

# non conventional structural patterns for tall buildings :

## From DiaGrid to HexaGrid and beyond...



Dipartimento di Strutture  
per l'Ingegneria e l'Architettura



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# Layout

- introduction
- diagrid – as starting point
- generalization – structural patterns
- hexagrid
- voronoi

# Tall Buildings @



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI  
**FEDERICO II**

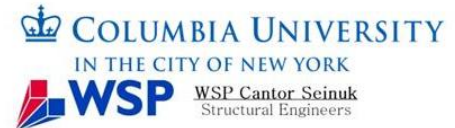
## Structures for High-Rise and Long-Span Bldgs (9 ECTS Course - Grad., Master)

### student outdoor internship

Luis Bozzo, Barcelona

Luis Bozzo Estructuras y Proyectos, S.L.

Columbia University, New York  
WSP, New York



StarSeismic Inc., Budapest



SOM, San Francisco



Atelier One, London



international student design competition

International Student Competit  
D'Agostino, D'Amico, Iovane



De Gregorio, Franzese, Lan



- case studies  
*learning from precedents*
- stiffness vs. strength design  
*posing the right questions*
- secondary bracing systems  
*a hidden design problem*
- non-regular triangular patterns  
*exploring non-conventional*

Diagrid



- **Hexagrid** - patterns, modeling, design
- from Hexagrid to **Voronoi** patterns

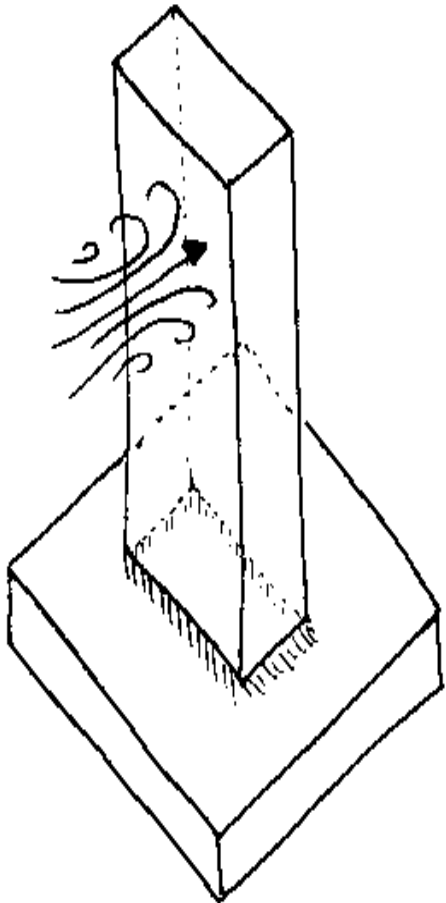
**MICRO-MEGA**

**Nature inspired structures for tall buildings:  
patterns, modeling, analysis**





The fundamental conceptual simplification : TB → a cantilever beam

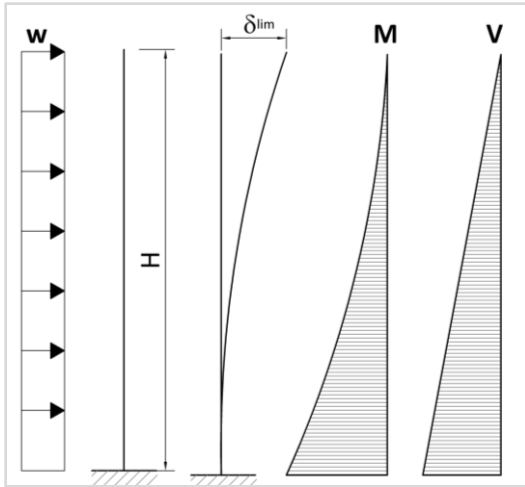


... By taking something as large and complex as a huge skyscraper, something formed by thousands of individual beams, columns, walls and slabs, and imagining it **as one simple entity**, the designer can design these giant structures rationally

In a certain sense, the tall building is the simplest of all structural problems

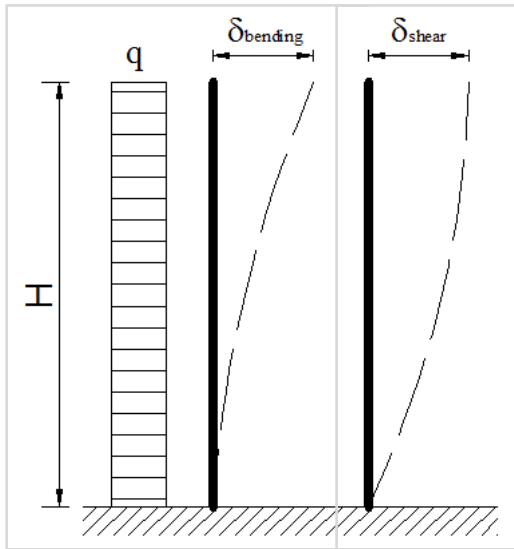
*Bill Baker. SOM Chicago*

Engineering this Idea : Conceptual definition of structural systems



**TB : a cantilever beam**

**globally statically determinant**  
 approximate total forces known *a priori*  
 overturning moments and shears  
 flexural and shear deformations



... the art and science of tall building design lies in selecting the appropriate system with adequate strength capacity and lateral stiffness

**Stiffness requirements**      **Strength requirements**



$$\delta_{top} = \delta_{bending} + \delta_{shear} \leq \frac{H}{\alpha}$$

He revolutionized TB design from conventional MRF system to tubular system by imagining the true response of bldgs in 3D space



## The history of modern skyscraper is the story of F. Khan

- max (potential) bending efficiency  
continuous vertical elements at the plan perimeter
- shear resisting system for carrying lateral loads to the vertical perimeter elements that, in turn, resist the overturning moments
- The crucial point of the tube system is that, in order for the columns to work as elements of an integrated system (a single giant cantilever beam) rather than an aggregation of individual elements or subsystems, and obtaining the ideal bending efficiency, it is necessary to interconnect them with an effective (stiff) shear-resisting system

**Framed Tube**



**Braced Tube**



**Diagrid**





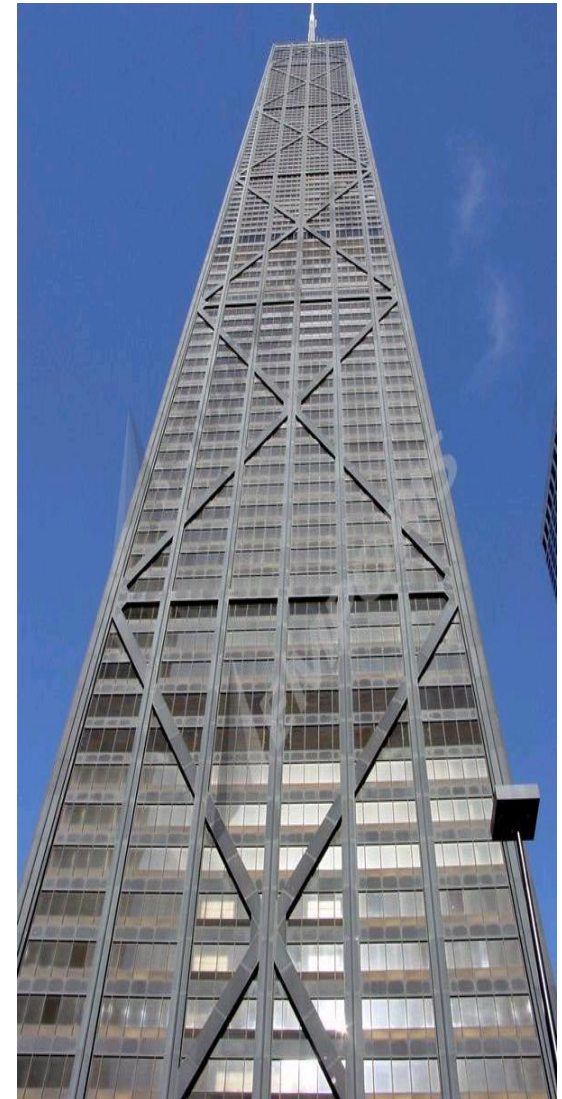
## Framed Tube



starting from the frame tube configuration

the structural efficiency has been highly increased thanks to the introduction of exterior mega-diagonals in the braced tube solution, which strongly reduce shear racking contribution to global deformation and shear lag effects

## Braced Tube



## Braced Tube



the perimeter configuration still holds for preserving the maximum bending resistance and rigidity

the mega-diagonal members are diffusely spread over the façade

giving rise to closely spaced diagonals, a narrow diagonal grid

With the possibility of eliminating the vertical columns, thus the frame rectangular grid, which is the major source of shear racking and shear lag effects

## Diagrid





... **however the concept is not new** : diagonal and triangulation is the oldest and most natural strategy for providing stability in the structural steelwork



Leadenhall  
Building

Hearst  
Tower

Swiss Re  
Building

Poly  
International  
Plaza

The Bow

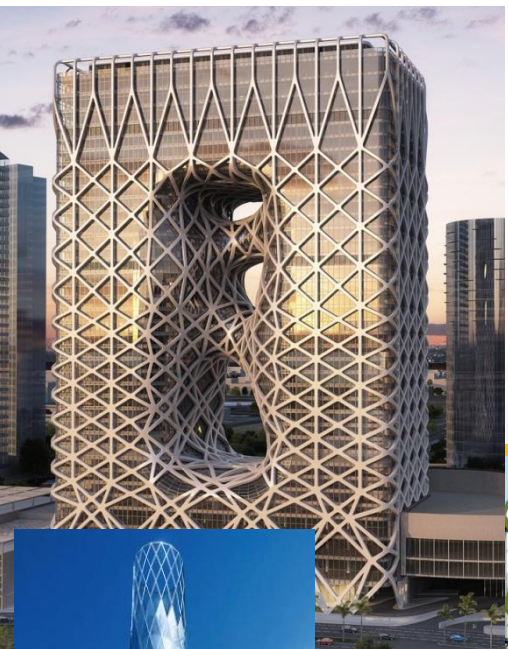
Guangzhou  
West Tower

Capital Gate

Guohua  
Financial  
Tower

what is strikingly new today in the latest years is a multiple and variegated use of triangle pattern, which brashly characterizes the aesthetics of important TBs, all diagrid, but each characterized, in an unique, different manner by triangulation





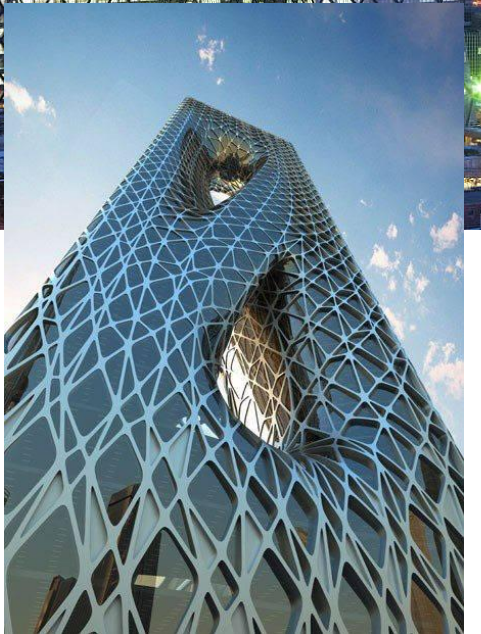
Sur le toit du bâtiment, une dizaine de turbines éoliennes servent à produire de l'électricité



Au nord, la résille de béton est fine et laisse passer la lumière. Au sud, plus compacte, elle joue le rôle de pare-soleil.



Des serres servent à créer un microclimat tempéré pendant toute l'année. La végétation assure une protection des façades exposées au soleil.



