

Shear capacity of masonry walls externally strengthened using Flax-TRM composite systems:
experimental tests and comparative assessment

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Shear capacity of masonry walls externally strengthened using Flax-TRM composite systems: experimental tests and comparative assessment / Ferrara, Giuseppe; Caggegi, Carmelo; Martinelli, Enzo; Gabor, Aron. - In: CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING MATERIALS. - ISSN 0950-0618. - 261:(2020), pp. 1-14. [10.1016/j.conbuildmat.2020.120490]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2995839 since: 2025-07-01T16:11:45Z

Publisher:

Elsevier

Published

DOI:10.1016/j.conbuildmat.2020.120490

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.conbuildmat.2020.120490>

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1 **Shear capacity of masonry walls externally strengthened using Flax-TRM**
2 **composite systems: experimental tests and comparative assessment.**

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21

22 **ABSTRACT**

23 *A growing environmental awareness is gradually changing the entire economic system, and consequently,*
24 *the building materials sector is increasingly interested in innovative sustainable solutions. The use of plant*
25 *fibres as reinforcement in inorganic composite systems, generally referred to as Textile Reinforced Mortar*
26 *(TRM), represents an attractive alternative to the use of most traditional high-strength inorganic fibres,*
27 *which reduces the environmental impact of the composite. However, there are several unresolved issues*
28 *regarding the correct mechanical behaviour of such innovative systems. Various studies have been*

1 *conducted to assess the fibre-to-mortar bond properties and to investigate the tensile behaviour of TRMs*
2 *prepared using plant textiles such as flax, hemp, coir, sisal, and jute. Moreover, there is still a lack of*
3 *experimental evidence concerning the efficiency of the composite material once applied to structural*
4 *elements. Therefore, this paper reports on an experimental study on the shear capacity of walls strengthened*
5 *by two TRMs characterised by a different amount of textile reinforcement. The experimental results are*
6 *discussed and compared by using theoretical models derived from formulations proposed by the standards in*
7 *this field. This study shows that Flax-TRM reinforcement enhances the strength and ductility of a masonry*
8 *assemblage, confirming the potential utility of such materials. Furthermore, it points out some limitations of*
9 *this reinforcement technique and paves the way for future studies to address such problems and improve the*
10 *efficiency of the entire system.*

11
12 **KEYWORDS:**

13 TRM/FRCM

14 Strengthening

15 Masonry

16 Plant/natural fibres

17 Flax

18 Diagonal Compression Test

19

20 **HIGHLIGHTS:**

21 Flax textiles are an efficient reinforcement in lime-based composites

22 Flax TRMs enhance the shear capacity of masonry walls

23 Flax TRM reinforcement guarantees a post-failure integrity of the wall

24

25

1 1. INTRODUCTION

2 Recent seismic events occurred in the Mediterranean Area highlighted the need for reducing vulnerability of
3 existing buildings, most of which are made of masonry, typically characterised by significant capacity under
4 gravity loads, but generally unsuited for resisting horizontal loads. In fact, catastrophic seismic events led to
5 both out-of-plane failures and in-plane failure of walls, often due to a lack of shear capacity [1].

6 Several retrofitting techniques were developed with the aim of increasing the capacity of individual
7 structural elements, and in general, conferring to the entire building a global response per the safety
8 performances proposed by standards. Among these techniques, the use of a class of inorganic composite
9 systems, generally referred to as Textile Reinforced Mortar (TRM), as reinforcement for masonry elements
10 experienced a significant increase in the last decade. Actually, different acronyms were used by the scientific
11 community to define the same kind of inorganic-based composite system characterised by textile
12 reinforcement, e.g., fibre reinforced cementitious matrix (FRCM), textile reinforced concrete (TRC),
13 cementitious matrix grid (CMG), inorganic-matrix grid (IMG), composite reinforced mortar (CRM) [2].
14 Interest in using TRM composites composed of high-strength fibre textile embedded in a mortar matrix is
15 due to several properties, which make this solution particularly suitable, such as good mechanical
16 performance, discreet fire resistance, permeability, reversibility of the intervention, and compatibility with
17 masonry substrates due to the affinity between the materials adopted [3].

18 The application of TRM systems has proven to be a versatile reinforcement technique adopted in
19 confinement of masonry members, in-plane and out-of-plane strengthening of walls, reinforcement of arches
20 and vaults, and combined seismic and energy retrofitting [4]. Several studies were carried out to define
21 characterisation methods and to mechanically characterise the response of different TRM systems. The most
22 common applications were characterised by the use of textiles made of high-strength fibres, such as
23 Polybenzoxazole (PBO) [5], carbon [6], steel [7], glass [8], and basalt [9][10]. Particular attention was paid
24 to choosing effective and easily repeatable testing methods capable of determining the relevant mechanical
25 parameters needed to characterise the strength of the system [11][12][13]. Technical recommendations were
26 provided on standardising the procedure of composite characterisation consisting of two main tests: tensile
27 tests of the TRM composite coupons [15] and single-shear tests of the TRM-to-masonry system, also called

1 shear bond tests, in which by transferring the stress from the textile to the substrate, passing through the
2 TRM, it is possible to amplify the weakness of the system primarily due to fibre strength or adhesion issues
3 at the fibre-to-matrix or TRM-to-substrate interface surfaces [16]. However, there are still several
4 uncertainties concerning durability of TRM composite systems, hence several experimental studies were
5 carried out to provide more information about the structural reliability in the long-term [17].

6 In the United States, guidelines have been formulated on designing retrofitting intervention using TRM and
7 acceptance criteria for masonry and concrete strengthening [18]. Furthermore, in Italy, instructions for both
8 qualifying the materials and designing interventions based on the use of TRM systems were released to
9 regulate the activity of practitioners in the field [19][20].

10 Experimental investigations were also conducted on a larger scale by assessing the actual capacity of
11 masonry elements strengthened externally by TRM systems. Several tests, often carried out by adopting the
12 diagonal-compression layout, were carried out both in situ and in the laboratory by varying the masonry
13 substrate, TRM composite, and reinforcement configuration, showing that this technique can significantly
14 increase the mechanical behaviour of the masonry elements on which it is applied [21][22][23].

15 Furthermore, as recognised by the EU research and innovation programme, “Horizon 2020”, the need for
16 more sustainable solutions is one of the leading “societal challenges” of our day. Globally, several initiatives
17 were proposed to find alternative materials and technologies, resulting in more sustainable and affordable
18 constructions [24]. The careful selection of constituents has been recognised as the easiest way for designers
19 to meet such sustainable principles when conceiving building projects.

20 In this context, the use of plant fibres as internal reinforcement in inorganic-matrix composites emerged as a
21 valuable and promising solution [25][26]. Therefore, fibres produced from several plants, such as flax, jute,
22 sisal, coir, hemp, and cotton, were employed as reinforcement in mortar-based composites tested in tension,
23 which showed that the composite system has good potential [27], and is generally characterised by a good
24 bond between fibres and mortar-based matrix [28][29]. Some issues were also highlighted, such as variable
25 results due to the nature of the fibres, and low stiffness values.

26 The determination of a proper volumetric ratio and impregnation treatment of fibres seems to be a crucial
27 aspect to respond to these issues and achieving mechanical properties comparable to those of synthetic fibre
28 based TRM systems [30][31]. Furthermore, adhesion between plant-fibre-based TRM composites and clay-

1 brick substrate was also investigated to understand whether and to what extent these composite systems can
2 be employed in strengthening masonry walls [32][33]. On a smaller scale, pull-out tests were carried out to
3 analyse the adherence behaviour between single yarns of fibre and organic mortars, cement, or lime-based
4 [34][35], and it was shown that by adopting fibre treatments, such as polymer coating, hornification, and
5 alkali treatments, the bond properties may be improved [36][37].

6 A few tests were conducted with the aim to assess the mechanical performance of masonry elements
7 reinforcement, either in-plane or out-of-plane, by plant-fibre-based TRMs. The tests showed that these
8 composite systems have significant potential for strengthening masonry structures, but further improvements
9 and optimisations are required [38][39][40][41].

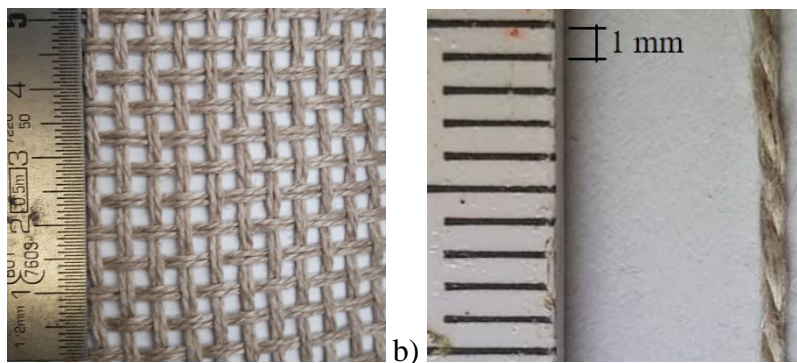
10 The aforementioned applications confirm that the use of plant fibres as reinforcement in mortar-based
11 composites presents a promising solution for improving the sustainability of the material. However, due to
12 the peculiar mechanical properties of plant textiles (e.g., lower strength and stiffness), some differences in
13 the mechanical behaviour were observed with respect to masonry walls strengthened using conventional
14 TRM systems.

