



EGUsphere, referee comment RC1
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Comment on egusphere-2022-703

Anonymous Referee #1

Referee comment on "Geoelectrical and hydro-chemical monitoring of karst formation at the laboratory scale" by Flore Rembert et al., EGU Sphere,
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General comments

In the present paper, the authors investigate the impact of calcite dissolution on the evolution of rock structure, hydrodynamics and electrical properties, as well as their coupling. Their approach consists in monitoring the permeability, calcium concentration in outlet fluid (to infer changes in porosity) and electrical conductivity of the sample and outlet fluid during the injection of acid brine into two limestone samples with different flow rates (and Peclet numbers). The samples are also characterized using traditional petrophysical lab measurements as well as micro-CT imaging before and after experiments. The electrical conductivity data are interpreted by using a physics-based model in which the pore space is represented by a fractal cumulative distribution of sinusoidal tortuous capillaries, and then compared with data available in the literature (Niu and Zhang, 2019; Vialle et al., 2014) by using the Johnson length. The results are well described and supported by clear and effective figures. However, they should be discussed in more depth, especially the ones that are unique to this paper. The laboratory and micro-CT petrophysical characterization of the samples before experiments are reported in a previous publication (Leger et al., 2021). The evolution of porosity and permeability during acid injection into the samples and the comparative characterization of petrophysical properties using lab and micro-CT techniques are also the scope of a previous paper (Leger et al., 2022a). The monitoring of electrical conductivity during these experiments and their interpretation is the novel aspect presented in this third paper. The objective of the paper as stated by the author is to give some insights on how the electrical signal is impacted by calcite dissolution, yet the conclusion does not clearly open back up to that broader goal. In general, the title of the paper is misleading, a few important details are missing in the material and methods section, some sections lack clarity and a few critical elements should be discussed or at least mentioned in the paper before it can be considered for publication.

Specific comments

1. The title of the paper is "Goelectrical and hydro-chemical monitoring of karst formation at the laboratory scale". The abstract indicates the need for "a better understanding of the mechanisms responsible for conduits formation in the rock mass and the development of detection methods for these hydrological and geochemical processes". In the short summary the authors states that their work is "showing the benefits of goelectrical monitoring to map karst formation". I found this to be quite misleading. One would expect the results to be discussed in terms of geophysical monitoring of karst formations at the field scale: would similar hydro-geochemical trends be expected for a much less acidic fluid? How much dissolution should occur before it can be identified on ERT data (presenting electrode spacing that would be much larger than in the experiments presented in the paper, hence lower resolution)? What would be the order of magnitude of corresponding time-scales? In general I would suggest removing "karst formation" from the title and change it with "calcite dissolution". The introduction does not even have a paragraph dedicated to karsts. It goes from carbonate formations to dissolution of carbonate rocks. Moreover the authors do not reproduce a karst at the laboratory scale. Instead they study limestone rock samples (which would correspond to the matrix component of a karst, in its saturated zone, far from fractures and conduits). The injected fluid is also very different from water that would flow through a karst. The application is almost more relevant to acid injection to increase formation permeability in the vicinity of a borehole. I would also refrain from using "conduits" in this work, as for the karst hydrology community this mostly refers to the larger dissolution features, for which Darcy's law is not applicable as the flow tends to be turbulent (open channel/pipe flow). I would suggest using "porosity development in the rock matrix" or simply "dissolution features", but avoid conduits.

2. This paper presents results obtained during dissolution experiments conducted on two samples, that were already the scope of two previous papers: one centering on multimodal petrophysical and structural characterization of the samples (Leger et al., 2021), and one focusing on the evolution of porosity and permeability of the samples during the dissolution experiments (Leger et al., 2022a). The key findings of these papers should be dedicated a paragraph in the introduction before introducing the goal of the present paper.

3. The materials and methods section needs have the following missing information and descriptions that need to be more detailed and/or better justified

- Instrument used for XRF (lines 60). If you specify for XRD then also specify for XRF, otherwise just simplify for both and refer to the characterization paper "XRD and XRF measurements show that... (leger et al., 2021)"
- Method used for porosity (helium porosity, water-saturated porosity?), permeability (it is gas permeability, water permeability?) (Line 62). Even if the full descriptions are available in previous papers, essential details should be reminded here.
- The identification of red and blue phases of the pore space presented Figure 6 and discussed in section 3.3 should be introduced in the paragraph related to XRMT analysis (Lines 82-85). In particular the novel processing using two segmentations, which differs from the one presented in Leger et al. (2022a) should be detailed here. Side note: use actual numbers and not "the largest pores" or "the darker pixels", for instance "pores presenting a mean diameter comprised between.... and ..." Any quantification of the percentage of the samples' pore space that are below the voxel size (12 μm) should also be indicated in this paragraph (rather than Page 12, line 11)
- In sub-section 2.2, the accuracy and detection limit of the essential components of the experimental set-up (pressure sensors, flow rate, pH, conductivity, ion concentrations...) be listed, as well as standard error on measured properties.
- There is no paragraph in sub-section 2.2 explaining how F is experimentally calculated. It does not have to be lengthy at all but it should be clearly written somewhere that for each time step, the formation factor (which I think is later referred to normalized formation factor or normalized F?) is calculated using equation (65), neglecting surface conductivity and taking xxx for the brine conductivity. The authors actually never explicitly mention what is taken for xxx. Is it the differential electrical conductivity between the outlet and inlet brine? Again, make sure to introduce what normalized F is before it suddenly comes up in the result section (Page 9, Line 175).

