Power extraction from floating elastic plates

S. Michele, F. Buriani, and E. Renzi

Abstract— **We present a novel mathematical model to investigate the extraction of wave power by flexible elastic floaters. The model is based on the method of dry modes, coupled with a matched eigenfunction expansion. Our model results compare satisfactorily with preliminary data obtained from a demonstrator device, developed at the University of Groningen. We show that the role of elasticity is to increase the number of resonant frequencies with respect to a rigid body, which has a positive effect on wave power output. The mathematical model is then extended to irregular incident waves, described by a JONSWAP spectrum. Our results show that the peak capture factors decrease in irregular waves, as compared to the monochromatic case. However, the system becomes more efficient at non-resonant frequencies. This work highlights the need to scale-up experimental investigations on flexible wave energy converters, which are still a small minority, compared to those on rigid converters.**

Keywords— **floating elastic plate, fluid-structure interaction, wave energy.**

I. Introduction

In this paper we present a novel mathematical model of wave energy extraction by means of flexible floaters. We started an investigation into innovative wave energy converters (WECs), with the goal of decreasing the levelized cost of energy (LCOE) of wave power generation. Indeed, the sheer size and complexity of many of the WEC devices proposed and tested during the past couple of decades has so far hindered their scalability and commercialisation [1]. To overcome such challenges, we consider the possibility of using light and flexible materials, instead of bulky components, in the design of the prime mover. To this aim, Renzi [2] analysed the coupled hydro-electromechanical response of a bimorph plate made by a flexible substrate intertwined with piezoceramic layers. Renzi [2] shows that the piezoelectric plate can extract sufficient energy for low-power devices, like sensors, LEDs, computers and wireless routers. Later, Buriani and Renzi [3] also showed that connecting the flexible piezoelectric device to a vertical wall significantly enhances its performance in small-amplitude waves. The idea of using flexible floaters to extract energy from the ocean has been recently pushed forward by Zheng et al. [4], who investigated the hydrodynamic interaction between water waves and an array of circular porous elastic plates. An important result shown in [4] is that wave power dissipation by the array of elastic plates increases thanks to the constructive interaction between the plates, which suggests an interesting potential for wave power generation.

Further investigations on floating elastic plates include the effects of three-dimensional structures on wave energy dissipation [5–7], and the interactions between a flexible plate and a bottom ridge [8]. The potential use of arrays of floaters to extract energy from waves has attracted the attention of the wave energy industry as well. For example, the Dutch company Ocean Grazer has recently proposed several versions of its "floater blanket" concept, an array of floater elements each connected to power take-off (PTO) systems [9]. For details on the technology, see [10].

The mathematical model proposed in this paper investigates a two-dimensional flexible plate floating on the surface of the ocean, and connected to a series of linear PTO devices. By coupling the method of dry modes with a matched eigenfunction expansion, we show that the energy extraction efficiency of the device is enhanced by the bending elastic modes of the plate.

We also show novel results of a demonstrator model of flexible wave energy device made by silicone sheets. The

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tests were carried out in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, University of Groningen (The Netherlands).

Finally, the mathematical model is extended to investigate the device performance in random seas. We show that the peak performance decreases in irregular

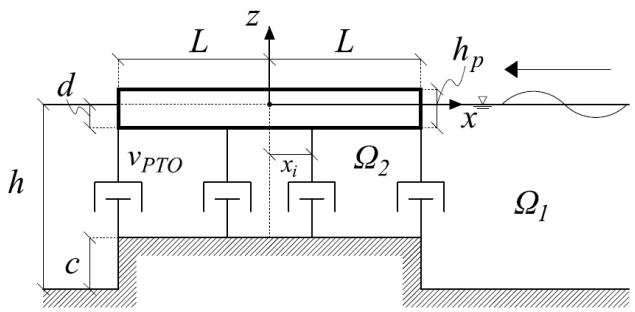

Fig. 1. Side view of the floating plate WEC. The power take-off (PTO) mechanisms are located at points x_i, $i = 1, ..., M$.

waves, as compared to the monochromatic case. However, the system becomes more efficient at non-resonant frequencies. We anticipate that these results will be of interest to wave energy companies working on the development of flexible WECs.

This work has been developed in the framework of a linear theory, while the device performance has been investigated by analysing the effects of a simplified symmetric PTO distribution, the bottom ridge height and the stiffness of the plate. Extensions to higher order theories, as well as the analysis of the plate shape effects on the wave field and the contribution given by complex PTO distributions are research area worth of investigation.