15 Therefore, further studies are needed to better understand the actual influence of plant based TRMs on the
16 overall mechanical behaviour of structural elements. Specifically, investigating the efficiency of TRM
17 systems to enhance in-plane shear capacity of masonry elements is one of the most relevant objectives, as it
18 plays a fundamental role in the response of masonry structures under seismic excitations. Based on the
19 promising results of previous studies on the mechanical response of sustainable TRMs comprising plant
20 fibres [34][42], the present paper reports an experimental analysis on clay-brick masonry walls externally
21 strengthened using a sustainable TRM composite composed of flax textiles embedded in a hydraulic lime-
22 based mortar. Specifically, these masonry walls were tested under diagonal compression to determine their
23 shear strength without and with the external strengthening of a composite system hereafter referred as Flax-
24 TRM. After describing materials and methods (Section 2), the study reports into details the experimental
25 results (Section 3) and proposes a comparison of the obtained results with analytical models adopted by
26 relevant codes and standards (Section 4).

1 **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

2 **2.1 Characterisation of the Flax TRM-to-masonry system constituents**

3 The plant textile adopted in this study was a bidirectional flax fabric (Figure 1). It was characterised by
4 filaments ordered in threads, which can be considered as the elementary element of the flax fabric under
5 consideration. The threads defined a mesh such that the interspaces within the grid were large enough (about
6 3 mm) to allow the mortar to easily penetrate through them. The main physical and mechanical properties of
7 the flax textile are presented in Table 1 [42]. The filament geometry was assessed via SEM image analysis
8 and the thread cross section was indirectly derived from the density estimation.



9 a) b)
10 *Figure 1: a) Bidirectional flax textile; b) Flax thread.*

11 The matrix of the TRM system consisted of a pre-mixed mortar with a natural hydraulic lime binder and
12 selected inert materials with a maximum effective diameter of 1.19 mm (99% of the aggregates < 1.19 mm).
13 It was cast by mixing an amount of water equal to 19% (in weight) of the pre-mixed formula, as
14 recommended by the manufacturer. The mortar grain size distribution curve and its properties in the fresh
15 state were presented in a previous study [34]. The main engineering properties of the mortar are presented in
16 Table 1 and were assessed according to the relevant standards [43] through three-point bending tests on 40 x
17 40 x 160 mm³ prisms and compression tests on the two half parts derived from each specimen tested under
18 bending.

19 Clay bricks 55 mm thick, 120 mm wide, and 250 mm long were employed for preparing the masonry
20 substrate. The bricks were arranged in a monolayer configuration characterised by a single row of bricks in
21 the thickness of one head. The main mechanical properties of the type of brick adopted in this study are
22 presented in Table 1 [44].

1 The bed and head joints of the masonry, characterised by a thickness of 10 mm, consisted of a low strength
 2 hydraulic lime-based mortar specifically designed to be representative of the mortar typically found in
 3 existing masonry buildings. It was characterised by the volumetric composition recommended in the Italian
 4 Guidelines [45] to reproduce a low strength hydraulic mortar consisting of 2 parts of binder, 4 parts of sand
 5 (maximum grain size of 2 mm) and 1.3 parts of water. Table 1 also summarises the mechanical properties of
 6 the mortar joints.

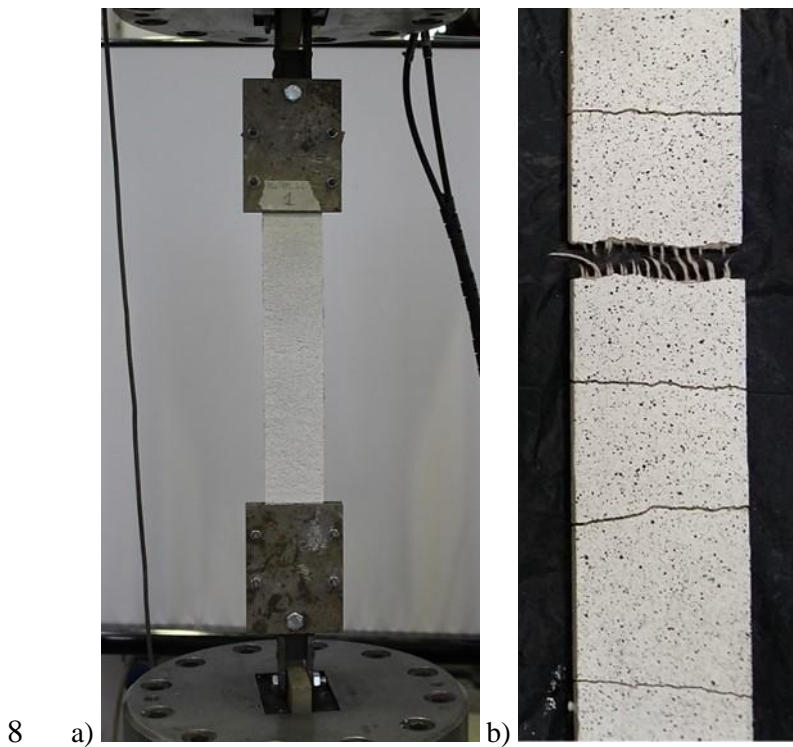
7 *Table 1: Main physical and mechanical properties of the Flax TRM-to-masonry system components.*

	Unit of measurement	Mean	Co.V. (%)	number of tests
<i>Flax textile</i>				
filament diameter	[mm]	16.78	30	28
density	[g/cm ³]	1.19	3	5
linear density	[Tex]	302	15	5
n° threads/cm	[threads/cm]	4.3	-	-
Thread cross section	[mm ²]	0.25	17	5
Thread Young's Modulus	[GPa]	9.36	11	26
Thread strain to failure	[%]	3.85	13	26
Thread tensile strength	[MPa]	353.72	12	26
<i>Hydraulic lime mortar (matrix)</i>				
flexural strength	[MPa]	3.13	13	18
compression strength	[MPa]	11.13	8	36
<i>Clay bricks</i>				
splitting strength	[MPa]	2.46	11	7
compression strength	[MPa]	17.89	5	12
<i>Hydraulic lime mortar (masonry)</i>				
flexural strength	[MPa]	0.94	20	27
compression strength	[MPa]	4.11	21	54

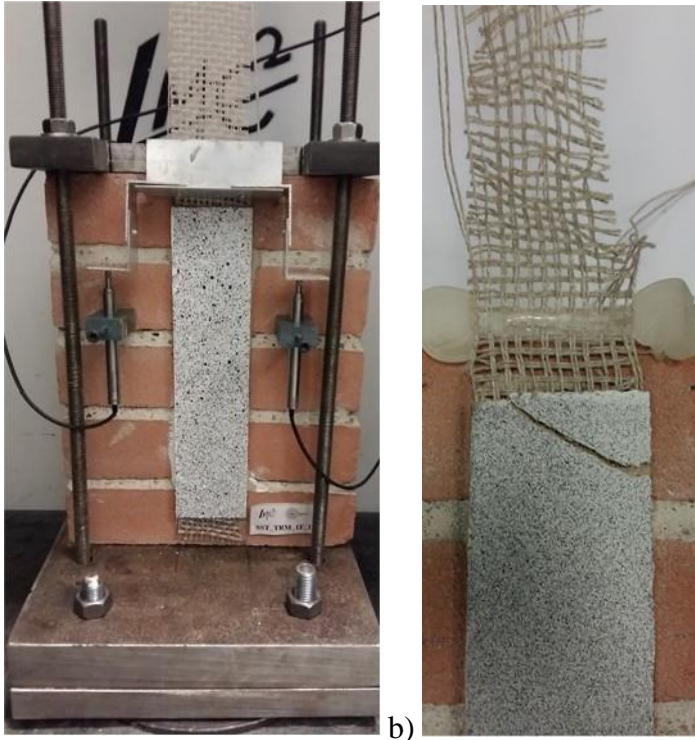
8 **2.2 Characterisation of the Flax-TRM composite and Flax TRM-to-masonry system.**

9 Two TRM systems were considered in this study. The first one, labelled *Flax-TRM-1L*, consisted of a TRM
 10 characterised by a thickness of 5 mm and one layer of reinforcing flax textile, with a fibre volumetric ratio of
 11 2.04%. The second one, labelled as *Flax-TRM-2L*, was characterised by a thickness of 8 mm and two plies of
 12 flax fabric overlapping each other via a thin layer of mortar, with a resulting fibre volumetric ratio of 2.55%.
 13 Based on RILEM recommendations [15][16], in previous related studies [46][47], the characterisation of the
 14 Flax-TRM composite system was conducted via tensile (Figure 2a) and single-shear tests (Figure 3a), for
 15 both *Flax-TRM-1L* and *Flax-TRM-2L*. Specimens tested in tension (width of 60 mm, gauge length of 300
 16 mm) exhibited a response characterised by the development of several cracks through the free length. The

1 specimens failed with a rupture of the textile in proximity to a cracked section (Figure 2b). Single-shear
2 tests highlighted that the system comprising Flax-TRM strip (width of 60 mm, bonded length of 260 mm)
3 applied on masonry substrate was characterised by good adhesion at the fibre-to-mortar interface with
4 respect to the tensile strength of the flax textile itself. The failure mode was characterised by a tensile failure
5 of the textile in the free length out of the composite (Figure 3b). The main values of the maximum strength,
6 in terms of load P_{max} , stress with respect to the fibre area, σ_f , and stress with respect to the matrix section, σ_m ,
7 are presented in Table 2 [46][47].



