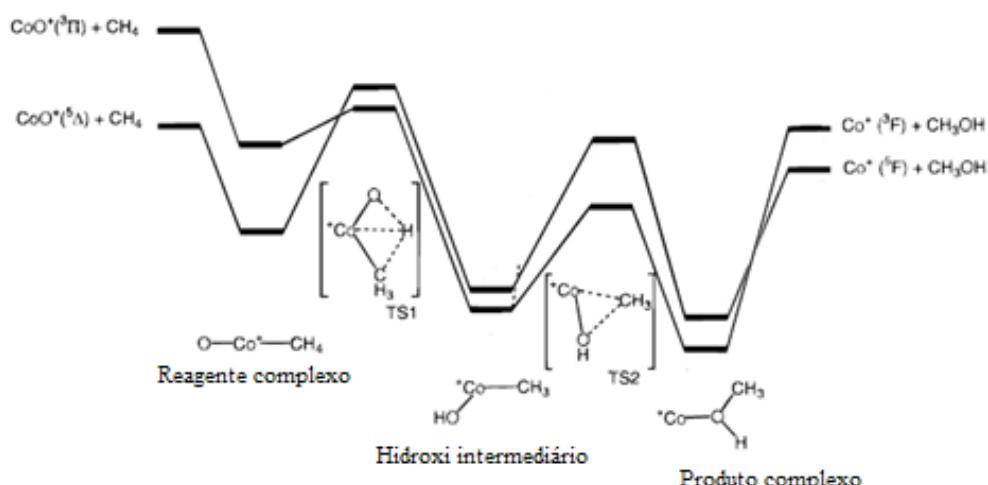
Segundo estudos, dentre as várias reações de conversão do metano, a reação via hidroxi intermediário é energeticamente mais favorável (YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998). A reação inicia-se com o encontro dos reagentes resultando na formação de complexo fracamente ligado  $\text{O}-\text{M}-\text{CH}_4$ , produzido por interações intermoleculares entre  $\text{MO}$  e metano. Para a formação do primeiro estado de transição, ocorre a migração de um átomo de hidrogênio, conduzindo ao hidroxi intermediário (SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998). Essa primeira etapa é a mais lenta da conversão do metano a metanol, e recebe o nome de ativação da ligação C-H do metano.

Nessa reação, mais de um estado de spin deve estar envolvido, os chamados fenômenos de cruzamento de spin. Esses fenômenos são vistos entre os complexos de metais de transição e desempenham um papel importante na diminuição das alturas da barreira de energia de ativação e na seletividade dessa reação (CHEN; XIE; WANG, 2015;

SCHAWARZ, 2011; SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998). Portanto, o comportamento dos cátions de óxidos de metais de transição é fortemente influenciado por esse processo (CHEN; XIE; WANG, 2015).

Com base em vários estudos para os óxidos  $\text{FeO}^+$ ,  $\text{CoO}^+$  e  $\text{NiO}^+$ , esse fenômeno ocorre duas vezes nos canais de entrada e saída, como ilustrado na Figura 13 (SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000; YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998).

Figura 13 - Superfície de energia potencial com inversões de spin para a reação  $\text{CoO}^+$  com  $\text{CH}_4$ .



Fonte: (Adaptada de YOSHIZAWA; SHIOTA; YAMABE, 1998).

A conversão catalítica de  $\text{CH}_4$  a  $\text{CH}_3\text{OH}$  é considerada um dos grandes desafios para a catálise, e, dessa forma, tornou-se uma área de pesquisa ativa com a busca de um catalisador mais eficiente (ALMEIDA et al., 2015; CHEN; MECCANN; TAIT, 2018; HAN et al., 2016; LI et al., 2015; MOULDER; CUNDARI, 2017; SILVA, 2014). Um meio de fornecer informações fundamentais sobre esse processo é estudar uma reação prototípica em fase gasosa (SHIOTA; YOSHIZAWA, 2000).

Uma ferramenta essencial na catálise homogênea, na busca por catalisadores mais efetivos e que reajam em condições suaves, são os estudos computacionais da estrutura e da reatividade de complexos organometálicos. Esses estudos podem potencialmente fornecer informações quantitativas sobre a termodinâmica e mecanismos para esse processo, ao mesmo tempo em que examinam as propriedades eletrônicas e geométricas dos catalisadores (BALCELLS; CLOT; EISENSTEIN, 2010).

### 3.6 Química computacional

O grande desenvolvimento da Química Computacional (QC) nos últimos anos fez com que a mesma se tornasse uma ferramenta indispensável na pesquisa em química. Essa ferramenta, de caráter multidisciplinar, engloba áreas como a farmacologia, a bioquímica, a química orgânica, entre outras, na busca do desenvolvimento de novos compostos (VERLI; BARREIRO, 2005).

As bases que regem a química computacional *ab initio* estão na química quântica, que começou a ser “escrita” por Max Planck em 1900, a partir de seus estudos sobre a luz emitida por sólidos aquecidos (radiação do corpo negro) e a quantização de energia. Portanto, o passo inicial no desenvolvimento dessa teoria foi o estudo da natureza da luz. A partir de então, vários cientistas brilhantes ajudaram a edificar a mecânica quântica e, assim, foi possível chegar à nossa atual capacidade de cálculo de propriedades de átomos e moléculas (TRSIC; PINTO, 2009).

A química computacional tornou-se uma maneira útil de investigar materiais que são muito difíceis de encontrar ou muito caros de comprar, além de evitar gastos com reagentes em sua análise experimental. Também ajuda os químicos a fazer previsões antes de executar as experiências reais para que eles possam aperfeiçoar e compreender processos, reações e interações. A aplicação de métodos computacionais para solucionar problemas químicos estende-se às áreas onde a química desempenha um importante papel (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

Investigações por meio de cálculos quânticos são, atualmente, um suporte valioso na análise de sistemas químicos. Essas pesquisas podem fornecer informações, tais como: as energias relativas entre espécies moleculares observadas experimentalmente, estruturas moleculares de espécies intermediárias e excitadas de reação com tempo de vida curto, informações sobre orbitais envolvidos no processo em estudo e avaliação de cada etapa dos mecanismos possíveis de reação observados experimentalmente (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

No estudo computacional envolvendo metais de transição, alguns efeitos tornam-se importantes de serem tratados com cautela, dentre eles estão os efeitos relativísticos. Esses efeitos são cruciais para uma descrição teórica e computacional correta desses sistemas eletrônicos (SIEGBAHN; BLOMBERG; SVENSSON, 1994; SIEGBAHN; SVENSSON;

BOUSSARD, 1995). Atualmente, existem vários métodos que permitem tratar esses efeitos de maneira consistente e com um custo computacional acessível.

A fim de obtermos dados confiáveis sobre a importância do efeito relativístico, cálculos foram realizados no pacote ADF (Amsterdam Density Functional).

### **3.6.1 Programa Amsterdam Density Functional (ADF)**

O programa ADF se originou na década de 1970, no trabalho realizado pelo grupo de química teórica da VU University, em Amsterdã, e pelo grupo de T. Ziegler, da Universidade de Calgary. É um programa para cálculos de estrutura eletrônica de primeiros princípios que faz uso da teoria do funcional de densidade (DFT). Esse programa tem o propósito de ser utilizado na compreensão e previsão de estruturas, reatividade de complexos de metais de transição e moléculas com átomos pesados (TE VELDE et al., 2000).

Com posteriores (e ainda em curso) adições e melhorias, por meio da pesquisa de grupos em Química Teórica de Amsterdam e Calgary, o ADF evoluiu para um pacote de estado da arte para pesquisa em química quântica (PARAGI et al., 2013; POATER et al., 2012; SETH; ZIEGLER, 2012; WOLTERS; BICKELHAUPT, 2012).

O ADF é um software preciso, rápido e robusto para estudar reatividade química, ligação e propriedades espectroscópicas de compostos simples e complexos. O ADF suporta uma ampla variedade de funcionais de troca correlação (XC), e incorpora os efeitos relativísticos com o formalismo da aproximação normal de ordem zero (ZORA), na abordagem escalar ou com os termos de *spin*-órbita ZORA-SO incluídos. Conjuntos de base são construídos com funções orbitais do tipo Slater. Gradientes de energia e derivadas de segunda ordem (calculado analiticamente) permitem cálculos de mínimos de energia, estados de transição, caminhos de reação e frequências harmônicas com intensidades na região do infravermelho. Efeitos de solvatação e ambiente do campo elétrico podem ser levados em consideração, além de propriedades moleculares, incluindo deslocamentos químicos de RMN e várias propriedades de resposta utilizando a teoria do funcional de densidade dependente do tempo (TDDFT): energias de excitação, (hiper) polarizabilidades dependentes da frequência, intensidades Raman e coeficientes de dispersão podem ser calculados (TE VELDE et al., 2000).

O programa ADF incorpora os efeitos relativísticos pelo uso de cálculos (ZORA) na descrição de energia (FAAS et al., 1995, 2000; VANLENTHE; BAERENDS; SNIJDERS,

1994). O formalismo implementado pode ser utilizado para tratar os efeitos, em razão de mudanças em massa dos elétrons e a interação *spin*-órbita média (efeitos escalares), que é decorrente do acoplamento *spin*-orbital (FAAS et al., 1995). O formalismo é efetuado por meio da incorporação de componentes relativísticos nas integrais 1-elétron (FAAS et al., 1995).

Na equação ZORA (1), descreve-se o átomo no estado de equilíbrio, portanto, a variação dos momentos de primeira ordem ou superiores é nula. A vantagem da utilização dessa equação é a obtenção de resultados mais precisos das energias dos elétrons na região do núcleo (FAAS et al., 1995).

$$H_{ZORA} = \left( \frac{p^2 c^2}{2mc^2 - V} \right) + V \quad (1)$$

Em que  $m$  é a massa de um elétron livre,  $p$  é o operador do momento linear,  $V$  é o potencial escalar efetivo e  $c$  é a velocidade da luz.

O programa ADF utiliza os conjuntos de base de tipo Slater (STOs), que são similares às funções hidrogenóides, porém bem mais simples de serem empregadas. O banco de dados desse programa contém um grande número de conjuntos de base para todos os elementos da tabela periódica, variando conjunto de base mínima de uma *único-zeta* (SZ) a *triplo-zeta duplamente polarizadas* (TZ2P) (TE VELDE, 2000). Vale ressaltar que o termo zeta decorre do fato de que o expoente das funções de base STO é frequentemente indicado pela letra grega  $\zeta$ .

As STOs descrevem bem os orbitais atômicos e são representadas pela equação 2 (JENSEN, 2007):

$$\chi_{\zeta,n,l,m}(r, \theta, \phi) = N Y_{l,m}(\theta, \phi) r^{n-1} e^{-\zeta r} \quad (2)$$

Em que  $\zeta$  é o chamado expoente orbital zeta (que pode associar-se a  $\frac{Z-w}{n}$ , sendo  $Z$  a carga nuclear e  $w$  uma constante de blindagem).  $N$  é a constante de normalização,  $Y_{l,m}$  são funções harmônicas esféricos (ALCACER, 2007) e  $r$  é a distância do elétron do núcleo atômico. Por último,  $n, l, m$  são os números quânticos, onde  $n$  é o número quântico principal que indica o nível de energia do elétron,  $l$  é o momento angular que corresponde ao subnível

de energia do elétron, e  $m$  é o componente do momento angular que está associado à região de máxima probabilidade de se encontrar o elétron (ALCACER, 2007; JENSEN, 2007).

Um conjunto de base do tipo Slater pode ser classificado de acordo com a quantidade de expoentes  $\zeta$  (bases estendidas do tipo  $n\text{-}\zeta$ ) utilizados para cada tipo de orbital. Se uma função de base, -STO, for utilizada para cada um dos orbitais atômicos ocupados, o conjunto de base é chamado base mínima. Somente são utilizadas funções suficientes para conter todos os elétrons do átomo neutro. Por exemplo, para o hidrogênio e o hélio, isso significa uma única função s. Para a primeira linha no sistema periódico, significa duas funções s (1s e 2s) e um conjunto de funções p (2px, 2py e 2pz) (JENSEN, 2007).

A partir de um conjunto de bases mínimas, dobrando-se o número de funções de bases produz-se uma base de qualidade dupla-zeta (ALCACER, 2007). O dobro do número de funções de base em relação à base mínima permite uma melhor descrição da distribuição eletrônica (BATISTA, 2010). Por exemplo, uma base DZ emprega, portanto, duas funções s para hidrogênio (1s e 1s'), quatro funções s (1s, 1s', 2s e 2s') e dois conjuntos de funções p (2p e 2p') para elementos de primeira fila (JENSEN, 2007). O próximo passo no tamanho do conjunto de base é um Triple Zeta (TZ). Essa base contém três vezes mais funções que a base mínima, ou seja, seis funções s e três funções p para os elementos da primeira fila (ALCACER, 2007; JENSEN, 2007).

Outros tipos de funções de bases muito empregados são as que incluem funções de polarização (dos tipos d, f para átomos pesados e p para átomos leves). Essas funções permitem uma melhor análise da ligação química, pois descrevem bem as deformações sofridas pelos orbitais que participam da ligação (BATISTA, 2010).

Vale ressaltar que, neste trabalho, foram utilizados dois conjuntos de funções de polarização em adição às funções de bases triplo-zeta, resultando no chamado, conjunto de bases triplo-zeta duplamente polarizadas (TZ2P).

A base TZ2P apresenta duplo zeta na região do núcleo e triplo zeta na região dos elétrons de valência com uma dupla polarização (SCIENTIFIC COMPUTING & MODELLING NV, 2010).

Uma grande quantidade de estudos computacionais comparativos da estrutura e reatividade de complexos de metais de transição na ativação da ligação C-H estabeleceu a teoria do funcional da densidade (DFT) como um método confiável para estudar a reatividade organometálica (ALMEIDA et al., 2015; BALCELLS; CLOT; EISENSTEIN, 2010; SILVA et al., 2016).

### 3.6.2 Teoria do Funcional da Densidade (DFT)

A Teoria do Funcional da Densidade (DFT) é uma das mais populares e bem sucedidas teorias da mecânica quântica para o estudo de estrutura eletrônica de sólidos e moléculas (CRAMER; TRUHLAR, 2009; MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007). Tal importância está relacionada ao fato de que sistemas de tamanho moderado a grande ( $N_{\text{átomos}} \geq 20$ ), podem ser estudados, com uma precisão química aceitável, a um custo computacional que, algumas vezes, corresponde a uma fração daquele obtido utilizando-se métodos correlacionados tradicionais, como a teoria de perturbação e coupled cluster (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

A DFT na versão Kohn-Sham pode ser considerada como uma melhora na teoria do HF, na qual o efeito de muitos corpos da correlação eletrônica é modelado por uma função da densidade eletrônica. Uma importante vantagem em utilizar a densidade eletrônica, ao invés da função de onda é a redução significativa do custo computacional, uma vez que a função de onda de um sistema de  $N$  elétrons depende de  $3N$  coordenadas (x, y e z para cada elétron), além o spin. Por outro lado, a densidade eletrônica independe do número de elétrons envolvidos e depende apenas das três coordenadas x, y e z. Isso permite que a DFT seja aplicável ao tratamento de sistemas com um grande número de partículas, pois a informação sobre o sistema é transferida da função de onda para a densidade eletrônica (BERGNER et al., 2009; FERREIRA, 2011; TSIPIS, 2014).

O teorema de Hohenberg-Kohn (HOHENBERG; KOHN, 1964) estabelece que a energia do estado fundamental é um funcional único da densidade eletrônica. Esse teorema prova que existe um único funcional tal que (EQUAÇÃO 3):

$$E[\rho(r)] = E_{ele} \quad (3)$$

Em que  $E_{ele}$  é a energia eletrônica exata. Além disso, demonstra-se que a densidade do elétron obedece ao teorema variacional (EQUAÇÃO 4):

$$E[p(r)] = E_{ele} \geq E_0 \quad (4)$$

Esse teorema significa que para uma dada densidade eletrônica de um sistema, sua energia  $E_{ele}$  será um valor maior ou igual ao valor da energia exata ( $E_0$ ) (ATKINS; FRIEDMAN, 2005; BERGNER et al., 2009).

A fim de resolver a energia pelo método DFT, Kohn e Shan propuseram que o funcional tem a forma, de acordo com a Equação 5:

$$E[\rho(r)] = T_e[\rho(r)] + V_{ne}[\rho(r)] + V_{ee}[\rho(r)] + E_{xc}[\rho(r)] \quad (5)$$

Em que o termo da energia potencial de atração núcleo-elétron  $V_{ne}$  é:

$$V_{ne}[\rho(r)] = \sum_j^{nuclei} \int \frac{Z_j}{|r - r_k|} \rho(r) dr \quad (6)$$

$V_{ee}$  é a energia potencial de repulsão elétron-elétron dada pela Equação 7:

$$V_{ee}[\rho(r)] = \frac{1}{2} \iint \frac{\rho(r_1)\rho(r_2)}{|r_1 - r_2|} dr_1 dr_2 \quad (7)$$

$T_e$  é a energia cinética dos elétrons representada na Equação 8:

$$T_e[\rho(r)] = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_1^{2N} \varphi_i^*(r_1) \nabla_1^2 \varphi_i^* r_1 dr_1 \quad (8)$$

$\varphi_i$  são funções de base, orbitais de khon-Sham, onde esses orbitais são utilizados para formar um determinante de Khon-Sham que é utilizado para calcular a energia total do sistema.

E  $E_{xc}$ , o funcional de correlação e troca, é, geralmente, escrito como uma soma de dois componentes, um componente de troca e outro de correlação. Eles são usualmente escritos em termos de uma energia de densidade  $\epsilon$  (EQUAÇÃO 9):

$$E_{xc}[\rho(r)] = E_x[\rho(r)] + E_c[\rho(r)] = \int \rho(r) \epsilon_x[\rho(r)] dr + \int \rho(r) \epsilon_c[\rho(r)] dr \quad (9)$$

A energia de troca e correlação é definida como um funcional de densidade eletrônica, e inclui todos os termos não clássicos. A correlação eletrônica introduz o termo de troca referente à correlação entre elétrons de mesmo *spin* e a diferença entre a energia cinética exata

e a do sistema de elétrons que não interagem. Esse funcional é que torna a DFT diferencial frente aos métodos *ab initio* (DUARTE; ROCHA, 2007; JACOB; NEUGEBAUER, 2014).

Como podemos verificar, todos os termos da energia possuem uma expressão analítica, exceto o termo de troca e correlação. Não é conhecida a expressão analítica para  $E_{xc}[\rho(r)]$  e a alternativa é então buscar uma forma aproximada desse termo (COSTA, 2010).

Dentro dessas aproximações, estão as aproximações da densidade local (LDA), a aproximação generalizada de gradiente (GGA) e os funcionais híbridos (COSTA, 2010; TSIPIS, 2014).

A LDA assume que, localmente, a densidade varia muito pouco e que ela pode ser tratada como um gás uniforme de elétron constante em todo o espaço (EQUAÇÃO 10):

$$E_{xc}^{LDA} = \int E_{xc} [p(r)] p(r) d(r) \quad (10)$$

Em que  $E_{xc}$  é a energia de troca-correlação por partícula de um gás uniforme (TRSIC; PINTO, 2009).

É possível realizar expansões de  $E_{xc}[\rho(r)]$  (MORGON; COUTINHO 2007) na tentativa de melhor resultado LDA, para a variação da densidade eletrônica com a posição. Um passo natural a ser seguido consiste em incluir correções do gradiente da densidade eletrônica  $\nabla p(r)$  no funcional  $E_{xc}$ , para se levar em conta a não homogeneidade da verdadeira densidade eletrônica. Essa aproximação da expansão do gradiente (GGA) está representada na Equação 11:

$$E_{xc}^{GGA}[p] = \int f_{xc}^{GGA} [p(r), |\nabla p(r)|] p(r) d(r) \quad (11)$$

Em que  $f_{xc}^{GGA}$  é uma função que depende de duas variáveis. É comum separar as contribuições de troca e correlação para essa função, como na Equação 12:

$$\int f_{xc}^{GGA} = \int f_x^{GGA} + \int f_c^{GGA} \quad (12)$$

Existem inúmeros funcionais GGA que diferem em como essas funções são escritas e compostas. Muitas combinações diferentes foram desenvolvidas tais como, BP, BLYP PW91 (JENSEN, 2007; LEE; YANG; PARR, 1988; MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007; PERDEW,

1986). Os nomes desses funcionais derivam basicamente da composição das contribuições individuais. Por exemplo, BLYP, possui o termo de troca proposto por BECK (B) (BECKE, 1993) e o termo de correlação proposto por Lee, Yang e Parr (LYP) (LEE; CHUNG, 2009; MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

Também existe a possibilidade de se combinar os funcionais de troca-correlação com o termo de troca de Hartree-Fock (HF) numa abordagem híbrida, como, por exemplo, o funcional híbrido B3LYP (JENSEN, 2007; MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007; TRSIC; PINTO, 2009). Esse funcional combina, além do termo de energia e troca de HF, os termos de correlação e troca do DFT ( $E_x^{LSDA}$ ,  $E_c^{LYP}$ ,  $E_x^B$ ,  $E_c^{LSDA}$ ), mais os parâmetros semiempíricos representados na Equação 13 (BECKE, 1993; LEE; CHUNG, 2009; MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

$$E_{xc}^{B3LYP} = (1 - a)E_x^{LSDA} + aE_x^{HF} + bE_x^B + cE_c^{LYP} + (1 - c)E_c^{LSDA} \quad (13)$$

Outro método alternativo à DFT, para incluir a correlação eletrônica no tratamento computacional, é o método Coupled Cluster (CC) que descreve a função de onda não relativística molecular no estado fundamental em termos da função de onda não perturbada HF e de um operador chamado cluster, é apresentado (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

### 3.6.3 Método Coupled Cluster

O método de Coupled Cluster é capaz de fornecer a energia de correlação eletrônica de maneira sistemática e bastante eficiente, é um esquema alternativo à teoria de perturação de muitos corpos (MBPT) (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007). Esse método está sendo cada vez mais utilizado; contudo, ele possui um alto custo computacional.