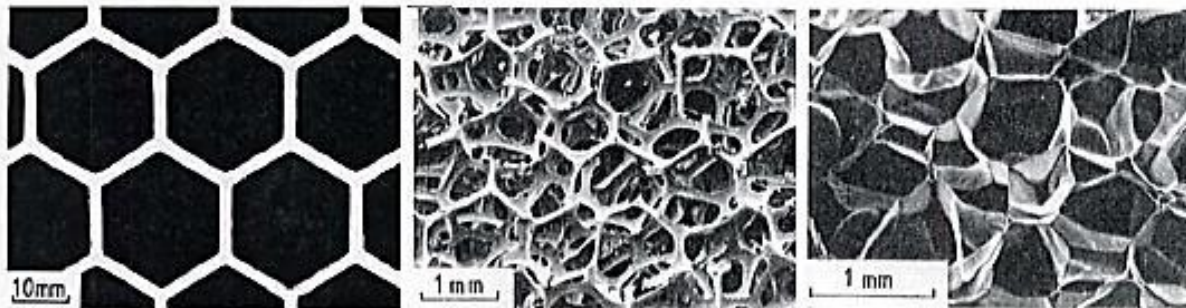
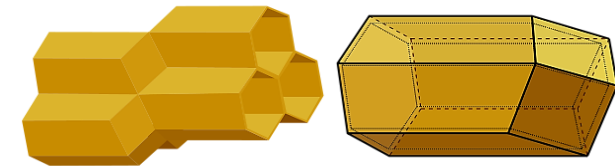
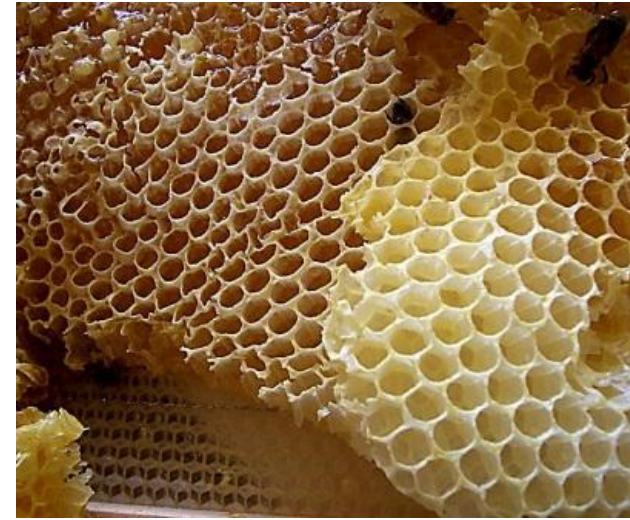


**alternative geometrical patterns** are worth of consideration for their structural efficiency and aesthetical qualities

**natural patterns**, i.e. geometrical patterns observable in nature, can be a fruitful and almost endless source of inspirations for efficient man-made structures, at **all scale levels**

- from the very tiny - material design
  - to the biggest – tall buildings
- embracing all intermediate steps

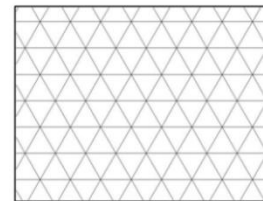
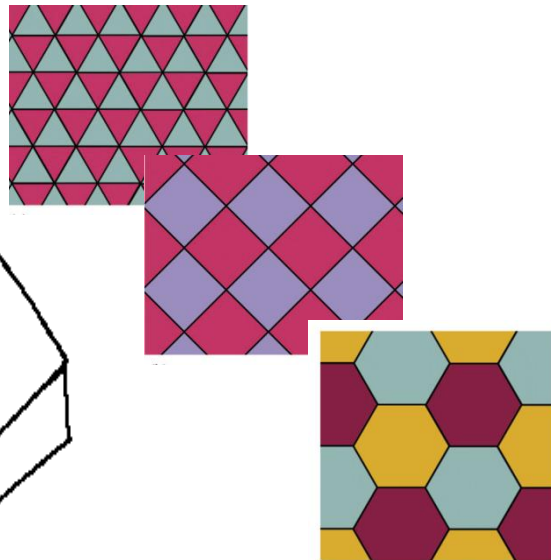
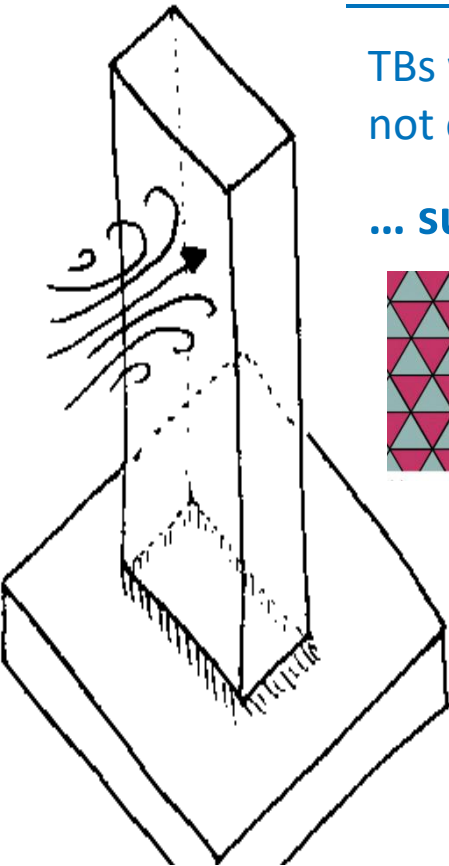
## cross-fertilization between science and engineering



## The Idea: The Structure as a Cantilever Beam

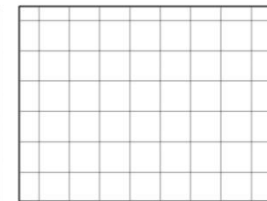
TBs with tube configuration can employ several different patterns:  
not only triangle, not only the beam-column rectangular grid

... suggestions come from the field of the geometry of tessellation



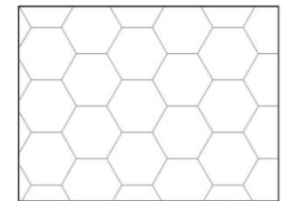
$3^6$

Triangular tiling



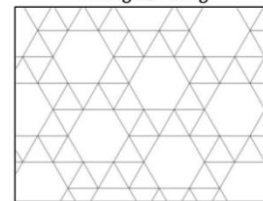
$4^4$

Square tiling



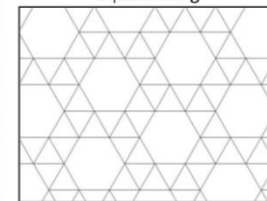
$6^3$

Hexagonal tiling



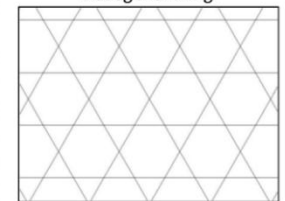
$3^4.6$

Snub hexagonal tiling



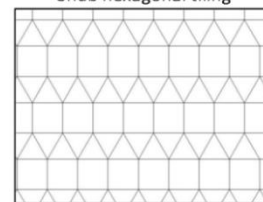
$3^4.6$

Snub hexagonal tiling reflection



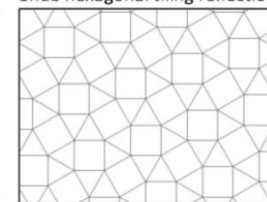
$3.6.3.6$

Trihexagonal tiling



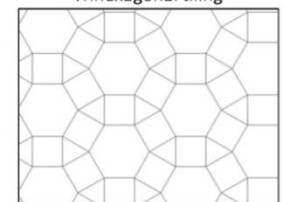
$3^3.4^2$

Elongated triangular tiling



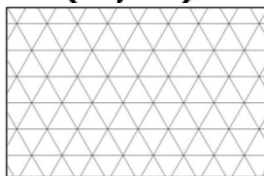
$3^2.4.3.4$

Snub square tiling

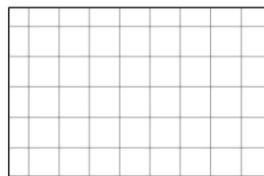


$3.4.6.4$

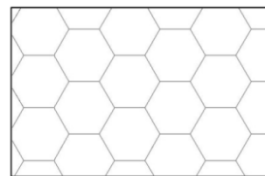
Rhombitrihexagonal tiling



$3^6$  Triangular grid / Isogrid



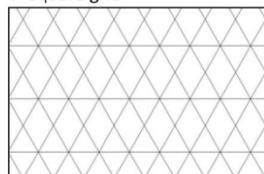
$4^4$  Square grid



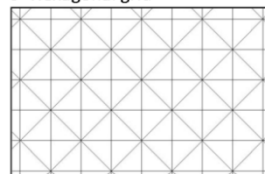
$6^3$  Hexagonal grid



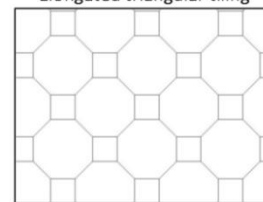
$3.6.3.6$ . Trihexagonal / Kagome



Diamond grid



Mixed triangle grid



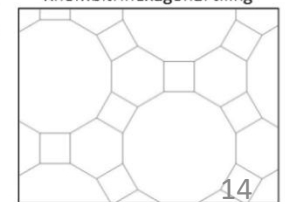
$4.8^2$

Truncated square tiling



$3.12^2$

Truncated hexagonal tiling



$4.6.12$

Truncated trihexagonal tiling

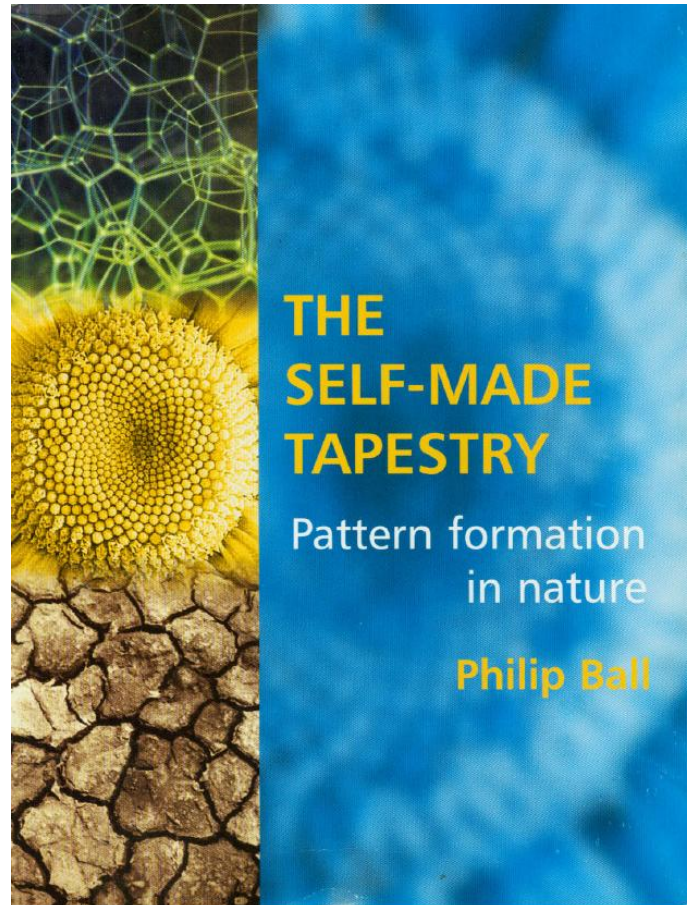
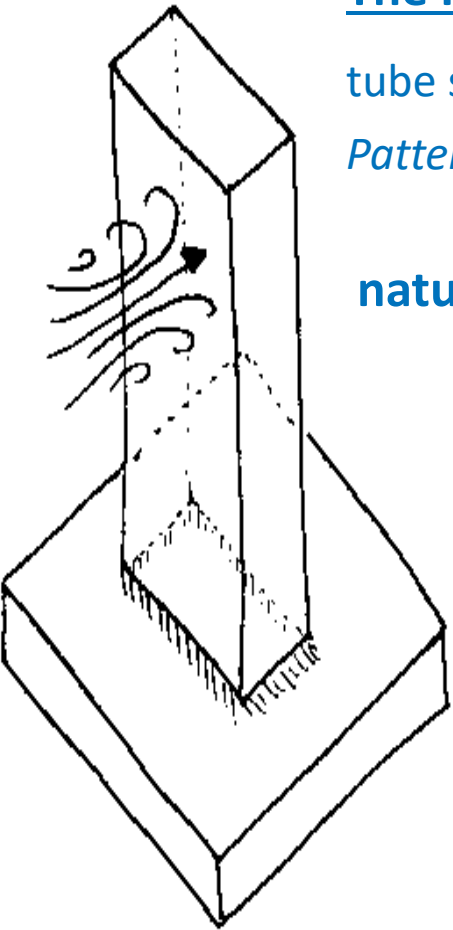