II. MATHEMATICAL MODEL

With reference to Fig. 1, consider an infinite two-dimensional channel of constant depth h and a rectangular ridge of width $2L$ and height c. Let us define a Cartesian reference system (x,z) with the x axis along the undisturbed free surface and the z axis positive upward. At $x = \in [-L, L]$, $z = 0$ rests a flexible floater WEC of length $2L$ and thickness h_p, allowed to oscillate under the action of incident waves. The WEC is connected to the ridge through a number M of vertical power take-off (PTO) mechanisms, each with damping coefficient $v = v_{PTO}$ and located at $x = x_i$, $i = 1, ..., M$. We assume $L>>h_p$, thus the elastic vibration of the floater can be described by the Euler beam equation. We assume also monochromatic incident waves of amplitude A coming from $x \to \infty$, inviscid fluid and irrotational flow. Hence, the velocity potential $\Phi(x, z, t)$ satisfies Laplace's equation in the fluid domain $\Omega(x, z)$. On the free surface, we have the linearised mixed boundary condition

$$\Phi_{tt} + g\Phi_z = 0, \quad z = 0, \quad x \geq |L|, \tag{1}$$

where g is the acceleration due to gravity and t is time. The subscripts denote differentiation with respect to the relevant variable. We require tangential fluid velocity at the bottom and on the ridge vertical walls, located at $x = \pm L$, i.e. $\Phi_n = 0$ where n denotes the normal derivative to the relevant surface. The kinematic boundary conditions on the wetted surface of the plate are

$$\Phi_z = \mathrm{W}_t, \quad z = -d, \quad x \in [-L, +L], \tag{2}$$

$$\Phi_x = -(z - z_g)\mathrm{W}_{xt}, z = -d, x \in [-L, +L], \tag{3}$$

where W is the vertical displacement response of the structure and z_g is the coordinate of the structure's centre of mass. Since the system is forced by monochromatic incident waves of frequency w, we assume harmonic motion

$$\{\Phi, \mathrm{W}, \zeta\} = Re\{(\phi, \eta, w)e^{-i\omega t}\}, \tag{4}$$

with i being the imaginary unit. Following Newman [12,13], we now decompose the displacement of the floater into a set of dry modes, i.e., in the absence of fluid or added mass. This approach allows us to separate the solutions of the hydrodynamical and structural problem, to significantly reduce the numerical computations and to obtain a deeper physical insight. We point out that the dry modes of an elastic beam consist of a combination of rigid and bending elastic modes. In the next Section we will show that the effect of the elastic modes is to increase significantly power extraction efficiency.

Since the plate and the fluid domain are symmetric with respect to the vertical axis $x = 0$, we decompose the modal expansion into symmetric and antisymmetric parts, hence

$$w = \sum_{l=0}^{\infty} [\zeta_l^S f_l^S + \zeta_l^A f_l^A], \tag{5}$$

where the superscripts S and A denote, respectively, the symmetric and antisymmetric components, while $\zeta_l^{S,A}$ represents the complex amplitude of the symmetric or antisymmetric l-th mode. The plate satisfies the Euler beam equation with free-free end conditions; therefore, the corresponding dry modal shapes are $f_0^S = 1$, $f_0^A = x$,

$$f_l^S = \frac{\cosh(\mu_l^S x/L)}{\cosh \mu_l^S} + \frac{\cos(\mu_l^S x/L)}{\cos \mu_l^S}, \tag{6}$$

$$f_l^A = \frac{\sinh(\mu_l^A x/L)}{\sinh \mu_l^A} + \frac{\sin(\mu_l^A x/L)}{\sin \mu_l^A}, \tag{7}$$

where f_0^S and f_0^Acorrespond to the rigid modes heave and pitch, respectively, while the eigenvalues $\mu_l^{S,A}$ are the positive real roots of the following eigenvalue conditions

$$\tanh \mu_l^{S,A} \pm \tan \mu_l^{S,A} = 0. \tag{8}$$

The decomposition into symmetric and antisymmetric parts allows us to analyse the half-problem in the region $x > 0$ and simplify significantly the mathematical structure. We also decompose the velocity potential into diffraction and radiation components, i.e,

$$\phi = \phi_D^S + \phi_D^A + \sum_{l=0}^{\infty} [\zeta_l^S \phi_{lR}^S + \zeta_l^A \phi_{lR}^A], \tag{9}$$

$$\phi_D^{S,A} = \frac{\phi_I}{2} + \phi_S^{S,A}, \tag{10}$$

where the subscript S denotes the scattering potential, D the diffraction potential and R the radiation potential. The incident wave potential is given by

$$\phi_I = \frac{-iAg \cosh k_0(h+z) e^{-ik_0 x}}{\omega \cosh k_0 h}, \tag{11}$$

where the wavenumber k_0 is the real root of the dispersion relation $\omega^2 = g k_0 \tanh k_0 h$.

A. *Diffraction Potential Solution*

The general solution in $\Omega^{(1,2)}$ is given by

$$\phi_D^{S,A(1)} = \frac{\phi_I}{2} + \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} C_j^{S,A(1)} X_j^{(1)} Z_j^{(1)}, \tag{12}$$

$$\phi_D^{S,A(2)} = \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} C_j^{S,A(2)} X_j^{(2)} Z_j^{(2)}, \tag{13}$$

where the $C_j^{S,A(1,2)}$ are unknown complex constants,

$$Z_j^{(1)} = \cosh k_j(h+z), \qquad X_j^{(1)} = e^{ik_j x}, \tag{14}$$

$$Z_j^{(2)} = \begin{cases} 1, j = 0 \\ cos \dfrac{j\pi(d+z)}{c+d-h}, j > 0 \end{cases}, \tag{15}$$

$$X_j^{S(2)} = \begin{cases} 1, j = 0 \\ cosh \dfrac{j\pi x}{c+d-h}, j > 0 \end{cases}, \tag{16}$$

$$X_j^{A(2)} = \begin{cases} x, j = 0 \\ sinh \dfrac{j\pi x}{c+d-h}, j > 0 \end{cases}, \tag{17}$$

while the terms k_j's are the roots of the dispersion relation

$$\begin{cases} \omega^2 = g k_0 \tanh k_0 h \\ \omega^2 = -g \bar{k_j} \tan \bar{k_j} h, k_j = i\bar{k_j}\, j > 0 \end{cases}. \tag{18}$$