Atualmente, o método Coupled Cluster é reconhecido como uma das ferramentas mais poderosas para obter-se a energia de correlação e de prever propriedades moleculares. O interesse pelo método só foi despertado no início dos anos 70, quando Cizek e Paldus rederivaram algebraicamente as expressões diagramáticas para o método Coupled Cluster mais simples, Coupled Cluster Doubles (CCD). A implementação computacional desse método, no entanto, só veio a acontecer no final dos anos 70. Ao se considerar a série completa dos operadores de cluster, a função de onda Coupled Cluster seria a solução exata da equação de Schrödinger, mas como não é possível trabalhar com uma função desse tipo, é necessário

truncar essa série em algum tempo. Como exemplo, no método CCSD utiliza-se como o operador de cluster  $T = T_1 + T_2$ . O método Coupled Cluster mais utilizado na atualidade é o Coupled Cluster Singles and Doubles (CCSD), cuja implementação em pacotes computacionais como Gaussian, ocorreu no início dos anos 80 (CIZEK, 1966).

Com o propósito de se obter uma maior precisão nos resultados, é necessário ir além do método CCSD. O método CCSD(T) (*Coupled Cluster* com excitações simples, duplas e triplas) possui um alto custo computacional, e seu uso juntamente com um conjunto de base extenso torna-se muitas vezes inviável. Efeitos das excitações conectadas de ordem mais altas podem ser incluídos nessa metodologia, como por exemplo, por meio do método CCSD(T). Nesse método, as excitações triplas conectadas são estimadas por meio da teoria da perturbação, posteriormente sendo inclusas no método CCSD. Assim, o método CCSD(T) proporciona uma boa combinação entre precisão e custo computacional, tornando possível o emprego de conjuntos de bases mais extensas (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

O método Coupled Cluster tornou-se muito popular nos últimos anos. Sua ideia central é tratar um sistema de muitos elétrons separando-o em vários aglomerados (clusters) com poucos elétrons. Neste caso, as interações entre os elétrons de um mesmo aglomerado são calculadas, e posteriormente, entre diferentes aglomerados. Considerando uma função de onda, sendo que ela se apresenta na forma de um determinante de Slater, pode-se construir um conjunto infinito de autofunções do hamiltoniano, por meio da substituição de orbitais “ocupados” desse determinante por orbitais “virtuais”. É digno de nota que a substituição de um único orbital resulta na construção de determinantes unicamente excitados. Na mesma linha, a substituição de dois orbitais leva aos duplamente excitados, e assim por diante (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

A equação fundamental da teoria é:

$$\Phi = e^T \Phi_0 \quad (14)$$

Em que  $\Phi$  é a função de onda eletrônica molecular do estado fundamental,  $\Phi_0$  é a função de onda de Hartree Fock do estado fundamental normalizada e  $T$  é chamado operador de cluster e definido como:

$$T = T_1 + T_2 + \dots + T_p \quad (15)$$

Onde,

$$T_1 = \sum_{a,r} t_a^r r + a \quad (16)$$

$$T_2 = \sum_{a < b} \sum_{r < s} T_{ab}^{rs} r + s + ab \quad (17)$$

e assim por diante, até  $T_p$ . Nas equações a, b representam orbitais ocupados no determinante HF, enquanto r, s representam orbitais virtuais. Os coeficientes T são reais e são chamados amplitudes de cluster. Basicamente,  $T_1$  é o operador que gera as configurações simples substituídas,  $T_2$  é o operador que gera as duplamente substituídas, e assim por diante (MORGON; COUTINHO, 2007).

As amplitudes de cluster,  $t$ , devem ser tais que a função de onda  $\Phi$  seja uma solução da equação de Schrödinger. Assim,

$$H e^T \Phi_0 = E e^T \Phi_0 \quad (18)$$

A expressão da energia é:

$$E = \frac{\langle \Phi_0 | e^{T^\dagger} H e^T | \Phi_0 \rangle}{\langle \Phi_0 | e^{T^\dagger} e^T | \Phi_0 \rangle} \quad (19)$$

Para a determinação das propriedades geométricas, eletrônicas e de ligação das espécies que serão abordadas neste trabalho, serão realizadas análises de decomposição de energia (EDA) e cálculos da teoria quântica de átomos em moléculas QTAIM.

### **3.6.4 Análise de decomposição de energia (EDA)**

As análises de decomposição de energia (EDA) desenvolvidas por Morukuma (MOROKUMA, 1971) e por Ziegler e Rauk (ZIEGLER; RAUK, 1977) são métodos que fornecem uma interpretação conceitual e quantitativa da natureza da ligação química (VON HOPFFGARTEN; FRENKING, 2012).

Nessa análise, a energia de ligação global entre dois fragmentos A e B em uma molécula A-B é dividida em dois componentes principais (EQUAÇÃO 20):

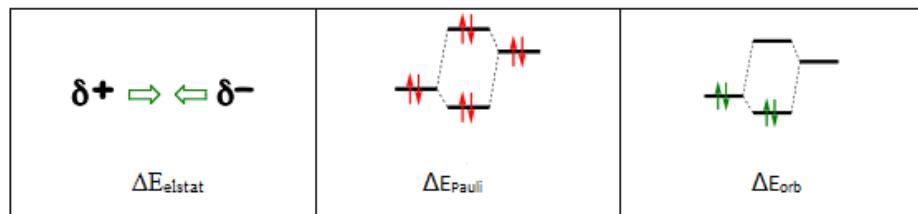
$$\Delta E = \Delta E_{\text{prep}} + \Delta E_{\text{int}} \quad (20)$$

Nessa equação, a energia de preparação ( $\Delta E_{\text{prep}}$ ) corresponde à quantidade de energia necessária para promover os fragmentos A e B de sua geometria de equilíbrio e estado fundamental eletrônico para a geometria e o estado eletrônico que eles têm no composto AB. A energia de interação instantânea ( $\Delta E_{\text{int}}$ ) entre os fragmentos da molécula é decomposta em três termos bem definidos (EQUAÇÃO 21) que podem ser interpretados de maneiras quimicamente significativas (PHIPPS et al., 2015; TE VELDE et al., 2000; VON HOPFFGARTEN; FRENKING, 2012).

$$\Delta E_{\text{int}} = \Delta E_{\text{elet}} + \Delta E_{\text{Pauli}} + \Delta E_{\text{orb}} \quad (21)$$

Esses termos são referentes à energia eletrostática ( $\Delta E_{\text{elet}}$ ), energia de Pauli ( $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$ ) e energia dos orbitais ( $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ ). A energia de interação eletrostática representa a interação eletrostática entre os fragmentos que são calculados com uma distribuição de densidade de carga. A energia de Pauli ( $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$ ) dá a energia de interação repulsiva entre os fragmentos em razão do princípio de Pauli que afirma que dois elétrons com a mesma rotação não podem ocupar a mesma região no espaço. A energia dos orbitais refere-se ao ganho de energia decorrente à mistura orbital dos fragmentos, como ilustradas na Figura 14 (TE VELDE et al., 2000; VON HOPFFGARTEN; FRENKING, 2012).

Figura 14 - Ilustração das três componentes da energia de interação.



Fonte: Dados do autor (2018).

Uma vantagem essencial do método EDA é que ele fornece uma descrição completa de energia de um complexo, não apenas à interação intermolecular, mas também à interação intramolecular.

Outro método de análise de ligação que interage com a abordagem EDA é a teoria quântica de átomos em moléculas (QTAIM). A riqueza de suas informações a torna um método promissor para estudos da natureza eletrônica dos sistemas moleculares.

### 3.6.5 Teoria quântica de átomos em moléculas (QTAIM)

A teoria quântica de átomos em moléculas (QTAIM), desenvolvida por Bader, é um modelo quântico considerado inovador no estudo da ligação química e na caracterização de interações intra e/ou intermoleculares (BADER, 1980, 1991; KUMAR; VENDAR; SUBRAMANIAN, 2016; OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; RAMOS, 2010). Segundo os conceitos mecânico-quânticos da metodologia QTAIM, esse método baseia-se na partição de um sistema molecular em subsistemas atômicos definidos por meio de uma análise da topologia de densidade eletrônica (MATTA; BODY, 2007).

A densidade eletrônica é utilizada como observável mecânico-quântico para execução de integrações numéricas, no qual o vetor gradiente  $\nabla\rho(r)$  é a condição básica para se determinar a topologia molecular (CORTS-GUZMÁN; BADER, 2005; MATTA; BODY, 2007) e para descrever um sistema químico.

As trajetórias ou linhas de contorno da densidade eletrônica são obtidas a partir de uma sequência de vetores gradientes  $\nabla\rho(r)$  (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; RAMOS, 2010) que se moldam para descrever um sistema químico. Essas trajetórias não se originam do infinito, mas de um ponto localizado entre dois atratores, os chamados pontos críticos de ligação (bond critical point ou BCP). A localização dos BCP é feita por meio do laplaciano da densidade eletrônica ( $\nabla^2\rho$ ), de acordo com a Equação 22 (MATTA; BOYD, 2007; OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; RAMOS, 2010).

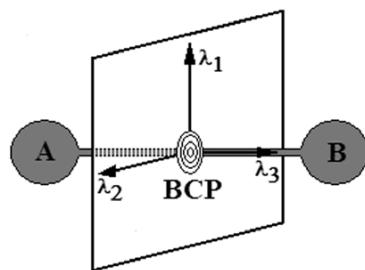
$$\nabla^2\rho = \underbrace{\frac{\delta^2\rho}{\delta_x^2}}_{\lambda_1} + \underbrace{\frac{\delta^2\rho}{\delta_y^2}}_{\lambda_2} + \underbrace{\frac{\delta^2\rho}{\delta_z^2}}_{\lambda_3} \quad (22)$$

É, nesse ponto, no BCP, que o laplaciano é calculado para ser utilizado como parâmetro na modelagem topológica da ligação química e o seu sinal descreve a concentração de densidade eletrônica em uma determinada zona de ligação. Se  $\nabla^2\rho < 0$ , a densidade eletrônica se concentra no BCP, resultando em ligações covalentes ou insaturadas. Por outro

lado, se  $\nabla^2\rho > 0$ , a densidade eletrônica concentra-se nos núcleos atômicos, indicando interações intra ou intermoleculares (GRABOWSKI; SOKALSKI; LESZCZYNSKI, 2004; OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; RAMOS, 2010).

Na Figura 15, mostra-se um exemplo de BCP entre dois átomos A e B (BADER, 1994; POPELIER, 2000).

Figura 15 - Ponto crítico de ligação (BCP) entre dois átomos A e B.



Fonte: (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; RAMOS, 2010).

Nessa teoria, os dois núcleos A e B formam uma ligação química, quando as trajetórias de ligação direcionadas a esses núcleos são formadas a partir de um único BCP (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; RAMOS, 2010; POPELIER, 2000).

Os parâmetros topológicos obtidos da QTAIM proporcionam uma descrição quântica sobre a localização e o comportamento dos átomos em uma ligação química (BADER, 1994; KUMAR; VENDAR; SUBRAMANIAN, 2016; POPELIER, 2000).

## 4 CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

A sociedade moderna depende de energia para sua existência. Quaisquer sinais de falta de energia, problemas ambientais e elevação dos preços são suficientes para fragilizar a confiança das pessoas e perturbar os mercados. Neste contexto, o gás natural tem sido apontado como uma alternativa interessante, devido a sua disponibilidade no mercado industrial e baixo preço, além de ser um combustível fóssil menos poluente.

Essa busca por fontes alternativas de energia tem proporcionado um aumento do interesse em estudos de processos de ativação do metano na fase gasosa por metais de transição. Sendo assim, este trabalho consistiu no estudo das propriedades geométricas, eletrônicas e de ligação dos complexos de nióbio  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $X = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  e  $\text{I}$ ) e espécies  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $m = 1, 2; n = 0, 1, 2$ ) na ativação da ligação C-H do metano.

O ponto de partida para o entendimento de tais sistemas consiste no conhecimento de suas estruturas geométricas e eletrônicas, que são requisitos básicos para a compreensão de propriedades e verificação das tendências que as partículas seguem. Nesta perspectiva, a análise de decomposição de energia (EDA) e as aplicações da teoria quântica dos átomos em moléculas foram apresentadas.

Com base nos resultados obtidos, quanto maior a eletronegatividade do halogênio ligado ao nióbio, maior a interação Nb-X e, consequentemente, a molécula é mais estável. Em relação aos óxidos de cobalto, o monóxido de cobalto neutro apresentou menor comprimento de ligação de acordo com o aumento da carga sobre o centro do metal e também, devido a maior densidade eletrônica.

Os resultados dos cálculos de EDA mostraram que a interação e as energias de ligação são maiores para o complexo  $\text{NbF}_5$  e para os monóxidos e dióxidos de cobalto neutro. Esse aumento vem da forte atração eletrostática e orbital.

De acordo com o diagrama de orbitais dos complexos, os elétrons menos envolvidos à ligação são  $\sigma_{\text{Nb}-\text{I}}$  e  $\sigma_{\text{Co}-\text{O}}$  para os monóxidos e dióxidos neutros. Por outro lado, o melhor aceitador de elétrons é o  $\sigma^*_{\text{Nb}-\text{F}}$  e  $\sigma^*_{\text{Co}-\text{O}}$  para os monóxidos e dióxidos divalentes.

Por fim, em relação à reatividade dos complexos de nióbio, os resultados globais indicaram que a  $E_{\text{Bonding}}$  é favorecida pelo aumento da eletronegatividade dos ligantes X e pelo aumento do caráter eletrofílico do nióbio. Em geral, o complexo  $\text{NbF}_5$  apresentou melhores condições termodinâmicas e cinéticas no mecanismo CMD.

Apenas o mecanismo CMD foi analisado para os complexos de nióbio, pois, complexos de metais de transição com alta valência envolve esse mecanismo para a ativação da ligação C-H. Já os óxidos de cobalto três mecanismos experimentalmente reconhecidos foram analisados e comparados entre si.

Em relação à reatividade dos óxidos de cobalto, o mecanismo OHM apresentou melhor desempenho entre os mecanismos analisados. Em relação aos óxidos de cobalto, a baixa densidade eletrônica dessas espécies e os ligantes oxo são importantes para a cinética e termodinâmica da reação e o mecanismo OHM é termodinamicamente mais favorável que o DHA. Entre os óxidos de cobalto investigados,  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  mostrou uma melhor performance cinética e termodinâmica na reação com o metano.

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**SEGUNDA PARTE - ARTIGOS****ARTIGO 1 - STRUCTURE AND BONDING IN NBX<sub>5</sub> X= (F, CL, BR E I)  
COMPLEXES: A MOLECULAR ORBITAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE C-H BOND  
ACTIVATION**

(Artigo publicado no periódico *Theoretical Chemistry Accounts*)

## ABSTRACT

In the present work, theoretical studies of the reactivity and stability of the  $\text{NbX}_5$  complexes ( $X = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  and  $\text{I}$ ) were carried out in the methane C–H bond activation. To study the chemical bonds formation of these complexes, an energy decomposition analysis was performed together with QTAIM calculations. The main results indicated that the interaction and binding energies are higher for  $\text{NbF}_5$  in relation to the halogen series. The niobium complexes gaps are influenced by the electronegativity of the halogens and the Nb–X bonding lengths. According to the energy diagram, the electrons less connected to the bond are  $\sigma\text{Nb–I}$ ; on the other hand, the best electron acceptor is  $\sigma^*\text{Nb–F}$ . The QTAIM calculations confirmed stronger Nb–X chemical bonds in  $\text{NbF}_5$  complexes. Regarding the reactivity of the niobium complexes, the overall results indicate better thermodynamic and kinetic conditions for the  $\text{NbF}_5$  complex.

Keywords: Niobium pentahalide complexes · Energy decomposition analysis (EDA) · QTAIM · C–H bond activation · Ligands effects.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The pentahalide complexes have different molecular structures in the solid phase, in which the metal center reaches the hexacoordination by means of bonds with halogens [1]. For example, the solid niobium pentafluoride ( $\text{NbF}_5$ ) is tetrameric with niobium and six-coordinate cis-fluoride bridges, while the heavier halogens, such as niobium pentachlorides ( $\text{NbCl}_5$ ) and niobium pentabromides ( $\text{NbBr}_5$ ) exist in the solid state as  $\text{M}_2\text{X}_{10}$  dimers. However, such complexes exist predominantly as monomers in the gas phase [2].

The colors of the complexes range from colorless ( $\text{NbF}_5$ ) to yellow ( $\text{NbCl}_5$ ), red ( $\text{NbBr}_5$ ) and black-brown ( $\text{NbI}_5$ ) [3]. These complexes are highly electrophilic, and therefore can act as Lewis acid catalyzing a variety of organic reactions, mainly in the methane C–H bond activation [4, 5]. This C–H binding study is of great importance for the comprehension of the methane–methanol conversion mechanism, because probably methanol will be an important energy source for the twenty-first century [5].

Catalyst is ubiquitous in modern synthetic and industrial chemistry, and plays a key role to reduce the consumption of energy and feedstock [6]. The design of catalysts with desired activity and selectivity is still a formidable task, and to a large extent, an empiric undertaking [7–10].

Currently, the development of more selective and efficient catalysts for the selective oxidation of saturated hydrocarbons under mild conditions is a central theme of research in modern chemistry [11]. The possibility of obtaining detailed data on catalytic processes has attracted a growing interest from the scientific and industrial community, motivated by the high economic, political and environmental impact that the activation of many inert molecules, such as methane, has for the world scenario [12].

Niobium pentahalide complexes did not have much attention in the past, but this scenario has been changing since the last decade [13]. These commercial compounds have found increasing use in homogeneous catalysis, stimulated by their easy availability and by the non-toxicity of the metallic elements [13, 14]. Some recent studies have shown that such compounds may be capable of activation pathways due to the high oxidation state of the metal combined with relatively strong metal-halide bonds [15, 16]. Other studies involved organic reactions using niobium pentahalide complexes as strong Lewis acid reactants [1, 17, 18], and these properties have encouraged their increasing application as efficient Lewis acid catalysts, since they are considered electrophilic agents [19, 20].

Thus, the first step in the development and improvement of catalytic processes homogeneous or heterogeneous is the understanding at the atomic level of these processes. Most of the catalysts currently developed and available, as well as those commonly used in the industry, involve the presence of at least one transition metal, hence the understanding of the electronic structure of these systems is not a simple task because of their greater chemical complexity. Studies using quantum calculations methodologies are a valuable tool in this objective, because these investigations can provide information of difficult access to experimentalists, which can be used to achieve the desired results, saving time and resources [21].

In this aspect, the present work is an effort to evaluate, from the computational standpoint, the reactivity and properties of niobium complexes in the methane C–H bond activation, as well as an interpretation of chemical bonds in terms of electrostatic interactions ( $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$ ), Pauli repulsive interaction among electrons ( $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$ ) and orbitals interaction ( $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ ). For this, a detailed investigation will be carried out using a methodology of energy decomposition analysis (EDA), developed by Morokuma and by Ziegler and Rauk [22, 23], in addition to QTAIM calculations [24, 25].

## 2 COMPUTATIONAL DETAILS

The first calculations were used to investigate the geometric properties and energy differences among the NbX<sub>5</sub> complexes (X = F, Cl, Br and I). For this analysis, all the electronic states of NbX<sub>5</sub> (singlet, triplet and quintet) were considered in order to verify the energetic difference among the different multiplicities, and also the influence of the halogens on the multiplicity of the system under study. For this, the ADF2012 computational package was employed [26].

Geometry optimization calculations and frequency analysis were performed by employing zero-order normal approximation (ZORA) calculations [26]. The functional applied was BLYP [27, 28], and the basis set the polarized triple-zeta Slater type (TZ2P) for niobium atoms and halogens [29–32]. The vibrational analyses were performed to determine the character (minimum point or saddle) of all stationary points.

With the determination of the optimized geometries of the niobium complexes, we proceed to the energy decomposition analysis of these complexes, along with QTAIM

calculations to obtain detailed information from the atomic and molecular point of view of the characteristics of chemical bonds of these complexes under study [25].

