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ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF OUTER ENVELOPE STRUCTURE ON INDOOR THERMAL ENVIRONMENT OF ZERO ENERGY BUILDING

by

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Zero-energy building is the main development trend in the current construction field. Reducing the carbon emission of the building, enhancing the indoor comfort of the building, and improving the comprehensive performance of the building are the current research hotspots in the field of construction, and it is necessary to explore the impact of the envelope on the performance of the building as the main medium for the transfer of indoor and outdoor heat in the building. In this paper, zero energy consumption buildings in Northwest China are taken as the study application. Numerical simulation and experimental research are combined to compare and analyze the changes of indoor thermal environment under the conditions of external wall insulation layer thickness of 150 mm, 140 mm, 130 mm and window-wall ratio of 0.36 and 0.5 in the heating season. The results show that the indoor comfort level of 130 mm is lower than that of 140 mm and 150 mm external wall insulation layer thickness, and in winter, the increase of window wall ratio improves indoor thermal comfort. In general, increasing the thickness of external wall insulation layer and window wall ratio can be effective means to improve indoor comfort. However, blindly increasing the thickness of insulation layer and window wall ratio will only cause resource waste and cost increase, affecting the long-term development of zero-energy buildings.

Key words: zero energy building, outer protective structure, indoor comfort, numerical simulation

Introduction

Energy security and environmental friendliness are the premise and basis of sustainable social development. With the rapid economic development and the continuous growth of population, energy crisis and environmental pollution are still the main concerns of the current

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society [1, 2]. Building energy consumption accounts for 22% of total social energy consumption, which is one of the main parts of saving energy and reducing carbon emissions [3, 4]. At the same time, building carbon emissions are one of the largest sources of CO_2 emissions, accounting for 35%-50% of total carbon emissions in China, of which 60% comes from the building's operation period, 40% from the construction process, and 2/3 from the main structure and envelope structure [5, 6]. Zero-energy buildings can take advantage of the renewable energy resources in and around the building, make the annual renewable energy capacity greater than or equal to the total energy consumption of the building throughout the year, which is the main research and development direction of the field of architecture [7, 8].

People spend between 85% and 90% of their time indoors on average [9, 10], whether indoor comfort is good or not will affect the physical and mental health of residents. With the progress of living quality, people's requirements for indoor thermal comfort are also gradually increasing. The research on the indoor comfort of buildings has been widely concerned by scholars [11, 12].

Some studies have investigated the indoor thermal environment and air conditioning supplementary heating behavior of the user's residence in winter, the temperature distribution in different areas of the residence is analyzed and the corresponding heating system optimization scheme is proposed [13]. A team conducted a practical test on the indoor thermal environment of a traditional house in a rural area, evaluated and analyzed the test results combined with the PMV-PPD human comfort index, and proposed improvement method according to the evaluation results [14]. Some utilized a questionnaire survey, a field test, and a simulation, the studies summed up the problems with the indoor light environment, heat and humidity environment, and air quality of a university classroom in Xi'an, as well as the rules regarding the way such conditions change over time and space. They also suggested methods to address the problems based on the outdoor climate of the area [15]. Some used AIRPARK software to simulate and analyze a postgraduate studio in Jinan City, and the distribution of indoor temperature and humidity is obtained. The results could provide theoretical methods and comparative analyses for the indoor comfort of similar office buildings [16]. A team used DESIGN BUILDER software to analyze the residential thermal environment, and the results indicated that a simple outer envelope structure and a single material were the main reasons for natural ventilation buildings poor indoor thermal environment. The author added thermal insulation materials to the envelope structure and hollow glass windows, along with other optimization strategies. The overall thermal environment rating of the residence was improved by 4.7% after optimization. [17]. Some studies have analyzed the annual changes of residential indoor thermal environment and the corresponding influencing factors, and combining with computer simulation of the changes of indoor thermal comfort under three optimal working conditions, an optimal solution is finally determined [18]. Researchers developed thermal energy storage cement mortar (TESCM) and explored the thermophysical properties, microstructure, and spectral properties of CS-ECPCM. The test results showed that the phase transition temperature and latent heat of CS-ECPCM were 23.67 °C and 24.43 J/g, respectively, and the structure of the calcium carbonate encapsulated TESCM was enhanced, which led to the compressive strength of TESCM to be decreases, in addition, its thermal conductivity decreases with the increase of CS-ECPCM dosage, which leads to the effective improvement of its thermal insulation performance [19].