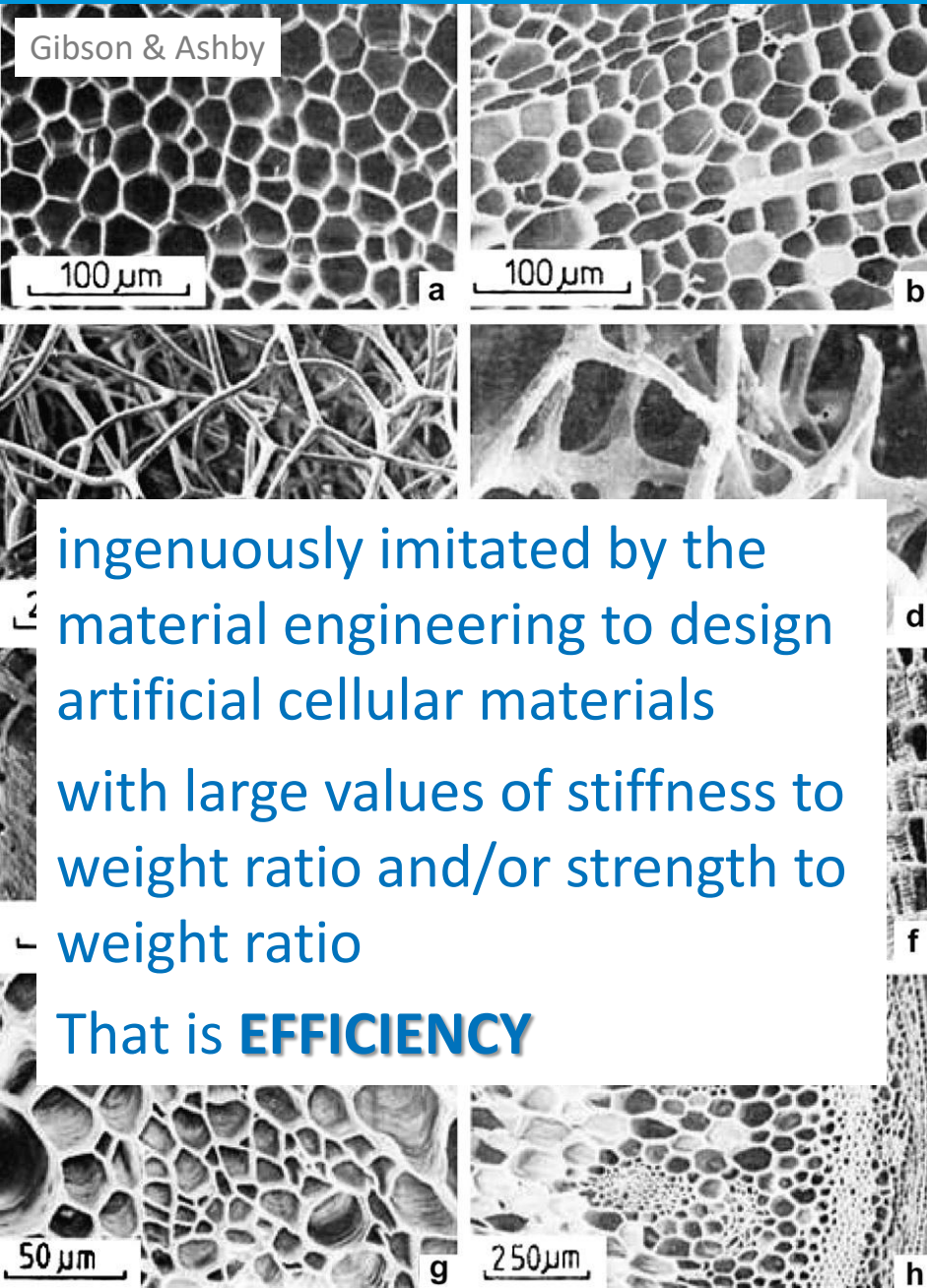
## The Idea: The Structure as a Cantilever Beam

tube structural pattern: not only triangle

*Patterns offer structure to the realm of ideas*

**natural vocabulary of patterns**





Gibson & Ashby

ingeniously imitated by the material engineering to design artificial cellular materials with large values of stiffness to weight ratio and/or strength to weight ratio

That is **EFFICIENCY**

## examples of cellular materials

- a – cork
- b – balsa
- c – sponge
- d – cancellous bone
- e – coral
- f – cuttlefish bone
- g – iris leaf
- h – stalk of plant

*... when modern man builds large load-bearing structure, he uses dense solids; steel, concrete, glass. When nature does the same, she generally uses cellular materials; wood, bone, coral. There must be good reason for it*

**M.F.Ashby**

*... the art of structure is how and where putting holes, building with holes, with things with no weight*

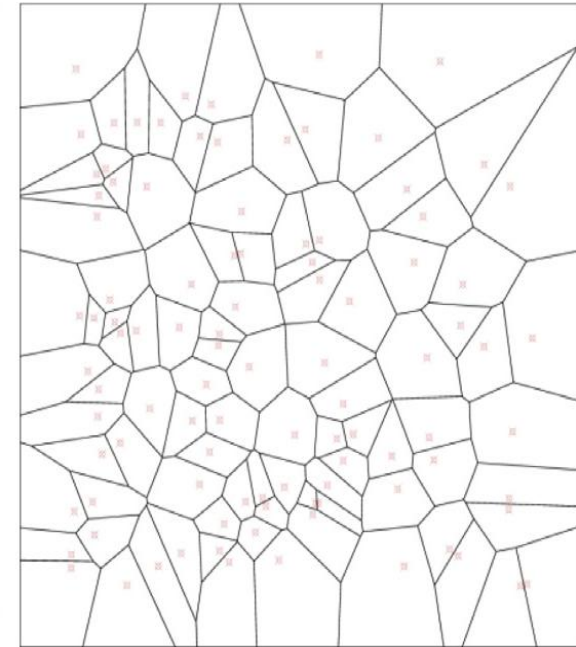




Most of these natural patterns can be and actually are modelled by means of Voronoi diagrams



... voronoi patterns  
in nature



the partitioning of a plane into convex polygons, starting from a number  $n$  of points, or seeds, such that each polygon contains exactly one generating point and every point in a given polygon is closer to its generating point than to any other





... today,  
the fascination for  
organic forms and  
natural patterns can be  
often observed in the  
field of TBs, with

**proposals,  
projects, visions**

(all, more or less  
explicitly, utilizing  
hexagonal patterns)

coming from the world  
of architecture

On the contrary engineers, the structural engineers, are less prone to explore  
the potentials of these non conventional patterns as structural grid



... hexagonal patterns in buildings

NanoTowers, Dubai  
Jansen et al. + Arup

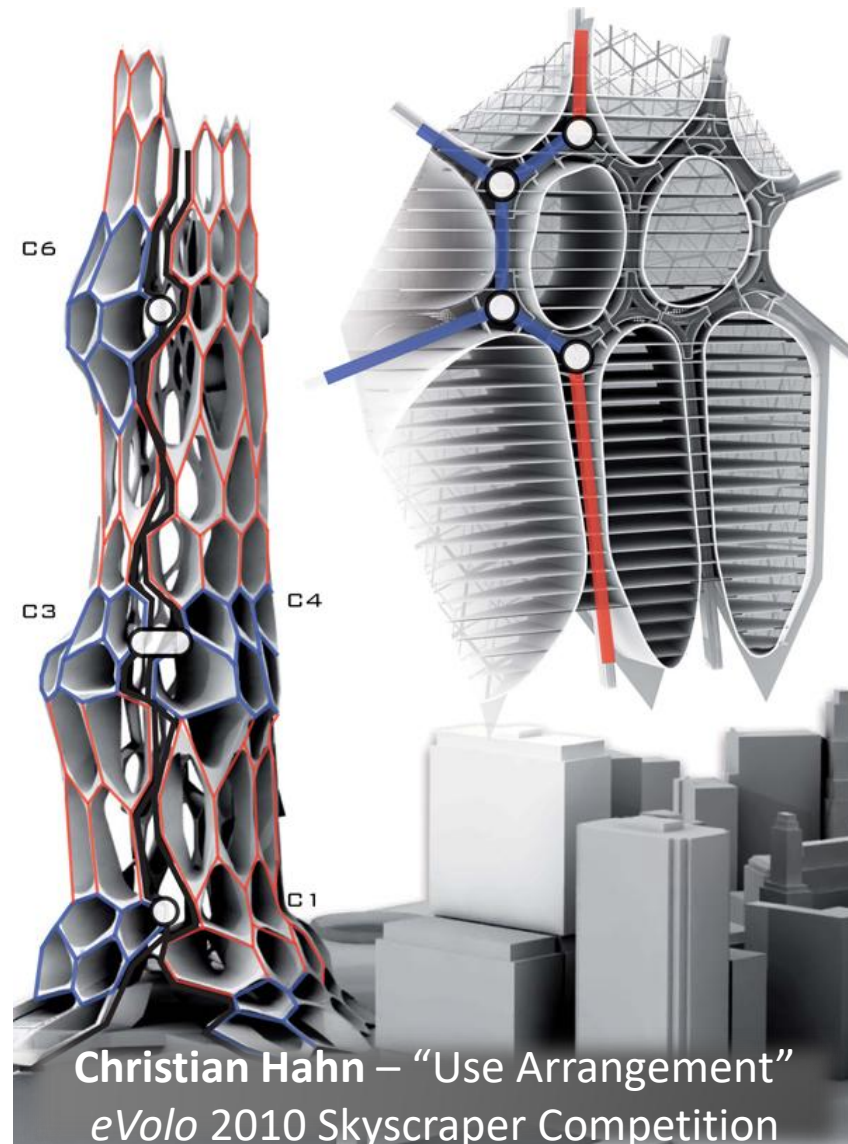


SinoSteel Tower  
Tianjin China  
MAD+ECADI





... voronoi patterns in buildings





design, modeling and analysis of non-conventional structural patterns:  
nor as familiar as in the case of the orthogonal pattern (beam-column  
frame) neither as straightforward as in the case of the triangular pattern  
(diagrid)

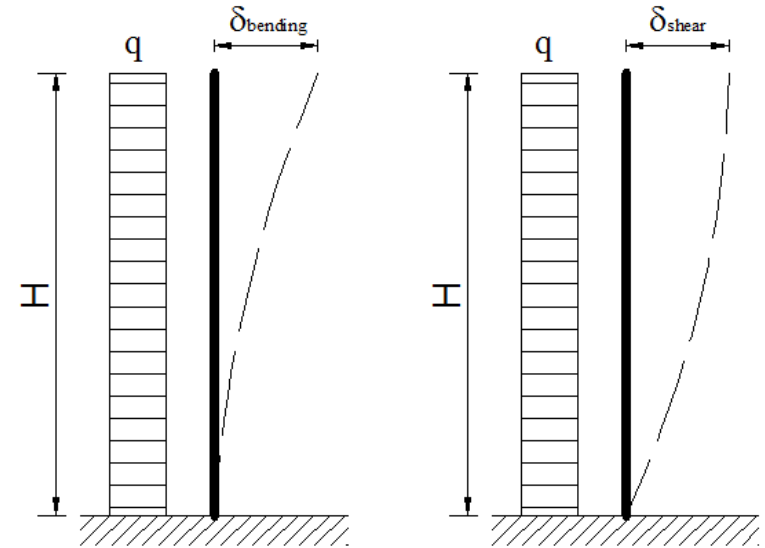
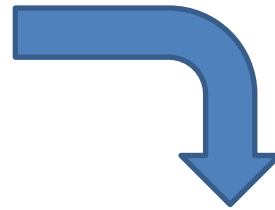
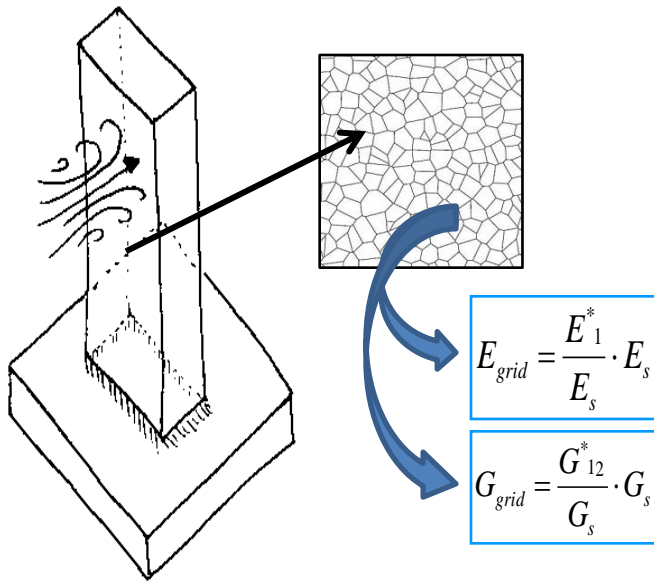
Challenging task for the research in structural engineering:  
define a **homogenization approach for dealing with any structural  
pattern**

**idealize the pattern as a continuous  
depleted medium characterized by  
penalized mechanical properties**



**material engineering  
cellular materials**

A tall building with TUBE configuration, with ANY structural pattern, can be designed still adopting the the very simplified cantilever beam model (with box cross section), still according to a simple global stiffness design criterion, provided that :



the structural pattern of the tube has been preliminarily characterized from the mechanical point of view, and equivalent, effective, homogenized mechanical properties have been defined

$$\delta_{tot} = \delta_{bending} + \delta_{shear} = \frac{q \cdot H^4}{8 \cdot (EI)_{grid}} + \frac{q \cdot H^2}{2 \cdot (GA)_{grid}} \cdot \chi < \frac{H}{500}$$

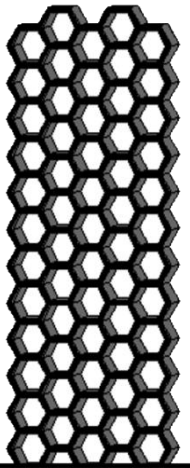
In the simple formula expressing the top drift, given by the flexural and racking contributions, the effective properties of the grid are considered



mechanical characterization of ANY structural pattern: defining  $E_{grid}$  and  $G_{grid}$

material engineering  
cellular materials

**Representative Volume Element (RVE)**, i.e. the smallest homogeneous material volume which macroscopic constitutive relationships must be referred to



**regular patterns**

eg. Hexagrid, diagrid, orthogonal frames ...