9 *Figure 2: a) Flax TRM tensile test set-up; b) Tensile test failure mode of Flax TRM system.*



1 a) b)
 2 *Figure 3: a) Flax TRM-to-masonry single-shear test set-up; b) Single-shear test failure mode of Flax TRM-*
 3 *to-masonry system.*

4 *Table 2: Strength of the Flax-TRM system in tensile and single-shear tests.*

type of test	type of reinforcement	n° of specimens	P_{max} (kN)	σ_f (MPa)	σ_m (MPa)	Co.V. (%)	Failure mode
tensile	<i>Flax-TRM-1L</i>	4	1.25	204.34	4.18	10	textile rupture
tensile	<i>Flax-TRM-2L</i>	5	2.43	198.62	5.06	8	textile rupture
single-shear	<i>Flax-TRM-1L</i>	3	1.35	220.69	4.50	2	textile rupture
single-shear	<i>Flax-TRM-2L</i>	5	2.57	210.06	5.35	1	textile rupture

5 **2.3 Methods**

6 Masonry assemblages externally strengthened by using Flax-TRM systems were subjected to diagonal
 7 compression tests with the aim to assess their shear (tensile) strength, achieved as the wall specimen split
 8 apart in the direction perpendicular to the direction of load. The tests were conducted at the Laboratory of
 9 Composite Materials for Construction (LMC²) of the University Claude Bernard Lyon, 1 France.

10 Three different series of specimens were considered (Figure 4):

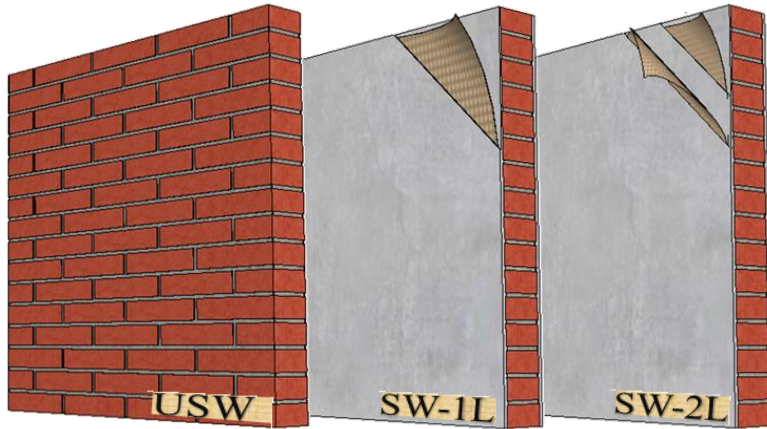
- 1 - the first series, labelled *USW*, were characterised by unstrengthened walls and was configured to
- 2 demonstrate the reference mechanical behaviour;
- 3 - the second series, labelled *SW-1L*, were characterised by walls externally strengthened via the *Flax-*
- 4 *TRM-1L* system;
- 5 - the third series, labelled *SW-2L*, were characterised by walls externally strengthened via the *Flax-*
- 6 *TRM-2L* system.

7 The substrate consisted in a single leaf panels with bricks arranged in the running bond pattern. In both the
8 strengthened series, the reinforcing system was applied uniformly throughout the wall surfaces and
9 symmetrically to both sides of the masonry elements, in line with similar studies in literature where this
10 reinforcement configuration appeared as a valuable solution to enhance the shear capacity of the panels [2].

11 The installation of the Flax-TRM reinforcing system involved the application of the first layer of mortar on
12 the masonry surface (Figure 5a), the application of the textile by ensuring that it was properly tight and
13 impregnated within the matrix (Figure 5b), the application of the next layer of mortar and possible
14 application of further flax textile layers, and then the application and smoothing of an external layer of
15 mortar (Figure 5c). Table 3 lists the main properties of the three series of specimens considered, including
16 the TRM unit tensile strength, ρ , defined as the maximum capacity in tension of the textile (assessed via
17 tensile tests on 60 mm large flax strips) included in a one-meter wide composite portion.

18 Figure 6 illustrates the apparatus adopted for conducting the diagonal compression tests. The testing
19 machine, with a maximum compressive load capacity of 500 kN, was equipped with a load cell placed along
20 the loading axis to record load values during the test.

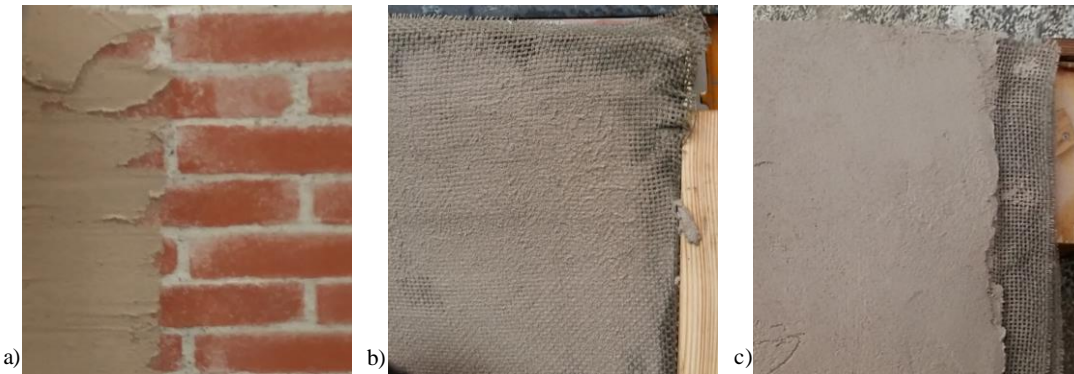
21 The test was conducted in displacement control at a rate of 1 mm/min. The load was transmitted to the
22 specimen via two loading shoes placed at the two edges of the vertical axis. The loading shoe consisted of a
23 steel device characterised by high stiffness (30 mm of thickness) and a bearing of length 150 mm specifically
24 designed to avoid excessive local stress in the bearing zone and to correspond with the mortar bed joints in
25 the loaded corner of the wall. The loading shoe was connected to the masonry assemblage via a high-strength
26 fast setting cement-based mortar. The walls were instrumented via two linear displacement transducers, with
27 a gage length of 1000 mm, to measure the shortening of the vertical diagonal and the lengthening of the
28 horizontal diagonal under load.