At present, scholars mainly focus on the internal comfort of ordinary building rooms and the corresponding improvement measures, while zero-energy buildings are defined as buildings with renewable energy greater than or equal to their own energy consumption, so their key technologies are how to save energy or maximize production capacity, but there is a lack of relevant research on the distribution of indoor temperature and humidity.

This paper takes the office building with zero energy consumption as the research object, hereinafter referred to as Zhongjian Building, and the parameters of indoor hygrograph and wind speed in heating season were tested experimentally. The CFD software was used to emulate and investigate the thermal environment inside the room under different insulation thicknesses and window-wall ratios, and the room interior comfort was evaluated with PMV-PPD evaluation index. The influence of insulation layer thickness and window-wall ratio on the room interior thermal environment of buildings was studied. This study can provide reference for the design of zero-energy building envelope structure in different areas, and has a positive effect on the application and advancement of zero-energy buildings.

Research methods

In this study, experiment and numerical simulation are used to analyze the distribution of temperature, humidity and wind speed in zero-energy architectures under different external wall insulation thicknesses as well as different window-wall ratios. The route of the paper is shown in fig. 1.



Figure 1. Research content and ideas

Introduction of research objects

Zhongjian Building is located in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, with a construction area of 2270.01 m^2 , four floors above ground, body shape coefficient of 0.31, east window wall area ratio of 0.05, west window wall area ratio of 0.04, north window wall area ratio of 0.34, and south window wall area ratio of 0.24. The building fully considers the local climate conditions and natural resources, the use of efficient lighting, efficient energy-saving evaporative chiller, plate heat exchanger energy-saving measures, low temperature air source heat pump energy-saving measures, mechanical ventilation heat recovery, tunnel air precooling and other active technologies, among which the envelope structure is made of air tightness envelope materials with high thermal insulation performance [20].

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Indoor thermal environment experimental test

Geographical location and meteorological conditions are the main factors affecting the thermal environment of buildings [21, 22]. The hourly meteorological parameters of Lanzhou from December 10 to March 31 are shown in figs. 2 and 3.

The winter in Lanzhou is long and cold, it has a large diurnal temperature difference. The mean temperature of the whole heating season is about -1 °C, the mean wind speed is 2 m/s, and the mean relative humidity is 52%. The lowest temperature reached -16.8 °C at 7 am on January 11, when the wind speed was 1 m/s and the relative humidity was 80%.



Figure 2. Hourly solar radiation and temperature



Figure 3. Outdoor hourly wind speed and relative humidity

Study of envelope effects on indoor comfort in extreme weather conditions more extensive. For example, the indoor thermal environment distribution of buildings under extreme weather conditions in heating season has been studied [23, 24]. The minimum temperature of -16.8 °C and the corresponding wind speed and relative humidity at that time were input into the AIRPARK software as boundary conditions, and other boundary conditions were set accordingly to study and analyze the indoor temperature, humidity and wind speed distribution of the zero-energy building.

There are many rooms in Zhongjian Building, some of which are non-office rooms, and the building faces south, so the northwest corner office of each floor on floors 1-3 is selected for data collection in this test. During the test, the side door on the first floor of the office

building was opened, but the main door of the hall and all other doors and windows in the building were closed. There were no disturbance in any other rooms except the test room, which had four people, the tunnel air and fresh air heat recovery system were opened.

Temperature and humidity data were collected for 111 consecutive days from December 10 to March 31, and the data was recorded every hour. The measuring points were evenly arranged in the middle of each room at a height of 1.7 m. The main experimental instruments used during the test are shown in tab. 1.