All binding analyses were performed at the ZORA-BLYP/TZ2P theoretical level [29,33]. In the EDA calculations, developed by Ziegler and Rauk, based on a similar work by Morokuma [22, 23], the general bond energy  $\Delta E$  between (Nb) and the halogens (X) consists of two main components (Eq. 1) [34, 35].

$$\Delta E = \Delta E_{prep} + \Delta E_{int} \quad (1)$$

The EDA decomposes the instantaneous interaction energy  $E_{int}$  between two fragments A and B in a molecule A–B in three well-defined terms (Eq. 2), they are: The quasiclassic electrostatic interaction energy among the charge densities of the fragments ( $\Delta E_{elstat}$ ), the repulsion of exchange among the fragments due to the Pauli principle ( $\Delta E_{Pauli}$ ), which is calculated by applying the Kohn–Sham determinant on the overlapping fragments to obey the Pauli principle for antisymmetry, renormalization and the energy gain due to the orbital mixture of the fragments ( $\Delta E_{orb}$ ). The EDA calculations of the present molecules were performed by using D3h symmetry. The orbital interaction  $\Delta E_{orb}$  in the Kohn–Sham theory explains the effect of charge transfer (i.e., donor–receiver interactions between occupied and unoccupied orbitals of two fragments, including HOMO–LUMO interactions) and polarization (empty–occupied orbital mixture in a fragment due to the presence of another fragment) [33, 36].

$$\Delta E_{int} = \Delta E_{elstat} + \Delta E_{Pauli} + \Delta E_{orb} \quad (2)$$

The deformation energy  $\Delta E_{prep}$  or  $\Delta E_{strain}$  is the amount of energy needed to deform the Nb and X fragments.

The topological properties of the electronic density in the NbX<sub>5</sub> chemical interactions were performed with the atoms in molecules (QTAIM) theory by Bader, as implemented in the AIM2000 program [24]. The QTAIM parameters located at the bond critical points (BCP) are useful tools for the characterization of chemical bonds.

In the study of the methane activation mechanism, all molecular precursor structures MP, transition state TS and complex product CP were taken into account at each point in the activation process. To ensure the correct reaction path of the lower energy structures of two

consecutive intermediate periods, it was employed calculations in the intrinsic reaction coordinate (IRC) to correctly optimize the transition state which link the intermediates under investigation [37]. Vibration analyses were then performed to determine the character (minimum or saddle point) of all stationary points. Each transition state structure (TS) shows only an imaginary frequency, which leads to the correct complex intermediate [38].

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Complexes $\text{NbX}_5$ ( $X = \text{F, Cl, Br and I}$ ) results

Table 1 shows the optimized geometries for  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $X = \text{F, Cl, Br and I}$ ). The BLYP calculations give more stable singlet states and based on these results, we can see that the halogen series does not influence on the multiplicity of the complex under study. From this point, all calculations were performed considering the singlet multiplicity for all systems. According to the results in Table 1,  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $X = \text{F, Cl, Br and I}$ ) has a D<sub>3</sub> h symmetry, with axial bond lengths larger than the equatorial ones [2]. In the series of complexes, the lengths of the Nb–X bonds become larger as we descend in the period of the periodic table. This is due to the increase in the atomic radius of the halogens caused by the increase of the principal quantum number n and the number of valence electrons of the –X (F, Cl, Br, and I) ligands. Among the halogens, iodine has a larger atomic radius because it is in the fifth period of the periodic table, and its electronic configuration is [Kr] 4d<sup>10</sup>5s<sup>2</sup>5p<sup>5</sup>. Another factor referring to the increase in Nb–X bond length is related to the decrease in the electronegativity of the halogens when changing from fluorine to iodine.

Table 1: Geometric parameters of the stationary points of the different multiplicities of the  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $X = \text{Halogens}$ ) complexes, using the BLYP method [2, 3].

$\text{NbF}_5$			
	Singlet	Triplet	Quintet
Nb- X <sub>ax</sub> (Å)	1.899	2.045	2.166
Nb- X <sub>eq</sub> (Å)	1.868	1.912	2.008
Nb-X (exp)(Å)	1.88±0.02	1.88±0.02	1.88±0.02
Energy*	-36.62	-31.08	-25.75
$\text{NbCl}_5$			
	Singlet	Triplet	Quintet
Nb- X <sub>ax</sub> (Å)	2.364	2.462	2.539
Nb- X <sub>eq</sub> (Å)	2.312	2.337	2.403
Nb-X (exp)(Å)	2.28±0.02	2.28±0.02	2.28±0.02

Energy*	-24.93	-22.22	-19.35
<b>NbBr<sub>5</sub></b>			
	Singlet	Triplet	Quintet
Nb- X <sub>ax</sub> (Å)	2.532	2.835	2.880
Nb- X <sub>eq</sub> (Å)	2.479	2.715	2.756
Nb-X (exp)(Å)	2.45±0.02	2.45±0.02	2.45±0.02
Energy*	-21.71	-16.76	-15.31
<b>NbI<sub>5</sub></b>			
	Singlet	Triplet	Quintet
Nb- X <sub>ax</sub> (Å)	2.766	2.620	2.683
Nb- X <sub>eq</sub> (Å)	2.705	2.496	2.554
Nb-X (exp)(Å)	-	-	-
Energy*	-19.82	-18.19	-17.60

\*Energy in eV."

It is worth noticing that the complexes studied present longer axial bonds than the equatorial ones; however, no difference in binding lengths has been found experimentally so far [2]. The Nb-X bond lengths are larger at the axial positions because of the increase in the electronic repulsion felt by the halogens located at 90° from the other halogens in the equatorial position.

The computational data obtained are in agreement with the experimental results [2], with small variations in lengths, as an example for the NbCl<sub>5</sub> complex, the difference is of 0.084 Å, and about 0.082 Å for NbBr<sub>5</sub>.

The energy values for NbX complexes increase throughout the series, ranging from -36.62 eV for Nb-F to -19.82 eV for Nb-I. One of the factors that influence this result is the increase of the electronegativity of the fluorine in relation to iodine, i.e., the higher the electronegativity of the halogen bound to the niobium, the higher the interaction Nb-X, and consequently, the more stable molecule.

The geometry obtained from the NbX complexes is bipyramidal trigonal, represented in Figure 1, with the halogen ligands oriented in the axial and equatorial position, and D<sub>3h</sub> symmetry, in agreement with the experimental results of electron diffraction [39]. The pentahalides under investigation are systems with electronic configurations d<sup>0</sup> for niobium.

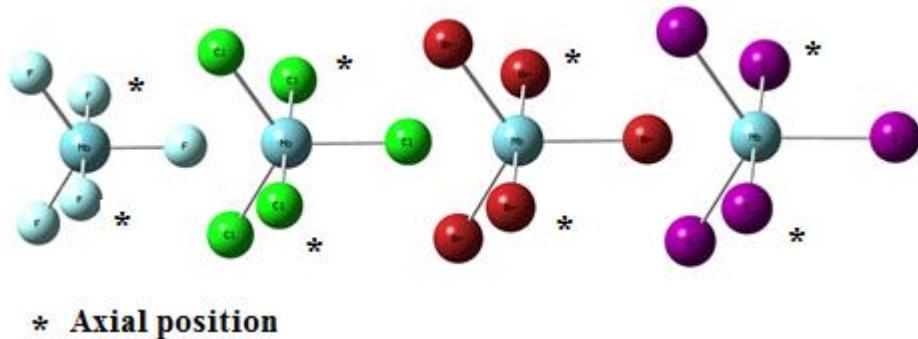


Figure 1: Geometric structures of complexes  $\text{NbX}_5$ ,  $\text{X} = (\text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  and  $\text{I})$ .

In order to study the formation of the chemical bonds in the  $\text{NbX}_5$  complexes ( $\text{X} = \text{F}$ ,  $\text{Cl}$ ,  $\text{Br}$  and  $\text{I}$ ), an energy decomposition analysis (EDA) was performed and the results are shown in Table 2. The EDA decomposes the Niobium interaction energy with halogens in three terms defined as  $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$ ,  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ , providing a significant chemically interpretation of the chemical bonds [39].

Table 2: Energy Decomposition Analysis of the  $\text{NbX}_5$ ,  $\text{X} = (\text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  and  $\text{I})$  at BLYP/TZ2P

Complexes	$\text{NbF}_5$	$\text{NbCl}_5$	$\text{NbBr}_5$	$\text{NbI}_5$
$\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$	0.72	0.62	0.55	0.46
$\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}^1$	-17.36 (90.00%)	-14.06 (85.50%)	-12.14 (81.70%)	-10.43 (78.00%)
$\Delta E_{\text{orb}}^1$	-2.02 (10.00%)	-2.41 (14.50%)	-2.72 (18.30%)	-2.98 (22.00%)
$\Delta E_{\text{int}}$	-18.64	-15.86	-14.34	-12.95

Energy values in kcal/mol.

1-Values in parentheses give the percentage contribution to the total attractive interactions  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}} + \Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ .

The results of the EDA calculations depend on the correct choice of the functional used due to the influence of the dispersion interactions on the results. According to Grimme [40, 41], the BLYP functional showed a very different behavior in relation to closed-loop repulsive interactions, resulting in accurate results regarding the EDA calculations.

According to Table 2, the numerical results of the EDA calculations show that the values of the term  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  are attractive, due to the optimization of the wave function during the calculations. As there were no positive values, one can conclude that there were no numerical errors in the calculation, but a correct configuration of the fragments Nb and X. The term  $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$  is positive indicating a repulsive tendency among the electrons of same spin of the fragments, and the electrostatic term ( $\Delta E_{\text{Elstat}}$ ) is generally attractive and shows a decrease

throughout the series F to I, due to the distribution of charge in the complexes as shown in Figure 2.

For the  $\text{NbF}_5$  complex, Figure 2a, there is a greater distribution of the electronic density on the axial and equatorial fluorine atoms, these more negative regions, in yellow, attract the more positive region of the niobium, in blue, throughout the molecule, leading to the high  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  value = -17.36 kcal/mol. The decrease in  $E_{\text{elstat}}$  values, i.e., for less stable values, is due to two factors, the decrease in the electronegativity and the increase of the bond length among the halogens. The reduction of the electronegativity causes the amount of charges separated and hence the dipole moment to decrease from  $\text{NbF}$  to  $\text{NbI}$  [39]. One can observe this decrease by the variation in the degree of displacement of the electronic charge density on these substances by the charge calculations in the GaussView 5.0 shown in Figure 2. For these molecules, the variation in the electronegativity difference affects more the dipole moment than the bond length. For the  $\text{NbCl}_5$  and  $\text{NbBr}_5$  complexes, the negative charges are concentrated on the axial halogens and a decrease of the positive region of the niobium atom occurs, as shown in Figure 2 (b) and (c), respectively. Due to the larger size of the iodine atom and its low electronegativity, the molecule becomes neutral with a symmetrical charge distribution, represented by the green region.

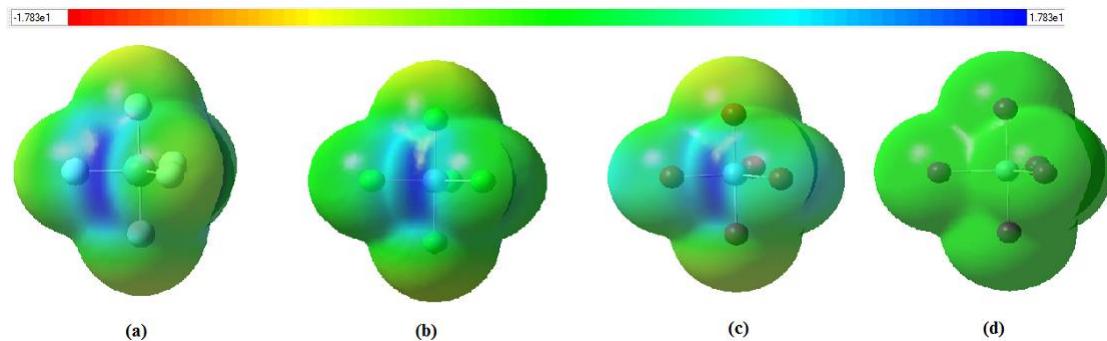


Figure 2: Electrostatic Potential Surface representation for the  $\text{NbX}_5$ , (a) $\text{NbF}_5$ , (b) $\text{NbCl}_5$ , (c) $\text{NbBr}_5$  and (d) $\text{NbI}_5$  complexes

As there is no geometric and electronic preparation of the atomic fragments Nb and X ( $\Delta E_{\text{prep}} = 0$ ), the interaction energy is equal to the binding energy for the studied  $\text{NbX}_5$  complexes. The EDA results show that  $\text{NbF}_5$  presents two stabilizing contributions to the total interaction energy, i.e., the orbital interactions  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  with a value of -2.02 kcal/mol and the

$\Delta E_{elstat}$  interactions with a value of -17.36 kcal/mol. The Pauli repulsion,  $\Delta E_{Pauli}$ , is positive, with a value of 0.72 kcal/mol, a higher value among the series of halogens due to a greater interaction between the fluorine atoms and the niobium from the smaller size and larger electronegativity of fluorine, thus leading to a larger repulsion of their spins with the same rotation. In this way, the strongly attractive electrostatic and orbital interactions of the fluorine and niobium atoms contribute to favorable interaction energy in relation to the other halogens, with a larger contribution of 90.00% of the electrostatic interactions.

The  $NbCl_5$  binding image follows the trend of the  $NbF_5$  complex, but with a lower electrostatic contribution (Table 2). The  $NbCl_5$  complex has a total interaction energy of  $\Delta E_{int} = -15.86$  kcal/mol due to highly attractive electrostatic and orbital interactions, and  $\Delta E_{Pauli} = 0.62$  kcal/mol. Table 2 shows that  $\Delta E_{elstat} = -14.06$  kcal/mol (85.50%) comes from the attraction energy, while  $\Delta E_{orb} = -2.41$  kcal/mol (14.50%) comes from the orbital energies.

For the  $NbBr_5$  complex, the EDA results show that two stabilizing energies contributed to the total interaction energy, the orbital interactions with a value of  $\Delta E_b = -2.72$  kcal/mol and the  $\Delta E_{elstat}$  interactions with a value of -12.14 kcal/mol. Thus, strongly attractive electrostatic and orbital interactions contribute to a favorable interaction energy of  $\Delta E_{int} = -14.34$  kcal/mol. For the  $NbI_5$  complex, the  $\Delta E_{orb}$  orbital interactions contributed with 22.00%, the highest contribution in the halogen series, due to the increase of the iodine fragments.  $\Delta E_{elstat}$  interactions contributed with 78.00%, the lowest contribution in the halogen series, due to the symmetrical distribution of electronic density in the complex, caused by the low electronegativity of iodine.

The interaction and binding energies are higher for the  $NbF_5$  complex than the halogen series. The EDA results show that the increase comes from the strong electrostatic and orbital attraction, with a greater contribution of the electrostatic attraction due to the electronegativity of the fluorine. Throughout the series, the interaction energy is favored by the energy of the orbitals and a weaker Pauli repulsion. The  $NbI_5$  complex has lower binding dissociation energy in the halogen series. Although the Pauli repulsion is smaller, this loss of repulsion does not compensate for the decrease of  $\Delta E_{elstat}$  and  $\Delta E_{orb}$ .

The comparison of the  $NbX_5$  complexes ( $X = F, Cl, Br$ , and  $I$ ), according to the EDA results, reveals that  $\Delta E_{elstat}$  strongly contributes to the chemical bonding, according to Spackman [42], in a study that showed that electrostatic interactions are quite important for chemical bonds in almost all molecules. EDA is a quite appealing method because it relates the total energy of interaction ( $\Delta E_{int}$ ) regarding two reagent molecules to mathematically well-

established and chemically significant kinds of interactions, for instance, it can be cited the electrostatic energy, electron-electron repulsion energy, and electron delocalization energy. As two reagent molecules undergo chemical transformations by reacting between each other to give rise to the transition state, it is observed modifications in geometry, along with intramolecular and intermolecular electronic reorganization. More specifically, one can notice C–H bond stretching and alkane angle changes [43].

After the energy decomposition analysis of the pentahalide niobium complexes, there was the Nb-X binding analysis by quantitative Kohn-Sham molecular orbital. The fragments molecular orbital (FMO) method was proposed as one of the efficient approximation schemes for the molecular orbital (MO) calculations, based on energy decomposition [44, 45].

Table SII (support information) reports the contribution percentages of the  $\text{MX}_5$  orbitals fragments for the formation of the highest occupied molecular orbitals (HOMO) and lowest unoccupied molecular orbitals (LUMO). The HOMO and LUMO molecular orbitals of the interaction between Nb and X are represented in Figure 3. As one can see, the *p* orbital of the halogens contributes about 98% to the formation of the HOMO molecular orbital, due to the presence of the valence electrons. The LUMO molecular orbital is formed by the contribution of the d orbitals of the niobium around 70% and to a lesser extent by the *p* orbital of the halogens. The d orbital of niobium is involved in the LUMO formation due to its empty d orbitals, owing to the  $d^0$  electronic configurations for niobium.

The interactions between a transition metal center and a ligand are formed by  $\sigma$  donation from the ligand to an empty acceptor orbital, the d orbital of niobium and a  $\pi$  donation back to an empty orbital - usually anti-ligand in the ligand [46]. In our study, according to the results of contribution per orbitals analysis, this retro donation did not take place and in all cases, the Nb-X bond is of  $\sigma$  type, with the metal center participating predominantly with d orbitals.

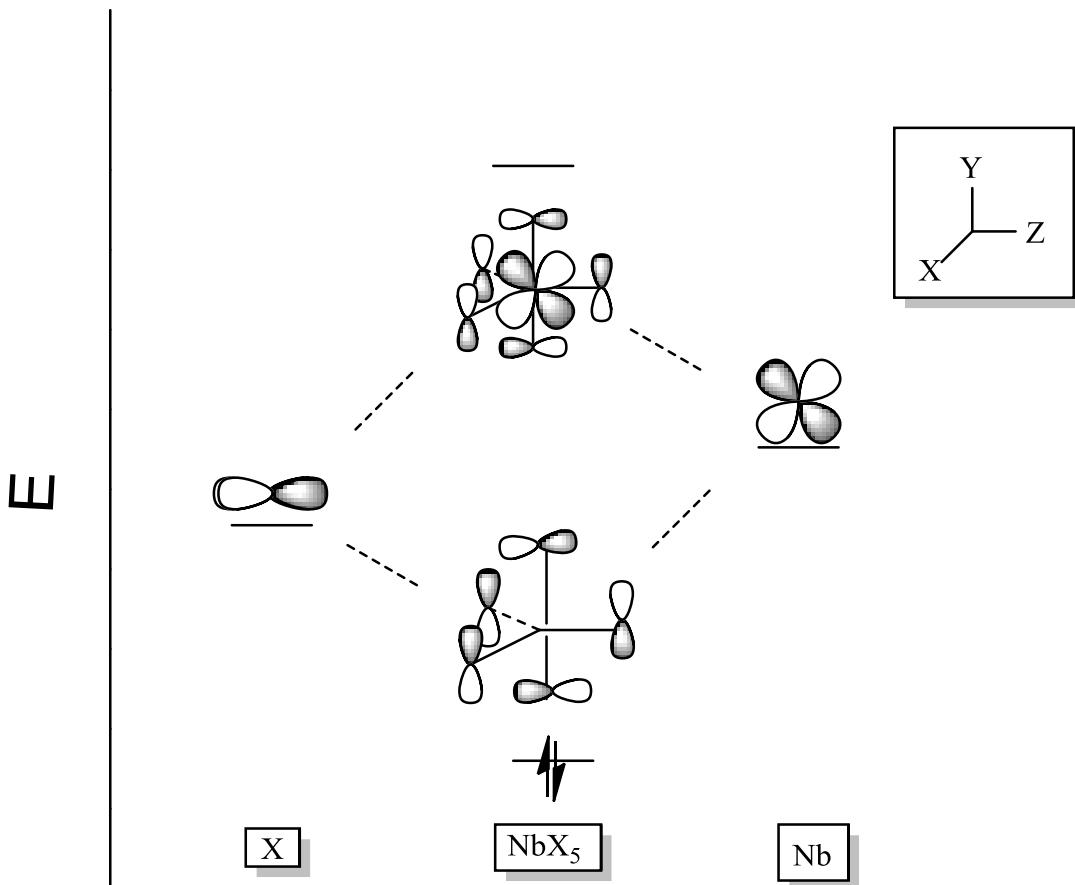


Figure 3: Orbital interaction diagram for the  $\text{NbX}_5$  complex ( $X = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}, \text{I}$ ), emerging from Kohn-Sham orbital analyzes in ZORA-BLYP / TZ2P.