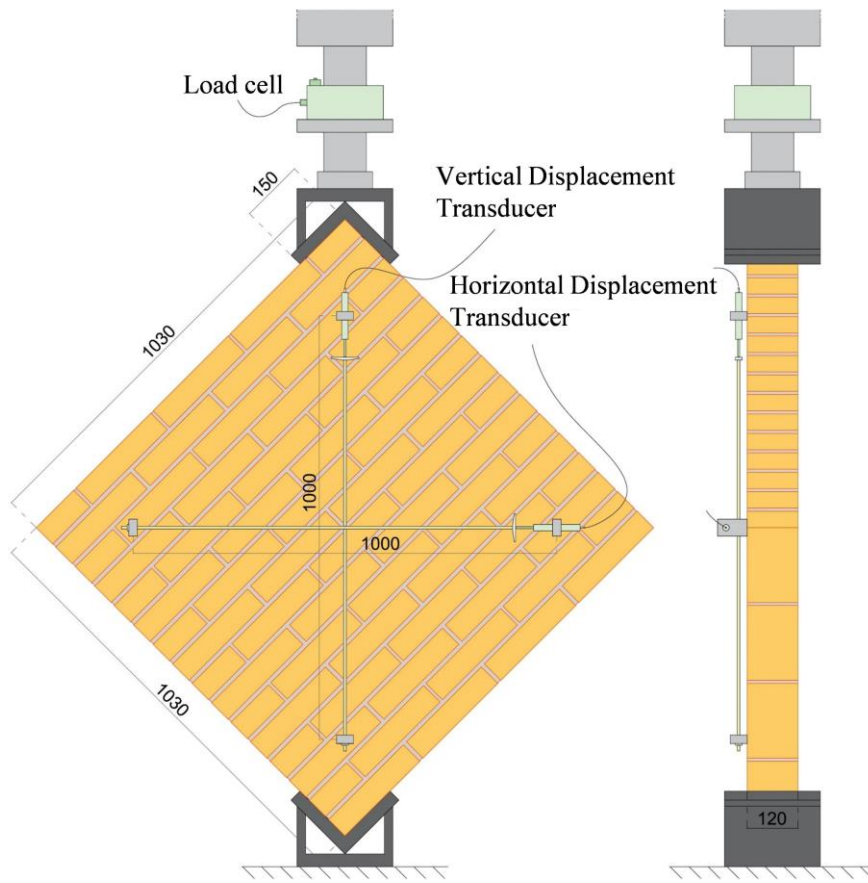
1
2 *Figure 4: Specimens subjected to diagonal compression test: UnStrengthened (USW), Flax-TRM-1L-*
3 *Strengthened (SW-1L), and Flax-TRM-2L-Strengthened (SW-2L) walls.*

4 *Table 3: Properties of the three series of specimens tested in diagonal compression.*

Series	# spec.	masonry type	Wall size t x w x h [mm ³]	Reinf. type	type of mortar	type of textile	TRM thick. [mm]	ρ [kN/m]
USW	3	clay bricks	120 x 1030 x 1030	—	—	—	—	—
SW-1L	3	clay bricks	130 x 1030 x 1030	Flax-TRM-1L	hydraulic lime	Flax	5	31
SW-2L	3	clay bricks	136 x 1030 x 1030	Flax-TRM-2L	hydraulic lime	Flax	8	62



5
6 *Figure 5: Application of the Flax-TRM system: a) application of the first layer of mortar; b) application of*
7 *the flax textile and impregnation of the matrix; c) application of the last layer of mortar and smoothing of the*
8 *surface.*

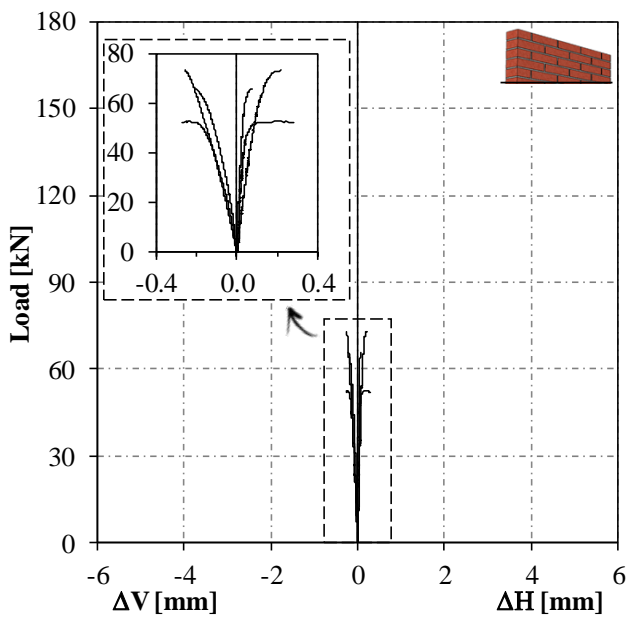


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 2 *Figure 6: Test set-up of Diagonal Compression Tests.*
 3

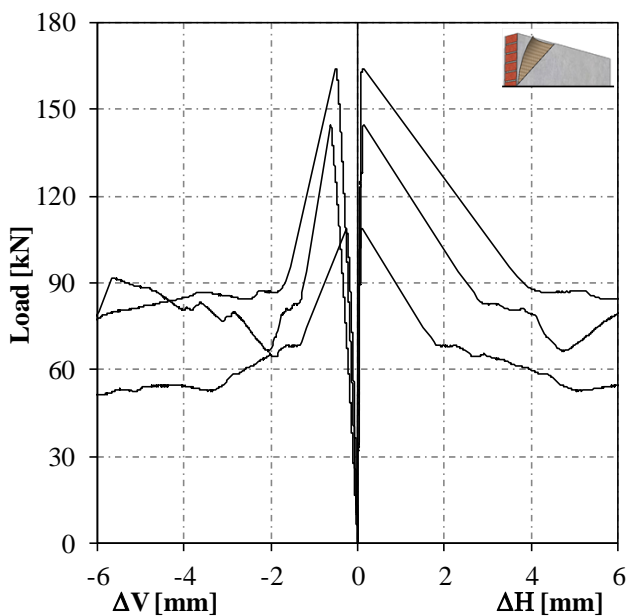
1 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

2 **3.1 Shear stress vs shear strain response**

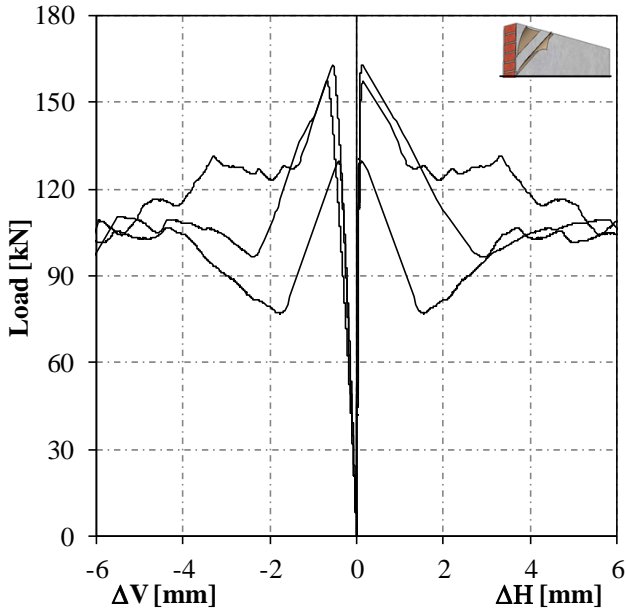
3 The results of diagonal compression tests conducted on the three series of specimens *USW*, *SW-1L*, *SW-2L*,
4 are shown in terms of applied load versus vertical and horizontal displacements (ΔV and ΔH), respectively.
5 Specifically, the shortening of the vertical diagonal and the lengthening of the horizontal diagonal are
6 represented in Figure 7, 8 and 9.



7
8 *Figure 7: Load-Vertical/Horizontal displacements curves of diagonal compression tests of series USW.*



9
10 *Figure 8: Load-Vertical/Horizontal displacements curves of diagonal compression tests of series SW-1L.*



1
2 Figure 9: Load-Vertical/Horizontal displacements curves of diagonal compression tests of series SW-2L.

3 On the basis of the recorded data, load and displacements, the values of the shear stress and the shear strain
4 in the centre of the masonry assemblage can be determined, per the standards governing diagonal
5 compression tests [48]. Shear stress, τ_o , and shear strain, γ , under the hypothesis of pure shear conditions in
6 the middle of the panel, can be respectively determined via Equation 1 and Equation 2:

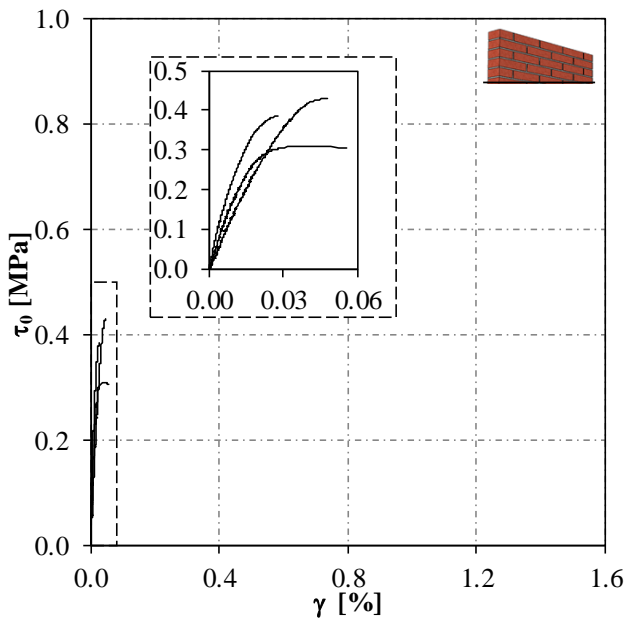
$$\tau_{o,ASTM} = \frac{P}{\sqrt{2} \cdot A_n} \quad \text{Equation 1}$$