Usage of $\phi^{(1)} = \phi^{(2)}$ and $\phi_x^{(1)} = \phi_x^{(2)}$ in $x = L$ gives two equations in the unknowns $C_j^{S,A(1,2)}$. Multiplying continuity of velocity and continuity of pressure by $Z_j^{(1)}$ and $Z_j^{(2)}$, respectively, and integrating over the relevant intervals, $z \in [-h, 0]$ and $z \in [-h + c, -d]$, yields a non-homogeneous linear system in the unknown coefficients $C_j^{S,A(1,2)}$. The resulting systems are solved by truncating and numerically solving an N x N system of equations. The singularity at the bottom edges of the WEC is weaker than that of objects characterised by sharp corners, thus the numerical convergence is fast [16-18]. Numerical computations can be checked through theoretical integral relations, such as the Haskind–Hanaoka formula.

B. *Radiation Potential Solution*

The general solution in $\Omega^{(1)}$ is given by

$$\phi_{lR}^{S,A(1)} = \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} D_{lj}^{S,A(1)} X_j^{(1)} Z_j^{(1)}, \tag{19}$$

where the $D_j^{S,A(1)}$ are unknown complex constants. The solution in $\Omega^{(2)}$ is given by the homogeneous part and a particular solution that accounts for the plate vibration in $z = -d$.

$$\phi_{lR}^{S,A(2)} = \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} D_{lj}^{S,A(2)} X_j^{(2)} Z_j^{(2)} + \tilde{\phi}_{lR}^{S,A}, \tag{20}$$

where the $D_j^{S,A(2)}$ are again unknown complex constants, the particular solution for the rigid heave mode reads

$$\tilde{\phi}_{0R}^{S} = \frac{-i\omega\,[z^2 - x^2 + 2z(h-c)]}{2(h-c-d)}, \tag{21}$$

while the particular solution for the pitching mode is given by

$$\tilde{\phi}_{0R}^{A} = \frac{i\omega x\,[x^2 - 3z^2 - 6z(h-c)]}{6(h-c-d)}. \tag{22}$$

For the symmetric and antisymmetric l-th bending mode, the particular solutions are

$$\tilde{\phi}_{lR}^{S} = -\frac{i\omega L}{\mu_l^S}\left[\frac{cos\frac{\mu_l^S x}{L}cosh\frac{\mu_l^S(z+h-c)}{L}}{cos\mu_l^S sinh\frac{\mu_l^S(h-c-d)}{L}} - \frac{cosh\frac{\mu_l^S x}{L}cos\frac{\mu_l^S(z+h-c)}{L}}{cosh\mu_l^S sin\frac{\mu_l^S(h-c-d)}{L}}\right], \tag{23}$$

$$\tilde{\phi}_{lR}^{A} = -\frac{i\omega L}{\mu_l^A}\left[\frac{sin\frac{\mu_l^A x}{L}cosh\frac{\mu_l^A(z+h-c)}{L}}{sin\mu_l^A sinh\frac{\mu_l^A(h-c-d)}{L}} - \frac{sinh\frac{\mu_l^A x}{L}cos\frac{\mu_l^A(z+h-c)}{L}}{sinh\mu_l^A sin\frac{\mu_l^A(h-c-d)}{L}}\right]. \tag{24}$$

As in the case of the diffraction potential, by multiplying $\phi_x^{(1)} = \phi_x^{(2)}$ by $Z_j^{(1)}$ and $\phi^{(1)} = \phi^{(2)}$ by $Z_j^{(2)}$, and integrating over the relevant intervals, yields an inhomogeneous linear system in $D_j^{S,A(1,2)}$. As in the previous section, the resulting linear system is solved numerically.

C. Structural Response and the Haskind–Hanaoka Formula

The vibration of the floating elastic plate is governed by the following Euler dynamic equation

$$-EIW_{xxxx} - \rho\phi_t - \sum_{m=1}^{M}\delta(x-x_m)\nu_{PTO}W_t - \rho gW - \rho_p h_p W_{tt} = 0, \tag{25}$$

where E is the elastic modulus of the plate, I is the area moment of inertia of the plate and δ denotes the Dirac delta function. The first term in the equation above represents the flexural rigidity, the second term is the dynamic pressure exerted by the diffracted and radiated wave fields, the third term represents the effect of localised forces due to the PTO system, the fourth term is the hydrostatic contribution, while the last term represents the inertia of the plate. By expanding W through the dry mode decomposition and recalling that for a free-free beam in the absence of applied loads $f_{xxxx} = f(\mu/L)^4$ we obtain