According to Table SI-2, the doubly degenerate HOMO orbitals ( $d_{2g}$ ) and the HOMO-1 orbitals include only very large contributions of the p valence orbitals of the halogens. The HOMO-2 orbital is doubly degenerate ( $d_{2g}$ ) and exhibits orbital interactions between halogen fragments and d atomic orbitals of the niobium atom. However, the LUMO orbitals include contributions of the p valence orbitals of the halogens and a larger contribution of the d orbital of niobium, around 80%, with greater participation of the  $d_{yz}$  and  $d_{xz}$  orbitals.

Figure 4 shows a comparison between the HOMOs and LUMOs of the pentahalide niobium complexes under study. By increasing the electronegativity of the halogen, the energies of the HOMOs increase and the energies of the LUMOs have little variations. Thus, one can conclude that the HOMO - LUMO energy differences are due to the variation of the electronegativity in the series of halogens, because the bonds containing F, Cl, Br and I are formed from 2p, 3p, 4p and 5p orbitals, respectively.

The energies of the orbitals described in Figure 4 for the HOMO-LUMO gap decrease throughout the series of niobium complexes. For example, the gap for  $\text{NbF}_5$  is -5.65 eV, whereas the HOMO-LUMO difference for  $\text{NbI}_5$  is -1.31 eV. Notice that the decrease in the electronegativity of the halide ligands and the increase of the Nb-X bond length, both cause a decrease of the gap among the niobium complexes.

The orbital diagram for the  $\text{NbX}$  complexes (Figure 4) shows that the electrons less attached to the bond are the  $\sigma_{\text{Nb-I}}$  and, therefore, the Nb-I bond is the best  $\sigma$  electron donor, followed by Nb-Br, Nb- Cl and, finally, Nb-F. This fact can be explained both in terms of electronegativity and halogen size. The electronegativity of X helps to determine the energy level of the orbital  $\sigma_{\text{Nb-X}}$ . Furthermore, the interaction among atomic orbitals of very different sizes, for example, 3d<sub>xy</sub> of Nb and 5p of I, generates labile bonds, formed by little stable electrons and, therefore, susceptible to be donated. In turn, Figure 4 shows that the best electron acceptor, the lowest energy empty orbital, is  $\sigma^*_{\text{Nb-F}}$ . This is due to the greater participation of the unoccupied orbital 3d<sub>yz</sub> of the niobium, and according to the electronegativity order, the most polarized bond is Nb-F and, therefore, the niobium in this binding will be more electrophilic, i.e., deficient in electrons [47, 48].

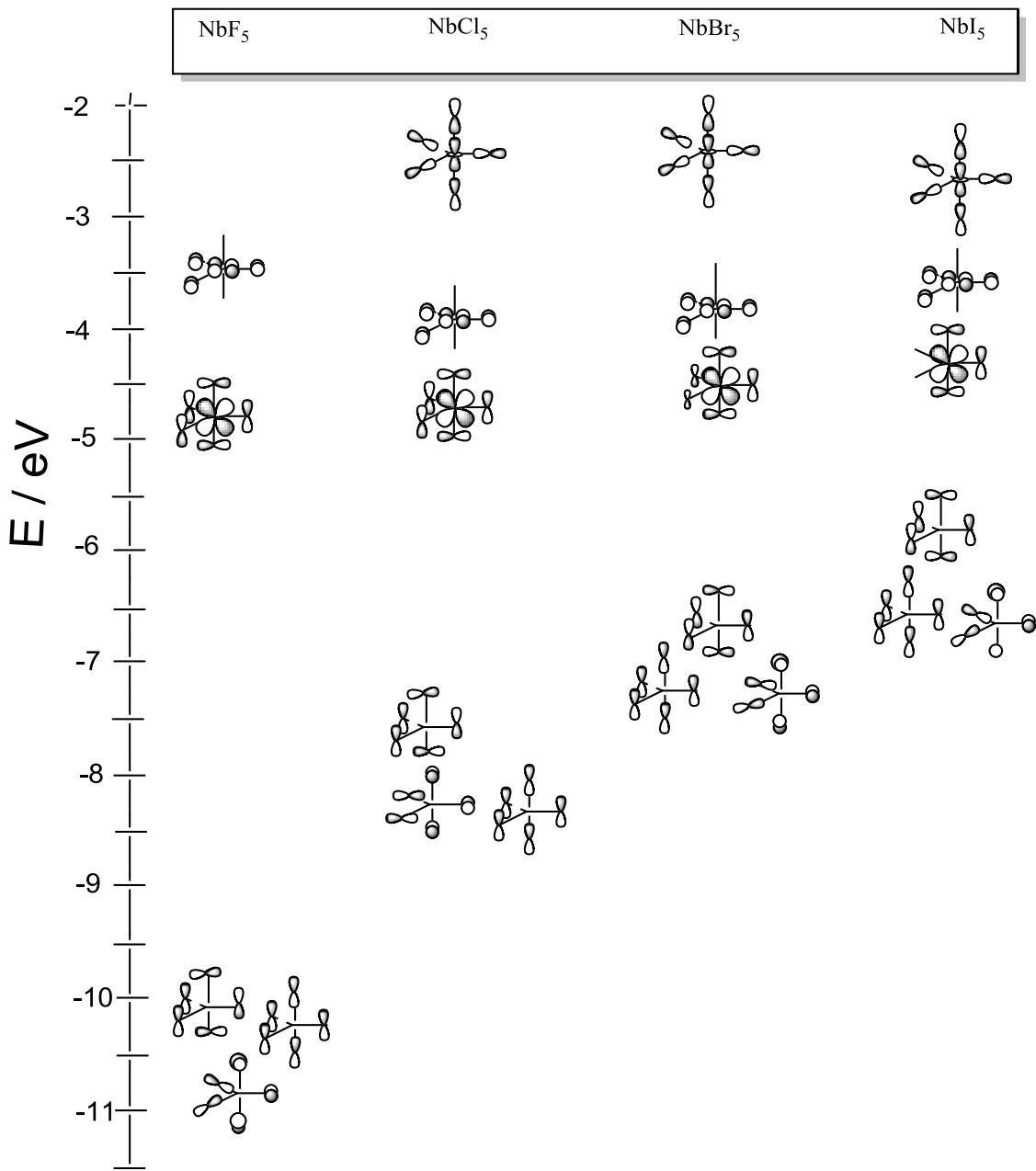


Figure 4: Scheme of the HOMO, HOMO-1, HOMO-2 and LUMO, LUMO + 1 and LUMO + 2 molecular orbitals for the NbX<sub>5</sub> complexes (X = F, Cl, Br, I) emerging from the Kohn-Sham orbital ZORA-BLYP / TZ2P.

In an attempt to understand the nature of the chemical bond (for example, if the bond is covalent, partially covalent or non-covalent), QTAIM calculations were performed. From these calculations, it is possible to characterize hydrogen bonds among the atoms involved and to look into the participation of the orbitals in these interactions with their respective energy values.

According to the mechanical-quantum concepts for the QTAIM methodology, the observable properties of a chemical system are contained in its molecular electronic density,  $X(r)$ , where the density is used as a quantum-mechanical observable for the execution of numerical integrations, in which the vector Gradient  $\nabla\rho(r)$  is the basic condition for determining the molecular topology [49].

The electronic density is shaped to describe a chemical system and according to the calculations, the bond critical point (BCP) is located at the center of the Nb-X bond of all niobium complexes, i.e. the point where the load density function ( $q(r)$ ) is a minimum along the binding pathway and maximum through the other two directions. In the bcp, the electronic density  $p(r)$ , Laplacian  $\nabla^2p(r)$ , kinetic energy density of the electron  $G(r)$ , and potential  $V$  density of energy of electrons ( $r$ ) were calculated and are arranged in Table 3.

Table 3: The QTAIM B3LYP/ Watchers f parameters, electronic density ( $p(r)$ ), Laplacian ( $\nabla^2p(r)$ ), total electron energy density ( $H(r)$ ), kinetic electron energy density ( $G(r)$ ), and potential electron energy density ( $V(r)$ ) for bcp of the Nb-X chemical bonds of the complexes  $\text{NbX}_5$ .\*\*

Species	$p(r)$ (a.u)	$\nabla^2p(r)$ (a.u)	$G(r)$ (a.u)	$V(r)$ (a.u)	$-G/V$	$H(r)$
$\text{NbF}_5$ (ax)	+0.1307	+0.7455	+0.2108	-0.2353	+0.8959	-0.0245
$\text{NbF}_5$ (eq)	+0.1412	+0.7242	+0.2130	-0.2449	+0.8679	-0.0319
$\text{NbCl}_5$ (ax)	+0.07673	+0.2502	+0.07196	-0.08135	+0.8845	-0.00939
$\text{NbCl}_5$ (eq)	+0.08547	+0.2489	+0.07472	-0.08719	+0.8570	-0.01247
$\text{NbBr}_5$ (ax)	+0.06618	+0.1527	+0.05004	-0.0626	+0.7993	-0.01256
$\text{NbBr}_5$ (eq)	+0.07327	+0.1450	+0.05128	-0.06630	+0.7734	-0.01502
$\text{NbI}_5$ (ax)	+0.05487	+0.07705	+0.03214	-0.04502	+0.7139	-0.01288
$\text{NbI}_5$ (eq)	+0.06068	+0.06837	+0.03247	-0.04785	+0.6785	-0.01538

\*\*Computed results were performed using AIM program.

As shown in Table 3, the computed values  $p(r)$  in the bcp of the Nb-X chemical bond range from +0.1307 au to +0.05487 au in the series of the axial halogens and from +0.1412 au to +0.06068 au for the equatorial halogens. These results indicate that the highest values of  $p(r)$  are calculated for the equatorial halogens in the trigonal bipyramidal structure of the complexes, and that the value of this parameter decreases with the size of the halogen and with the decrease of the electronegativity. Therefore, these results of  $p(r)$  confirm our interpretation of the EDA values of the complexes, in which they indicate stronger Nb-X chemical bonds in  $\text{NbF}_5$ , binding energy value  $\Delta E_{\text{bond}} = -19.3722$ . In practical terms, the Laplacian  $\nabla^2\rho(r)$  has the property of describing the concentration of electronic density in a

given binding zone. For example, if  $\nabla^2\rho(r) < 0$ , the electronic density accumulates in the bcp of the chemical bonds, while if  $\nabla^2\rho(r) > 0$ , it is given that the atomic cores support the entire charge concentration [24]. From Figure 5, one can see that the accumulation of electronic density at the axial fluorine atoms at the  $\text{NbF}_5$  bond is due to its larger electronegativity and the repulsion of axial fluorine in comparison to the equatorial one. For the other complexes, there is an increase in the electronic density in the niobium and in the axial halogens in a smaller proportion, except for the bromine atom that concentrates the electronic density in the equatorial atoms.

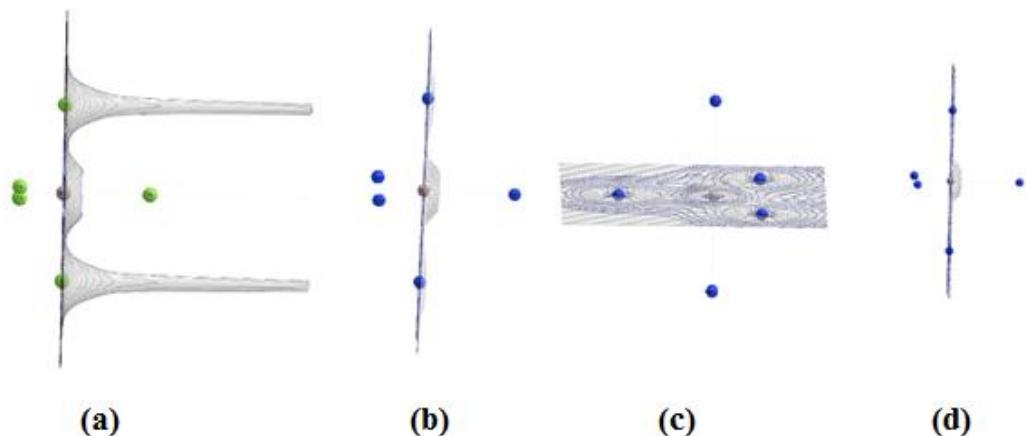


Figure 5: Electronic density of the entire  $\text{NbX}_5$  ( $\text{X} = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  and  $\text{I}$ ) complexes, wherein (a)  $\text{NbF}_5$ , (b)  $\text{NbCl}_5$ , (c)  $\text{NbBr}_5$  and (d)  $\text{NbI}_5$

As shown in Table 3, we observe that all  $\nabla^2\rho(r)$  bonds have values higher than zero and such values decrease throughout the series of the studied complexes indicating a decrease in the ionic character of the bond. To verify the ionic character of the bond, it is necessary to analyze other parameters such as:  $-G/V > 1$ ;  $H(r) > 0$ . It is possible to conclude according to Table 3, although  $\nabla^2\rho(r)$  has positive values, the  $\text{Nb-X}$  bond has a partial covalent character, due to the other parameters  $-G/V > 1$ ;  $H(r) > 0$ . Therefore, the results of the QTAIM calculations indicate that the  $\text{Nb-F}$  chemical bonds own a strong ionic character and that result is in agreement with the values of  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}} = -17.3553$  kcal/mol, contributing to the stability of the complex. The other complexes of the halogen series present an ionic and covalent character of the  $\text{Nb-X}$  bond, and the stabilization of the complexes is due to the values of  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ .

Based on the results of the geometric, electronic and bonding properties of the  $\text{NbX}_5$  complexes ( $X = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  and  $\text{I}$ ), we set out for theoretical analysis of the kinetic and thermodynamic preferences of the different products involved in the methane activation by the Niobium complexes in study. In this investigation, the molecular complexes involved in this reaction were analyzed, i.e., molecular precursor (MP), transition state (TS) and complex product (CP) for the whole series of  $\text{NbX}_5$  complexes ( $X = \text{F}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$  and  $\text{I}$ ) under investigation.

### 3.2 Methane C-H bond activation process

As already mentioned, the niobium complexes present large coordination numbers, high oxidation states (+5), beyond the Lewis acidity in their complexes. Due to these characteristics, these complexes have received great attention by several research groups, mainly in their application in diverse organic reactions and in the organometallic catalysis [50].

In this sense, we studied the activation reaction of the methane C-H bond by the concerted metalation-deprotonation mechanism (CMD) [51-53].

In the entrance channel of the CMD mechanism, it occurs the formation of weakly bound complexes, the molecular precursors (MP). Thus, the most important orientations representing the interactions of the methane hydrogen with the niobium complex of (position 1, position 2 and position 3) type for the MP were considered as can be seen in Figure 6.

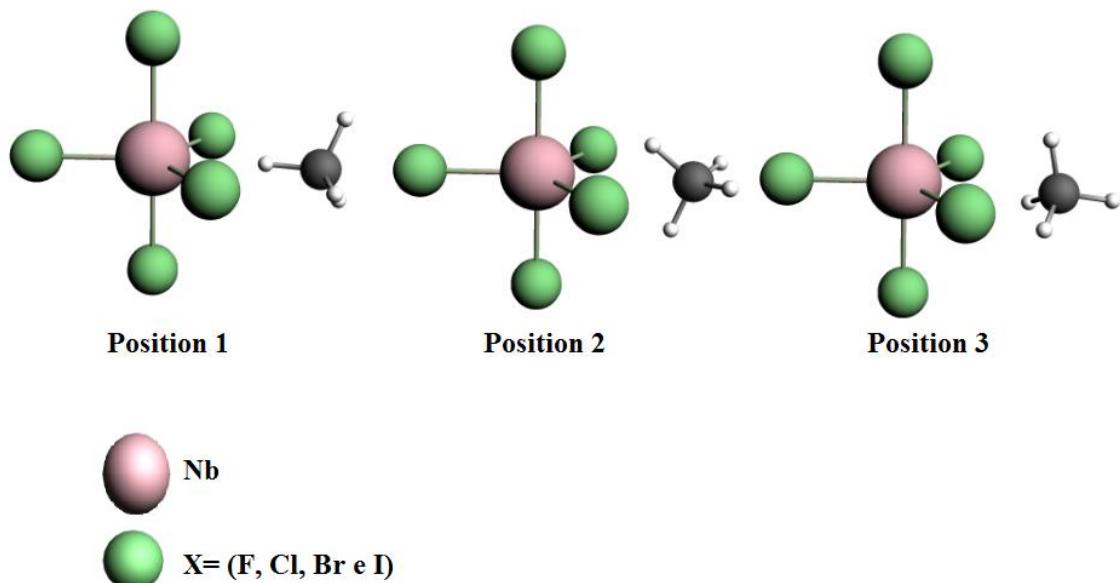


Figure 6: The coordination modes of weakly bound MP complexes.

These conformations show three different interactions of the metal complex with methane. All weakly bound Van der Waals MP complexes showed a preferential conformation (position 3) in the equatorial region as fundamental conformation with the niobium center directed towards methane.

After these results, all possible TS complexes were taken into account and the optimized conformation leads to the first stable activated complexes recognized as products (CP).

Figure 7 shows the optimized molecules structures of the MP, TS and CP involved in the methane activation process by the CMD mechanism.

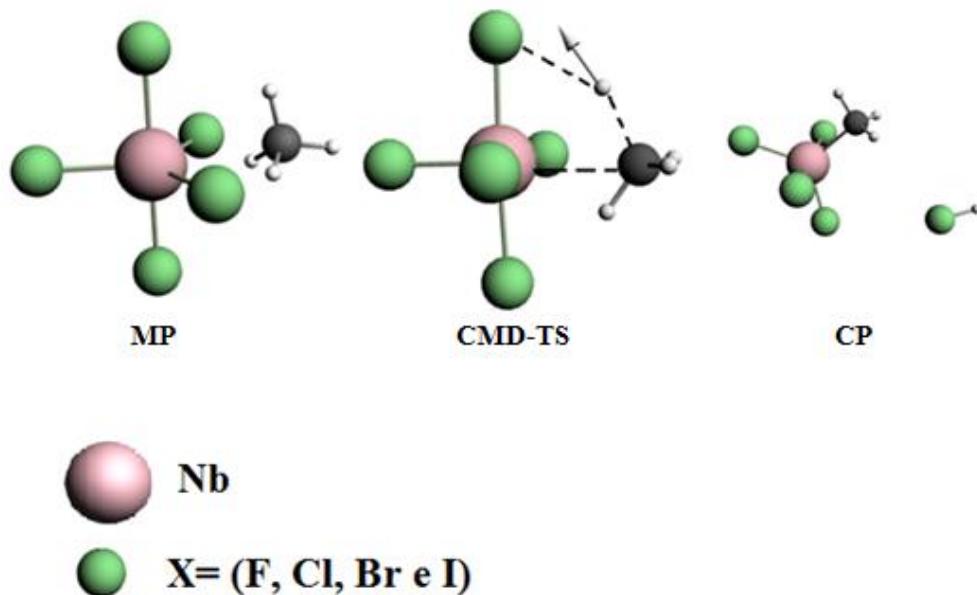


Figure 7: The optimized molecular structures of the MP, CMD-TS and CP complexes in the concerted metalation-deprotonation (CMD) mechanism.

The optimized transition state structures resulted in a complex (CMD-TS) with four interaction centers. The electrons pair already involved in the sigma binding between the methane C-H atoms serves as a ligand for the  $\text{NbX}_5$  complex, thus forming the CMD-TS. Figure 7 shows that the carbon of the methyl group is oriented in the equatorial position in the CMD-TS, due to the greater stability of this position in relation to the axial position.

The hydrogen ( $\text{H}'$ ), which is being attracted by the halogens, shows a slight excess of positive charge and the resulting methyl group is negatively charged.

The optimized CP structures converged to the formation of an organometallic complex  $\text{CH}_3\text{-Nb-X}_4$  ( $\text{X} = \text{F, Cl, Br and I}$ ) with trigonal bipyramidal structure and a hydrogen halide.

The determinant factor for the hydrogen halide outlet is due to the higher value of the X charges at the axial versus equatorial positions. In relation to the CP, one can realize that the niobium continued with penta coordination, because it is in its maximum oxidation state.

In Table 4, the data related to the geometric analyzes of the molecular precursor (MP), transition state (CMD-TS) and complex product (CP) formed during the reaction are arranged.

Table 4: BLYP/ TZ2P geometrical parameters for molecular precursor (MP), transition state (TS) and product complex (PC) of the niobium complexes in the oxidative insertion mechanism. The bond lengths are in Å and the bond angles are in degrees.

Parameter	NbF <sub>5</sub>			NbCl <sub>5</sub>			NbBr <sub>5</sub>			NbI <sub>5</sub>		
	MP	TS	PC	MP	TS	PC	MP	TS	PC	MP	TS	PC
Nb-C	2.84	2.35	2.20	3.80	3.10	2.21	4.08	2.73	2.20	5.10	2.44	2.27
Nb-H'	2.55	2.26	-	3.33	2.57	-	4.00	2.43	-	5.02	2.09	-
C-H'	1.09	1.72	-	1.09	2.20	-	1.09	2.51	-	1.09	2.05	-
X-H'	2.70	1.10	0.94	3.01	1.81	1.29	4.09	1.81	1.43	5.20	1.90	1.63
<C-Nb-H'	68.7	65.2	-	59.8	55.7	-	72.9	55.2	-	53.3	58.5	-

Based on the results in Table 4, it is possible to realize an increase of the Nb-C bonding lengths for the MP complexes. In relation to the NbF<sub>5</sub> and NbI<sub>5</sub> complexes, there was an increase of 2.26Å. This increase is due to the electron density distribution in the niobium complexes and the methane electronic distribution. We can conclude that these results are in agreement with the electronic and binding properties.