$$\gamma = \frac{\Delta V + \Delta H}{L_g} \quad \text{Equation 2}$$

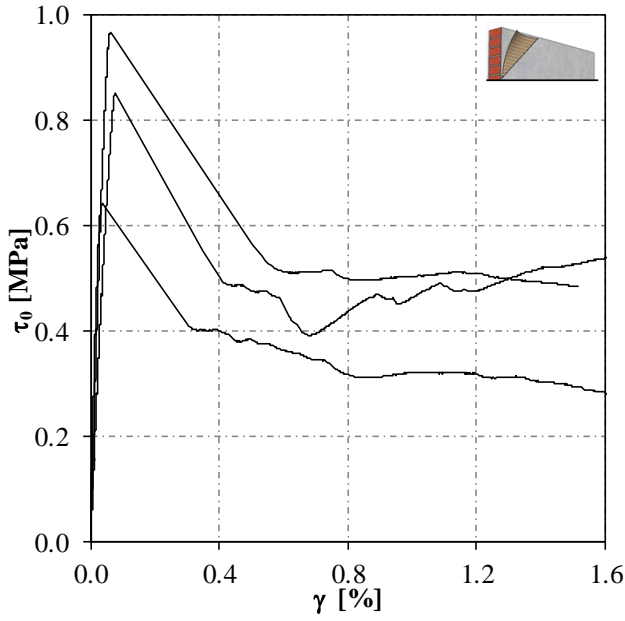
7 where P represents the applied load, A_n , the net transversal area of the specimen (i.e. $A_n=0.5(w+h)t$ with w
8 the panel width, h the panel height and t the panel thickness [48]), ΔV the vertical shortening, ΔH the
9 horizontal lengthening, and L_g is the gauge length, equal to 1000 mm.

10 The curves in terms of shear stress, τ_o , and shear strain, γ , for all the series of specimens are plotted in Figure
11 10, 11 and 12. The behaviour of the unstrengthened specimens, *USW*, was characterised by a pseudo-elastic
12 branch followed by a short plastic branch and a brittle failure of the wall due to the opening of a crack along
13 the vertical direction (Figure 10). The externally strengthened walls, *SW-1L* and *SW-2L*, exhibited an elasto-
14 plastic behaviour as well, up to the achievement of the maximum capacity. Furthermore, in these cases, the
15 end of the elastic phase is due to the development of cracks within the wall and the mortar of the Flax-TRM

1 system in correspondence to the loaded diagonal. The unavoidable geometric inaccuracies deriving from the
 2 installation process of the strengthening composite over the wall surfaces, resulted in more scattered results
 3 in series *SW-1L* and *SW-2L*. Unlike the *USW* specimens, the reinforced ones exhibited a post-peak phase in
 4 which the textile was properly tight and conferred to the system the capacity of bearing significant loads at
 5 high values of the displacement. Although a considerable strength loss after the attainment of the maximum
 6 load occurred, the implementation of the Flax TRM systems over the masonry assemblages insured the post-
 7 failure integrity of wall, as shown by the residual load which is sustained for large values of shear
 8 deformation. This aspect, as known, represents a fundamental aspect, especially in view of solutions aimed at
 9 improving the structures performance toward horizontal actions. The significant drop of load following the
 10 peak is due to the crack opening in the TRM along the vertical diagonal. The crack, starting from the middle
 11 of the panel, progressively spread to the edges of the wall. That caused the involvement of larger number of
 12 fibre yarns through the entire diagonal cross section, resulting in a hardening residual branch. The next
 13 progressive decrease of the load observed corresponds to the gradual failure of the textile bundles in
 14 correspondence of the cracks developed along the loaded diagonal.

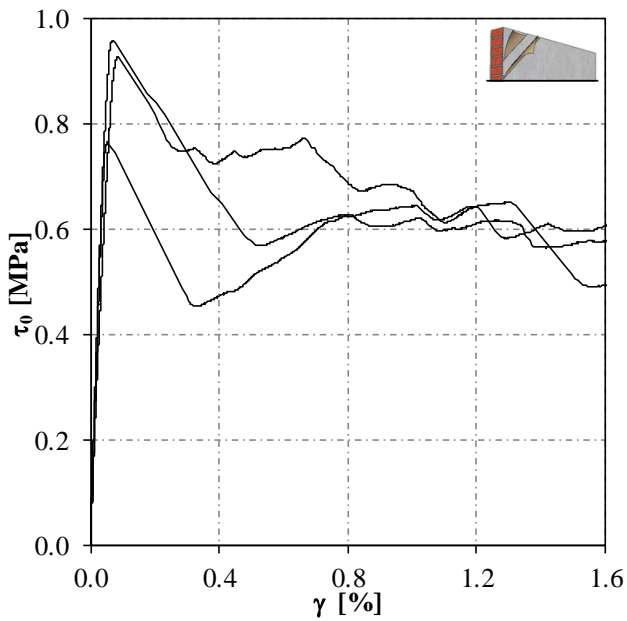


15
 16 *Figure 10: Shear stress – shear strain curves concerning diagonal compression tests of series USW.*



1

2 *Figure 11: Shear stress – shear strain curves concerning diagonal compression tests of series SW-1L.*



3

4 *Figure 12: Shear stress – shear strain curves concerning diagonal compression tests of series SW-2L.*

5 The main parameters concerning the diagonal compression tests conducted on the three series of specimens,
 6 are listed in Table 4 with respect to the single walls and in terms of mean values for each series together with
 7 the corresponding coefficient of variation.

8 *Table 4: Parameters concerning diagonal compression tests conducted on the three series of specimens:*
 9 *USW, SW-1L and SW-2L.*

specimen	P_{peak} [kN]	$\tau_{0,\text{peak}}$ [MPa]	γ_{peak} [%]	G [MPa]	μ	Γ_1 [J]	Γ_2 [J]
USW-1	66	0.39	0.03	2987	-	9	-

USW-2	73	0.43	0.05	1473	-	11	-
USW-3	53	0.31	0.05	2104	-	11	-
mean	64	0.38	0.04	2188	-	10	-
Co.V.	16	16	27	35	-	11	-
SW-1L-1	164	0.97	0.03	2412	4.25	48	881
SW-1L-2	145	0.85	0.05	1460	3.01	51	1552
SW-1L-3	109	0.64	0.05	3560	4.88	19	1019
mean	139	0.82	0.04	2478	4.05	39	1151
Co.V.	20	20	27	42	23	45	31
SW-2L-1	163	0.96	0.07	2335	3.72	54	1730
SW-2L-2	130	0.77	0.05	1945	3.42	31	2964
SW-2L-3	158	0.93	0.08	2002	4.14	65	3222
mean	150	0.88	0.07	2094	3.76	50	2639
Co.V.	12	12	22	10	10	35	30

1 In terms of maximum load, P_{peak} , the externally strengthened walls, *SW-1L* and *SW-2L*, gained an average
2 value more than two times higher than the one attained by the unstrengthened walls, *USW*. However, in
3 comparing the two reinforced series, no significant differences are observed, even if the amount of textile
4 reinforcement was doubled in the *SW-2L* series with respect to the *SW-1L* series. As might be expected, the
5 textile did not significantly impact the elastic phase, which was primarily governed by the contribution of the
6 matrix, while the impact of the textile was significant when higher values of the strains were obtained in the
7 post-peak phase with the mortar matrix already cracked.

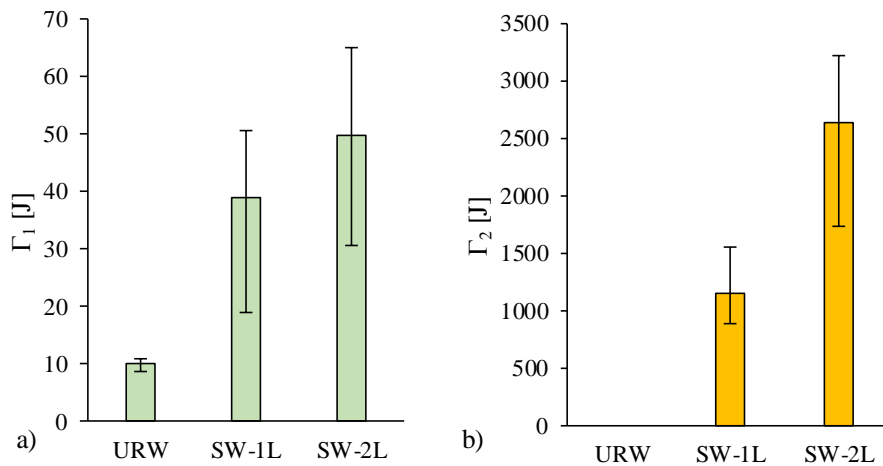
8 Similar considerations can be made for the shear modulus G , determined as the slope of the shear stress-
9 shear strain curve in the elastic phase (slope of the secant line intersecting the curve at 10% of the maximum
10 shear stress), which did not show any significant change between the three series of specimens.