Table 1. Testing instrument

Name	Producer	Accuracy	Туре
Temperature and humidity recorder	The Big Dipper	±0.1 °C ±3% RH	NB-IoT wireless temperature and humidity

Based on the test data in figs. 4 and 5, the average temperature of rooms 101, 201, and 301 is 21.64 °C, 23.06 °C, and 21.94 °C, respectively, and the average humidity is 36.55%, 31.32%, and 34.28%, respectively. In the heating season, more than 2/3 of them meet the requirements of indoor thermal environment standards [25].



Figure 4. Indoor hourly temperature by measuring



Figure 5. Indoor hourly relative humidity by measuring

Physical model establishment

It is not realistic to analyze indoor thermal environment under different working conditions by experimental method [26, 27], by changing the parameters of the envelope structure in a software, the influence of the envelope structure on intra-room thermal environment can be emulated and analyzed. In this paper, the Northwest corner office on the 2nd floor is selected and the physical modeling is carried out in AIRPARK software.

The room is equipped with four computers, four desks and four staff, the staff are in a sitting state, the air outlet is set at the top of the east wall and the ceiling near the window side position, in addition, a 35 °C heat source is set on the floor instead of the air source heat pump in the room, the south window wall ratio is 0.24, the door is set in the north wall.

The 4 mm SLATE glass fiber reinforced polyester tire + 3 mm PE glass fiber tire + 150 mm extruded polystyrene board + 200 mm reinforced concrete roof board are used for roof construction, and the south wall (exterior wall) adopts 15 mm finishing paint + 5 mm plastering paste + 150 mm rock wool insulation layer + 10 mm cement mortar + 15 mm finishing mortar + 200 mm base wall. The east, west and north walls (interior walls) are made of 15 mm finishing paint + 5 mm plastering mortar + 50 mm rockwool insulation layer + 10 mm cement mortar + 15 mm finishing mortar + 200 mm base wall. As shown in tab. 2. The composition of wall materials is shown in fig. 6.



Figure 6. Wall structure

Name	Size and construction	Boundary condition	Operating parameter
Typical room	$7.75~m\times 6.95~m\times 3.97~m$	_	_
Door	1.5 m × 2.4 m	_	Heat transfer coefficient 0.9 W/m ² K
Window	1.8 m × 2 m	Constant heat transfer coefficient	Heat transfer coefficient 0.8 W/m ² K
Air supply outlet	$0.5 \text{ m} \times 0.2 \text{ m}$	Velocity inlet, 1m/s	_
Return air opening	$0.5 \text{ m} \times 0.2 \text{ m}$	Free export	_
Personnel (4)	$0.4 \text{ m} \times 0.3 \text{ m} \times 1.75 \text{ m}$	75 W	_
Computer (4)	$0.4~m\times0.3~m\times0.3~m$	150 W	_
Desk (4)	$1.5 \text{ m} \times 0.5 \text{ m} \times 1 \text{ m}$	Adiabatic	_

Table 2. Basic parameter settings

Mathematical model

The zero equation model refers to the turbulent viscosity as a function of local mean velocity and length scale [28, 29]. Compared with k- ε turbulence model, it is more converging and accurate in dealing with indoor problems, and has a high agreement with experimental results. The AIRPARK software is also based on the zero equation model, and adopts the finite

volume method to obtain the distribution of temperature, humidity, velocity and pressure at various positions in the flow field through the continuity equation, energy conservation equation and momentum conservation equation of fluid flow [30, 31]. The outer insulation layer of the room is made of polystyrene board material. In addition, since the temperature in the area where the research object is located is the lowest on January 11, 2022, reaching -16.8 °C, at which time the wind speed is 1 m/s, and the relative humidity is 80%, the boundary conditions of the CFD simulation are also set in this way. Also, the following assumptions need to be made in the simulation calculations.

- The flow of indoor air is steady flow.
- The radiative heat transfer between the envelope and indoor objects is neglected.
- Ignoring the effects of cold air infiltration through doors and windows.
- The physical parameters of the fluid and the interior structure keep constant.

In order to simplify the simulation calculation, it is assumed that the air inside the building room is an incompressible fluid [32, 33]. Based on the aforementioned assumptions, the air flow in the building room follows the governing equations [34, 35].