**RVE is the structural model of the basic geometric unit of the grid (unit cell)**

RVE can be established by looking at deformation modes and resisting mechanisms of the basic geometric unit (unit cell)

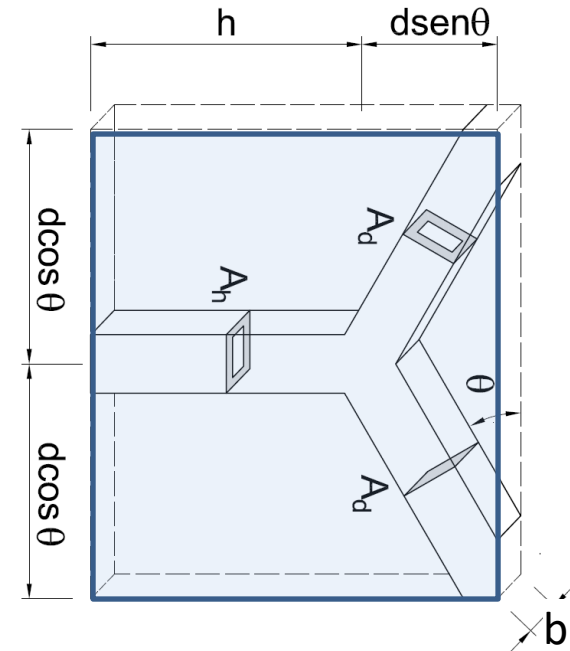
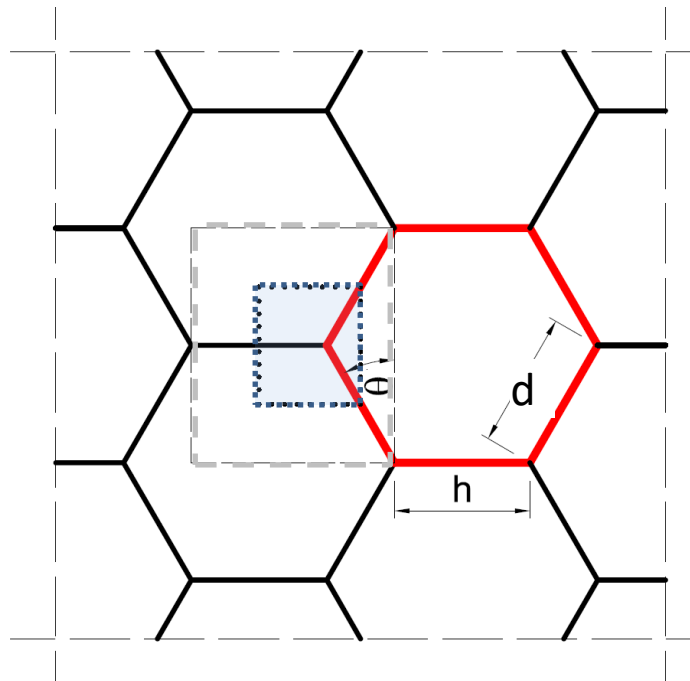
**non regular, non periodic patterns**

eg. Voronoi grid

RVE should be established on a statistical base, after having identified the governing geometric parameters of the grid



HEXAGRID structural assemblage of horizontal and diagonal members → hexagonal frames



— HEXAGONAL MODULE      - - - - - UNIT CELL      ······ R.V.E.

Can be recognized:

a hexagonal module (like the triangle module in diagrid)

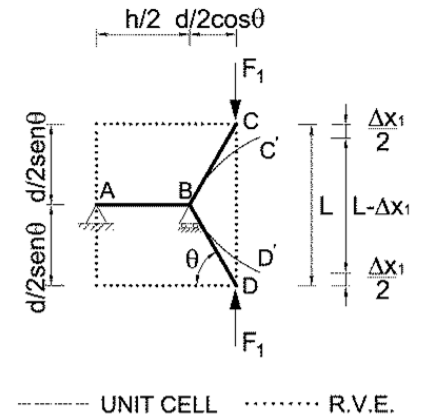
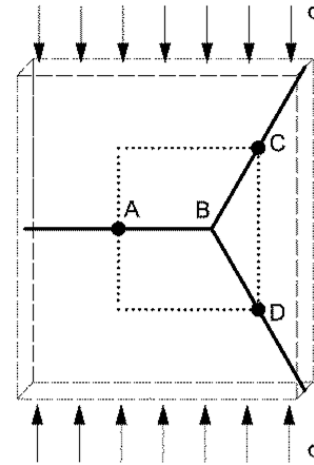
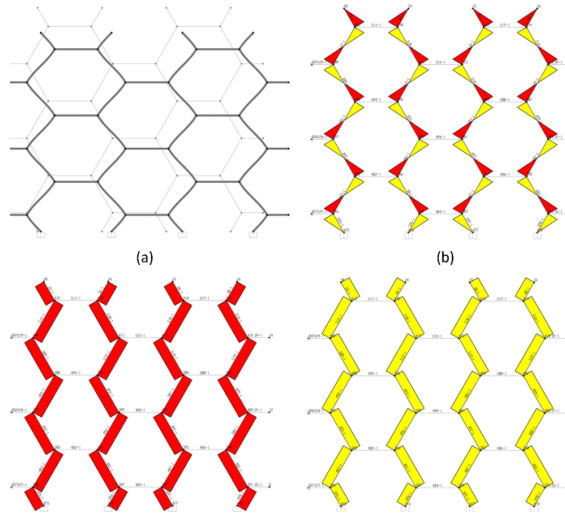
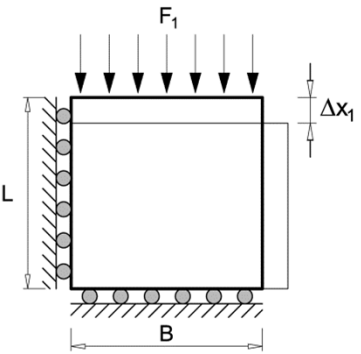
an unit cell, which is the basic geometric unit, that replicated, can completely tessellate the plane, without voids and overlaps

and a RVE, which is the structural model of the unit cell



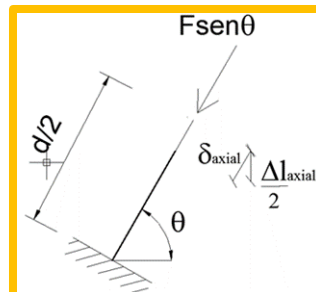
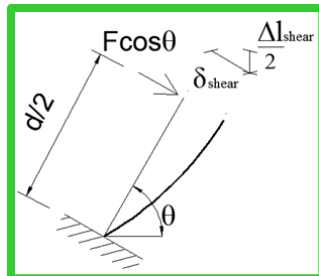
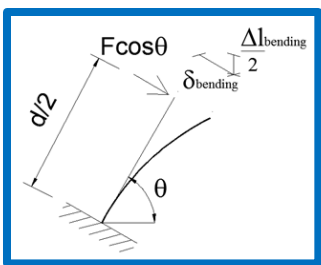
## axial test

$$E^*_1 = \frac{\sigma}{\varepsilon} = \frac{\frac{F_1}{B \cdot b}}{\frac{\Delta x_1}{L}}$$



$$\sigma = \frac{F}{A} = \frac{F}{(h + d \cos \theta) \cdot b}$$

$$\varepsilon = \frac{\Delta l}{l} = \frac{\Delta l_{bending} + \Delta l_{shear} + \Delta l_{axial}}{d \sin \theta}$$

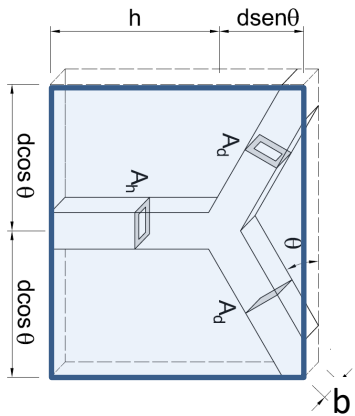


$$E^*_1 = \frac{\sigma}{\varepsilon}$$

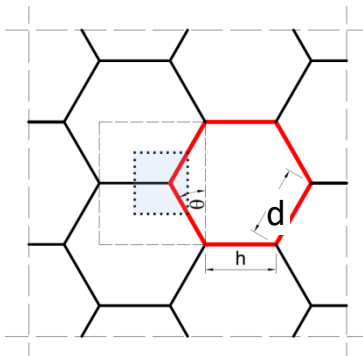
$$E^*_1 = \frac{\sigma}{\varepsilon}$$

## effective axial stiffness

$$\frac{E^*_1}{E_s} = \frac{12I_d \sin\theta A_d}{(h + d \cos\theta)b [\cos^2\theta (d^2 A_d + 24I_d \chi(1+\nu)) + 12\sin^2\theta I_d]}$$



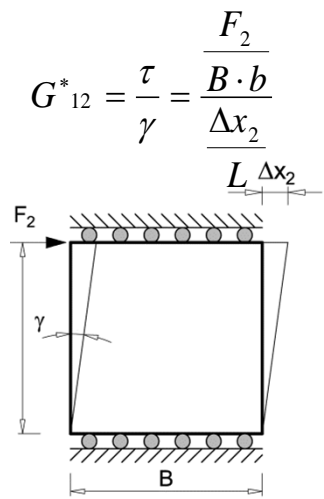
**(local) geometrical properties of the member cross sections**



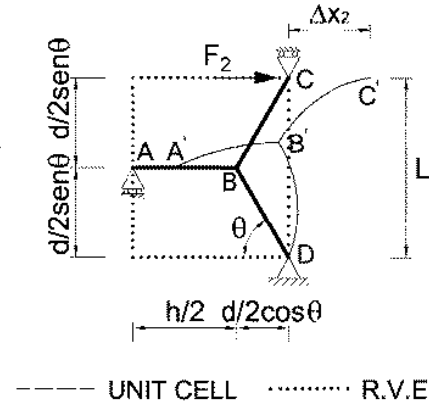
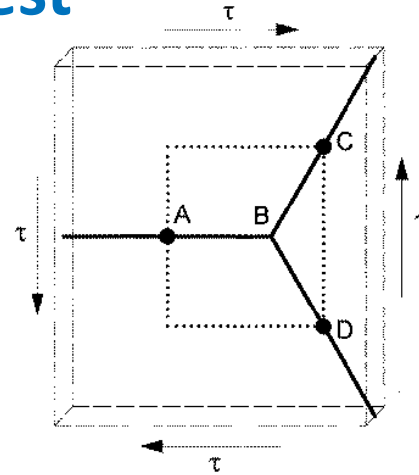
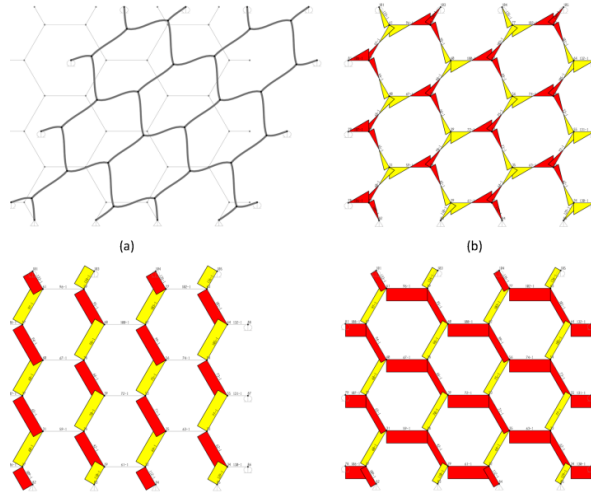
**(global) geometrical properties of the grid**



## shear test



$$G^*_{12} = \frac{\tau}{\gamma} = \frac{F_2}{\frac{\Delta x_2}{L}} \cdot \frac{B \cdot b}{L}$$