11 In all strengthened walls, a significant load loss was observed immediately after the achievement of the peak
12 load. However, this load loss, that was of about the 30% of the maximum load in the case of *SW-1L*
13 specimens, halved in the case of *SW-2L* (about 15% of the maximum load). This aspect emphasised that in
14 the post-peak phase, at higher values of the strain, the contribution of the fibres became significant, and
15 better performance was attained by increasing its amount within the reinforcement system.

16 The μ coefficient, defined as the ratio of the shear strain value after the peak (corresponding to a loss of the
17 charge of the 20% of the peak load in the post-peak phase) to the value of the elastic shear strain
18 (corresponding to the maximum load), was assumed as a parameter representative of the loss of charge

1 corresponding to the peak load. Unless *USW* specimens, in which an abrupt failure followed the peak load,
 2 the strengthened series, *SW-1L* and *SW-2L*, exhibited a mean value of the parameter μ indicating that in
 3 correspondence of a loss of charge of 20% the system was capable to show a shear strain about four times
 4 the value of the elastic strain corresponding to the peak load (Table 4).

5 In order to analyse the influence of the textile amount in the post-peak phase, the value of the energy
 6 dissipated was determined as the area underlying the load-vertical displacement curve. Specifically, F_1 is the
 7 energy dissipated to achieve the peak load, F_2 represented the energy dissipated during the post-peak phase
 8 corresponding to the range between the peak load and a load equal to 30% the peak load. This threshold,
 9 although considering the response of the panel at strain values significantly larger than those corresponding
 10 to the wall failure, was chosen to get a parameter of comparison between the series of specimens analysed to
 11 describe the influence of the textile amount in the post-peak phase. Due to the preservation of experimental
 12 tools (LVDT, technical setup), it was not possible to continue the test until a post peak load equal to “0”. It
 13 was observed that by doubling the amount of flax textile, the mean value of the dissipated energy more than
 14 doubled (Figure 13). The analysis of this parameter, in line with the others, confirmed the significant
 15 contribution of the textile during the post-peak phase.



16
 17 *Figure 13: Mean values of the energy dissipated during diagonal compression tests for all series of*
 18 *specimens a) energy dissipated to achieve the peak load, b) energy dissipated during the post-peak phase.*

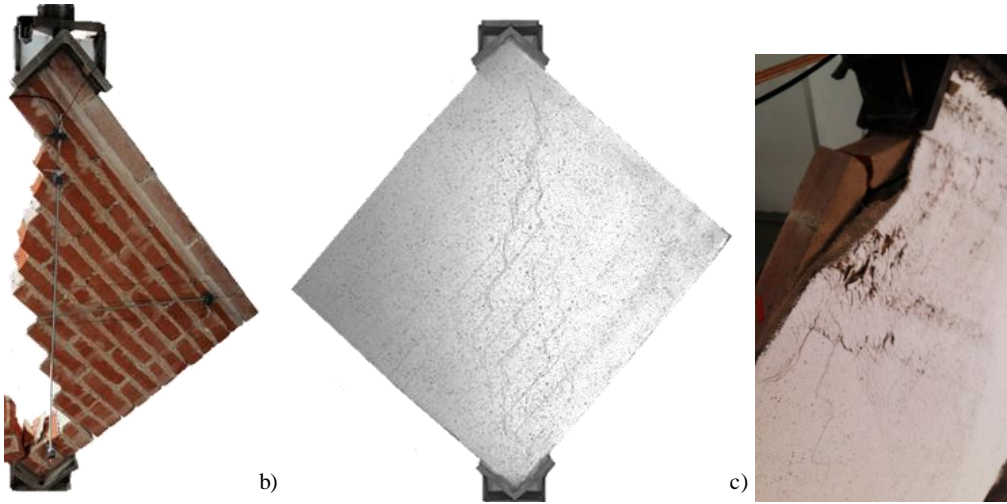
19 The increase in shear capacity provided by the Flax TRM system investigated, is in line with similar few
 20 studies from literature in which plant textiles, i.e. hemp and flax based, were adopted as reinforcement in
 21 TRMs for strengthening of masonry panels [41][42]. The cited studies, comprising 9 different series of walls
 22 characterised by a unit tensile strength, ρ , varying between 13 kN/m and 54 kN/m, showed a mean value of

1 the maximum shear stress $\tau_{0,peakx}$, varying in the range between 0.50 MPa and 2.13 MPa. The increase of
2 strength in the reinforced panels with respect to the unreinforced walls varied between the values 1.2 and 5.4.
3 In the present study, the two series of strengthened specimens, *SW-1L* and *SW-2L*, respectively comprising a
4 composite system with a unit tensile strength ρ of 31 kN/m and 62 kN/m, showed a maximum shear stress of
5 0.82 MPa and 0.82 MPa, and an increase of shear capacity of 2.2 and 2.3. It can be asserted that in terms of
6 maximum shear capacity, the results obtained are consistent with similar literature studies.

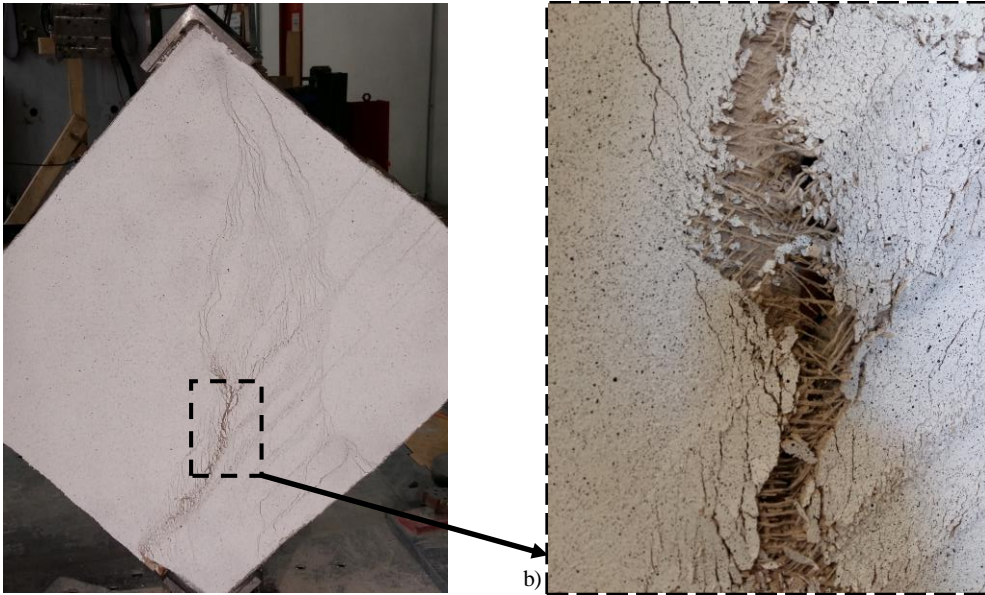
7 **3.2 Failure mode**

8 As expected, the failure mode was characterised by the development of cracks along the loaded vertical
9 diagonal, due to a stress concentration in correspondence to the tensile principal direction. A brittle failure
10 mode characterised the unreinforced walls, with the splitting of the two parts of the wall via quasi-vertical
11 cracks that primarily followed the mortar bed joints and in some parts broke the clay bricks (Figure 14a). The
12 same crack development trend was observed on the externally strengthened walls in which the cracks spread
13 to the mortar matrix of the Flax-TRM system adopted (Figure 14b). During the post-peak phase, the rupture
14 of the flax threads was observed in correspondence of such transversal cracked surfaces in both the
15 reinforced series of specimens, *SW-1L* and *SW-2L* (Figure 15). This aspect is consistent with what was
16 observed in the characterisation tests on a local scale, tensile and single-shear lap tests, in which in both the
17 cases, the ultimate failure was mainly governed by the tensile capacity of the flax textile (Table 2) [47]. This
18 behaviour, although being due to the relatively low tensile capacity of flax fabric (for instance compared to
19 the more common high-strength fibre textiles), emphasised that the system was characterised by an effective
20 bond between its components, i.e., good properties at both TRM-to-masonry and fibres-to-mortar interface
21 surfaces. Furthermore, this behaviour did not change with an increase in the amount of textile, leaving room
22 for the possibility of further research aimed at improving the global shear capacity of the system by further
23 increasing the amount of textile reinforcement.

24 In one case (specimen *SW-1L-1*) a local buckling of the reinforcing layer was observed, with a detachment of
25 the Flax-TRM system from the masonry substrate at one of the edges of the wall (Figure 14c). This
26 behaviour, due to its isolated nature, may be attributed to possible inaccuracy of the installation of the TRM
27 composite to the wall.