Among the complexes, NbF<sub>5</sub> presented the shortest distance Nb-C (2.84Å). This result indicates that the increase of the electronegativity in the halogens series favors the electrostatic interaction between the metal center and the methane at the beginning of the reaction in the entrance channel. However, steric impediments caused by the less electronegative halogens decreased the Nb-C interaction.

Comparing the Nb-C bond lengths between the MP and CMD-TS complexes, there was a decrease in bond length due to the interaction of the methyl group with the niobium. The reverse occurred for the C-H' bond lengths. These results indicated the formation of a 4-center transition state with the methane hydrogen binding to the X ligand and the methyl group binding to niobium (Figure 7).

The results of the thermodynamic and kinetic values of the CMD mechanisms are reported in Table 5.

Table 5: Bonding ( $\Delta E$  Bonding), activation barriers ( $\Delta E$  Act) and reaction energies ( $\Delta E_{Reac}$ ) for the CMD.\*

Species	$E_{bonding}$	$E_{act}$	$E_{react}$
$NbF_5$	-1.04	28.39	-1.4
$NbCl_5$	-0.52	35.4	-0.35
$NbBr_5$	+0.14	47.7	+21.8
$NbI_5$	+0.16	51.3	+26.7

\*Energy in kcal/mol.

The van der Waals MP complexes formed at the beginning of the reaction entrance channel have lower energies than the respective reactant energies. According to the results of the calculations, the binding energies that are derived from the electronic energy difference between MP and reactants ( $NbX_5 + CH_4$ ) range from -1.04 kcal/mol for  $NbF_5$  up to 0.16 kcal/mol for  $NbI_5$ . Thus, according to the results, it is possible to conclude that the formation of the electrostatically bound MP complex is favored by the increase of the X ligand electronegativity. The presence of the electronegative ligands provided a more favorable initial electrostatic interaction for the methane.

Regarding the reaction results, it is given that the energy barrier values increase according to the reduction of the halogens electronegativity. Making a comparison of the TS energy values among the complexes, the energy difference between  $NbF_5$  and  $NbI_5$  is 12.9 kcal/mol. Activation barrier results indicate that the decrease in the electronegativity of the halogenated ligands does not favor the methane activation process. In general, the activation barrier indicates therefore that the decrease of the electronegativity of the X ligands and the decrease of the load in the metal center does not favor the kinetics of the methane C-H bond activation by CMD mechanism.

This result may be due to the fact that the X ligands are good electron density acceptors and the less electronegative ligands are larger, causing steric hindrance in both MP and TS formation. Therefore, the balance between kinetic and thermodynamic factors will define whether the methane activation process will take place. To answer this, it is well known that gas phase reactions will only occur if all stationary points are located below the reactant energies.

In relation to the reaction thermodynamics, it can be seen in Table 5 that the reactions of the  $\text{NbF}_5$  and  $\text{NbCl}_5$  complexes with methane are exothermic and for the other complexes of the series are endothermic. The thermodynamics of this process is favorable with the presence of a more electronegative ligand that causes an increase in the complex reactivity.

Reactivity trends can be explained not only in terms of the X electronegative character, but also by the corresponding reaction enthalpies which are mainly related to the  $\text{HX}$  formation, whose binding-dissociation energies are much smaller for the heavier halogens.

Although these processes do not provide a catalytic functionalization, it is noticed that the cleavage of the methane C-H bond is a central step towards the design of catalytic reactions. Techniques that can favor the methane activation process are of great interest, being intensively investigated by diverse research groups worldwide [37, 54, 55-61]. It is important to keep in mind that the C-H bond of methane is observed as being thermodynamically strong and kinetically inert, and the breakdown of this bond is a crucial step in the methane activation process. The better comprehension of underlying mechanisms and improvement of the existing technologies are part of a big challenge in catalysis [54, 55]. The computational method used, for instance, regarding the employment of BLYP density functional, is according to procedures successfully used in other works [43, 56]. In this line, it is worth mentioning the work from Wolters et al (2015), wherein a theoretical study was developed by employing palladium complexes, and their results suggest that the theory level used was suitable to treat multielectronic atoms, such as niobium in this case [56]. These works, along with our present study, bring about important contributions to the development of more efficient strategies capable of potentializing the methane activation process, providing significant advances to this research area.

## 4 Conclusions

In conclusion, the pentahalide complexes are found predominantly as monomers in the gas phase, presenting a trigonal bipyramidal structure of  $D_{3h}$  symmetry. These complexes are highly electrophilic and therefore can act as Lewis acid, which has encouraged their increasing application as catalysts. Based on the results obtained in the investigation of the geometric properties of niobium complexes, the Nb-X bond lengths in the axial positions are higher than in the equatorial positions, due to the increase in the electronic repulsion felt by

the halogens located at 90° of the other halogens in the equatorial position. The energy values for NbX<sub>5</sub> complexes increase throughout the series, and one of the factors influencing this trend is the increase of the electronegativity of the fluorine in relation to iodine; therefore, the higher the electronegativity of the niobium-bound halogen, the larger the Nb-X interaction and consequently the more stable the molecule is supposed to be.

The EDA calculations results showed that the decrease of the E<sub>elstat</sub> values is due to two factors: the decrease of the electronegativity and the increase of the bond length among the halogens. For these molecules, the variation in the electronegativity difference affects more the dipole moment than the bond length. The interaction and binding energies are higher for the NbF<sub>5</sub> complex over the course of the halogen series. The EDA results show that the increase comes from the strong electrostatic and orbital attraction, with a greater contribution of the electrostatic attraction due to the electronegativity of the fluorine. The NbI<sub>5</sub> complex has lower binding dissociation energy in the halogen series.

The HOMO molecular orbitals are formed by the p orbital of the halogens and contribute about 98% due to the presence of the valence electrons. In turn, the LUMO molecular orbital is formed by the contribution of the d orbitals of the niobium, about 70% and to a lesser extent by the p orbital of the halogens. According to the orbitals diagram for the complexes, the electrons less attached to the bond are σNb-I. On the other hand, the best electron acceptor is the σ\*Nb-F. Finally, the QTAIM calculations indicated that the highest values of p(r) are calculated for the equatorial halogens in the trigonal bipyramidal structure of the complexes, and that the value of this parameter decreases with the size of the halogen and with the decrease of the electronegativity. Therefore, these results confirm our interpretation of the EDA values of the complexes, in which they indicate stronger Nb-X chemical bonds in NbF<sub>5</sub>. The results of the QTAIM calculations indicate that the Nb-F chemical bonds present a strong ionic character, contributing to the stability of the complex. The other complexes of the halogens series present an ionic and covalent character of the Nb-X bond, and the stabilization of the complexes is due to the values of ΔE<sub>elstat</sub> and ΔE<sub>orb</sub>, with higher contribution of the electrostatic interaction energy.

Regarding the reactivity studies of the niobium complexes, in gas phase, in the selective activation of inert C-H bonds, the CMD reaction pathway was investigated. The optimized structures of the mechanism resulted in the formation of a 4-centers transition state with the methane hydrogen binding to X and the methyl group binding to niobium, and the complex product is formed by the X<sub>4</sub>-Nb-CH<sub>3</sub> complex and HX.

The main results indicate that the initial interactions between the niobium complexes and methane play a fundamental role in the activation process of the CH bond of this hydrocarbon, since  $E_{\text{Bonding}}$  is favored by the increase of the X ligands electronegativity and increase in the niobium electrophilic character. On the other hand, the steric hindrances caused by the less electronegative halogens decreased the Nb-C interaction and the  $E_{\text{Bonding}}$  energy.

Activation barrier results indicate that the decrease in the electronegativity of the X ligands and the decrease in load at the metal center do not favor the kinetics of the methane C-H bond activation by the CMD mechanism.

In relation to the reaction thermodynamics, the reactions of the  $\text{NbF}_5$  and  $\text{NbCl}_5$  complexes with methane are exothermic and for the other complexes of the series are endothermic. It is seen that the thermodynamics of this process is favorable with the presence of a more electronegative ligand that causes an increase in the complex reactivity.

In general, the increased electronegativity of the X ligands is responsible for the stability and reactivity of the niobium pentahalide complexes.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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### **Supplementary information**

#### **Summary Information**

SI. Additional geometric information of the complexes  $\text{NbX}_5$  (X= Halogens)

SII. Percentage contribution of the linear combination of several Fragment orbitals

### **Supporting information I**

**Table SI-1:** Geometry parameters of the stationary points of the complexes  $\text{NbX}_5$  (X= Halogens) using the BLYP method.

Complexes	C-H (Å)	Nb-H (Å)	Nb-C (Å)	$\angle\text{C-Nb-H}$	$\angle\text{H-C-H}$	$\angle\text{Nb-C-H}$	Energy*
$\text{NbF}_5$	1.09	5.20	5.71	11.5	109.3	64.0	-59.817
$\text{NbCl}_5$	1.09	4.94	5.99	8.3	109.5	86.7	-48.121
$\text{NbBr}_5$	1.09	6.00	7.08	6.8	109.5	72.9	-44.901
$\text{NbI}_5$	1.09	7.02	8.10	4.3	109.5	23.3	-41.375

\*Energy in eV

## Supporting information II

**Table SI-2:** Percentage contribution of the linear combination of several Fragment orbitals (SFO)

$\text{NbF}_5$				
	Nb		F	
	SFO	%	SFO	%
LUMO+3	d:xy	69.96	p	21.40
LUMO+2	d: $x^2-y^2$	69.96	p	21.40
LUMO+1	d:xz	79.85	p	20.74
LUMO	d:yz	79.85	p	20.74
HOMO	-	-	p	98.09
HOMO-1	-	-	p	98.09
HOMO-2	-	-	p	66.61
			p	21.14
HOMO-3	-	-	p	84.92

$\text{NbCl}_5$				
	Nb		Cl	
	SFO	%	SFO	%
LUMO+3	d:xy	62.78	p	20.69
LUMO+2	d: $x^2-y^2$	62.78	p	20.69
LUMO+1	d:xz	72.37	p	26.64
LUMO	d:yz	72.37	p	26.64
HOMO	-	-	p	97.94
HOMO-1	-	-	p	97.94
HOMO-2	-	-	p	68.47
			p	25.97
HOMO-3	-	-	p	68.47

			p	25.97
<b>NbBr<sub>5</sub></b>				
	<b>Nb</b>		<b>Br</b>	
	SFO	%	SFO	%
LUMO+3	d:xy	60.71	p	23.90
LUMO+2	d:x <sup>2</sup> -y <sup>2</sup>	60.71	p	23.90
LUMO+1	d:xz	70.42	p	27.37
LUMO	d:yz	70.42	p	27.37
HOMO	-	-	p	97.83
HOMO-1	-	-	p	97.83
HOMO-2	-	-	p	91.78
HOMO-3	-	-	Py	73.98
			pz	20.21
<b>NbI<sub>5</sub></b>				
	<b>Nb</b>		<b>I</b>	
	SFO	%	SFO	%
LUMO+3	d:xy	57.55	p	26.64
LUMO+2	d:x <sup>2</sup> -y <sup>2</sup>	57.55	p	26.64
LUMO+1	d:yz	68.23	p	30.00
LUMO	d:xz	68.23	p	30.00
HOMO	-	-	p	97.64
HOMO-1	-	-	p	97.64
HOMO-2	-	-	p	91.24
HOMO-3	-	-	p (axial)	74.56
			p (eq)	19.53

**ARTIGO 2 - METHANE ACTIVATION BY  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $N = 0, 1, 2$ ;  $M= 1, 2$ ):  
REACTIVITY PARAMETERS, ELECTRONIC PROPERTIES AND BINDING  
ENERGY ANALYSIS**

**(VERSÃO PRELIMINAR)**

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### **Abstract**

The need for renewal, more efficient and conscious usage of energy resources has led to a great interest in carrying out studies aiming to find novel sources of energy, which are capable of supplying the growing global demand, and at the same time, providing an eco-friendly usage of natural resources. In this context, the employment of methane stands out as a promising energetic alternative for this purpose, due to the existence of vast reserves, its low cost and less polluting fuel. For theoretical calculations B3LYP, CCSD (t) and ZORA-BLYP methods were employed to study the catalytic properties of ( $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  n= 0, 1, 2 and m=1, 2) in the methane C-H bond activation. Based on the EDA results, the studied species presented two stabilizing contributions to the total interaction energy, being the electrostatic  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and orbital  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  interactions. The HOMO and LUMO orbitals were also evaluated according to the molecular orbital diagrams for the monoxides and dioxides series. According to the oxidative insertion mechanism, the results show that the initial interaction between oxide and methane plays a key role in the methane activation process, in which  $E_{\text{Bonding}}$  is favored by the increase of charge on the metal center. The high electron density of the oxides is important for the kinetics of the reaction and the oxo ligands influence the thermodynamics of the reaction, becoming the DHA mechanism exergonic. In relation to the OHM mechanism, better kinetic conditions are found for  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  and better thermodynamics for doubly charged cobalt monoxides and dioxides.

### **Keywords**

Methane . C–H bond activation . Cobalt oxides . Theoretical study . Gas phase

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The growing global demand for energy brought about by the technological development of society has led to the search for safer and more economical energy sources [1-5]. Natural gas (NG) appears as a promising alternative resource for energy supply due to the discovery of vast reserves, low cost and by being a less polluting fuel and source of raw material and fuel generation for modern industry [5, 6-9].

The NG, constituted by 80-90% methane [7, 10-11], is available worldwide [5, 9,10]. Most of its reserves are located in remote areas that are difficult to access; thus, transport and storage are inconvenient and economically unfeasible due to the high energy costs in the conversion of methane to fine commodities [12,13].

In this way, the main challenge facing the chemical industry is how to activate methane in an economical, clean and environmentally friendly way [14]. For this purpose, several studies have been performed in search of effective catalysts of transition metals that can activate the C-H bond in an efficient and selective way, thus making possible its large scale application [6, 10, 12, 15-23]. The efficiency of the conversion reaction of methane to methanol and the branching ratio of methanol are significantly dependent on the transition metals [24,25].

The methane activation in the gas phase by first-line transition oxide ions (MO), wherein M being Sc, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni and Cu is proposed to proceed in two steps through two transition states [17-19,24,26,27]. Regarding the first-line metals, the  $\text{CoO}^+$  ion exhibits a high branching ratio for methanol and its high rotation and low rotation potential energy surfaces intercept twice in the reaction input and output channels [19,24,25]. According to the work from CHEN et al., the mechanism involved in converting methane to gas phase methanol by cobalt monoxide produces an intermediate  $\text{HO-Co-CH}_3$ , which plays an important role in this reaction [28].

Cobalt oxides have been considered promising for the efficient conversion of methane to methanol [24,25,28]. Due to this feature and other factors, several experimental and theoretical studies have been carried out with the goal of analyzing the properties of this oxide in the activation of the methane C-H bond [25, 29-32]. In the work from Bitler et al., the authors studied the C-H bond activation by cobalt-doped ZSM-5 zeolite [33]. In their study, 1.2  $\mu\text{mol}$  of methanol/g of catalyst was produced with a selectivity of about 75% [33].

In line with this expectation, more information can be extracted by looking into reactivity parameters, electronic properties and binding energy analysis of  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $n = 0, 1, 2$ ;

$m=1, 2$ ). Thus, our main goal was to perform a detailed study by employing computational methodologies of quantum calculations on each aspect of the gas-phase methane activation reactions by cobalt oxides  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $n = 0, 1, 2$ ;  $m=1, 2$ ). This kind of analysis is quite relevant and required. This theoretical procedure provides an economically viable route for applications but also opens a new avenue to study new possibilities for obtaining catalysts with a more diversified and rich electronic structure, presenting great scientific, environmental and economic importance.

## 2. COMPUTATIONAL DETAILS

The first calculations were used to investigate the geometric and electronic properties of Cobalt oxides ( $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$   $n=0, 1, 2$  and  $m=1, 2$ ). For this analysis, all electronic states of Co (doublet, quartet and sextet),  $\text{Co}^+$  (singlet, triplet, quintet) and  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  (doublet, quartet and sextet) were considered in order to verify the energy difference among the different multiplicities, and also to analyze the importance of the spin crossings involved in the reaction pathways; a characteristic commonly referred to as reactivity of two states [17,26,27]. For the accomplishment of these calculations, we used the Gaussian 2009 computational package [34] and all calculations were performed in the gas phase.

In the first stage of the work, geometry optimization calculations and frequency analysis were carried out using different computational methods [35]. The methods employed were DFT (Density Functional Theory) and Coupled Cluster (CCSD (T)) [35,36]. In relation to the DFT method, it was used in this work the B3LYP three-parameter hybrid functional which was successfully employed in previous works involving transition metals species [37-41]. We refer to these calculations as B3LYP hereafter. In these calculations, the WATCHERS f base sets were used for the Cobalt atom [42], while an extended polarized basis assembly, called 6-311G++(d,p) [43] was used for the Oxygen atom.

A comparison of the B3LYP results for cobalt oxides with data obtained from the CCSD (T) calculations was done in S1 of the supplementary information. The single point CCSD (T) calculations with the mentioned atomic base sets were performed to ensure the high quality of the energy differences, for which zero-order energy corrections at the B3LYP level were also taken into account.

In these calculations, no restriction of symmetry was imposed during geometry optimizations. The vibrational analyzes were performed to determine the character (minimum

point or saddle) of all stationary points, and the B3LYP zero-point energy (ZPE) corrections were considered in all relative energies.

Secondly, zero-order regular approximation (ZORA) [44] calculations were carried out using the ADF2009 software package [45,46a,b]. The functional applied was BLYP [35], the basis used was of the polarized triple-zeta Slater type (TZ2P) for the iron and oxygen atoms [47,48].

With the determination of the optimized geometries of cobalt oxides, we set out to investigate their geometrical and electronic properties and the analysis of the bindings to obtain detailed information from the atomic and molecular standpoint of the characteristics of the chemical bonds of these oxides under study.

The analyzes of the bonds were made by using AIM calculations in order to determine the covalent or ionic character of the bonds. The topological properties of electron density in the CoO chemical interactions were performed with atoms in molecules (AIM) theory by Bader as implemented in the AIM2000 program [49]. The AIM parameters located at the bond critical points (BCP) are useful tools for the characterization of chemical bonds [49].

In addition to the AIM calculations and with the purpose of studying the participation of the orbitals and the energies involved in the formation of the chemical bonds in the oxides, it was performed an Energy Decomposition Analysis (EDA), proposed by Morokuma [50] and Ziegler and Rauk [51]. All binding analyzes were carried out at the ZORA-BLYP / TZ2P theoretical level [47,48]. In the EDA calculations, the general bond energy  $\Delta E$  between the cobalt atom (Co) and the oxygen atoms (O) is constituted by two principal components, equation 1 [52].

$$\Delta E = \Delta E_{\text{prep}} + \Delta E_{\text{int}} \quad (1)$$

The EDA decomposes the instantaneous interaction energy  $E_{\text{int}}$  between two fragments A and B in a molecule A-B in three well-defined terms (equation 2), they are: the energy of quasiclassic electrostatic interaction among the charge densities of the fragments ( $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$ ), the exchange repulsion among the fragments due to the Pauli principle ( $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$ ) and the energy gain due to the orbital mixture of the fragments ( $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ ). The orbital interaction  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  in the Kohn-Sham theory explains the charge transfer (i.e., donor-receiver interactions between occupied orbitals in a fragment and unoccupied orbitals on the other, including HOMO-

LUMO interactions) and polarization (empty / occupied orbitals mixture in a fragment due to the presence of another fragment).

$$\Delta E_{\text{int}} = \Delta E_{\text{elstat}} + \Delta E_{\text{Pauli}} + \Delta E_{\text{orb}} \quad (2)$$

The deformation energy  $\Delta E_{\text{Prep}}$  or  $\Delta E_{\text{strain}}$  is the amount of energy needed to deform the Co and O fragments.

The reaction mechanisms which are experimentally recognized to activate the C-H chemical bonds by transition metal oxides have been investigated. In this part of the study, the kinetic and thermodynamic preference of different reaction products was analyzed in detail. In this investigation, the molecular complexes involved in the activation of the methane C-H bond were analyzed, e.g., molecular precursor (MP), transition state (TS) and complex product (CP) for the entire series of cobalt oxides under investigation.

To guarantee the correct reaction, the path of the lower energy structures of two intermediate consecutive periods, intrinsic reaction coordinate (IRC) calculations were carried out [53], which are performed to correctly optimize the transition state linking the intermediates under investigation [18, 43, 54]. The vibration analyzes were then accomplished to determine the character (minimum or saddle point) of all stationary points. We are able to ensure this, since each transition state (TS) structure obtained in PESs (Potential Energy Superfice) shows only an imaginary frequency, which correctly leads to the correct intermediate.