## effective shear modulus

$$\frac{G^*_{12}}{G_s} = \frac{24 \cdot A_d \cdot A_h \cdot I_d \cdot I_h (1 + \nu) (h + d \cos \theta) \text{sen} \theta}{12 \cdot A_h \cdot I_d \cdot I_h \cdot b \cdot \cos \theta (2 \cdot d \cdot h + (d^2 + h^2) \cos \theta) + b \cdot \text{sen}^2 \theta (12 \cdot A_h \cdot I_d \cdot I_h \cdot \chi_d (d^2 + 2 \cdot h^2 (1 + \nu))) + (A_d \cdot d \cdot h \cdot (A_h \cdot h \cdot (2 \cdot h \cdot I_d + d \cdot I_h) + 48 \cdot I_d \cdot I_h \cdot \chi_h (1 + \nu)))}$$

(local) geometrical properties of the member cross sections

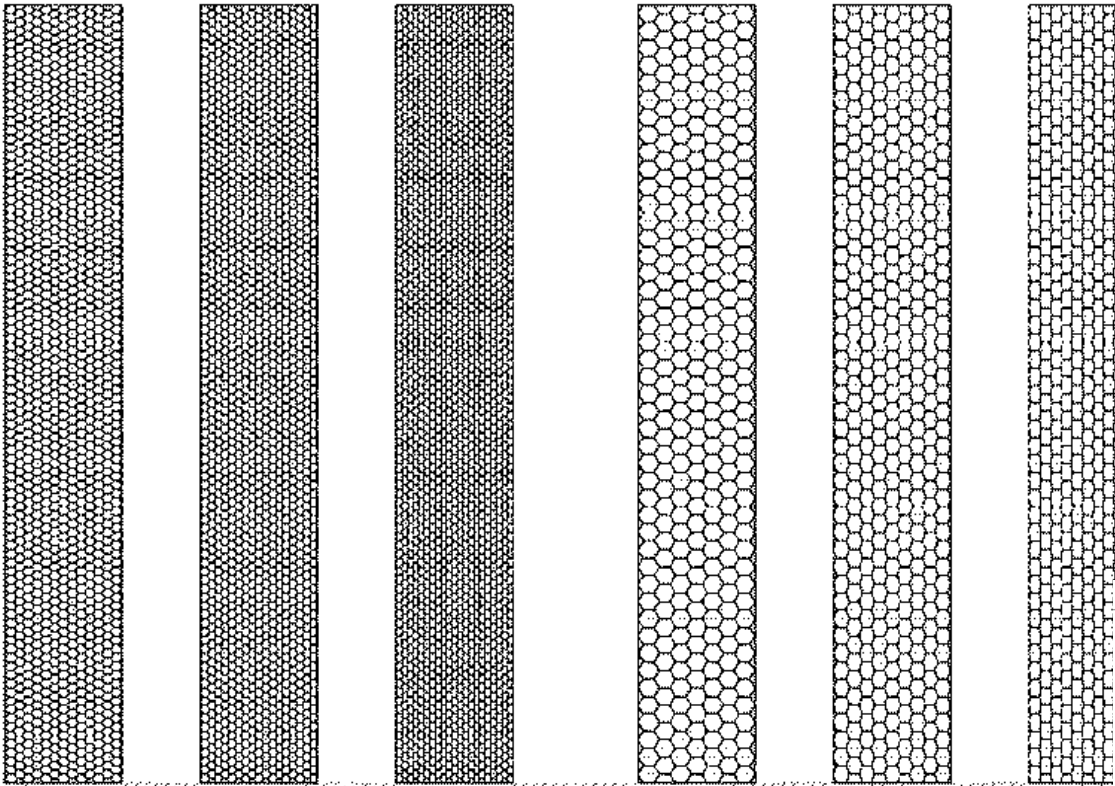
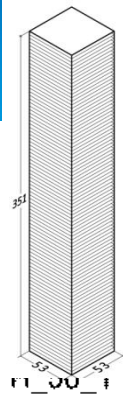
(global) geometrical properties of the grid

# preliminary member sizing – hexagrid tall building

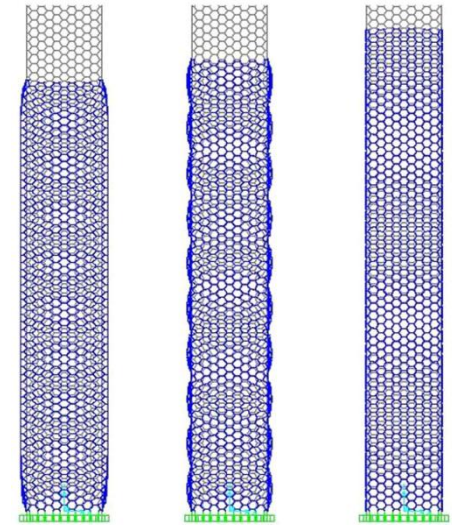
## building model

$$\delta_{tot} = \delta_{bending} + \delta_{shear} = \frac{q \cdot H^4}{8 \cdot (EI)_{grid}} + \frac{q \cdot H^2}{2 \cdot (GA)_{grid}} \cdot \chi < \frac{H}{500}$$

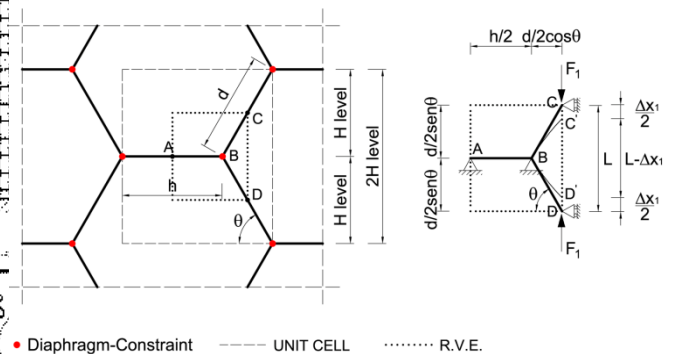
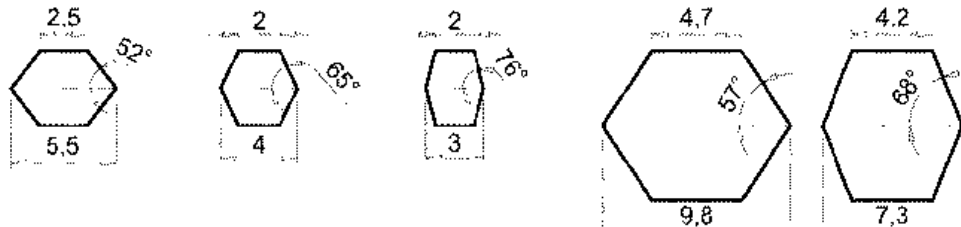
stiffening effect of floor rigid diaphragm on vertical def. mode



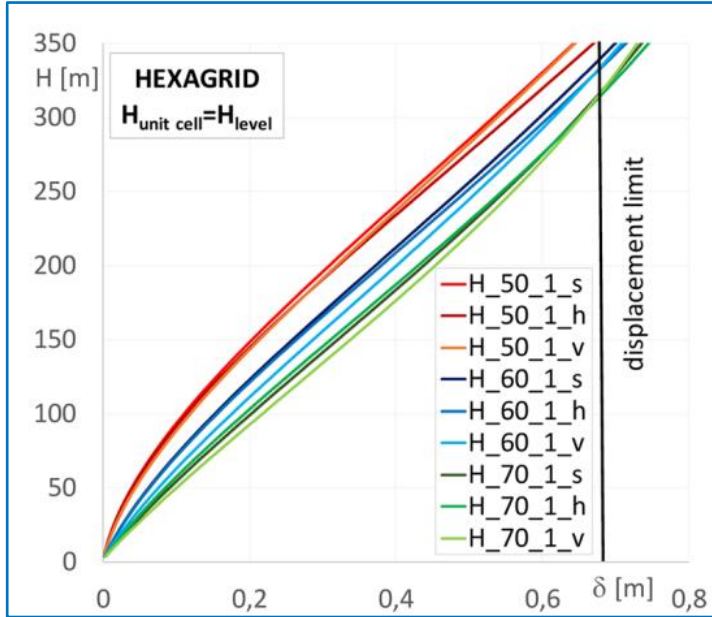
no RD    10 RD    90 RD



changing the RVE

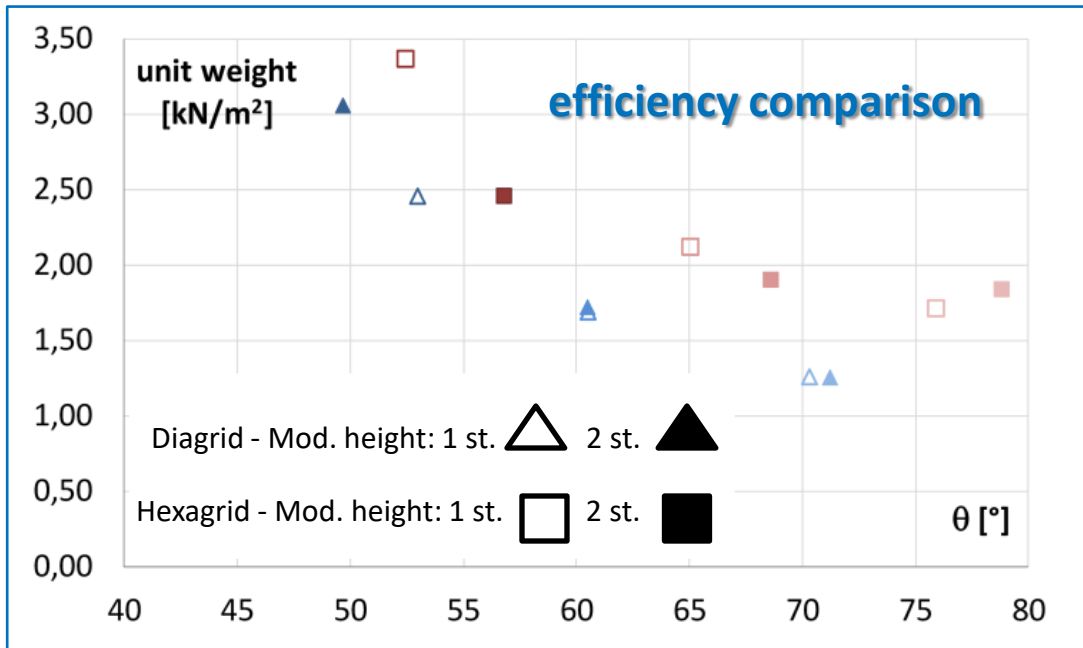






FE analysis of the hexagrid solutions obtained with the design procedure → confirm the expected structural performance (top drift close to  $H/500$ )

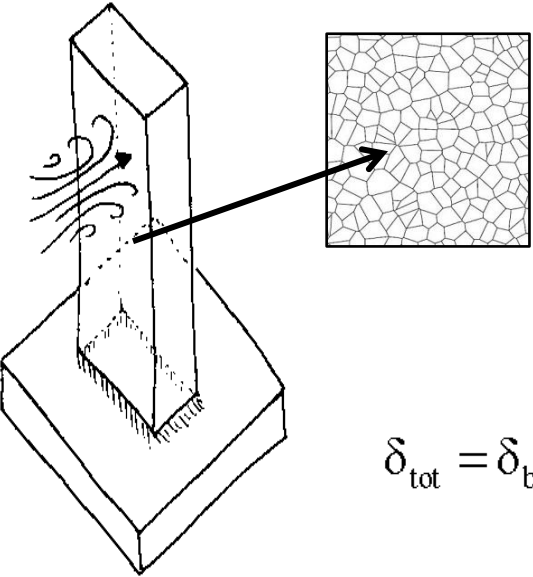
- hexagrids, being bending-dominated structures, are inherently less stiff, thus less weight efficient, than diagrids, that are stretch-dominated structures
- the rigid diaphragm effect provides a considerable increase of the stiffness of the hexagrid, making it comparable to the diagrid



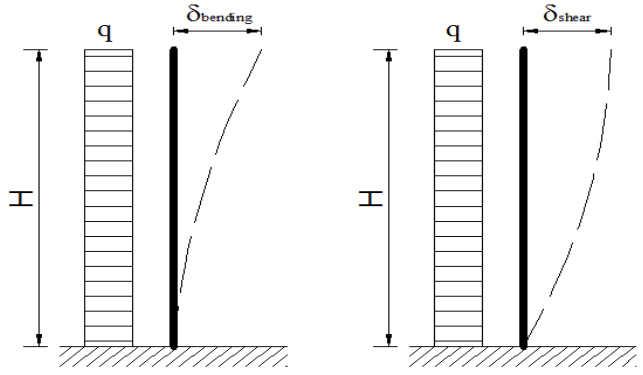
design procedure suitable for quick evaluations during the preliminary design stage

can provide a deep understanding of the effects of varying geometrical and mechanical parameters on the overall structural behavior

In the case of Voronoi grid, the idea is basically the same, with only an additional step and a slightly greater complexity



... still the cantilever beam model with box cross section ....