4. Figure 3. The sample conductivity is presented on the same graph as the differential calcium concentration. This is somewhat confusing. Wouldn't it be better to present it together with the brine conductivity (with two y-axis)? Or actually present the brine conductivity together with calcium concentration since an increase of ion in the brine would result in an increase in electrical conductivity? If the only change in the water chemistry is due to the calcite dissolution, you should have a straight-forward relationship in between the two (evolution of calcium concentration and evolution of brine electrical conductivity), as electrical conductivity is directly related to ionic strength. In the paragraph describing these particular graphs (Figure 3d, e and f), top of page 11, start by reminding the reader what one would expect to see: calcite dissolution should increase the formation electrical conductivity as it increases 1) pore volume and 2) pore water electrical conductivity.

5. There are some conflicting information regarding the importance of microstructure on rock properties. Page 12, line 238 "leading to the conclusion that large pores are more likely to control rock parameters on core scale. In addition, this importance of macropores is even more of interest in reactive transport, as it can be seen in fractured media (ref)". I would not use ref of studies of reactive transport in fractured media, and would be interested to actually see work backing up the control of large pores on reactive transport in porous media. In general, the smallest pores control fluid flow and even the slightest modifications of the constrictions of hydraulic flow paths (throats/smaller pores) can have a major impact on permeability. The importance of microstructure on rock properties is actually the main conclusion of Leger et al. (2021), and later in the paper (Page 150, Line 283-284) the authors emphasize this statement with "As discussed in the literature (refs) the pore throats play a primary role on the hydrodynamic behavior of porous media". This should really be discussed in further details since a portion of this work utilizes micro-CT images acquired at a fairly low resolution, hence only probing the largest pores. It should at least be addressed when presenting the red/blue phases of the connected pore space after acid injection.

6. In the sub-section 3.4.2, the authors compare their data with data from two previous studies (Vialle et al., 2014; Niu and Zhang, 2019). The Peclet and Damkohler numbers are reminded for the two datasets. The Damkohler number of the present study is never given. It would be great to have an estimation of it, to be able to fully compare the three datasets. Even though they have different values of Pe and Da , would the three datasets still be located in the same dissolution regime – dominant wormhole? (Golfier et al., 2022 - Figure 19)?

7. The conclusion section should make a better job to expand the findings of the study to geoelectrical monitoring in general. It is is a mere summary of the results, listed linearly rather than integrated and put back in context. What are the implications of the work? Limitations? Future work? Application to karst? Implications for field scale? On the one hand, the first paragraph of the conclusions is literally the main conclusion of Leger et al., (2022a). On the other hand, the statement in the result and discussion section (Page 15, Line 288) "This behavior (...) indicates that monitoring electrical properties allows us to be sensitive to the impact of dissolution on the porous medium long before the sample is percolated", which is an important statement, is not at all reflected in the conclusion.

Technical corrections

- Page 2, Line 20: "...issues **related to** contamination, erosion..."
- Page 3, Line 26: "...well studied **in the laboratory** to understand..."
- Page 3, Line 27: "...and **their intricate coupling with** transport properties **such as** porosity and permeability..."
- Page 3, Line 28: "these experiments generally **rely on** image analysis, which is an accurate..."
- Page 3, Line 39-40: "highlighting their interest for non-intrusive characterization" – the interest of what/whom? The studies? The authors of the studies? The processes? – Please rephrase
- Page 3, Line 48-49: "Evolution of all these properties coupled with the initial conditions" unclear – precise what you mean exactly.
- Page 3, Line 49: "...is analyzed in order to **assess** in which proportion..." (**quantify** would work as well)
- Page 4, Line 63: "...on **samples saturated with brine with varying salinity** to determine..."
- Page 4, Line 89: "...of the medium through **Archie's law** (1942)"
- Page 4, Line 83: "...analyzed with a **in-house** software..." same for Page 5, Line 94
- Page 5, Line 87-88: Reverse the sentence: "**The same laboratory and imaging characterization was repeated on the samples after dissolution in order to estimate the impact of the core-flooding experiments on the rock properties.**"
- Page 6, Line 127: "...Vinogradov et al., **2021**). **It** uses..." (point missing)
- Page 6, Line 129: "...model consider N **capillaries that do not...**" (no coma)
- Page 7, Line 144: "...after the dissolution **experiments. Thus...**" (point missing)
- Page 8, Line 167-168: "it can be defined...formation factor **as**"
- Page 10, Table 1 – Title: remind Q/Pe for E04 and E05
- Page 14, Figure 6 - Title : indicate image resolution
- Page 15, Line 280: "In this **section we focus on** the link..."
- Page 15, Line 291: "**In order to compare our results with previously published data...**"
- Page 15, Line 297: "values obtained are a bit high" – avoid vague terms when describing scientific data.
- Page 16, Line 298: "known for their natural heterogeneity and also the one created by dissolution" What does "the one" refer to? Unclear, please rephrase.
- Page 17, Line 324: "We first **demonstrate that the lower the** Peclet condition..., **the lower** the dissolution rate is."
- Page 18, Line 334: "...as a property of the pore structure **that is impacted by chemical processes to a greater extent**" (I would also replace chemical processes by dissolution processes, as the data cannot be extended to other chemical processes such as precipitation).
- Page 18, Line 340: "We believe that the present study **expands our understanding** of..."