### **3. Results and discussions**

This work is an important starting point for the understanding of the electronic structures of the prototypes of  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $n = 0, 1, 2$ ;  $m=1, 2$ ), which might provide us relevant information in the search for more effective catalysts, that react under mild conditions and in a potentially clean and sustainable way.

In these studies, the first step is the analysis of the geometric, electronic and binding properties of cobalt oxides. In Table SI-1 experimental and computed geometrical parameters as well as the multiplicity for cobalt oxides are described. After these calculations, electronic and bond properties were analyzed and reported in the first section of this article.

### 3.1 Study of the electronic and binding properties of $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$ ( $n = 0, 1, 2$ ; $m=1, 2$ )

For a quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the nature of the chemical bonds of cobalt oxides, an energy decomposition analysis (EDA), developed by Morukuma [50] and by Ziegler and Rauk [51] was employed. The EDA decomposes the interaction energy of cobalt with the oxygens in three terms defined to  $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$ ,  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ , providing a chemically significant interpretation of chemical bonds [55, 56].

Table 1 presents the results of the EDA investigation of the cobalt oxides prototypes. For the production of accurate results, we selected the BLYP functional, which besides correcting the influence of the dispersion interactions in the results, it is important to keep in mind that this functional is widely used for calculations involving transition metals [57].

Table 1: Energy Decomposition Analysis of the  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $n = 0, 1, 2$ ;  $m=1, 2$ ) at ZORA BLYP/TZ2P, in  $\text{kcal.mol}^{-1}$

Oxides	$\text{CoO}$	$\text{CoO}^+$	$\text{CoO}^{++}$	$\text{CoO}_2$	$\text{CoO}_2^+$	$\text{CoO}_2^{++}$
$\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$	0.52	0.51	0.30	0.53	0.52	0.28
$\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$	-1.49	-2.05	-2.37	-1.33	-1.84	-2.15
$\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$	-0.56	-0.99	-1.77	-0.58	-1.00	-1.80
$\Delta E_{\text{int}}$	-1.54	-2.53	-3.84	-1.39	-2.32	-3.66

According to the calculations, since there is no geometric and electronic preparation of the atomic fragments Co and O at  $\Delta E_{\text{prep}} = 0$ , the interaction energy is equal to the binding energy for  $\text{CoO}_m^{n+}$  ( $n = 0, 1, 2$ ;  $m = 1, 2$ ). Thus, the EDA results showed that the species under study have two stabilizing contributions to the total interaction energy, i.e., the electrostatic  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and orbital  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  interactions. As there were no positive values for  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$ , configurations of the Co and O fragments are likely correct. The Pauli repulsion results are positive due to the destabilizing interactions among the occupied orbitals in the fragments, and it is responsible for the steric repulsion among the fragments. Those  $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$  values decrease along the oxides series.

The values of the term  $\Delta E_{\text{Elstat}}$  decrease throughout the monoxides and dioxides series, ranging from -1.49 to -2.37 kcal/mol for the monoxides, and from -1.33 to -2.15 kcal/mol for the dioxides. It is possible to see a greater contribution of this term to the monoxides in relation to the dioxides, which comes from a stronger interaction of the core of the cobalt

atoms that carry a positive charge and an oxo ligand that carries a much greater negative charge than the dioxides. Another fact that proves this growth of  $\Delta E_{\text{Elstat}}$  is the increase of electron density for the monoxides according to table 2, regarding the QTAIM results.

In relation to the monoxides series,  $\text{CoO}^{++}$  presents the highest stabilizing contributions to the total interaction energy, which are  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  with a value of -2.37 kcal/mol and  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  with a contribution of -1.77 kcal/mol. On the other hand,  $\text{CoO}$  presents a higher positive value of  $\Delta E_{\text{Pauli}}$  throughout the series, with a value of 0.30 kcal/mol. This outcome is due to a greater interaction between the cobalt and oxygen atoms coming from the smaller size of the oxide, which causes a larger repulsion of their spins with the same rotation.

The EDA results for the dioxides series follow the trend of the monoxides series, with a lower electrostatic contribution due to the decrease of the electron density (table 2), and a greater contribution of  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  due to the orbital interaction of the cobalt with two oxygens. Among the dioxides series,  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  presents the highest stabilizing contributions,  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  with a value of -2.15 kcal/mol and  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  with a contribution of -1.80 kcal/mol.

Comparison of the cobalt monoxide and dioxide series shows that a detailed analysis of all individual terms of the total interaction energy is needed to understand the strength and nature of a chemical bond. The EDA results showed that the stabilizing energies  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$  contributed to the higher total interaction energies of the monoxides and divalent dioxides in agreement with the work from Spackman [58], whose study showed that electrostatic interactions are very important for chemical bonds in almost all molecules. In relation to the cobalt prototypes series, the monoxides showed a larger  $\Delta E_{\text{int}}$  due to a higher electron density in relation to the dioxides, and also by the polarity of the bond that contributed to the  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  stabilization.

Figure 1 shows the orbital correlation diagram illustrating the orbitals involved in the interactions of a  $d^7$  transition metal with oxygen. Table SII-1, supporting information, reports the contribution percentages of the orbitals fragments of  $C_1$  symmetry cobalt oxides to monoxides and  $D_2H$  to dioxides involved in the formation of highest occupied molecular orbitals (HOMO) and lowest unoccupied molecular orbitals (LUMO).

It is possible to realize that, according to table SII-1, the LUMO orbitals consist of a large contribution of the d and s orbitals of the metal and a smaller percentage of the p orbital of the oxygen. The mono and divalent monoxides and dioxides present a greater participation of the  $dz^2$  orbital. This contribution increases throughout the monoxides and dioxides cobalt series because of the removal of the electrons from this orbital, caused by the increased

charge of the metal. Regarding the doubly degenerate (d<sub>2g</sub>) HOMO orbitals, the major contributions are related to the d<sub>xy</sub> and d<sub>x<sup>2</sup>-y<sup>2</sup></sub> orbitals of cobalt. According to the results from table SI-1 arranged in the support information, cobalt is involved in donation and receipt of electrons.

It is important to comment that molecular orbitals are important descriptors for the rationalization of various reactions and play a crucial role in the understanding of chemical reactivity [17, 59]. Thus, Figure 2 shows a comparison between the HOMOs and LUMOs of the cobalt prototypes under study. By increasing the cobalt charge over the cobalt monoxides and dioxides series, the HOMO and LUMO energies decrease. For example, HOMO orbitals for monoxides range from -0.24 to -0.89 eV and the LUMOs orbitals -0.08 to -0.79 eV. Thus, we can conclude that the HOMO - LUMO energy differences are due to the variation of the electron density and polarity of the Co-O bond.

The orbitals diagram, Figure 1, shows that the electrons less attached to the bond are the σ<sub>Co-O</sub> of the neutral monoxides and dioxides. Thus, it is possible to conclude that CoO and CoO<sub>2</sub> are considered the best σ electron donors. This fact can be explained by the higher electron density of these oxides obtained by the QTAIM calculations. On the other hand, Figure 1 shows that the best electron acceptors, the empty orbital of lower energy, are the σ\*<sub>Co-O</sub> of the divalent monoxides and dioxides. This feature is due to the higher participation of the unoccupied 3dz<sup>2</sup> orbital of cobalt, and due to the lower electron density of these oxides (Table 2) [60].

The energy decomposition analysis results show the importance of their association with the results from the QTAIM calculations for understanding the nature of the chemical bond (e.g., whether the bond is covalent, partially covalent or non-covalent).

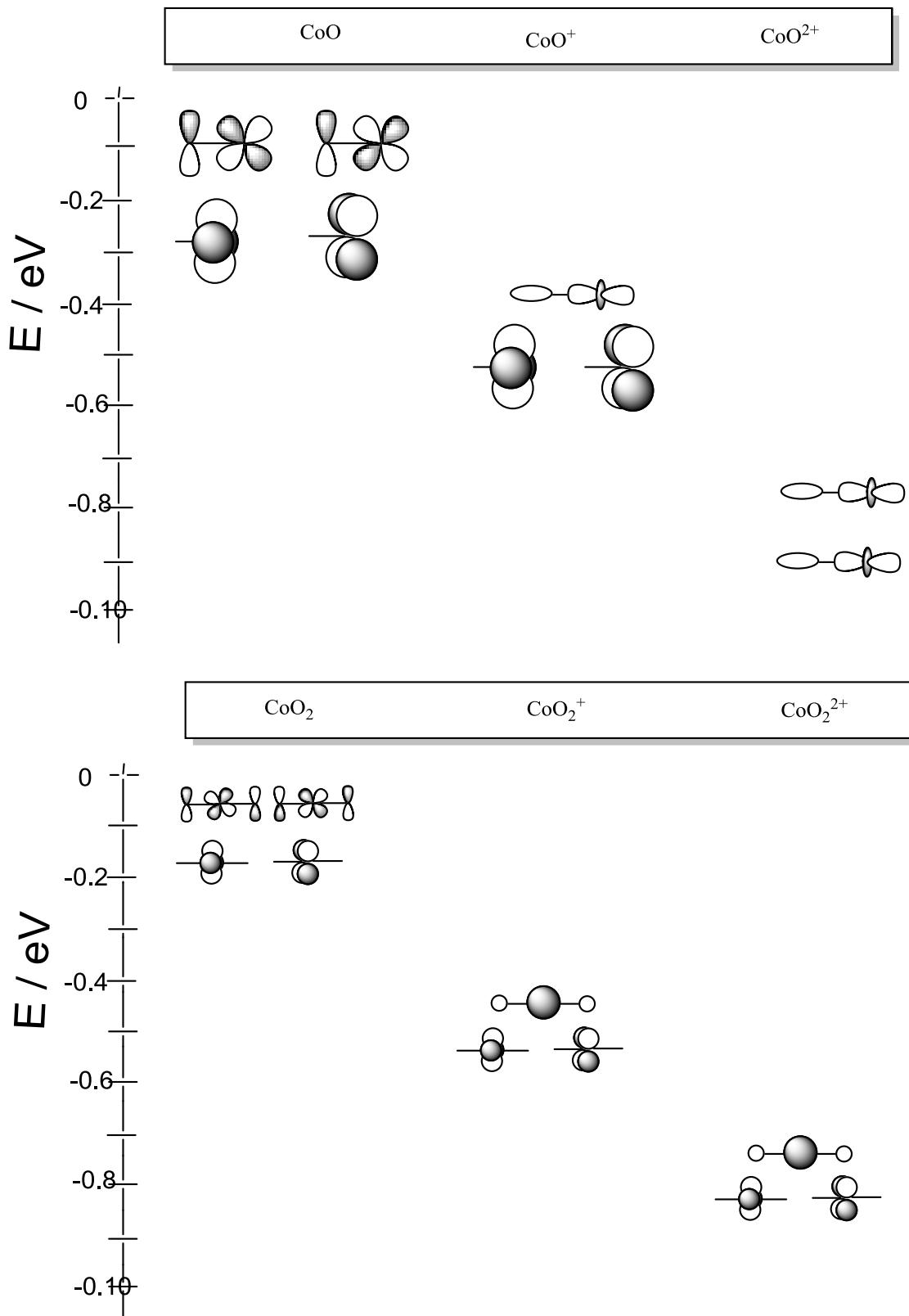


Figure 1: Diagram of the HOMO and LUMO molecular orbitals for cobalt oxide prototypes, emerging from Kohn-Sham orbital analyzes in ZORA-BLYP / TZ2P.

### 3.1.1 AIM Analyses

Table 2 contains all the parameters of the cobalt oxides prototypes resulting from the AIM calculations. According to the calculations, the point where the charge density function ( $q(r)$ ) is a minimum along the binding path and maximum in the other two directions, i.e., the bond critical point (BCP) is located at center of the Co-O bond of all cobalt oxides prototypes.

Table 2: The AIM B3LYP/ Watchers f parameters, electron density ( $p(r)$ ), Laplacian ( $\nabla^2 p(r)$ ), total electron energy density ( $H(r)$ ), kinetic electron energy density ( $G(r)$ ), and potential electron energy density ( $V(r)$ ) for bcp of the Co-O chemical bonds of the ground-state cobalt prototypes.\*\*

Species	$p(r)$ (a.u)	$\nabla^2 p(r)$ (a.u)	$G(r)$ (a.u)	$V(r)$ (a.u)	$-G/V$	$H(r)$
CoO	+0.2056	+0.9415	+0.3319	-0.4284	0.7747	-0.0965
CoO <sup>+</sup>	+0.1867	+1.0260	+0.3342	-0.4119	0.8113	-0.0777
CoO <sup>2+</sup>	+0.0886	+0.4012	+0.1090	-0.1178	0.9252	-0.0088
CoO <sub>2</sub>	+0.1906	+1.0725	+0.3512	-0.4343	0.8086	-0.0831
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>	+0.1671	+0.9871	+0.3071	-0.3674	0.7071	-0.0603
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>	+0.1284	+0.7238	+0.2106	-0.2403	0.8764	-0.0297

\*\*Computed results were performed by using the AIM program.

According to the results in Table 2, the values computed for  $p(r)$  at the critical point of the Co-O bond decrease along the cobalt oxides series, ranging from +0.2056 a.u. to +0.0886 a.u. for the monoxides and +0.1906 a.u. to +0.1284 a.u. for the dioxides. These results indicate that the higher  $p(r)$  values are calculated for the neutral cobalt oxides, and that the value of this parameter decreases with increasing load on the metal center. Therefore, these  $p(r)$  results confirm our interpretation of the energy decomposition analysis, in which they indicate more favorable interaction energy for the monoxides and divalent dioxides.

All Co-O bonds have positive values for  $\nabla^2 p(r)$  (a.u.), indicating that the atomic nuclei support the entire charge concentration and that the electron density is accumulated on cobalt. To verify the character of the Co-O bond, it is necessary to analyze some parameters, such as  $\nabla^2 p(r)$ ,  $-G/V$  and  $H(r)$ . We can conclude according to Table 2 that, although  $\nabla^2 p(r)$  has positive values indicating an ionic character, the Co-O bond also presents a partial covalent character, due to the other parameters  $-G/V > 0$  and  $H(r) < 0$ . Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the AIM calculations results indicate that the Co-O chemical bonds have a partial ionic and covalent character.

After the studies of the electronic and binding properties of the cobalt oxides, the next step was to analyze the activation mechanisms of the methane C-H bond. To date, no cobalt

oxide series studies have been found in this activation. Such analyzes are reported in the second section of this article.

### **3. 2 The Methane C-H bond Activation Process.**

Cobalt oxides have been drawing the attention of the scientific community as a catalyst in inert hydrocarbon reactions due to its appropriate electronic configuration to activate methane in addition to the high branching index of methanol in the reaction.

Due to these and other properties, three experimentally recognized mechanisms for the C-H bond activation were studied in the second part of this work [13, 20]. The first mechanism is the oxidative insertion of a metal center to the methane C-H bond [13, 61]. The second is the C-H bond metathesis by the oxygen of cobalt oxides, called direct abstraction [62, 63], and the third one, 4-center hydrogen abstraction or oxidative hydrogen migration (OHM), responsible for the formation of the hydroxymethyl intermediate that was produced in a laser ablation source and characterized by electronic and vibrational spectroscopy, in the work from Altinay et al. [19, 25].

All stationary molecular systems involved in these reaction mechanisms were investigated in detail. The first system, molecular precursor (MP), which is a weakly bound complex formed in the reaction input channel, had all possible H-type molecular interactions considered, as can be seen in Fig. 2. These conformations, called  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^2$  and  $\eta^3$  showed three different metal interactions with methane. In this step, it was also considered all these options with an oxygen atom of the oxo ligands initially directed to the respective hydrogen atom of methane.

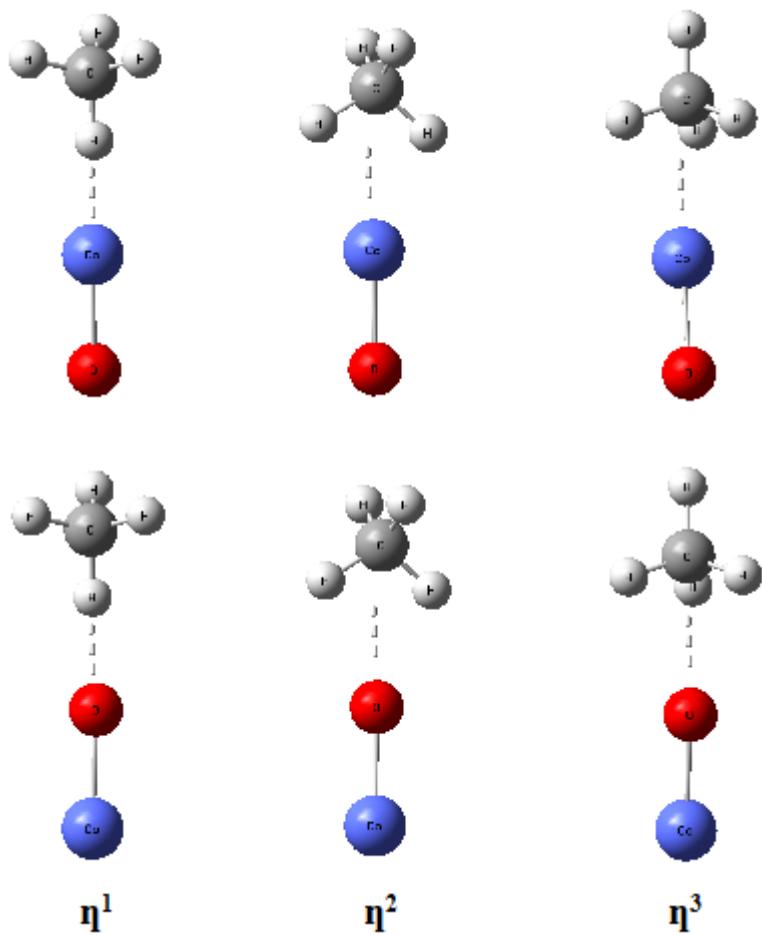


Figure 2: The coordination types of the weakly bound MP  $n$ -complexes.

After these results, all possible TS organometallic complexes were taken into account and the optimized conformation leads to the first stable organometallic complexes recognized as complex products (CP). The optimized molecular structures MP, TS and CP involved in the reaction mechanisms were identified by harmonic vibrational frequency such as minimum conformation or transition state.

### 3.2.1 Oxidative insertion mechanism

This mechanism is typical of electron-rich complexes, of the "late" transition metals found on the right side of the periodic table, such as Iron and Cobalt [13].

In Figure 3, the structures of the optimized molecules involved in the methane activation process are represented by the oxidative insertion mechanism.

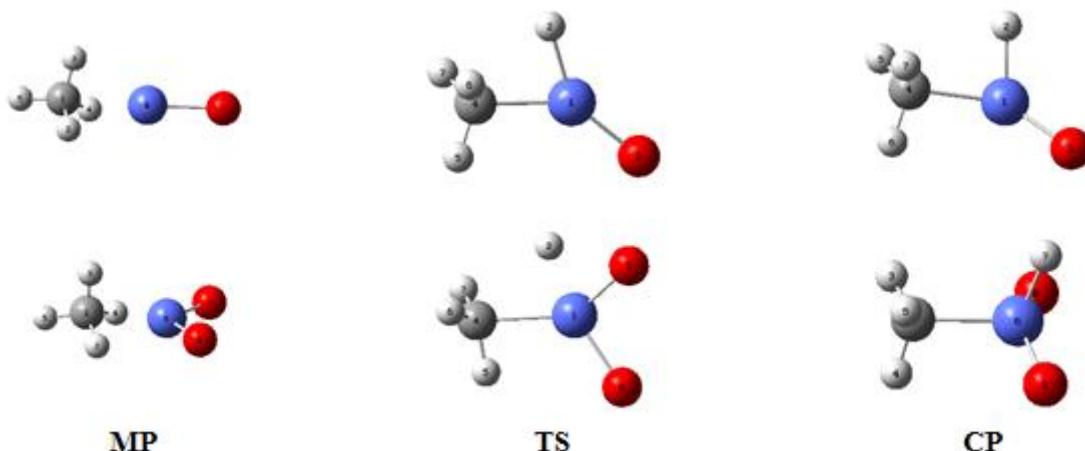


Figure 3: The B3LYP optimized molecular structures of the lowest-energy spin state MP, TS and CP complexes in the oxidative insertion mechanism.

According to our calculations, MP complexes formed by the coordination of methane to a metal center presented a preferential conformation  $\eta^3$  with the cobalt atom directed to the three hydrogen atoms of methane (figure 3).

By analyzing the geometric parameters of the table SIII-1, a decrease in the Co-C binding lengths along the MP complexes for both monoxides and dioxides is observed. This variation in the Co-C bond length is due to the decrease in the electron density of the cobalt oxides throughout the series.

CoO and CoO<sub>2</sub> present a higher electron density and these oxides donate this density to the  $\sigma^*$  C-H orbital of methane, resulting in higher Co-C lengths [64]. Since the other oxides of the series have a lower electron density and therefore, the complexes are formed by the interaction of the electron density of the bond  $\sigma$  C-H of methane to the empty d orbital of cobalt [64]. These results are in agreement with the energy decomposition analysis and QTAIM.