$$\delta_{tot} = \delta_{bending} + \delta_{shear} = \frac{qH^4}{8 \cdot E_{1,H}^* \cdot \eta_{E1,A}} I + \frac{qH^2}{2 \cdot G_{12,H}^* \cdot \eta_{G12,A}} A \chi = \frac{H}{500}$$

hexagrid

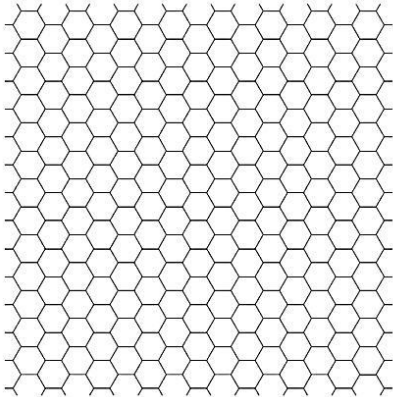
correction factors

→ use the effective properties of the regular hexagrid, multiplied by **correction factors**, able to account for the irregularity of the Voronoi pattern

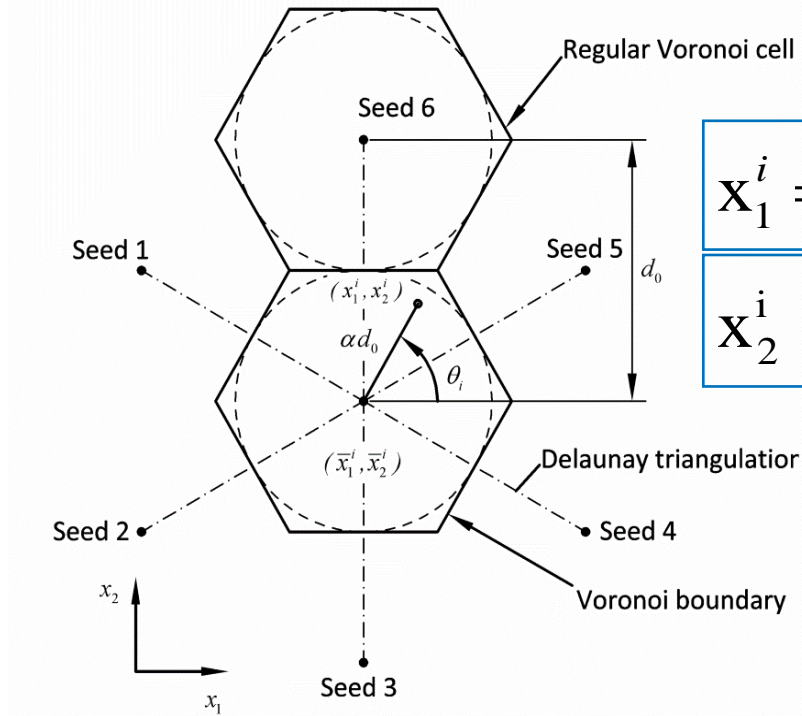
In order to establish these correction factors, the first step is to construct a Voronoi grid starting from a regular hexagrid



1. apply Voronoi tassellation to a regular array of points



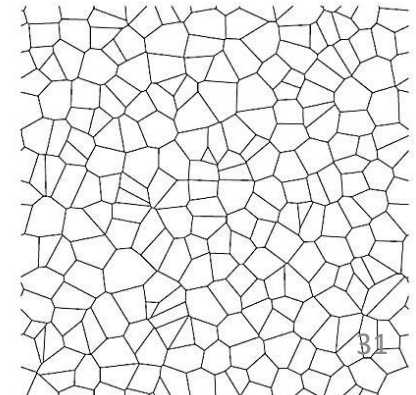
2. alter the coordinates of the seeds

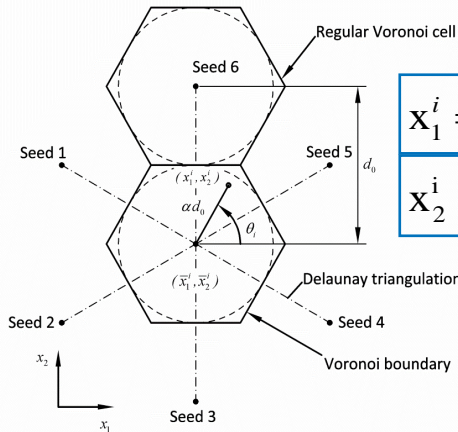


$$\mathbf{x}_1^i = \bar{\mathbf{x}}_1 + \alpha(d_0 \cos \mathcal{G}_i) \varphi_i$$

$$\mathbf{x}_2^i = \bar{\mathbf{x}}_2 + \alpha(d_0 \cos \mathcal{G}_i) \varphi_i$$

3. generate the irregular Voronoi pattern





$$\mathbf{x}_1^i = \bar{\mathbf{x}}_1 + \alpha(d_0 \cos \vartheta_i) \cdot \varphi_i$$

$$\mathbf{x}_2^i = \bar{\mathbf{x}}_2 + \alpha(d_0 \cos \vartheta_i) \cdot \varphi_i$$

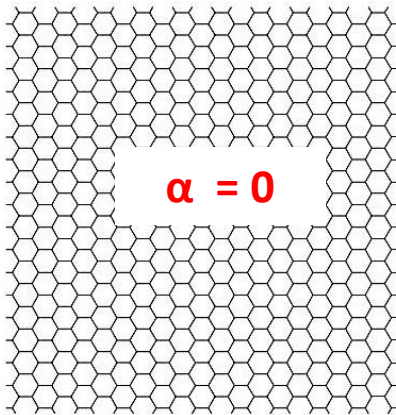
$\vartheta$  : random angle between  $\mathbf{x}_1$  the line connecting the perturbed and non perturbed position of the seed  $s$

$\varphi$  : random scale factor

$$P_{\vartheta}(\vartheta_i) = \begin{cases} 1/2\pi & 0 \leq \vartheta_i \leq 1 \\ 0 & \vartheta_i < -1, \vartheta_i > 1 \end{cases}$$

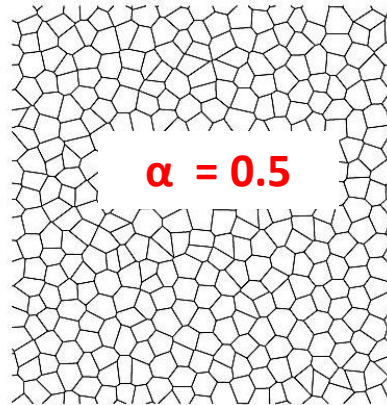
$$P_{\varphi}(\varphi_i) = \begin{cases} 1/2 & -1 \leq \varphi_i \leq 1 \\ 0 & \varphi_i < -1, \varphi_i > 1 \end{cases}$$

$\alpha$  [0,1] defines the irregularity degree of the Voronoi grid

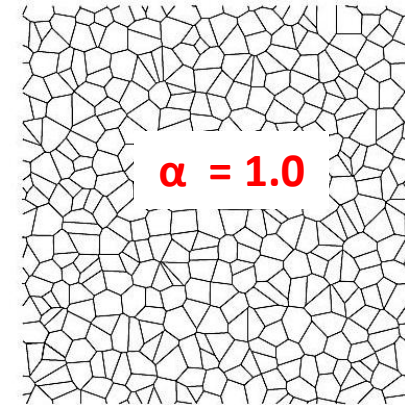


$\alpha = 0$

Regular geometry



$\alpha = 0.5$

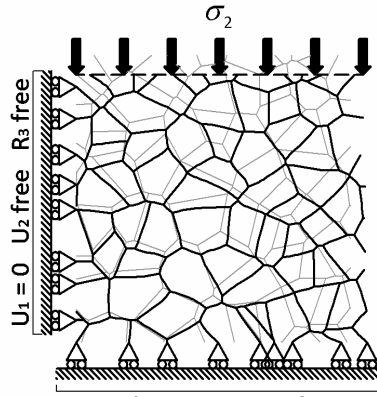
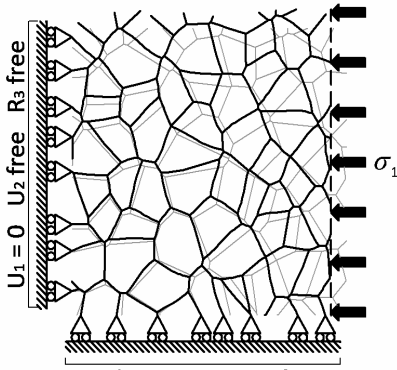


$\alpha = 1.0$

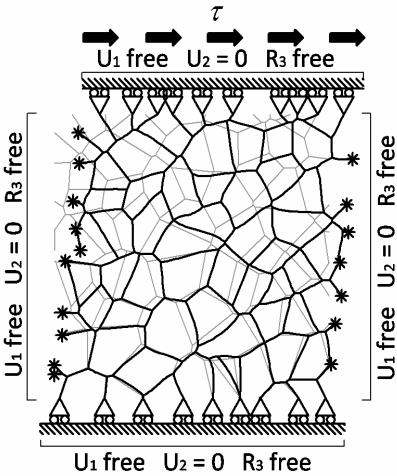
Maximum Irregularity

$\alpha$  is the major parameter that characterizes the irregular grid geometry  $\rightarrow$  the correction factors for each values of  $\alpha$  (i.e. for each level of irregularity), infinite geometric configurations (Voronoi diagrams) can be generated varying the two random parameters

## FEM axial tests



$$E^*_{11} = \frac{\sigma}{\varepsilon} = \frac{\frac{F_1}{B \cdot b}}{\frac{\Delta x_1}{L}}$$



## FEM shear test

$$G^*_{12} = \frac{\tau}{\gamma} = \frac{\frac{F_2}{B \cdot b}}{\frac{\Delta x_2}{L}}$$

## Voronoi (FEM results)

$$\eta_{E1,i} = \frac{E^*_{1,V,i}}{E^*_{1,H}}$$

hexagrid

## Voronoi (FEM results)

$$\eta_{G12,i} = \frac{G^*_{12,V,i}}{G^*_{12,H}}$$

hexagrid

Given the random nature of the parameters  $\theta$  and  $\phi$ , the mechanical characterization of the pattern and the derivation of the correction factors should be obtained through statistical analysis of the FE results obtained on an appropriate number of specimens, generated for the same  $\alpha$ , varying  $\theta$  and  $\phi$