$$\sum_{l=0}^{\infty}\{[K_{il}^S - \omega^2(I_{il}^S + M_{il}^S) - i\omega(C_{il}^S - \nu_{PTO}D_{il}^S)]\zeta_l^S + [K_{il}^A - \omega^2(I_{il}^A + M_{il}^A) - i\omega(C_{il}^A - \nu_{PTO}D_{il}^A)]\zeta_l^A\} = F_i, \tag{26}$$

where K_{il}, I_{il}, M_{il}, C_{il} and D_{il} are the generalised stiffness matrix, mass matrix, added mass matrix, radiation damping matrix and PTO damping matrix, while the term at the right-hand side represents the exciting force vector. The structure of the latter equation suggests that the floating plate behaves as a linear forced harmonic oscillator. The natural modes of the WEC are then evaluated from the homogeneous unforced and undamped system. By equating to zero the determinant of the coefficient matrix, it is possible to get the eigenfrequencies and the respective modal forms.

The Haskind–Hanaoka formula valid for two-dimensional domains can be used to check the numerical computations of the diffraction and radiation velocity potentials. Usage of Green's Theorem [15] gives

$$F_i^{S,A} = 2\rho A C_g D_{i0}^{S,A(1)}\cosh k_0 h, \tag{27}$$

in which $D_{i0}^{S,A(1)}$ is the first complex coefficient of the radiation potential, C_g is the group velocity and $F_i^{S,A}$ is the exciting force.

D. Wave Power Extraction and Theoretical Maximum Efficiency

Once the complex coefficients $\zeta_l^{S,A}$ are determined, the average power absorbed over a wave period by the plate in monochromatic waves can be calculated as

$$P = \frac{1}{T}\int_0^T dt\,\nu_{PTO}\sum_{m=1}^{M}W(x_m)_t^2 = \frac{\nu_{PTO}\omega^2}{2}\sum_{m=1}^{M}\left|\sum_{l=0}^{\infty}\zeta_l^S f_l^S(x_m) + \zeta_l^A f_l^A(x_m)\right|^2. \tag{28}$$

Then, we define the capture factor as the ratio between the power output P and the incident wave energy flux per unit width $C_F = P/EC_g$ where E is the total energy. We now turn to the evaluation of the theoretical maximum capture factor. Using the radiated wave amplitudes at large distances [15], the most general expression of the capture factor for two-dimensional flexible floaters becomes

$$C_F = -Re\left\{2\sum_l A_l^- \zeta_l^* + \sum_l\sum_i \zeta_l\zeta_i^*(A_l^- A_i^{-*} + A_l^+ A_i^{+*})\right\}, \tag{29}$$

where $(.)^*$ denotes the complex conjugate of $(.)$, $A_l^{\pm}$ is the amplitude of the radiated waves at large distance

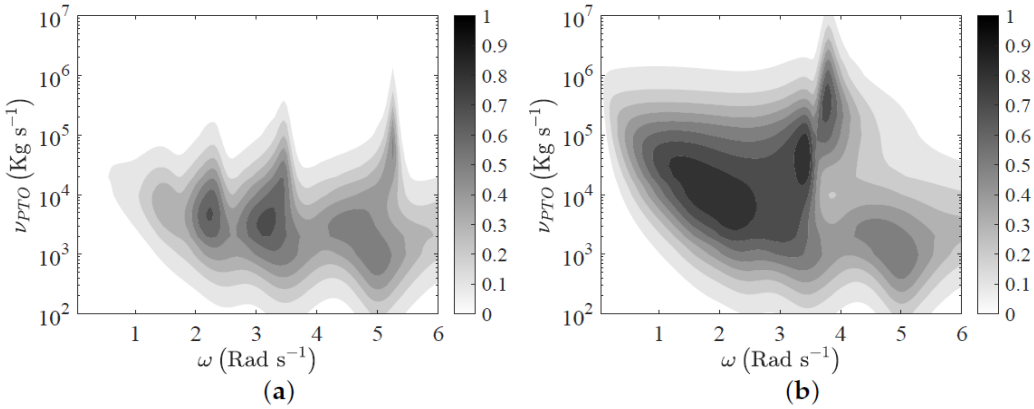

Fig.2. Behaviour of the Capture Factor versus frequency of the incident waves and PTO-Coefficient. (a) PTO at the ends $x_l = \pm L$; (b) Equally spaced PTO every 5 m.