Comparing the Co-C bond lengths of the monoxides in relation to the dioxides, it is possible to notice that the Co-C chemical distances in the MP dioxides complexes are smaller regarding the monoxides, indicating that the presence of two oxo ligands and the lower electron density of the dioxide favor the electrostatic interaction between the metal center and methane at the beginning of the reaction in the input channel.

The TS and CP structures of the cobalt oxides prototypes after optimization presented a preferential trans conformation that is stabilized in relation to the Co-H bonds.

Regarding the optimized bond lengths of the TS and CP complexes, a decrease of the Co-C binding lengths over the series for these complexes is observed. This feature indicates a greater interaction between cobalt and methane, leading to the formation of organometallic complexes caused by the insertion of a metal center on the C-H bond.

In relation to the Co-H binding lengths, lower values are observed for the dioxides complexes regarding the monoxides complexes. A smaller difference is observed for the Co-H binding lengths for the CP complexes compared to the TS complexes values.

The results of the binding energies, activation energy and reaction energy of the oxidative insertion mechanisms of the species under study are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Bonding ( $\Delta E_{\text{Bonding}}$ ), activation barriers ( $\Delta E_{\text{Activation}}$ ) and reaction energies ( $\Delta E_{\text{Reaction}}$ ) for the oxidative insertion with niobium oxides into the methane C-H bond.\*

	$E_{\text{Bonding}}$	$E_{\text{Activation}}$	$E_{\text{Reaction}}$
Species	B3LYP	B3LYP	B3LYP
CoO	-12.55	18.82	-12.55
CoO <sup>+</sup>	-25.10	69.02	-50.20
CoO <sup>2+</sup>	-87.85	119.23	-81.57
CoO <sub>2</sub>	-18.82	12.55	-31.37
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>	-69.03	56.47	-69.02
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>	-106.67	81.57	-75.30

\*Energies in kcal/mol

According to the results of the binding energies of the cobalt complexes for the oxidative insertion mechanism, such energies ranged from -12.55 kcal/mol to -87.85 kcal/mol for the monoxides and from -18.82 kcal/mol to -106.67 kcal/mol for the dioxides. Based on these results, one can conclude that the formation of the electrostatically bonded MP complex is favored by the decrease in the electron density of cobalt oxides, and the presence of oxo ligands provides an initial electrostatic interaction more favorable for methane, providing an extra dipole interaction.

In relation to the kinetic values of the analyzed mechanism, lower values were found for neutral monoxides and dioxides, and the dioxides presented lower energy barriers in

relation to the cobalt monoxides. We can, thus, conclude that this result is due to the low electron density of the dioxides involved in the formation of TS organometallic complexes.

The balance between kinetic and thermodynamic factors will determine if the methane activation process is going to take place. In face of this consideration, it is well known that gas phase reactions will only occur if all stationary points are located below the reactive energies.

According to the results reported in Table 3, the oxidative insertion reactions of cobalt with methane are all exergonic. It is shown that the thermodynamics of this process is favorable with increasing load on the metal center, as well as the increase of oxo ligands. The ratio of these results can be correlated with the electronic configurations of Co, Co<sup>+</sup> and Co<sup>2+</sup> species, which are [Ar] 3d<sup>7</sup>4s<sup>2</sup>, [Ar] 3d<sup>7</sup>4s<sup>1</sup> and [Ar] 3d<sup>7</sup>, respectively. In the formation of CP organometallic complexes, it is required an electronic configuration capable of making two covalent bonds, Co-H and Co-CH<sub>3</sub> for their formation.

### 3. 2. 2 Hydrogen abstraction mechanism

Other processes related to the methane activation are the mechanisms of direct hydrogen abstraction (DHA) and 4-center hydrogen abstraction or oxidative hydrogen migration (OHM). The DHA mechanism is a type of external sphere mechanism, in which involves the abstraction of the hydrogen of methane directly by the oxygen of the cobalt oxides leading to the formation of the MP complex of  $\eta^1$  conformation [18] according to Figure 4.

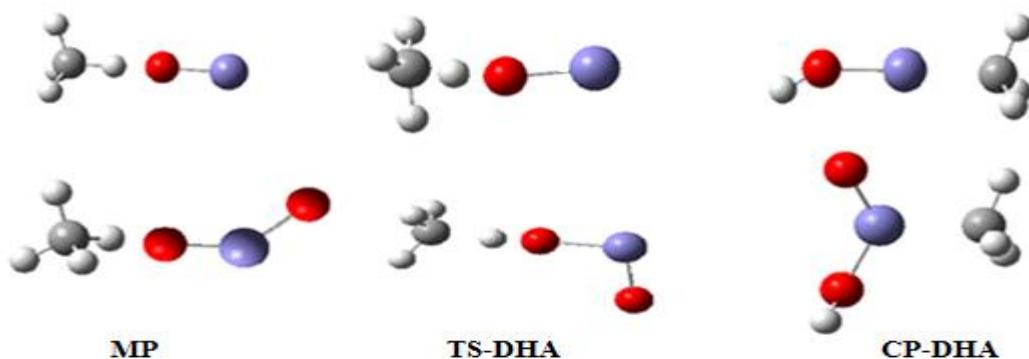


Figure 4: The B3LYP optimized molecular structures of the lowest-energy spin state MP, TS and CP complexes in the hydrogen abstraction of direct form.

The OHM takes place by means of an internal sphere mechanism, in which the metal interacts directly with the methane C-H bond [17, 18, 61]. In the mechanism exposed in Figure 5, at the beginning of the reaction, the formation of a complex of  $\eta^3$  conformation occurs, in which the cobalt oxides point directly to the three hydrogens of methane. In the course of the reaction there is the formation of a 4-centered transition state, which leads to an intermediate reaction involving the ligands OH and CH<sub>3</sub> (OH-Co-CH<sub>3</sub>), without the formation of an alkyl radical in the course of the reaction.

In the three mechanisms studied, only the stage of formation of MP, TS and CP, limiting step of the conversion of methane to methanol called C-H bond activation, was analyzed in this work.

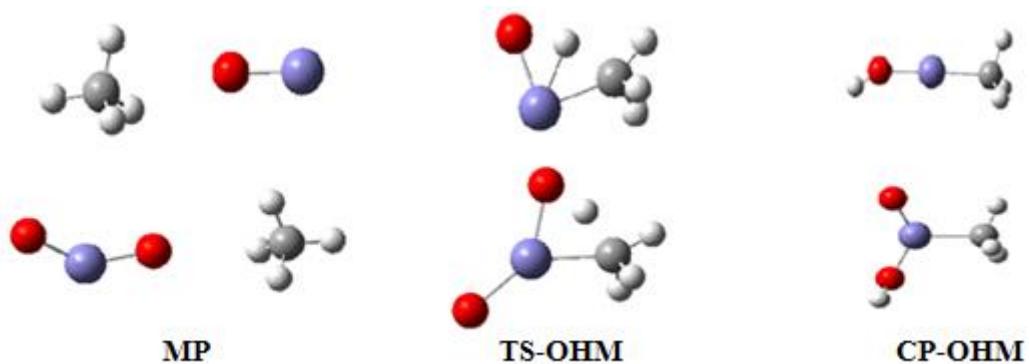


Figure 5: The B3LYP optimized molecular structures of the lowest-energy spin state MP, TS and CP complexes in the 4-OHM mechanism.

According to Figure 4 and 5, it is possible to observe the differences between the abstraction mechanisms, because in the OHM mechanism, there is a significant interaction between the cobalt and the active center of the carbon atom of the substrate, forming the hydroxymethyl organometallic complex.

In Table SIII-2 and 3, the geometric parameters of binding lengths and binding angles for the DHA and OHM mechanisms are showed.

Regarding the values of the geometric parameters of the cobalt complexes in the direct abstraction mechanism, reported in the support information, a decreasing behavior of the O-H bond lengths throughout the series for both monoxides and dioxides is observed. The cobalt dioxides have lower values indicating a more efficient interaction due to the presence of the second oxygen in comparison to the monoxides.

For the 4-center abstraction mechanism, there is a decrease in the length of the Co-C bond in the oxide series for all complexes formed indicating once more the strong interaction of cobalt oxides with methane to form stable complexes. An inverse trend has been observed for the Co-O bond lengths which indicate that this bond length of the oxides become weaker with coordination with methane. In particular, this characteristic is highlighted as the number of increases of oxo ligands.

The thermodynamic and kinetic results of the hydrogen abstraction mechanisms are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Bonding ( $\Delta E_{\text{Bonding}}$ ), activation barriers ( $\Delta E_{\text{Activation}}$ ) and reaction energies ( $\Delta E_{\text{Reaction}}$ ) for the direct abstraction with cobalt oxides into the methane C-H bond.\*

	$E_{\text{Bonding}}$	$E_{\text{Activation}}$	$E_{\text{Reaction}}$
Species	B3LYP	B3LYP	B3LYP
CoO	-12.55	14.27	9.41
CoO <sup>+</sup>	-25.10	16.55	11.27
CoO <sup>2+</sup>	-100.40	18.82	-50.20
CoO <sub>2</sub>	-25.10	19.41	-25.10
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>	-100.40	26.10	-51.57
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>	-106.77	16.87	-53.92

\*Energies in kcal/mol

Table 5: Bonding ( $\Delta E_{\text{Bonding}}$ ), activation barriers ( $\Delta E_{\text{Activation}}$ ) and reaction energies ( $\Delta E_{\text{Reaction}}$ ) for the 4-center abstraction with cobalt oxides into the methane C-H bond.\*

	$E_{\text{Bonding}}$	$E_{\text{Activation}}$	$E_{\text{Reaction}}$
Species	B3LYP	B3LYP	B3LYP
CoO	-12.55	31.37	-56.47
CoO <sup>+</sup>	-25.10	34.51	-62.75
CoO <sup>2+</sup>	-87.85	43.92	-94.12
CoO <sub>2</sub>	-18.82	56.47	-69.02
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>	-69.03	25.10	-87.85
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>	-106.67	12.55	-144.32

\*Energies in kcal/mol

The  $E_{\text{Bonding}}$  values for the abstraction mechanisms decrease throughout the cobalt monoxides and dioxides series indicating that the initial interaction between these oxides and methane is favored by the formation of the MP complexes. These results may suggest that the increase of the oxo ligands coordinated to the metal center plays an important role at the beginning of the input channel of these gas phase reactions. This is due to the electron accepting characteristic of these oxides, as reported in the QTAIM results.

The activation energies values of the DHA mechanism increase with the charge on the metal center and with the addition of the second oxo ligand, with the exception of  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$ . This trend follows for the OHM mechanisms concerning the cobalt monoxides and, in relation to the dioxides, an opposite trend is observed. This outcome indicates that oxo ligands are important in the OHM-TS formation.

The activation barrier of the DHA mechanism ranges from 14.27 to 18.82 kcal/mol for the monoxides and from 19.41 to 16.87 kcal/mol for the dioxides series, decreasing the activation barrier and increasing the kinetics of the reaction. For the 4-center abstraction mechanism, the values range from 31.37 to 43.92 kcal/mol for the monoxides series, and from 56.47 to 12.55 kcal/mol for the dioxides series.

General results for the DHA mechanism indicate better kinetic conditions and thermodynamics for the doubly charged cobalt dioxides. Based on these results, it is possible to conclude that an oxo ligands influence the thermodynamics of the reaction, making the DHA mechanism exergonic.

In relation to the OHM mechanism, better kinetic conditions are found for  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  and better thermodynamics for doubly charged cobalt monoxides and dioxides. Based on these results, we can conclude that a low electron density of oxides and oxo ligands are important for kinetics and thermodynamics of the reaction.

Finally, the best results obtained for the 4-center abstraction mechanism were for the divalent cobalt dioxide due to high-spin states and spins crossing between the quartet and sextet multiplicities in the input channel and at the end of the reaction.

Figure 6 shows the potential energy surface for the OHM reaction of  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$  by using the B3LYP/Watchers method. Based on the figure, the minimum energy pathway firstly involves the MP formation. The hydrogen abstraction *via* OHM-TS leads to the CP intermediate  $[\text{HO} - \text{Co} - \text{CH}_3]^{++}$ . The reagent  $\text{CoO}^{++}$  has a ground state of the sextet and along the reaction pathway, sextet and quartet change of rotation in the input and output channel of the reaction.

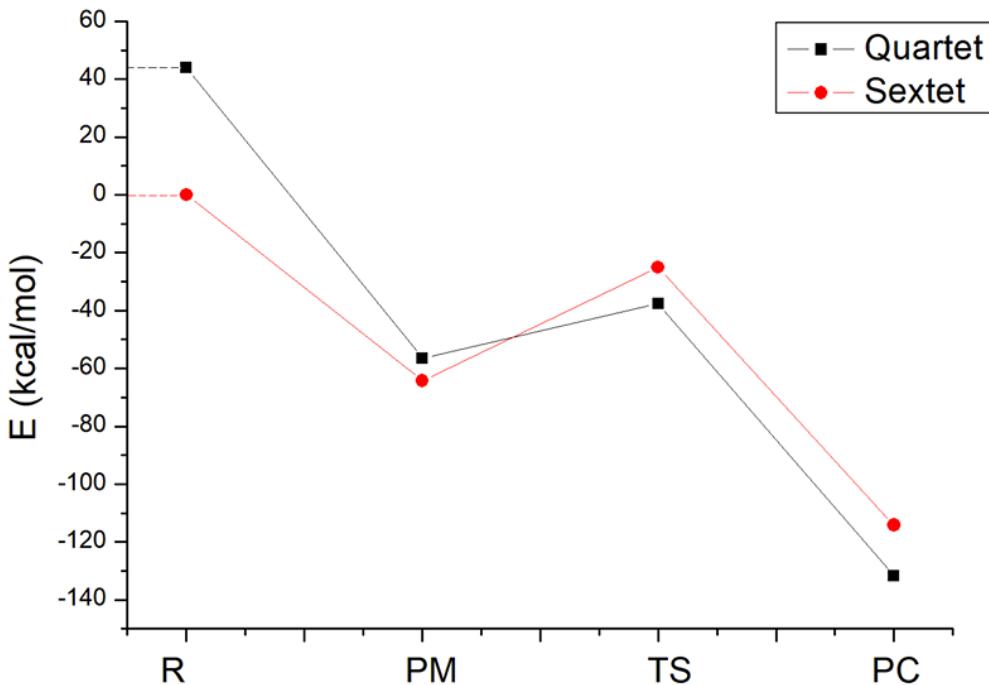


Figure 6: Potential energy surface of the OHM mechanism for the more thermodynamically favorable  $\text{CoO}_2^{++}$ . Energies (in kJ/mol) are calculated at the B3LYP / Watchers theory level.

According to the energy values, it is shown that both hydrogen abstraction mechanisms can take place in the methane activation, in the gas phase, involving cobalt oxides, but with low efficiency at room temperature. However, once the insertion intermediate is formed ( $\text{CH}_3\text{-Co-OH}$ ),  $\text{CH}_3\text{OH}$  is selectively produced [25, 28].

#### **4. Final Considerations**

Based on our findings considering geometric and electronic properties of cobalt oxides, it is possible to conclude that the monoxides bound lengths are smaller than those of the dioxides. These values are related to the highest electron density and electrostatic force between Co and O atoms, which can indicate that the bonds of the monoxides are stronger than the bonds of the dioxides, and all have a partial ionic and covalent character, based on the AIM calculations.

Results from the EDA showed that the species under study have two stabilizing contributions to the total interaction energy, i.e., the electrostatic  $\Delta E_{\text{elstat}}$  and orbital  $\Delta E_{\text{orb}}$

interactions, with a greater contribution of the term  $\Delta E_{elstat}$  to the monoxides in relation to the dioxides. This contribution comes from a stronger interaction of the nuclei of the cobalt atoms that carry a positive charge and an oxo ligand that carries a much greater negative charge than on the dioxides, and also due to the higher electron density of the monoxides.

According to the molecular orbital diagram, the LUMO orbitals consist of a large contribution of the d and s orbitals of the metal and a lower percentage of the p orbital of the oxygen. Regarding HOMO orbitals doubly degenerate (d<sub>2g</sub>), the major contributions are related to the d<sub>xy</sub> and d<sub>x<sup>2</sup>-y<sup>2</sup></sub> orbitals of cobalt and the energies of these orbitals decrease over the cobalt monoxides and dioxide series.

The EDA calculations also showed that CoO and CoO<sub>2</sub> are considered to be the best σ electron donors and that the best electron acceptors, the lowest energy empty orbital, are the σ\*<sub>Co-O</sub> of the CoO<sup>2+</sup> and CoO<sub>2</sub><sup>2+</sup>.

In relation to the reactivities of cobalt oxides prototypes, for the oxidative insertion mechanism, the results show that the initial interaction between oxide and methane plays a key role in the methane activation process, in which E<sub>Bonding</sub> is favored by the increase of charge on the metal center. In addition, the presence of oxo ligands gives rise to an extra electrostatically dipole interaction for methane, thus improving the polarization of this inert molecule at the beginning of the reaction input channel. Another important result is that the kinetics of activation process is not favored by the presence of oxo ligands. This is due to the fact that oxo ligands show good electron acceptor capacity, thus making it difficult to oxidatively add the metal center to the methane C-H bond.

In relation to the hydrogen abstraction mechanism, it is possible to notice differences among the mechanisms studied, because the OHM mechanism shows a significant interaction between the cobalt and the active center of the carbon atom of the substrate, resulting in the formation of the hydroxymethyl.

General results for the DHA mechanism indicate better kinetic and thermodynamics for doubly charged cobalt dioxides. Based on these results, we can conclude that the oxo ligands influence the thermodynamics of the reaction, making the DHA mechanism exergonic.

In relation to the OHM mechanism, better kinetic conditions are found for CoO<sub>2</sub><sup>++</sup> and better thermodynamics for doubly charged cobalt monoxides and dioxides. According to these results, it is possible to conclude that the low electron density of the oxides and the oxo ligands are important for the kinetics and thermodynamics of the reaction, and that the OHM mechanism is thermodynamically more favorable than DHA.

The study of the efficient catalytic functionalization of methane, directly into easily transportable and high value-added chemicals, in a potentially clean and sustainable way, has great scientific, environmental and economic importance. Thus, in this study it was possible to obtain a better understanding of the reactivity, selectivity and electronic structures of the cobalt oxides prototypes in the methane C-H bond activation process.

## **5. Acknowledgements**

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## **6. Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

### **Suport Information**

### **Summary Information**

SI. Additional data on the geometric properties of cobalt oxides by using different theoretical levels

SII. Additional data from the EDA analysis of cobalt oxides prototypes: table

SIII. Additional geometric data of the cobalt oxide complexes related to the mechanisms analyzed: Tables

SIV. References

### **Supporting information I**

#### **SI- Geometric properties of cobalt oxides**

The computational parameters of the experimental and theoretical geometry for the most stable cobalt oxides are shown in table SI-1 [1-3].

**Table SI-1:** Optimized bond lengths values, bond angles, vibration frequencies and zero point energy of cobalt oxides by using different computational methodologies.

Species	Method	R(Co-O) (Å)	$\angle O\text{-Co}\text{-}O$	V Co-O (cm <sup>-1</sup> )	Electronic energy (Hartree)
CoO [4]	B3LYP	1.61	-	903.9	-1457.86
	CCSD(T)	1.60	-	902.5	-1457.64
	ZORA/BLYP	1.59	-	-	-0.5648
	Exp*	1.61	-	-	-
CoO <sup>+</sup> [5]	B3LYP	1.66	-	751.9	-1457.58
	CCSD(T)	1.65	-	784.2	-1457.37
	ZORA/BLYP	1.63	-	-	-0.2047
	Exp*	1.65	-	-	-
CoO <sup>2+</sup> [6]	B3LYP	1.97	-	326.25	-1456.88
	CCSD(T)	1.98	-	301.7	-1455.64
	ZORA/BLYP	1.96	-	-	-0.4386
	Exp*	1.93	-	-	-
CoO <sub>2</sub> [6]	B3LYP	1.60	180	224.4 892.3 932.9	-1533.08
	CCSD(T)	1.62	180	174.4 872.3 942.9	-1532.58
	ZORA/BLYP	1.64	180	-	-0.7975
	Exp*	1.615	180	-	-
	B3LYP	1.62	180	288.7 666.4 775.16	-1532.58
	CCSD(T)	1.63	180	243.5 665.5 776.18	-1532.60
	ZORA/BLYP	1.68	180	-	-0.3473
	Exp*	-	-	-	-
CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup> [6]	B3LYP	2.08	180	28.81 308.4 380.1	-1531.91
	CCSD(T)	2.08	180	29.57 309.45 380.58	-1531.98
	ZORA/BLYP	2.10	180	-	-0.2721
	Exp*	-	-	-	-

\*[1-3]

All cobalt oxides were optimized by using different theoretical levels and basis sets (B3LYP/ Watchers f, CCSD (T)/Watchers f, ZORA/B3LYP). The use of these approaches was performed to refine the different computational methodologies and to validate the B3LYP methodology for the rest of the work.