## statistical approach

sensitivity analysis

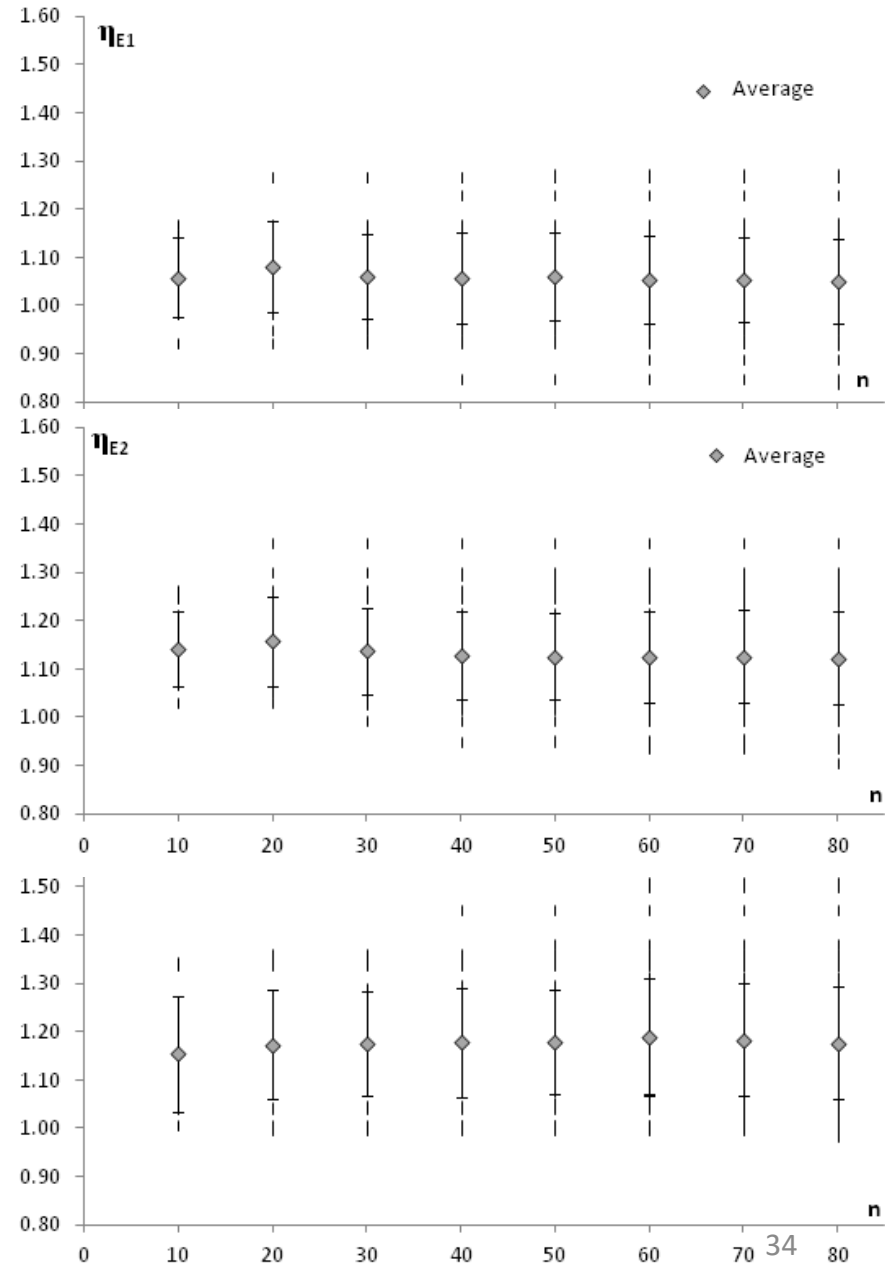
→ average and standard deviation of

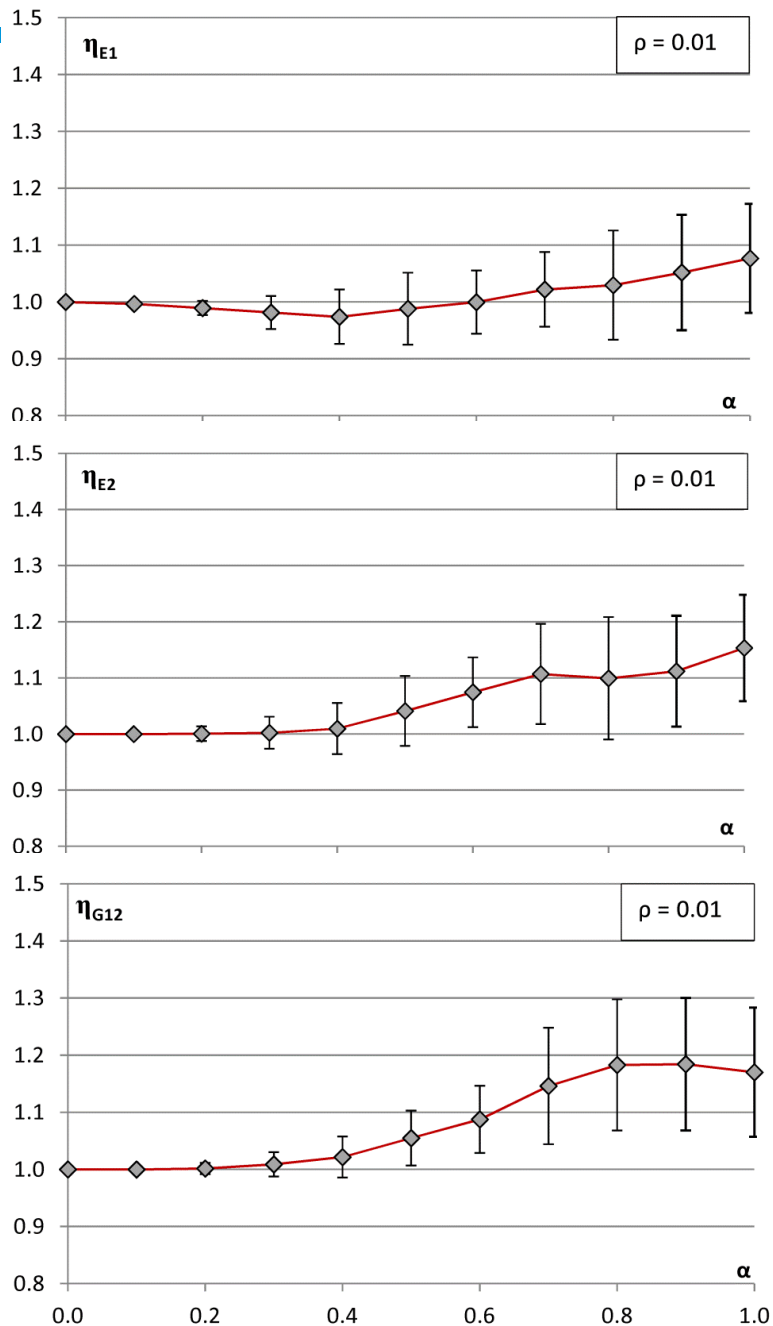
$$\eta_{E1,i} = \frac{E_{1,V,i}^*}{E_{1,H}^*}; \quad \eta_{E2,i} = \frac{E_{2,V,i}^*}{E_{2,H}^*}; \quad \eta_{G12,i} = \frac{G_{12,V,i}^*}{G_{12,H}^*}$$

varying the no. of specimens



20 specimens for each irregularity levels  
(each values of  $\alpha$ )



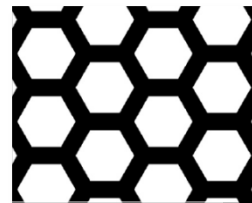
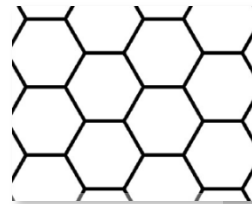


Therefore, for each degree of irregularity, in the range 0.0 – 1.0, 20 specimens have been generated and tested

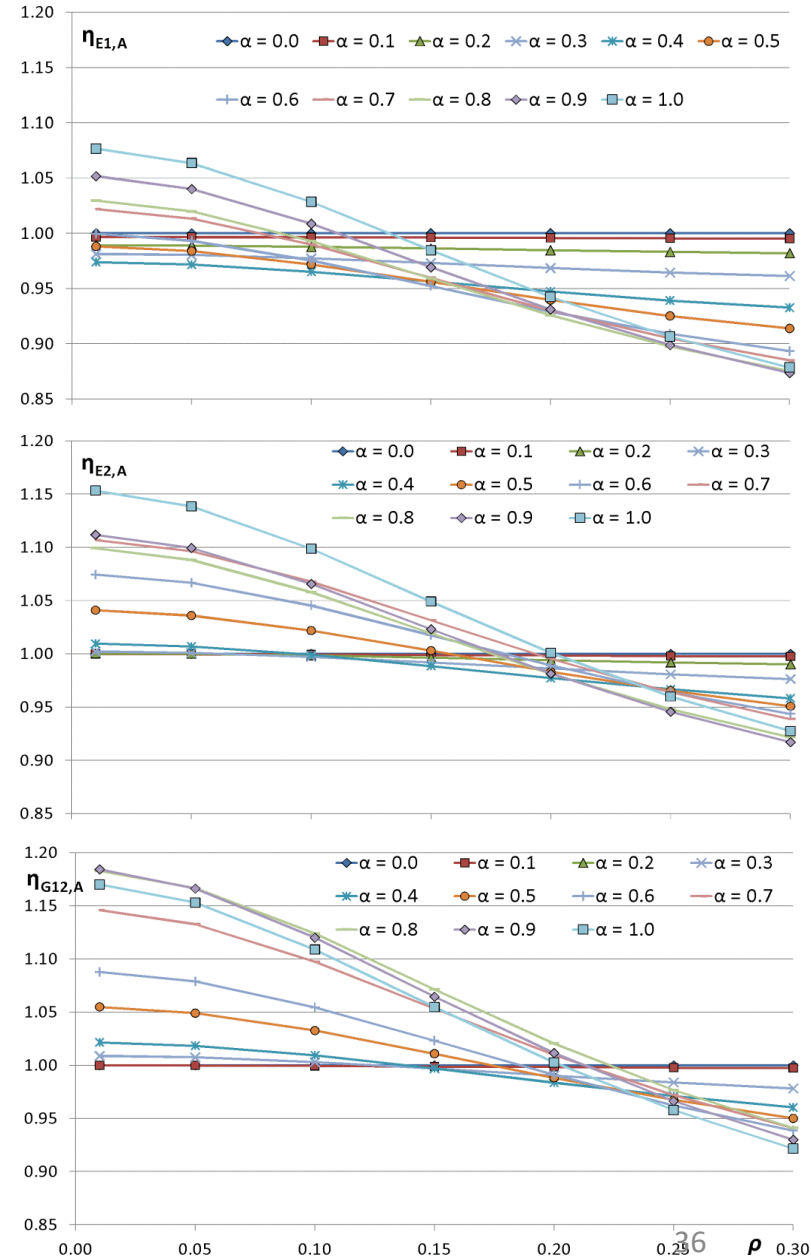
In this way the average values of the correction factors have been obtained as a function of  $\alpha$

Another important design parameter for the grid is the relative density  $\rho$ , defined as the solid volumetric fraction

$$\rho = \frac{\rho^*}{\rho_{vol}} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n l_i \cdot A_i}{L_1 \cdot L_2 \cdot b}$$

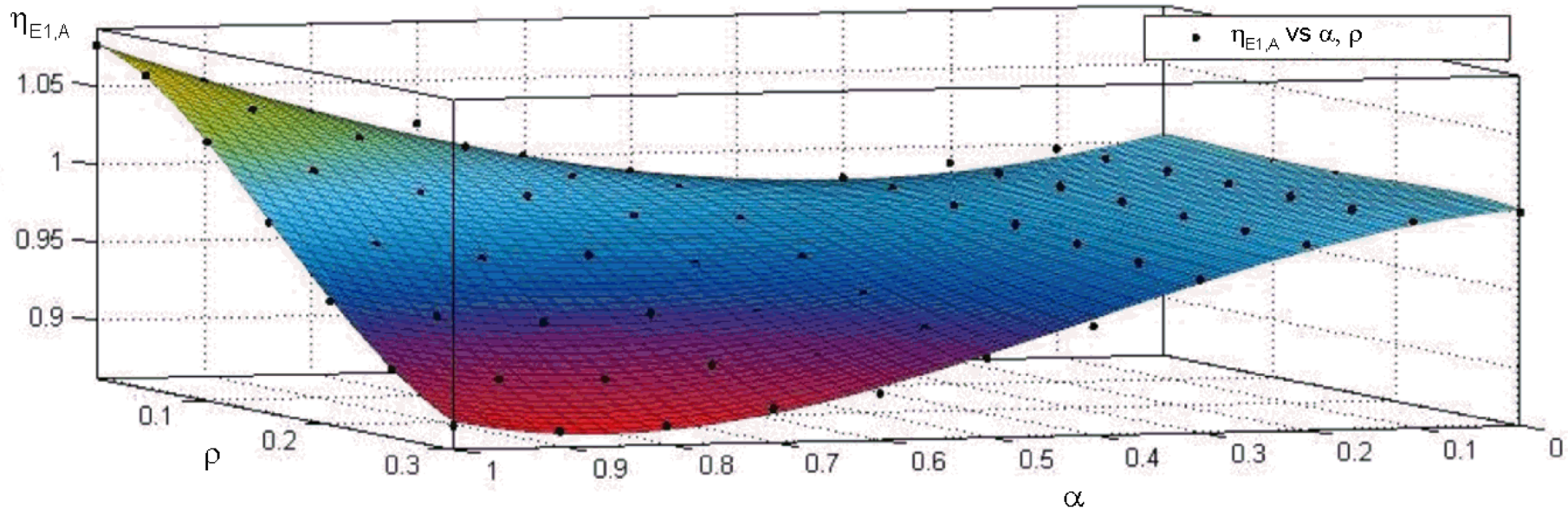


varying  $\rho$  between 0.01 and 0.30, for each value of  $\alpha$ , the average correction factors are expressed as a function of  $\rho$