from the plate, for unit modal amplitude, while the superscripts A, S denoting symmetric and antisymmetric components are omitted for brevity. If there is one degree of freedom, the latter gives $C_F = 0.5$. This result can be derived in a different way directly from the equation of motion of a two-dimensional rigid absorber properly constrained [15,19]. We remark that the theoretical maximum of the capture factor for a two-dimensional WEC cannot be larger than 1 because of conservation of energy. The plate considered in this work is elastic and characterised by two rigid modes (heave and pitch) and an infinite set of bending modes, thus C_F can be maximised several times within the range of frequencies of interest. For example, let us consider two modes that dominate the dynamics with respect to the others, one symmetric and the other one antisymmetric. Recalling that wave energy extraction is optimised when the total scattered and radiated waves are maximised in the direction opposite to the incident wave field, we assume $A_l^{S-} = A_l^{A-}$, $A_l^{S+} = A_l^{A+}$, i.e., the radiated wave amplitude of each mode in the direction opposite to the incident waves is the same. The corresponding capture factor becomes

$$C_F = -2Re\left\{2\sum_l A_l^{S-}(\zeta_l^{S*} + \zeta_l^{A*})\right\} - 2\left|\zeta_l^S A_l^{S-}\right|^2 - 2\left|\zeta_l^A A_l^{S-}\right|^2. \tag{30}$$

The capture factor is maximised when the first term on the right-hand side is real and negative and when the modal coefficients satisfy the following condition

$$\left|\zeta_l^{S,A}\right| = \frac{1}{2|A_l^{S-}|}. \tag{31}$$

The latter gives $C_F = 1$, a value independent of the WEC size. This result has been obtained from the simplified assumption of WEC motion dominated by two modes, while the flexible floater considered in this work includes rigid and bending elastic modes as well. This aspect potentially implies multiple optimisation and consequent larger efficiency with respect to standard rigid devices.

III. Results and Discussion

In this section, we investigate the effects of the plate geometry, ridge height c and PTO distribution on the hydrodynamic behaviour and efficiency of the system. We choose the following parameters: $A = 1$ m, $h = 5$ m, $\varrho = 1000$ kg m^{-3}, $EI = 6.9 \times 10^4$ kg m^{3}s^{-2}, and $L = 10$ m. Since in the expressions for the velocity potentials and bending modes there are infinite terms, the summations must be truncated up to a limiting value in the computations. Here, we use $j = 10$ and consider the first 5 dry modes to reach good accuracy. Calculations were carried out using the MATLAB software.

A. *Effects of the PTO distribution*

Here, we investigate the effects of the PTO coefficient ν_{PTO} and PTO distribution on the power extraction efficiency. For the sake of brevity, let us assume $c = 0$ m.

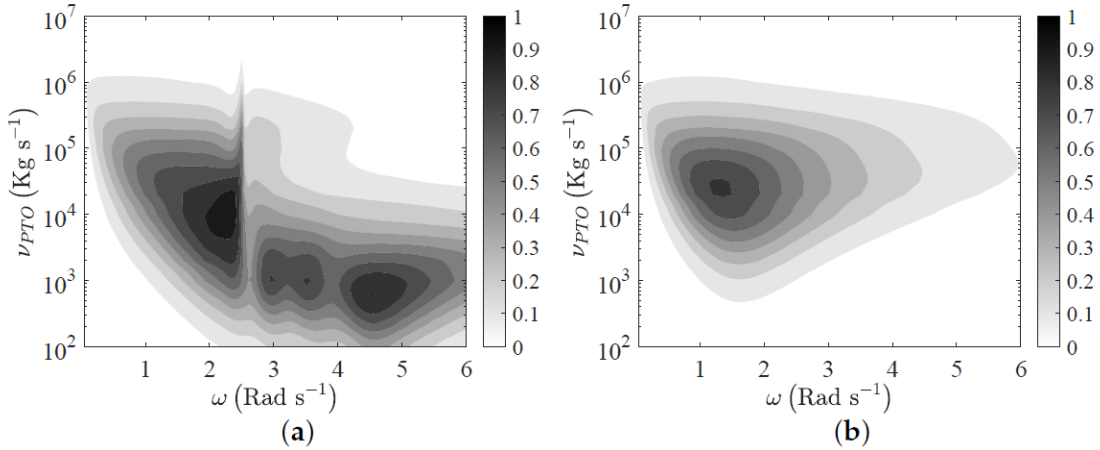

Fig.4. Behaviour of the Capture Factor versus frequency of the incident waves and PTO-Coefficient. (a) Flexible plate with stiffness factor EI = 6.9 x 10^3 kg m^{3}s^{-2}; (b) The case of a rigid plate.

Fig. 2 shows the surface plot of the capture factor versus the incident wave frequency and the PTO coefficient for different PTO distributions. Fig. 2a refers to the case of two PTO systems located at the ends of the plate $x_i = \pm L$, while Fig. 2b shows the case of 5 PTOs equally spaced located at $x_i = \pm L, \pm\frac{L}{2}, 0$. When the number of the PTOs increases, the bandwidth of the capture factor increases and the system becomes more efficient. Several peaks with value $C_F \approx 1$ are shown, therefore the theoretical maximum of a two-dimensional WEC in a channel can be almost reached. This result confirms the theoretical predictions obtained in Section 2.D. Note also that the maxima are located in correspondence to the first eigenfrequencies of the system, i.e., ω_i = 0.99, 1.55, 2.24, 2.77, 3.66, 5.06 Rad s^{-1}. As in the case of oscillating wave surge converters and oscillating water columns [17,18,20–24], resonance of natural modes is beneficial in terms of power extraction efficiency.