As can be seen, all values obtained show a small difference to the extent that different methodologies are considered. In general, B3LYP calculations underestimate the calculated binding lengths in lengths less than 0.02 Å, while the relativistic ZORA results tend to overestimate the Co-O binding lengths of the oxides under study.

According to the binding lengths results forth in Table SI-1, there was an increase in the Co-O bond lengths in the monoxide series, ranging from 1.60 to 1.98 Å for the CCSD (T) calculations. Thus, the neutral cobalt monoxide presents a lower binding length according to the increase of the load on the metal center.

The binding lengths for the divalent monoxides and dioxides are higher because of their more stable multiplicities.

For cobalt dioxides, there is an increase in the binding length for  $\text{CoO}_2^{2+}$ , ranging from 1.62 to 2.09 Å for the CCSD (T) calculations.

It can be seen from the table that the binding length results for the B3LYP and CCSD (T) calculations are close and with small variations in relation to the experimental lengths. For the B3LYP calculations, for the neutral cobalt monoxide, it is observed a variation of 0.01 Å, and a greater variation of 0.03 Å for  $\text{CoO}^{2+}$ . In general, there is good agreement between the available experimental data and the calculated values for the oxides, with the exception of doubly charged cobalt monoxide. It is possible to conclude that the B3LYP method correctly reproduces the geometric properties of cobalt oxides.

The vibrational frequencies results for Co-O become smaller with increasing charge on the metal center, suggesting strong chemical bonds for the neutral species. The vibration frequencies values for the CCSD (T) method are  $902.5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  in  $\text{CoO}$ ,  $784.2 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  in  $\text{CoO}^+$  and an even a lower value of  $301.7 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  for  $\text{CoO}^{2+}$ .

It is noteworthy that the calculated frequency values of the dioxides are significantly lower than those calculated for the monoxides series. These results suggest that stronger chemical bonds should be observed in monoxides than in the dioxides series, and this tendency has been proven by the electronic properties calculations.

The computed zero point energy values show that the most stable species are  $\text{CoO}$  (quartet),  $\text{CoO}^+$  (quintet) and  $\text{CoO}^{2+}$  (sextet), and for cobalt dioxides are:  $\text{CoO}_2$  (sextet),

$\text{CoO}_2^+$  (quintet) and  $\text{CoO}_2^{2+}$  (sextet), such results are in agreement with the literature. Another observation was that the neutral cobalt monoxides and dioxides obtained the lowest zero point energy, resulting in a smaller Co-O binding length. In general, due to the small differences between the CCSD (T) and the DFT results, the B3LYP calculations were used to evaluate the geometries of all the molecular systems of reactions under investigation.

Due to the amount of electrons in the transition metals, some effects become important to be treated with caution, among them there are the relativistic effects. Therefore, additional calculations employing the ZORA scalar effect in the ADF package were performed. We can see, according to table SI-I, that the B3LYP calculations presented results close to those of ZORA calculations.

With the determination of the optimized geometries of cobalt oxides, we continued to investigate the geometric and electronic properties of the oxides to obtain detailed information from the atomic and molecular standpoint of the chemical binding properties of these oxides. These analyzes are reported in the first part of the article.

## Supporting information II

### SII – Energy Decomposition Analysis (EDA)

**Table SII-1:** Percentage contribution of the linear combination of several fragment orbitals (SFO)

$\text{CoO}$					
	$\text{Co}$		$\text{O}$		
	SFO	%	SFO	%	
LUMO+1	s; p <sub>z</sub> ;	38.49; 25.84	p <sub>z</sub>	13.16	
LUMO	d: xz; p <sub>x</sub>	60.14; 6.84	p <sub>x</sub>	32.95	
	d: yz; p <sub>x</sub>	60.14; 6.84	p <sub>y</sub>	32.95	
HOMO	d: x <sup>2</sup> - y <sup>2</sup>	99.18	-	-	
	d: xy	99.18	-	-	
HOMO-1	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	40.64; 34.34	p <sub>z</sub>	25.74	
$\text{CoO}^+$					
	$\text{Co}$		$\text{O}$		
	SFO	%	SFO	%	
LUMO+1	d: xz; p <sub>x</sub>	43.86; 4.27	p <sub>x</sub>	51.18	
	d: yz; p <sub>x</sub>	43.86; 4.27	p <sub>y</sub>	51.18	
LUMO	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	49.42; 30.39	p <sub>z</sub>	19.06	
HOMO	d: x <sup>2</sup> - y <sup>2</sup>	97.77	-	-	
	d: xy	97.77	-	-	
HOMO-1	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	39.08; 22.08	p <sub>z</sub>	38.35	
$\text{CoO}^{++}$					
	$\text{Co}$		$\text{O}$		
	SFO	%	SFO	%	
LUMO+1	d: xz; p <sub>x</sub>	23.23; 2.67	p <sub>x</sub>	71.13	
	d: yz; p <sub>x</sub>	43.86; 4.27	p <sub>y</sub>	51.18	
LUMO	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	50.92; 19.29	p <sub>z</sub>	28.63	
HOMO	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	37.34; 13.56	p <sub>z</sub>	46.87	
HOMO-1	d: xz	34.80	p <sub>x</sub>	65.2	
	d: yz	34.80	p <sub>y</sub>	65.2	
$\text{CoO}_2$					
	$\text{Co}$		$\text{O}$		
	SFO	%	SFO	%	
LUMO+1	s; d: z <sup>2</sup>	80.46; 14.49	Sigma.g	6.25	
LUMO	d: xz	71.96	p <sub>x</sub>	29.18	
	d: yz	71.96	p <sub>y</sub>	29.18	
HOMO	d: x <sup>2</sup> - y <sup>2</sup>	98.87	-	-	
	d: xy	98.87	-	-	
HOMO-1	d: xz	70.65	p <sub>x</sub>	28.91	
	d: yz	70.65	p <sub>y</sub>	28.91	
$\text{CoO}_2^+$					
	$\text{Co}$		$\text{O}$		
	SFO	%	SFO	%	
LUMO+1	d: xz	54.19	p <sub>x</sub>	47.13	

	d: yz	54.19	p <sub>y</sub>	47.13
LUMO	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	51.80; 30.27	Sigma.g	17.65
HOMO	d: x <sup>2</sup> - y <sup>2</sup>	97.76	-	-
	d: xy	97.76	-	-
HOMO-1	d: xz	73.03	p <sub>x</sub>	28.13
	d: yz	73.03	p <sub>y</sub>	28.13
<b>CoO<sub>2</sub><sup>++</sup></b>				
	Co		O	
	SFO	%	SFO	%
LUMO+1	d: xz	18.02	p <sub>x</sub>	81.33
	d: yz	18.02	p <sub>y</sub>	81.33
LUMO	d: z <sup>2</sup> ; s	53.88; 19.01	Sigma.g	27.08
HOMO	d: x <sup>2</sup> - y <sup>2</sup>	95.79	-	-
	d: xy	95.79	-	-
HOMO-1	d: x <sup>2</sup> - y <sup>2</sup>	96.42	-	-
	d: xy	96.42	-	-

### Supporting information III

**Table SIII-1:** The B3LYP geometric parameters for the lowest spin state of the cobalt complexes via the oxidative addition mechanism pathway. The binding lengths are in Å and the binding angles are in degrees.

Parameter	CoO			CoO <sup>+</sup>			CoO <sup>2+</sup>	
	MP (4)	TS (6)	CP (6)	MP (5)	TS (3)	CP (3)	MP (6)	TS (4)
Co-C	2.318	2.002	1.958	2.121	1.998	1.970	2.082	1.930
Co-O	1.662	1.730	1.657	1.646	1.647	1.586	1.586	1.695
Co-H'	2.226	1.785	1.503	2.064	1.629	1.506	2.047	1.456
<C-Co-O	177.9	166.7	138.3	177.2	139.4	123.7	160.6	159.5
<C-Co-H'	28.60	88.4	81.65	31.67	30.29	134.2	32.15	91.46
	CoO <sub>2</sub>			CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>			CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>	
Parameter	MP (6)	TS (4)	CP (4)	MP (5)	TS (3)	CP (3)	MP (6)	TS (4)
Co-C	2.200	2.328	1.950	2.085	2.024	1.990	2.028	1.940
Co-O	1.759	1.642	1.651	1.682	1.678	1.698	1.621	1.756
Co-H'	1.856	1.747	1.474	1.933	1.613	1.505	2.011	1.455
<C-Co-O	166.64	132.7	103.0	158.1	136.1	111.3	102.6	159.5
<C-Co-H	29.42	30.6	105.4	29.83	75.1	123.4	28.1	91.4

**Table SIII-2:** The B3LYP geometric parameters for the lowest spin state of molecular precursor (MP), transition state (TS) and complex product (CP) of the cobalt complexes in the direct hydrogen abstraction pathway. The binding lengths are in Å and the binding angles are in degrees.

Parameter	CoO			CoO <sup>+</sup>			CoO <sup>2+</sup>	
	MP (4)	TS (4)	CP (3)	MP (5)	TS (5)	CP (4)	MP (6)	TS (6)
O-H	2.387	1.850	0.975	2.251	1.715	0.962	2.101	1.514
Co-O	1.613	1.649	1.728	1.659	1.652	1.709	1.672	1.788
Co-H'	3.997	3.488	2.409	3.905	3.329	2.564	3.780	3.292
<Co-O-H'	176.1	170.7	118.8	173.9	162.8	145.8	170.8	170.6
	CoO <sub>2</sub>			CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>			CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>	
Parameter	MP (6)	TS (6)	CP (5)	MP (5)	TS (5)	CP (6)	MP (6)	TS (6)
O-H	2.315	1.750	0.971	1.703	1.352	0.950	1.513	1.068
Co-O	1.735	1.741	1.801	1.661	1.840	1.817	1.751	1.790
Co-H'	4.369	3.663	2.429	4.142	3.091	2.501	4.602	2.783
<Co-O-H'	177.9	115.9	119.4	166.6	150.6	124.1	176.7	152.8

**Table SIII-3:** The B3LYP/ WACHTERS-F geometric parameters for the lowest spin state of molecular precursor (MP), transition state (TS) and product complex (PC) of the cobalt complexes of 4-centers abstraction mechanism. The bond lengths are in Å and the bond angles are in degrees.

Parameter	CoO			CoO <sup>+</sup>			CoO <sup>2+</sup>		
	MP (4)	4CHA-TS (6)	CP (6)	MP (5)	4CHA-TS (3)	CP (3)	MP (6)	4CHA-TS (4)	CP (4)
Co-C	2.318	1.930	1.973	2.121	2.022	1.971	2.082	2.187	1.722
Co-O	1.662	1.820	1.807	1.646	1.633	1.731	1.586	1.836	1.649
Co-H'	2.226	1.544	2.473	2.064	1.790	2.629	2.047	1.812	2.253
<C-Co-O	177.9	120.0	178.1	177.2	117.9	156.1	160.6	106.8	163.3
<C-Co-H'	28.60	54.3	158.7	31.67	30.7	146.2	32.15	31.5	145.3
	CoO <sub>2</sub>			CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>+</sup>			CoO <sub>2</sub> <sup>2+</sup>		
Parameter	MP (6)	4CHA-TS (4)	CP (4)	MP (5)	TS (3)	CP (3)	MP (6)	4CHA-TS (4)	CP (4)
Co-C	2.200	2.016	2.002	2.085	2.297	1.958	2.028	2.311	1.973
Co-O	1.759	1.688	1.734	1.682	1.649	1.762	1.621	1.683	1.717
Co-H'	1.856	1.486	2.642	1.933	1.786	2.445	2.011	1.793	2.679
<C-Co-O	166.4	128.28	112.6	158.1	111.2	104.3	102.6	108.3	100.4
<C-Co-H	29.42	52.8	105.1	29.83	29.0	96.7	28.1	32.2	95.2

## Supporting information IV

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## ANEXO A - TRABALHOS DESENVOLVIDOS AO LONGO DO MESTRADO E DOUTORADO

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### Theoretical structural and electronic analyses with emphasis on the reactivity of iron oxide prototypes in methane C–H bond activation

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**Abstract** In the present work, a detailed theoretical investigation using B3LYP, CCSD(T) and ZORA-B3LYP calculations has been performed in order to investigate activation processes of methane C–H bond by iron oxide prototype series:  $\text{FeO}_m^{n+}$  ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ). The main results indicate that, in accordance with previous experimental findings, only  $\text{FeO}^+$  monoxide is kinetically and thermodynamically feasible through the hydrogen abstraction mechanism, with an already known pathway described as “oxidative hydrogen migration”. The overall results indicate better thermodynamic and kinetic conditions for all iron monoxides, in relation to iron dioxides. Based on the energy values and the structural parameters, the 4-center abstraction mechanism should be thermodynamically more favorable in relation to the direct abstraction mechanism, due to the lack of Fe–C interaction for the direct abstraction mechanism. The AIM calculations indicate a larger ionic character for the  $\text{Fe}-\text{O}^+$  chemical bond, whereas a mixed participation, relative to ionic and covalent character, was found in chemical bonds of the remaining iron oxides.

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**Electronic supplementary material** The online version of this article (doi: [10.1007/s11144-016-1103-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11144-016-1103-9)) contains supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.

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## Methane C–H bond activation by niobium oxides: Theoretical analyses of the bonding and reactivity properties of $\text{NbO}_m^{n+}$ ( $m = 1, 2$ ; $n = 0, 1, 2$ )

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### ABSTRACT

The catalytic properties of  $\text{NbO}_m^{n+}$  ( $m = 1, 2$ ;  $n = 0, 1, 2$ ) on the methane C–H bond activation were investigated using B3LYP and CCSD(T) calculations. The spin-orbit relativistic effects were evaluated by means of ZORA approximations. The main results indicate that in agreement with the previous experimental findings only the neutral  $\text{NbO}$  monoxide is kinetically and thermodynamically feasible via the oxidative addition, whereas the remaining oxides and dioxides show better theoretical predictions in the hydrogen abstraction pathways. In these reactions, a known mechanism described as "Oxidative Hydrogen Migration (OHM)" was found to be more stable for the neutral and singly charged niobium-oxo species, while competitive direct H abstraction (DHA) and OHM pathways were obtained for the doubly charged niobium oxides, with slightly preferential conditions observed in DHA. Overall, the increase of charge on the metal center and the presence of the oxo ligands favors the initial electrostatic interaction between niobium oxides and methane, decreasing the activation barrier heights in the H abstraction pathways due to the electron acceptor nature of oxo ligands. Among the investigated oxides,  $\text{NbO}^{2+}$  and  $\text{NbO}_2^{2+}$  show the best performances in the methane activation process, with activation barriers computed to be around 1.5–5.9 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>.

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### 1. Introduction

There is a huge need for improved methane-oxidation catalysts. This is motivated by the fact that methane is the largest constituent of natural gas and its proven natural reserves have doubled in the last decade, mainly from increasing of unconventional gas such as those from shale, coal and tight gas [1]. Transition Metal (TM) oxides are considered as prototype models for the methane-oxidation processes as the neutral and charged  $\text{CH}_4 + \text{MO}_m^{n+}$  reactions are the simplest models involving oxidation-catalysts. These reactions may therefore be used to understand the intrinsic mechanisms of the more complex catalytic processes, including those found in biological systems. In particular, there is a great interest in the selective conversion of methane to methanol as it is well-known that soluble

methane monooxygenase (sMMO) enzyme catalyzes this oxidation process under physiological conditions [2,3]. Several experimental and theoretical studies have therefore been performed for understanding how to apply the catalytic behavior of this biological system in the development of new catalysts with maximized selectivity and efficiency [4,5]. In this respect, methane activation is the first step of catalytic processes, including the methane to methanol reactions by niobium oxides. This process has been recognized as the rate determining step of reactions between TM species and methane in the gas-phase. Furthermore, the C–H bond activation has been successfully used to evaluate the reactivity of the TM series toward methane [6–9].

Gas-phase reactions of TM oxides and methane have been systematically investigated by Schröder, Schwarz, Armentrout and co-workers. [10a,b,c,d,e,f,11a,b] The results for the first row TM oxide ions indicate the late TM monoxide ions can efficiently react with methane, whereas the early TM oxides cannot [11]. Theoretical results of Shiota and Yoshizawa research group coincide with the

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## Molecular Docking, Metal Substitution and Hydrolysis Reaction of Chiral Substrates of Phosphotriesterase

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**Abstract:** During World War II, organophosphorus compounds with neurotoxic action were developed and used as the basis for the development of structures currently used as pesticides in the agricultural industry. Among the nerve agents, Tabun, Sarin, Soman and VX are the most important. The factor responsible for the high toxicity of organophosphorus (OP) is the acetylcholinesterase inhibition. However, one of the characterized enzymes capable of degrading OP is Phosphotriesterase (PTE). This enzyme has generated considerable interest for applications of rapid and complete detoxification. Due to the importance of bioremediation methods for the poisoning caused by OP, this work aims to study the interaction mode between the PTE enzyme and organophosphorus compounds, in this case, Sarin, Soman, Tabun and VX have been used, which are potent acetylcholinesterase inhibitors, taking into account the enantiomers "R<sub>p</sub>" and "S<sub>p</sub>" of each compound, with the S<sub>p</sub>-enantiomers presenting the higher toxicity. With that, we were able to demonstrate the existence of the stereochemical preference by PTE in these compounds. With the purpose of increasing the speed of the hydrolysis mechanism, we have proposed a modification in the enzyme active site structure, where Zn<sup>2+</sup> ions were substituted by Al<sup>3+</sup> ions. To analyze the stability of Al<sup>3+</sup> ions in the wild-type PTE active site, MD simulations were also performed. This mutation brought relevant results; in this case, there was a reduction of the reaction energy barrier for all the compounds, mainly for VX in which the reaction presented lower activation energy values, and consequently, a faster hydrolysis process.

**Keywords:** Enzyme, Phosphotriesterase, QM/MM, MD, Organophosphorus.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Organophosphorus (OP) has been used in the agriculture in pest control for a long time and its overuse can be harmful to the environment and human health [1]. These compounds have neurotoxic effects on the central nervous system, and their toxicity is related to the acetylcholinesterase (AChE) inhibition and subsequent accumulation of acetylcholine (ACh) [2].

In an attempt to find a bioremediation for organophosphorus poisoning, several enzymes with the potential to degrade these compounds have been isolated and characterized [1]. In this sense, one of the most promising enzymes is Phosphotriesterase (PTE) [3-7].

PTE is a zinc metalloenzyme which is able to hydrolyze different species of OP [8] such as those employed in agriculture and chemical weapons [9, 10]. A deeper understanding of the enzymatic hydrolysis mechanism is essential to raise new insights for the bioremediation process of OP.

This enzyme is an amidohydrolase group member [6]. It is well-known that the PTE enzyme active site consists of two central metals, which are important for catalysis. The wild-type enzyme contains two Zn<sup>2+</sup> ions per monomer, but divalent cations, such as Cd<sup>2+</sup>, Co<sup>2+</sup>, Ni<sup>2+</sup>, or Mn<sup>2+</sup> can replace it without the loss of catalytic activity [11].

The catalytic property of PTE enzyme is interesting due to its stereochemical preference in the central phosphorus of OP [12]. Once the PTE structure is connected to analogue substrate, diethyl 4-methylbenzylphosphonate, has been shown that substituents are bonded to the central phosphorus of specific forms [13].

It is important to highlight that the stereochemical preference of the PTE enzyme has not been elucidated clearly yet. In this line, efforts have been made to design mutant enzymes able to degrade efficiently the S<sub>p</sub>-enantiomers, given that these compounds are more toxic than R<sub>p</sub>-enantiomers [14-16].

The reaction pathway followed by PTE consists primarily of the activation of a water molecule, followed by the attack to the central phosphorus, leading to a change in configuration [8]. As commented previously, it has been noticed that the catalytic degradation of OP by PTE is

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***Asymmetric biodegradation of the nerve agents Sarin and VX by human dUTPase: Chemometrics, Molecular Docking and Hybrid QM/MM calculations***

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## Iron Oxides Applied to Catalysis

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Chapter

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### Abstract

The elements iron and oxygen are the most common in the earth's crust, causing the natural formation of iron oxides through rocky weather, both on land and in oceans. These oxides are a class of compounds with interesting features due to their magnetic, electrical, physical-chemical, and morphological properties, which are significant from the scientific and technological point of view. Among the different iron oxide application areas, the processes involving adsorption and catalysis stand out, especially in reactions directed to environmental remediation. Among the iron oxides, the interest in the maghemite ( $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ) by industry is quite high because of its high catalytic activity combined with considerable thermodynamic stability. Although iron oxides already present numerous benefits to catalytic reaction performance, a tool that has been widely used is the process optimization by doping with other metals. This behavior was exemplified in this chapter by presenting an experimental and theoretical study about the improvements in the properties of the  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  catalyst after doping with  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions.

### Keywords

Iron oxides Heterogeneous catalysis Maghemite Doping DFT  
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