– Continuity equation:

$$\frac{\partial \rho U_i}{\partial X_i} \tag{1}$$

where U_i is the mean velocity component in the X_i -direction and p denotes the air density.

– Momentum equation:

$$\frac{\partial \rho U_i}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial \rho U_i U_j}{\partial X_i} = -\frac{\partial P}{\partial X_i} + \frac{\partial}{\partial X_j} \left[\mu \left(\frac{\partial U_i}{\partial X_j} + \frac{\partial U_j}{\partial X_i} \right) - \rho U_i U_j \right]$$
(2)

where U_j represents the average velocity component in the X_j -direction, and respectively represent the pulsation velocity component, P stands for air pressure, and μ expressed dynamic viscosity.

– Energy equation:

$$\frac{\partial \rho H}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial (\rho \mu_j H)}{\partial X_j} = \frac{\partial}{\partial X_j} \left(\frac{k}{c_p} \frac{\partial T}{\partial X_j} - \rho \mu_j H' \right)$$
(3)

where H and H' represent static enthalpy and pulsating static enthalpy and c_p represents the specific heat capacity at constant pressure.

Model verification

In order to explore the optimal grid size and reserves of the model, the grid division of the model was adjusted and simulated for many times. The data of five kinds of grid quantities with the maximum grid size of 50 mm, 60 mm, 70 mm, 90 mm, and 120 mm at the same position were compared, and the corresponding grid numbers were shown in tab. 3. The temperature data of points 1 and 2 were selected to verify the grid independence of the simulation, where points 1 and 2 were the measurement points with the height of 0.5 m and 1.7 m in the center of the room, respectively.

Maximum mesh size [mm]	Grid number	Temperature at point 1 [°C]	Temperature at point 2 [°C]
120	480863	29.95	28.5
90	827869	29.32	28.12
70	1425861	29.04	28.03
60	2003620	29.03	28.01
50	3152465	29.03	28.01

Table 3. Temperature comparison of maximum mesh size and mesh number

As can be seen from fig. 7, when the maximum mesh size is reduced to 70 mm and the number of grids is 142 w, the temperature data will not be reduced, so the mesh size of 70 mm is used for subsequent simulation.

After the grid independence was verified, the accuracy of the physical model was verified. Four measurement points, A, B, C, and D, were selected horizontally at a height of 1.7 m in the room, and the experimental and simulated values of temperature and humidity at these points were compared one by one, as shown in tab. 4.



Figure 7. Grid independence verification

Doint	Temperature [°C]		Relative humidity [%]		
Folin	Experimental	Analogue	Experimental	Analogue	
А	23.06	24.26	32.32	32.86	
В	23.15	23.41	31.12	32.32	
С	24.21	25.12	30.85	31.23	
D	23.22	24.12	31.26	32.21	

Table 4. Comparison of tested and simulated values

As can be seen from tab. 4, the four measurement points temperature simulation value and the measured value of the largest error value at point A, the error value of 4.9%, the smallest error of 1.1% at point B. The maximum error value of relative humidity is 3.7%, the simulation value of the above measurement points and the measured value of the error is within 5%, within the error allowable range. Therefore, the established physical model has good reliability and can be used for further investigation.



Figure 8. Vector cloud map of temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed; (a) Z = 0.6 m, temperature cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, temperature cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, relative humidity cloud map, (d) Z = 1.7 m, relative humidity cloud map, (e) Z = 0.6 m, velocity vector cloud map, and (f) Z = 1.7 m, velocity vector cloud map

Simulation results

The thickness of insulation layer and the ratio of window to wall are two main reasons affecting the room interior thermal environment [36, 37]. The intra-room thermal environment under the thickness of 150 mm, 140 mm, and 130 mm external wall insulation layer and the southward window to wall ratio of 0.36 and 0.5 under the condition of 150 mm were simulated and analyzed respectively. Since most of the time, indoor staff conduct office activities in sitting position, the perceived temperature zone above the head of the indoor staff is about 1.7 m above the ground, and the thermal comfort zone of the legs is about 0.6 m above the ground [38, 39].