B. *Effects of the ridge height*

Now we analyse the effects of the ridge height c on the capture factor. Let us fix the PTO distribution to be equally spaced every 5 m and consider the same floater geometry analysed in the previous section. By comparing Fig. 2b (case without ridge) with Fig. 3a,b, we note that when the ridge height increases, the overall efficiency of the system decreases, while a narrow peak appears around ω = 2.2 Rad s^{-1}. This behaviour is mainly due to the reflection of the incident waves with increasing c and the shifting of the eigenfrequencies towards smaller values. In any case, this analysis shows that if a bottom structure with a large height c is needed, the floater geometry and the PTO distribution can be still optimised to maximise C_F up to values around one.

C. *Effects of the plate stiffness*

In order to evaluate the effects of the plate stiffness on the generated power, a parametric analysis is performed for a softened plate characterised by a smaller value of the stiffness factor EI = 6.9 x 10^3 kg m^{3}s^{-2} and a rigid plate. Fig. 4a shows that when the flexural rigidity of the plate decreases, the efficiency of the system can increase. This is due to the shifting of the bending mode eigenfrequencies towards smaller frequencies and the fact that these frequencies tend to be much close to each other. Differently from the case shown in Fig. 2b, there are now four peaks in which the capture factor C_F is close to one. When the plate is rigid, or characterised by very large stiffness, there are no contributions from the bending modes and the dynamics is governed by pitching and heaving only. Fig. 4b shows that there is one maximum

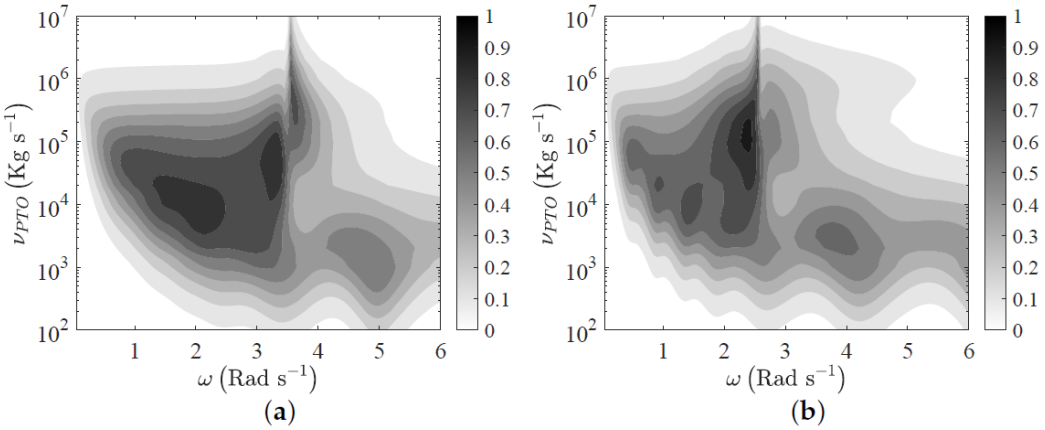

Fig.3. Behaviour of the Capture Factor versus frequency of the incident waves and PTO-Coefficient. (a) Ridge height c = 2 m; (b) c = 4 m.

around ω = 2.2 Rad s^{-1} with value $C_F \approx 0.8$. This frequency falls within the eigenfrequencies of the heave mode 1.07 Rad s^{-1} and pitching mode 1.67 Rad s^{-1}, respectively. The overall efficiency is clearly smaller with respect to the cases shown so far because we reduced the number of eigenfrequencies, the resonances of the natural modes and the possible modal optimisations. This highlights the beneficial effects of the bending elastic modes on the power extraction efficiency.

IV. Comparison with Preliminary Demonstrator Data

The flexible floater demonstrator is made by two layers of Polymax SILO-CELL silicone sponge sheet, each of dimensions 2 m (length) x 0.2 m (width) x 0.01 m (thickness), see Fig. 5. The floater is attached to a laboratory model (scale 1:35) of the multi-pump, multi-piston power take off system (MP²PTO) designed by the University of Groningen and Ocean Grazer, shown at the top of Fig. 5. The MP²PTO system is installed inside a wave tank, which is 1.20 m high, 0.77 m wide and 10 m long. Two transparent lateral walls are also installed inside the wave tank, along the direction of the incident waves, restricting the width to 0.2 m. This effectively creates a channel inside the tank, and the flexible floater is then installed inside this channel. The channel width matches the floater width (0.2 m), hence the dynamics inside the channel are two-dimensional. The water level in the tank is h = 0.9 m. The waves are generated by a flap paddle driven by a rotating-arm engine, located at one side of the tank. The engine frequency and the length of the rotating arm can be set to a maximum of 60 Hz and 0.25 m, respectively. At the other side of the tank, a plane beach induces wave breaking, thus dissipating wave energy and reducing reflection. To calibrate the wave maker, digital particle image velocimetry (DPIV)