1
 2 *Figure 14: Failure modes: a) USW representative specimen; b) SW representative specimen; c) failure for*
 3 *local debonding (specimen SW-1L-1).*



4
 5 *Figure 15: Tensile failure of the flax textile: a) specimen SW-2L-3; b) close-up of the textile rupture.*

1 **4. COMPARISON WITH ANALYTICAL MODELS**

2 The aim of this section is to compare the experimental evidence with the strength value obtained
3 theoretically by adopting the formulations proposed by the standards on the assessment of the shear capacity
4 of masonry elements and walls externally strengthened by TRM systems. First, the experimental strength of
5 unstrengthened walls was compared with the strength assessed with respect to the Italian standard NTC 2018
6 [45], and specifically referring to the section concerning the assessment of the capacity of existing buildings.
7 Secondly, the increase in shear capacity conferred by the TRM composite experimentally observed was
8 compared with the increase evaluated according to the instructions provided by the CNR-DT 215/18 [20]
9 conceived to design such retrofitting interventions.

10 The models adopted by the standards provided the shear strength of masonry elements in direct shear loading
11 conditions while in this experimental study the capacity of the wall was assessed via diagonal compression
12 tests. Because it was not possible to directly compare the shear capacities, the comparison was done in terms
13 of shear stress attained in the centre of the masonry element, for unstrengthened walls, and in terms of the
14 increment of strength provided by the reinforcement, for strengthened walls.

15 **4.1 Unstrengthened walls**

16 The capacity of unstrengthened walls was expressed in terms of the parameter, labelled τ_0 , defined as the
17 maximum shear stress attained in the centre of the panel in pure shear conditions, in the absence of
18 compression stress.

19 Considering diagonal compression test loading conditions, several approaches are available to determine the
20 shear stress, τ_0 . According to the approach followed by the standard ASTM 519-2 [48] considering the
21 element in the middle of the panel, with the axis oriented parallel to the two diagonals with the origin at their
22 intersection, the two principal stresses, oriented along these axes, attain the same value, and the shear stress
23 in the absence of normal stress, $\tau_{0,ASTM}$, can be defined according to Equation 3, where A_n represents the net
24 area of the wall. According to the approach described by RILEM TC-76-LUM recommendations [49], the
25 state of stress in the middle of the panel is the result of an elastic solution considering the wall a
26 homogeneous and isotropic material. Based on that hypothesis, the principal stress in compression and

1 tension assume different values and the shear stress in the absence of normal stress, $\tau_{0,RILEM}$, is determined
 2 using Equation 4.

$$\tau_{0,ASTM} = \frac{P_{peak}}{\sqrt{2} \cdot A_n} \quad \text{Equation 3}$$

$$\tau_{0,RILEM} = \frac{0.90 \cdot P_{peak}}{A_n} \quad \text{Equation 4}$$

3 It can be assumed that the experimental maximum value of the shear stress in the middle of the panel, with
 4 respect to the series of specimens *URW*, is included in range between $\tau_{0,ASTM}$ and $\tau_{0,RILEM}$.

5 The theoretical value of the shear stress, τ_0 , was assessed by taking into account the mean values proposed by
 6 the Italian standard code, according to which the strength of the masonry assemblage is assessed based on
 7 the mechanical properties of the components of the wall. Specifically, with the mechanical strength of the
 8 bricks and the mortar of the bed joints being known, an estimation of the characteristic compression strength
 9 of the masonry was done by interpolating values proposed by the standard (Table 11.10.VI of the [45]). A
 10 mean compression strength of the masonry equal to 6.3 MPa was computed. As a function of this strength,
 11 and considering a masonry typology of solid bricks with hydraulic lime-based mortar, a range of values,
 12 $\tau_{0,1} \div \tau_{0,2}$, in which the shear stress is included, was assessed (Table C8.5.I and Table C8.5.II of the [45]).

13 The range of values in which the shear stress is contained, deriving from both the experimental and
 14 theoretical evaluation, are listed in Table 5.

15 *Table 5: Comparison of the shear strength between experimental and theoretical results of unstrengthened*
 16 *walls.*

Experimental results		Standard model
$\tau_{0,ASTM}$	0.38 MPa	0.10 MPa < τ_0 < 0.25 MPa
$\tau_{0,RILEM}$	0.48 MPa	

17 The values of shear stress τ_0 derived from the tests were about 2.5 times the average value assessed via the
 18 formulation proposed by the standard code, highlighting that the strength values conventionally used in the
 19 design phase guarantee a wide safety margin. This aspect also emphasises that the diagonal compression test
 20 does not perfectly guarantee pure shear conditions.

1 The theoretical shear capacity of the unreinforced wall, under direct shear conditions, was assessed based on
 2 the modified formulation of the Turnsek-Cacovic criterion reported in the Italian standard NTC 2018 [45],
 3 which in the absence of normal stress takes the following form (Equation 5):

$$V_t = \frac{A_n \cdot 1.5 \cdot \tau_0}{b} \quad \text{Equation 5}$$

5 where A_n represents the net area of the wall defined as the product of the length and the thickness, τ_0 is the
 6 shear stress in the absence of normal stress defined as the mean value of the range $\tau_{0,1} \div \tau_{0,2}$ previously
 7 assessed, b is a corrective coefficient that takes into account the distribution of the shear stress over the
 8 section (in this case assumed equal to 1). The theoretical value of the shear capacity of the unreinforced wall
 9 in direct shear conditions, V_t , is equal to 31 kN.

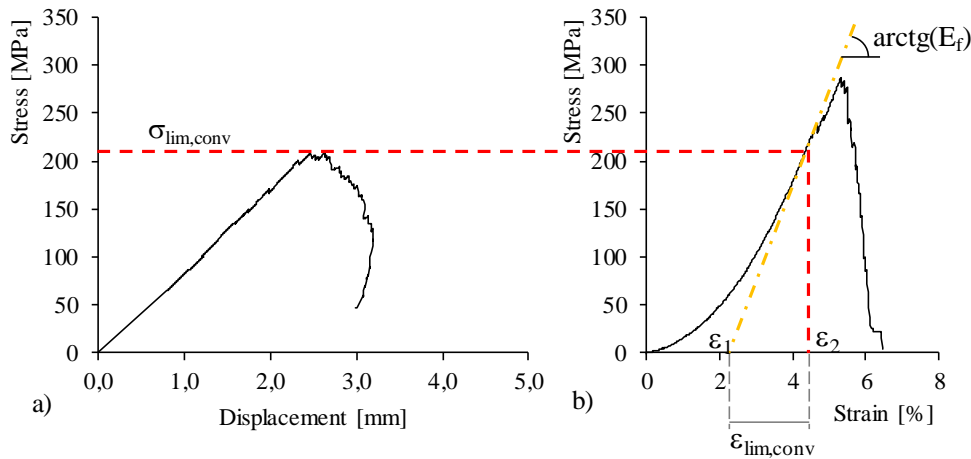
10 **4.2 TRM externally strengthened walls**

11 The increase of strength experimentally observed by applying the TRM system on the masonry elements was
 12 compared with the increase in strength that can be theoretically assessed using models proposed by the
 13 standards. According to the Italian instructions on designing TRM interventions [19], the shear capacity of
 14 masonry elements loaded in their plane, $V_{t,R}$, externally strengthened by TRM systems symmetrically applied
 15 to both sides of the wall, uniformly over the entire surface, and preferably with the fibres oriented in both
 16 vertical and horizontal directions, is calculated as the sum of the contribution of the unstrengthened wall, V_t ,
 17 and the contribution brought by the application of the TRM composite system, $V_{t,f}$. The latter can be
 18 evaluated via Equation 6.

$$V_{t,f} = 0.5 \cdot n_f \cdot t_{v,f} \cdot b_f \cdot \alpha_t \cdot \varepsilon_{lim,conv} \cdot E_f \quad \text{Equation 6}$$

19 where the product $n_f t_{v,f} b_f$ represents the area of the textile comprised in the cross section of the wall in the
 20 direction parallel to its sides (assuming the values of 219 mm² for SW-1L, 438 mm² for SW-2L); α_t is a
 21 coefficient that takes into account the decrease of tensile test of the fibres when subjected to shear and it is
 22 equal to 0.8; $\varepsilon_{lim,conv}$ represents the maximum deformation of the textile superiorly limited by the maximum
 23 value attained during the single-lap shear test; E_f represents the dry textile stiffness. In Figure 16, a

1 representative shear bond test response of Flax-TRM-to-masonry substrate system and a representative
 2 tensile response of the dry flax textile are compared. These responses, deriving from previous studies ([42],
 3 [47]), refer to the Flax TRM systems adopted in the present study (Table 2). According to the procedure
 4 proposed by the instructions on designing TRM interventions [19], the strain ε_2 , derived from the graphical
 5 construction shown, would represent the conventional strain to be used for designing purposes. However, in
 6 the instructions, it is assumed the tensile textile response to be linear. In the case of plant fibres, a less stiff
 7 branch is typically exhibited at low strain levels, due to the morphology of the fibres at a microscale, and of
 8 the textile on a macro scale. Being the stiffness, E_f , determined in the linear branch, it is necessary to define
 9 the limit value of the strain, $\varepsilon_{lim,conv}$, as the difference between the strains values ε_1 and ε_2 , such that the
 10 product between the conventional limit strain and the mean stiffness results to be equal to the conventional
 11 limit stress, $\sigma_{conv,lim}$ (Figure 16). The resulting mean values: conventional limit stress, $\sigma_{conv,lim}$, 215 MPa [47];
 12 mean dry stiffness of the textile, E_f , 9.03 GPa [42]; conventional limit strain, $\varepsilon_{lim,conv}$, 2.4%.