First option

The first envelope scheme is the simulation of indoor thermal comfort when the thickness of the insulation layer is 150 mm and the south-facing window-to-wall ratio is 0.24, as in fig. 8.

As can be seen from fig. 8, when people are sitting, because there is floor heating in the room (instead of air source heat pump), the indoor temperature is generally about 23.2 °C while the wind speed at this time is about 0.05 m/s-0.1 m/s, and the wind speed at the location of computers and personnel is slightly larger than that in other areas. When Z = 1.7 m, the average indoor temperature is about 22.5 °C, the temperature is more comfortable, the wind speed is larger than that when Z = 0.6 m, the relative humidity of air in Z = 0.6 m and Z = 1.7 m is about 32%, and the south wall (with windows) is in direct contact with the external environment, the temperature at both heights is low.

The PMV-PPD comfort index is an index proposed by Professor Fanger in Denmark to characterize human thermal response, while the percentage of dissatisfaction predicted by PPD is to make up for the incompleteness of PMV index value. When PMV value is between -1 and 1, human comfort is good when PPD is within 20% [40, 41]. From fig. 9, it can be observed that the PMV values at two heights of 0.6 m and 1.7 m are -0.8 and 0.3, respectively, and the PPD values are less than 20%, it can be seen that the indoor comfort of the building under this condition meets the human thermal comfort requirement.



Figure 9. The PMV-PPD index cloud map; (a) Z = 0.6 m, PMV cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, PMV cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, PPD cloud map, and (d) Z = 1.7 m, PPD cloud map

Second option

The second envelope scheme is the simulation of indoor thermal comfort when the thickness of the insulation layer is 140 mm and the south-facing window-to-wall ratio is 0.24, as in fig. 10.

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Figure 10. Vector cloud map of temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed; (a) Z = 0.6 m, temperature cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, temperature cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, relative humidity cloud map, (d) Z = 1.7 m relative humidity cloud map, (e) Z = 0.6 m velocity vector cloud map, and (f) Z = 1.7 m, velocity vector cloud map

As can be seen from fig. 10, after the thickness of the external wall insulation layer is reduced by 10 mm, the indoor temperature at the height of 0.6 m is reduced from 23.2 °C to about 22.3 °C, and the room internal temperature at an altitude of 1.7 m is reduced from 22.5 °C to about 21.6 °C, both of which decrease by about 1 °C. The relative humidity changes from 32% to 35%, and the changes can be ignored.

As can be seen from fig. 11, from the PMV-PPD index distribution at the two heights, it can be seen that after the thickness of the insulation layer is reduced from 150 mm to 140 mm, except for the position near the wall and the window, the degree of human dissatisfaction in the remaining space is still less than 20%, and the human comfort level has little change.



Figure 11. The PMV-PPD index cloud map; (a) Z = 0.6 m, PMV cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, PMV cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, PPD cloud map, and (d) Z = 1.7 m PPD cloud map

Third option

The third envelope scheme is the simulation of indoor thermal comfort when the thickness of the insulation layer is 130 mm and the south-facing window-to-wall ratio is 0.24, as shown in fig. 12.

As can be seen from fig. 12, after the thickness of external wall insulation layer is reduced from 140 mm to 130 mm, the room internal temperature is reduced to about 18.5 °C compared with 140 mm and 150 mm insulation layer thickness, the temperature is reduced by 3 °C and 5 °C, respectively. At a height of 1.7 m, the relative humidity increased by 4% and 7%, and the wind speed increased by 0.06 m/s and 0.08 m/s, respectively.

Based on fig. 13, the PMV-PPD index cloud map, as the thickness of the insulation layer on the external wall decreases, correspondingly decreases the level of human comfort. This means that the level of human dissatisfaction rises, but it is still within the acceptable range for the human body. This means that the PMV value is between -1 and 1, and the index value is below 20%. However, the range of human comfort is noticeably lower compared with the previous two kinds of insulation layer thickness.

Fourth option

As can be seen from fig. 14, the fourth envelope scheme is the simulation of indoor thermal comfort when the thickness of the insulation layer is 150 mm and the south-facing window-to-wall ratio is 0.36, as in fig. 14.