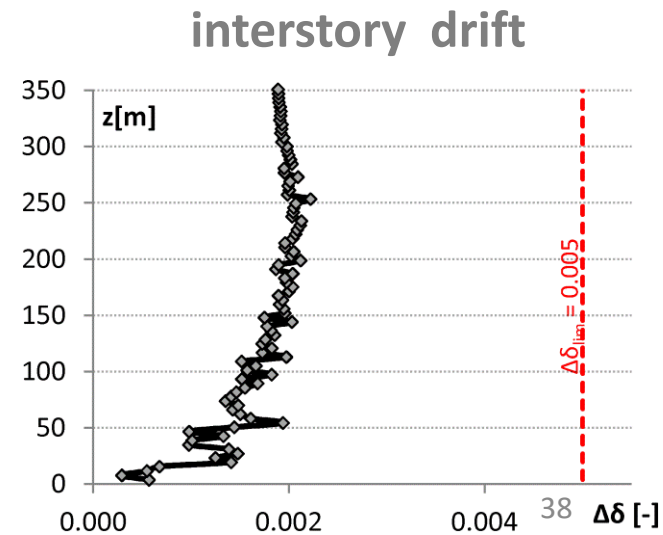
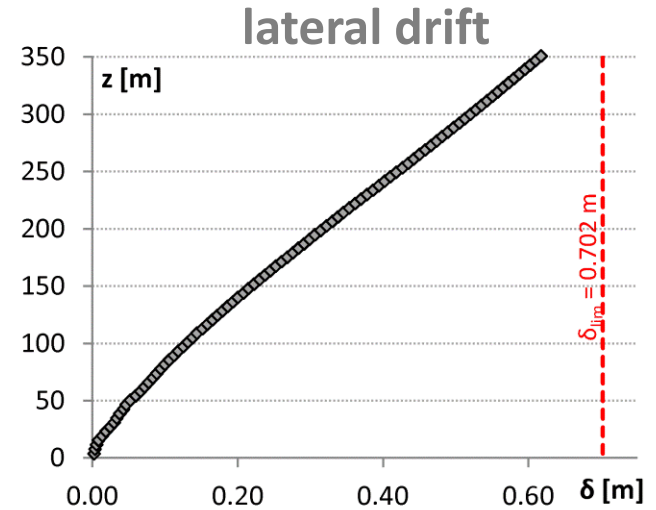
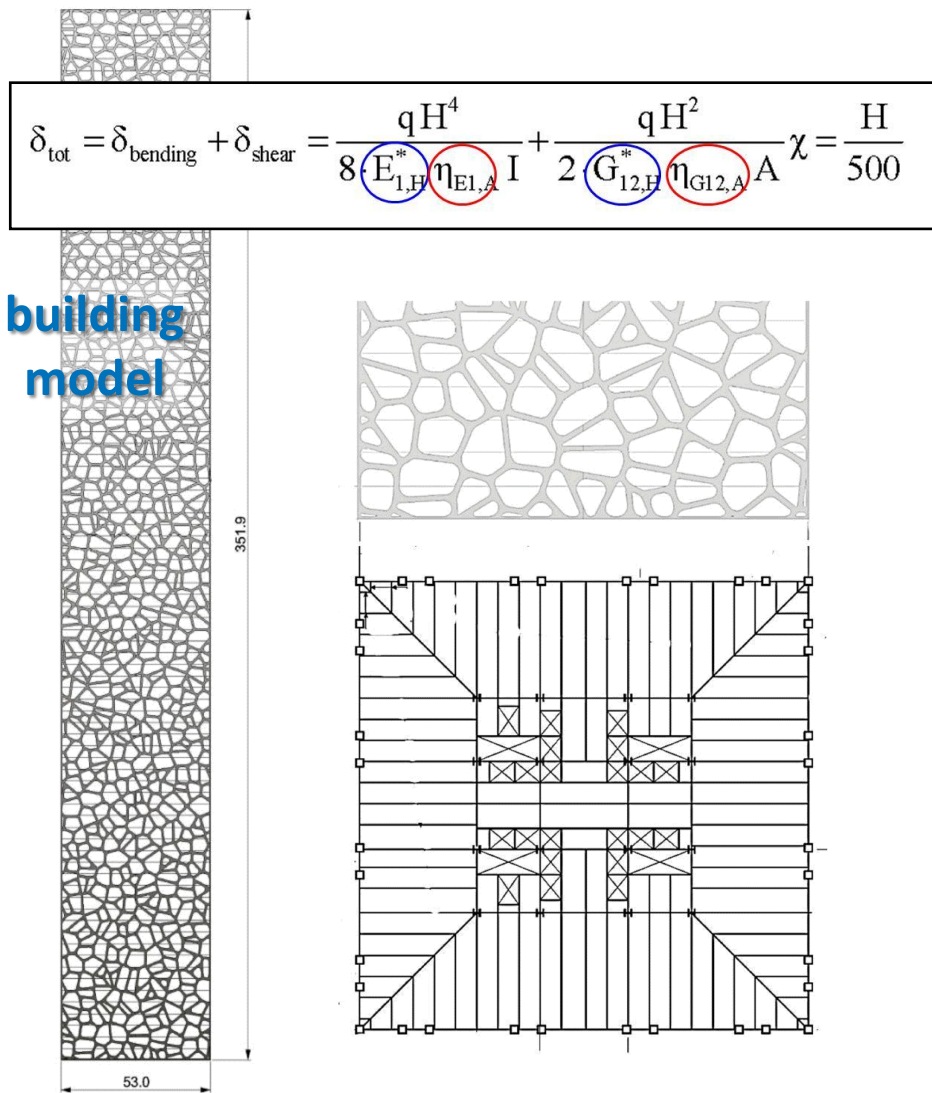
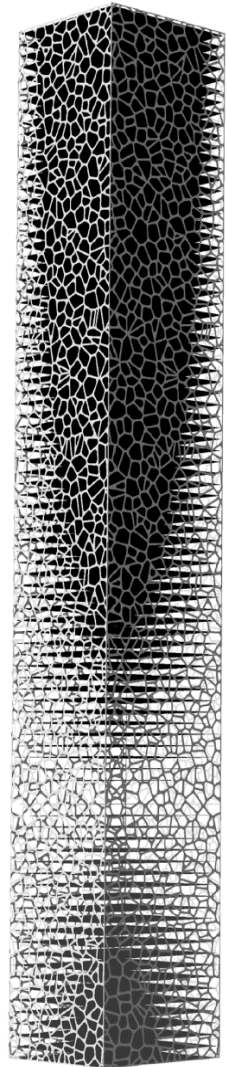
A surface fitting of the results has provided polynomial expressions for the average correction factors as a function of  $\alpha$  and  $\rho$



$$\eta_{i,A} = f(\rho, \alpha) = k_{00} + k_{00} \cdot \alpha + k_{01} \cdot \rho + k_{20} \cdot \alpha^2 + k_{11} \cdot \alpha \cdot \rho + k_{02} \cdot \rho^2 + k_{30} \cdot \alpha^3 + k_{21} \cdot \alpha^2 \cdot \rho + k_{12} \cdot \alpha \cdot \rho^2 + k_{03} \cdot \rho^3 + k_{31} \cdot \alpha^3 \cdot \rho + k_{22} \cdot \alpha^2 \cdot \rho^2 + k_{13} \cdot \alpha \cdot \rho^3 + k_{04} \cdot \rho^4$$

correction factors for calculating the mechanical properties of the Voronoi pattern, characterized by  $\alpha$  and  $\rho$ , starting from the regular hexagrid with the same  $\rho$

stiffness design criterion applied for sizing members of a TB model with Voronoi structural pattern; design solution checked by means of FEA



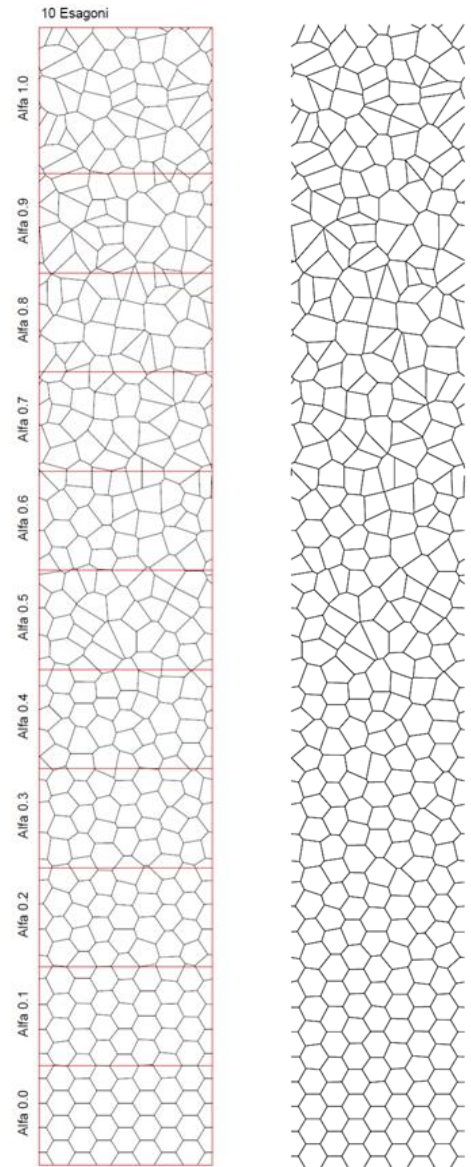
## conclusive remarks

- the design procedure allows for defining the cross sections of a very large number of structural members, assembled according to an apparently random grid, by means of simple relationships
- within the framework of the proposed approach, it is possible to deal with geometrical patterns characterized by **density and/or irregularity degree variable along the building height**
- So, density optimization, irregularity optimization, or **member size optimization**, best tuning the strength and stiffness along the elevation, can be obtained with small effort and retaining the conceptual consistency of the procedure.



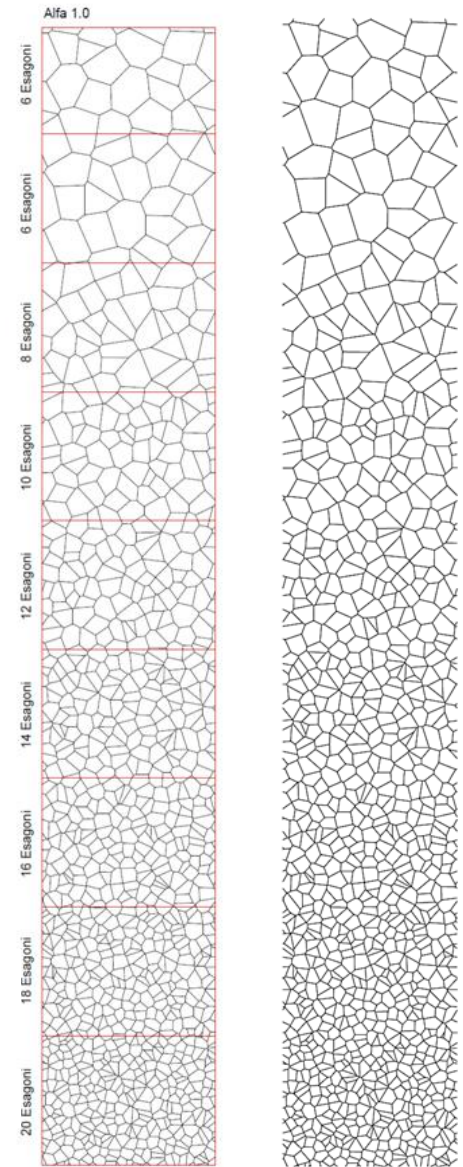
## irregularity variations

- $\alpha = 1.0$
- $\alpha = 0.9$
- $\alpha = 0.8$
- $\alpha = 0.7$
- $\alpha = 0.6$
- $\alpha = 0.5$
- $\alpha = 0.4$
- $\alpha = 0.3$
- $\alpha = 0.2$
- $\alpha = 0.1$
- $\alpha = 0.0$



## density variation along buildings height

- 6 hex
- 6 hex
- 8 hex
- 10 hex
- 12 hex
- 14 hex
- 16 hex
- 18 hex
- 20 hex



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 The Structural Design of Tall and Special Buildings. 23, 124–145, **2014** (online July 2012)

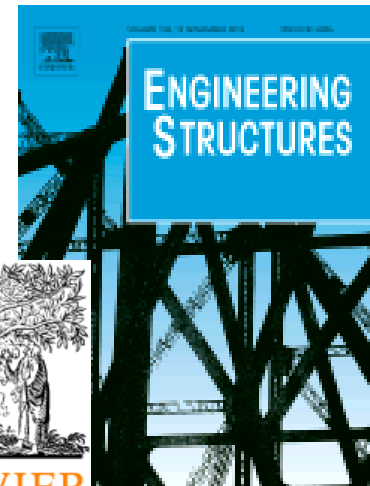
**G. Montuori , E. Mele, G. Brandonisio, A. De Luca. 2013**  
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 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Structures and Architecture ICSA2016  
 Guimaraes, Portugal, 27-29 July 2016



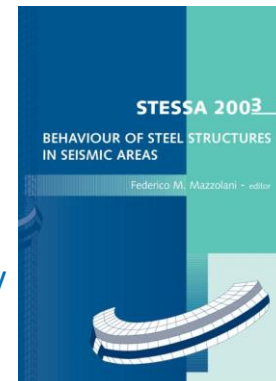
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**Non conventional structural patterns: from Hexagrid to Voronoi**  
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 of columns with partial-strength connections**  
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De Luca A., Di Fiore F., **Mele, E.**, Romano A. 2003  
**The collapse of the WTC twin towers: analysis of the design approach**  
 4<sup>th</sup> Int. Conf. STESSA 2003. Behaviour of Steel Structures in Seismic Areas. 9-12 June 2003, Naples, Italy







*any comments,  
observations, questions ...*

*... several research needs and design topics worth of study and analysis*

*glad to discuss them with anyone interested in*