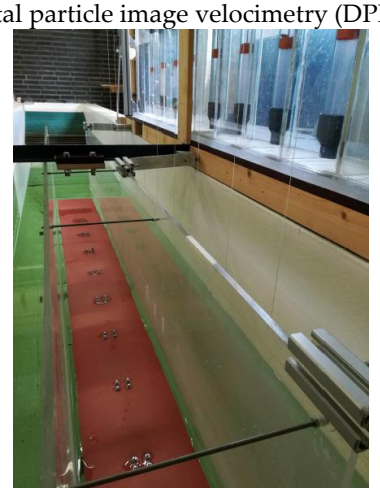

Fig. 5. The floater blanket, made by a two-layer red silicone sheet, inside the wave tank. The absorbing beach is visible at the end of the tank.

measurements were taken using a high-definition camera. The camera recorded the motion of tracer particles (polyamide particles) seeded in the tank, which was illuminated by means of a laser sheet. For details on the measurement procedure and associated errors, we refer the interested reader to Refs. [25,26] and references cited therein. The system of pistons and cables was calibrated using load cells, as described in Ref. [27]. The flexible floater is connected to the MP²PTO system in the tank via high-performance polyethylene cables, which are in turn connected to pistons. Each piston is located inside a 0.057 m wide cylinder. As the floater deforms under the action of the incident waves, it transmits its motion to the pistons via the cables. In turn, the pistons pump water inside the cylinders. The power extracted by each PTO element can be approximated by calculating the work done by the piston against the force of gravity to lift the water column of weight ρgAH, where A is the cross-sectional area of the cylinder and H is the maximum hydraulic head over a cycle. Thus, the extracted power is given by $P = \rho g A H^2/\tau$ where τ is the duration of the upstroke motion of the piston.

The floater is a continuous flexible silicone sheet of 2 m length, the maximum hydraulic head in each cylinder is measured eight times, and the average of such measurements is then taken. The wave height is 0.08 m and the wave period is 1.62 s.

Now, we show a preliminary comparison between the results of the experimental and mathematical models. We remark that the PTO system is modelled as a linear damper in the mathematical model, whereas it is nonlinear in the experimental model. For the sake of comparison, we selected a PTO coefficient for the model which generates the same total power output as that in the demonstrator device. This allows some quantitative comparisons and discussions. Fig. 6 shows the behaviour of the power output for each piston, in both the mathematical model and the test. The overall behaviour is captured well and, in general, the comparison is satisfactory. Both models show that the maximum power

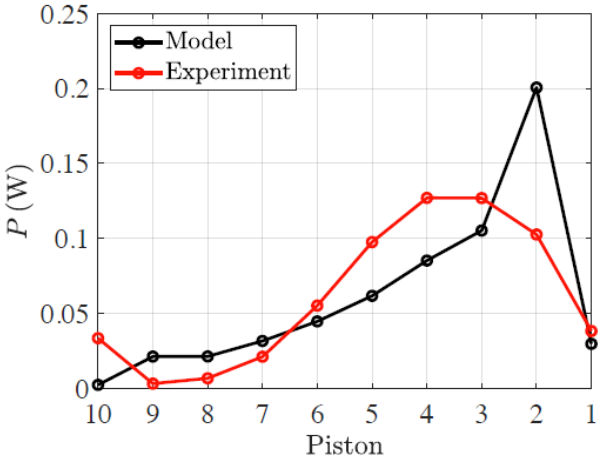

Fig. 6. Extracted power by the single pistons for the mathematical and experimental models. Connecting lines are for graphical illustration purposes.

output is achieved by those pistons located towards the front of the device. Some differences (especially for the Piston 2) still remain, and these are likely due to the use of a linear PTO in the mathematical model and wave

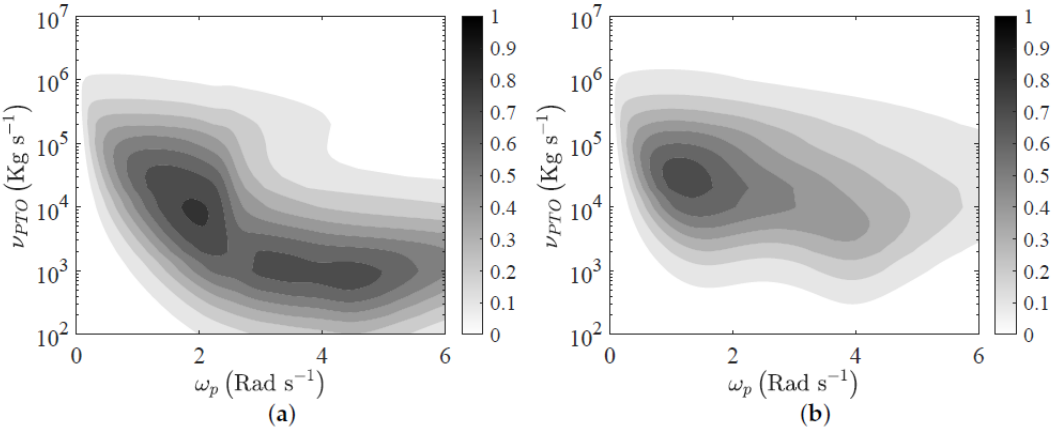

Fig.7. Behaviour of the Capture Factor in irregular sea waves versus peak frequency of the incident JONSWAP spectrum and PTO-Coefficient. (a) Softened flexible plate with stiffness factor $EI = 6.9 \times 10^3$ kg m^{3}s^{-2}; (b) The case of a rigid plate.

overtopping. We remark that, to date, very few studies have investigated the non-linear dynamics of wave-plate systems analytically, see for example Refs. [29,30]. However, these dealt with the interaction of waves with ice sheets. On the contrary, to the best of our knowledge, no application of nonlinear theories to wave power extraction from flexible plates has been made so far. This highlights the need for developing higher-order mathematical models to achieve a more accurate description of the power extraction dynamics.