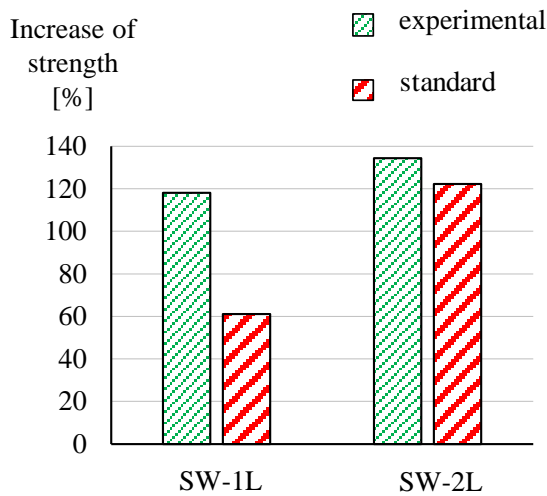


13
 14 *Figure 16: Assessment of the conventional limit stress and strain from the comparison between a*
 15 *representative curve of Flax-TRM-to-masonry single-lap shear test (a) [47], and a representative curve of*
 16 *Flax strip tensile test (b) [42].*

17 Applying Equation 6 to the case of the reinforcement *Flax-TRM-1L* and *Flax-TRM-2L*, considered uniformly
 18 applied to both the sides of the wall, it was obtained an increase in strength, $V_{t,f}$, of 19 kN and 38 kN,
 19 respectively. It is clear that the theoretical approach proposed by the standards was conceived such that the
 20 TRM strength contribution linearly increases with increase in the amount of reinforcing fibre.

21 The values of the resulting global shear capacities of the TRM externally strengthened walls, $V_{t,R}$, (obtained
 22 by summing the contribution of the unstrengthened wall strength, V_t , and the increase in strength provided by

1 the TRM system, $V_{t,f}$) were 50 kN, for the SW-1L walls, and 69 kN, for the SW-2L walls, respectively. Figure
2 15 presents the ratio of the strength of the strengthened wall over the strength of the unstrengthened wall.



3
4 *Figure 17: Comparison of the increase in strength derived from standard models and from the experimental*
5 *campaign for series SW-1L and SW-2L.*

6 It can be observed that in the case of the reinforcement *Flax-TRM-1L* the experimental increase in strength
7 observed is much higher than what was observed by applying the theoretical model of the standard. In the
8 case of SW-2L series, such a difference between experimental and theoretical results decreases. In both
9 cases, the results of the standard model tend to be conservative, providing smaller values of increase in
10 strength. By looking at the increase in strength concerning the reinforcement system *Flax-TRM-2L*, it can be
11 observed that, contrary to what proposed by the standard, the experimental evidence show that the increase
12 in strength was not directly proportional to the increment in terms of fibre textile reinforcement. This
13 discrepancy in the results emphasises that the increase in the fibre mechanical ratio by overlapping different
14 textile plies does not necessarily result in the same increase in strength obtainable with the use of a denser
15 textile grid. Furthermore, it confirms that the textile arrangement plays a fundamental role in the global
16 behaviour of the system, especially in the case of the use of plant fibres, already characterised by issues
17 related to a uniform distribution of the stress between the several fibre bundles due to the unavoidable
18 imperfections of the natural fabric itself.

19 The approach of the standard seems to consider the maximum capacity of the system coinciding with the
20 tensile failure of the reinforcing grid. However, while a tensile crisis of the fibres characterised the ultimate
21 state, the maximum capacity coincided with the end of the phase when the masonry and the mortar matrix of
22 the TRM system began to crack, but the textile remained unbroken. Although this indicates a discrepancy

1 between the experimental and theoretical results, it also highlights a limit in the standard model that does not
2 consider different failure modes, like the one that occurred in this study. For example, it did not take into
3 account the nature and contribution of the mortar used in the TRM system.

4 Further analysis aimed at obtaining a more elaborate formulation that would better consider the contribution
5 of all the components of the TRM-to-masonry system may provide a more efficient model capable of better
6 predicting the mechanical behaviour of the entire system. Textile amount, and fibres mechanical properties
7 (stiffness and adherence with the mortar) play a fundamental role in the response of the overall system:
8 massive walls strengthened with TRMs with poor fibre amounts, tend to fail after the achievement of the
9 elastic peak load; slender walls, strengthened by TRM with large fibre amounts, tend to show a hardening
10 post-elastic phase. In order to better predict the shear response, critical values of the fibre amount have to be
11 defined, and in the case of “poor strengthened walls”, the model proposed by the standard need to be
12 enriched with formulations taking into account the failure of the wall in correspondence of the mortar matrix
13 crack.

1 5. CONCLUSIONS

2 This study proposes an experimental investigation of the shear strength of masonry walls externally
3 strengthened using Flax-TRM composite systems. Experimental evidences are discussed and compared with
4 the strength values derived using the formulations proposed by standards in the field. The main findings of
5 the research are summarised as follow:

- 6 - application of the Flax-TRM system significantly enhances the mechanical response of clay-brick
7 masonry walls tested under diagonal compression, by giving them an increase in shear capacity of
8 118% in the case of the system characterised by one ply of flax textile (*SW-1L*), and 136% in the
9 case of the system characterised by two overlapping flax textile plies (*SW-2L*);
- 10 - the failure mode of the walls is characterised by the development of cracks along the loaded vertical
11 diagonal, followed by a gradual rupture of the fibres with the opening of the cracks; no significant
12 debonding phenomena are observed at the interface surface between the TRM and the masonry
13 substrate;
- 14 - furthermore, the externally strengthened walls exhibit a post-peak phase, completely absent in the
15 brittle behaviour of the unreinforced walls, underlying the significance of the TRM reinforcement
16 that confers a “pseudo-ductility” to the entire system consisting in a post-failure integrity of the wall;
- 17 - no significant differences are recorded in terms of maximum shear stress, $\tau_{o,max}$, between the two
18 series of specimens, *SW-1L* and *SW-2L*. However, in the post-peak phase, the walls externally
19 strengthened using the *Flax-TRM-2L* system exhibit a value of dissipated energy, I_2 , which is more
20 than two times higher than that exhibited by the walls strengthened by the system *Flax-TRM-1L*;
- 21 - in terms of increase of shear capacity, the results provided by the study are in line with similar
22 studies from literature in which plant fibres are adopted in TRM systems for strengthening of
23 masonry elements;
- 24 - from the comparison of the experimental results with the models derived from the formulations
25 proposed by standards in the field, as concerning the unstrengthened walls, the shear stress in the
26 absence of normal stress, τ_0 , derived from the experimental tests, is much higher than that derived by

1 applying the formulation of the standards, confirming that the latter provides a substantial safety
2 margin;

- 3 - regarding the systems externally strengthened by TRMs it is observed that the increase of strength
4 theoretically defined is conservative compared with the values derived experimentally. Furthermore,
5 unlike the formulation proposed by the standards, in the experimental analysis, the increase in
6 strength is not directly proportional to the increase in the amount of reinforcing fibres.

7 The study highlights the potential of using plant (e.g. flax) fibres and textiles, as reinforcement in TRM
8 systems to enhance the shear capacity of masonry assemblages. Conversely, it also points out some
9 possible limitations of this technique primarily related to significant loss of charge observed in the post-
10 elastic phase. However, there is still room for improvement, and further studies are needed aiming at
11 providing possible solutions to these issues. In this sense, fibre impregnation processes that allow the
12 grid respond in a more uniform way can be investigated, and parametric studies that vary the amount of
13 textile to achieve higher capacities in the post-peak phase can be conducted.

1 **6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

2 The authors gratefully acknowledge the company, Innovations srl. for providing the materials tested in the
3 experimental research presented in this paper. The first author’s PhD scholarship is awarded by the Italian
4 Ministry for Education, University and Research (MIUR) as part of the programme “Dottorati Innovativi a
5 caratterizzazione industriale” funded by the European Union (Structural Funding ERDF-ESF for Research
6 and Innovation 2014-2020), whose financial support is gratefully acknowledged.

7

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