As can be seen from fig. 15, when the window wall ratio increased from 0.24 to 0.36, the indoor temperature increased by about 2 °C, and the relative humidity decreased from 32% to about 30%. According to the PMV-PPD index value, human comfort is slightly improved.

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Figure 12. Vector cloud map of temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed; (a) Z = 0.6 m, temperature cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, temperature cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, relative humidity cloud map, (d) Z = 1.7 m relative humidity cloud map, (e) Z = 0.6 m, velocity vector cloud map, and (f) Z = 1.7 m velocity vector cloud map

Fifth option

As can be seen from fig. 16, the fifth envelope scheme is the simulation of indoor thermal comfort when the thickness of the insulation layer is 150 mm and the south-facing window-to-wall ratio is 0.5, as in fig. 16.

When the window-wall ratio is increased to 0.5, the temperature is observed to be slightly higher than previous two window-wall ratio conditions for the heights of 0.6 m and 1.7 m.

According to the change of PMV-PPD index values shown in fig. 17, indoor comfort increases when the window-wall ratio is increased to 0.5. The reason maybe that an increase in the window-wall ratio of the south wall can increase the amount of solar radiation, which makes indoor sunlight more abundant, and thus the indoor comfort is effectively improved in winter.



Figure 13. The PMV-PPD index cloud map; (a) Z = 0.6 m, PMV cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, PMV cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, PPD cloud map, and (d) Z = 1.7 m, PPD figure loud map



Figure 14. Vector cloud map of temperature, relative humidity and wind speed; (a) Z = 0.6 m, temperature cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, temperature cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, relative humidity cloud map, (d) Z = 1.7 m relative humidity cloud map, (e) Z = 0.6 m, velocity vector cloud map, and (f) Z = 1.7 m velocity vector cloud map



Figure 15. The PMV-PPD index cloud map; (a) Z = 0.6 m, PMV cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, PMV cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, PPD cloud map, and (d) Z = 1.7 m, PPD cloud map



Figure 16. Vector cloud map of temperature, relative humidity and wind speed; (a) Z = 0.6 m, temperature cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, temperature cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, relative humidity cloud map, (d) Z = 1.7 m, relative humidity cloud map, (e) Z = 0.6 m, velocity vector cloud map, and (f) Z = 1.7 m, velocity vector cloud map



Figure 17. The PMV-PPD index cloud map; (a) Z = 0.6 m, PMV cloud map, (b) Z = 1.7 m, PMV cloud map, (c) Z = 0.6 m, PPD cloud map, and (d) Z = 1.7 m PPD cloud map

Conclusions

In this paper, a test and numerical simulation approach are proposed to study the influence of external wall insulation layer thickness and the window-wall ratio on the indoor thermal environment of zero-energy buildings in Northwest China. The following are the main conclusions.

- In general, increasing the thickness of the insulation layer can improve indoor comfort. Nevertheless, it is discovered that changing the thickness of the insulation layer by 10 mm has very little influence on intra-room thermal environment index value and comfort. Therefore, a waste of economic cost/resources may be caused when the thickness of the external wall insulation layer is blindly increased. For better develop zero-energy buildings, the insulating material and its thickness should be appropriately selected according to the geographical environment and natural resources of the location.
- It is demonstrated that the window-wall ratio is one of the main influential factors that affecting the indoor thermal environment. Similarly, the window-wall ratio of the building should be rationally selected considering the geographical environment and climatic conditions of the area in order to avoid resources waste and high economic cost.

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Nomenclature

H – static enthalpies, [J] H' – pulsatile static enthalpies, [J] k – turbulent kinetic energy of a fluid, [J] P – air pressure, [Pa] $MV_{L}PD$ – human thermal comfort evaluation	t – time, [seconds] U_i – average velocity component in the X_i -direction U_j – average velocity component in the X_j -direction <i>Greek symbols</i>		
indicators	μ – dynamic viscosity, [Pa·s]		
T – temperature, [°C]	ρ – air density, [kgm ⁻³]		

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