V. Power Extraction in Irregular Waves

In this section, we investigate the effect of irregular sea waves on the floating plate dynamics and power extraction efficiency. Let us assume the following JONSWAP spectrum function [31]

$$S_\zeta = \frac{\alpha H_s^2}{\omega}\left(\frac{\omega_p}{\omega}\right)^4 e^{-1.25\left(\frac{\omega_p}{\omega}\right)^4} \gamma^{\exp\left[-\left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_p}-1\right)^2/(2\sigma^2)\right]}, \tag{32}$$

in which Hs is the significant wave height, ω_p denotes the peak frequency and

$$\alpha = \frac{0.0624(1.094 - 0.01915\ln\gamma)}{0.23 + 0.0336\gamma - 0.185(1.9+\gamma)^{-1}}, \quad \gamma = 0.33, \quad \sigma = \begin{cases} 0.07: \omega \le \omega_p \\ 0.09: \omega > \omega_p \end{cases}. \tag{33}$$

Since the problem is linear, we obtain the following expression for the averaged generated power [32]

$$\overline{P}_s = \nu_{PTO} \sum_{m=1}^{M} \int_0^\infty S_\zeta \, RAO^2 \omega \, d\omega, \tag{34}$$

where RAO is the response amplitude operator for the plate. Defining P_ζ as the total incident wave power per unit crest width

$$P_\zeta = \int_0^\infty \rho g C_g S_\zeta \, d\omega, \tag{35}$$

the capture factor in irregular seas can then be written as $C_{F\zeta} = \overline{P}_s / P_\zeta$. The latter expression gives the capture factor for any sea state characterised by significant wave Hs, peak frequency ω_p and PTO coefficient ν_{PTO}.

Let us investigate the capture factor in irregular waves of the same plates analysed in Section 3.C. Fig. 7 shows the behaviour of $C_{F\zeta}$ versus peak frequency ω_p and PTO coefficient ν_{PTO} for the softened flexible plate and the rigid plate. The softened plate has stiffness factor $EI = 6.9 \times 10^3$ kg m^{3}s^{-2}, while the rigid plate has $EI \to \infty$. As in the case of monochromatic incident waves, the flexible plate results in being more efficient than the rigid plate and can be optimised for several values of ω_p and ν_{PTO}. Indeed, the rigid plate shows a single peak, while the flexible plate shows three maxima and a much larger bandwidth. In addition, by comparing Fig. 4 and 7, we note that the maxima are reduced with respect to the case of monochromatic waves, whereas the system can be more efficient outside the resonant frequencies. This is mainly due to the coupling between the broadband incident waves and the eigenfrequencies of the system. Similar results were already obtained in the context of oscillating wave surge converters and oscillating water columns [17,20,22].

VI. Conclusion

This paper has presented novel results on analytical and demonstrator model of a wave energy converter made by a flexible floating plate. The mathematical model is based on a linearised potential-flow theory, whereby the method of dry modes is combined to matched eigenfunction expansions, in order to solve the hydrodynamics of the converter. The main results of the analytical model are:

1) The effect of the plate elasticity is to increase the number of the resonant frequencies with respect to a rigid plate, while wave power extraction and the

bandwidth of the capture factor become larger. The same result has been obtained both in monochromatic and irregular waves. The PTO distribution plays a significant role, and it is seen that, by increasing the number of PTO devices, modal optimisation occurs, and the overall efficiency of the system improves. However, this theory considers only the simplified assumption of symmetric PTO distributions because of the decomposition into symmetric and anti-symmetric components. Extensions to more complex PTO distributions is a research subject worth of investigation.

2) We also investigated the effect of the ridge height below the plate. Analytical results showed that if a bottom structure is needed, the floater can be properly designed to maximise power extraction, despite reduced incident wave transmission. This aspect has potentially strong implications for the design of nearshore structures for coastal protection.
3) We analysed the plate response to irregular waves described by a JONSWAP spectrum. We showed that the presence of a broad wave frequency range reduces the maximum resonant peaks of the system. However, away from resonance, the efficiency can be larger than that of the monochromatic case and the benefit of irregular waves is significant.

A preliminary demonstrator model was also realised, by connecting a flexible silicone sheet to the multi-piston MP²PTO system developed at the Faculty of Science and Engineering, University of Groningen. A comparison between the mathematical model results and the demonstrator data was encouraging. Further experiments will need to be undertaken in a larger wave tank, with a more sophisticated absorption system, to confirm the trend identified in this work. Given the promising efficiency levels shown by the mathematical model, our results highlight the need to scale-up experimental investigations on flexible wave energy converters, which are still a small minority, compared to those on rigid converters.

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