

Effects of fluvial sedimentary heterogeneity on CO₂ geological storage: Integrating storage capacity, injectivity, distribution and CO₂ phases

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This is a postprint version of this article:

Sun, X., Cao, Y., Liu, K., Alcalde, J., Cabello, P., Travé, A., Yuan, G., Cruset, D., and Gomez-Rivas, E. 2023. Effects of fluvial sedimentary heterogeneity on CO₂ geological storage: integrating storage capacity, injectivity, distribution and CO₂ phases. *Journal of Hydrology*, 617(A), 128936. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2022.128936>

The published copy-edited version can be found at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022169422015062>

Abstract: Fluvial system deposits often form suitable reservoirs for CO₂ geological storage (CGS). These potential storage sites usually present heterogeneous fluvial architectures at multiple scales. This heterogeneity can exert varied effects on different aspects of CGS, resulting in significant storage efficiency variability. Here, we investigate the effects of variable fluvial lithofacies associations on CO₂ storage, using the Puig-reig anticline in the SE Pyrenees (Spain) as a reservoir analog. To test this, we employ a multidisciplinary approach that integrates field sedimentology, reservoir modeling, and numerical simulation of CO₂ injection to produce models akin to different fluvial lithofacies associations. The storage volume and injectivity of CO₂ are found to decrease in reservoirs with decreasing fractions and sizes of high-permeable facies from the proximal to the medial-distal lithofacies associations. The flow barriers created by low-permeable facies can hinder the vertical migration of the CO₂ plume and prevent it from reaching the reservoir top, hence reducing the direct contact between the CO₂ plume and the overlying caprock. Furthermore, an

optimal amount of low-permeable layers (around 30% in this study) can increase the swept area of CO₂ and reduce the proportions of free CO₂ phase. These aspects can collectively increase the amount of permanently trapped CO₂ and reduce the leakage risks of the injected CO₂. Based on the characteristics of the resulting models (i.e., storage volume, injectivity, distribution and phases of CO₂), a multi-criteria decision-making method has been used to quantitatively rank the different lithofacies associations according to their suitability for CO₂ storage. In this analysis, the proximal-medial fluvial lithofacies associations are assessed to be the most suitable ones because they feature low proportions of the injected CO₂ reaching the reservoir top and in free phase while maintaining the high storage volume and injectivity. This study reveals that heterogeneous reservoir architectures appear to have mixed effects on CO₂ storage, and reservoirs featuring moderately heterogeneous architectures (appropriate fractions of low-permeable facies ranging from 30% to 40%) are beneficial to keeping the balance among different aspects of CO₂ storage. This provides new insights for the screening and selection of potential geological sites for CO₂ storage.

Keywords: CO₂ geological storage, trapping mechanism, reservoir heterogeneity, fluvial lithofacies association.

1. Introduction

To date, 194 parties have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) to the Paris Agreement to describe their strategies for climate change mitigation (UNFCCC, 2022). Among these, more than forty countries mention carbon capture and storage (CCS) explicitly in their national climate change mitigation pathways (Sun et al., 2021a). Although CCS has been widely considered an important technology for greenhouse gas reduction (Alcalde et al., 2018; Bui et al., 2018; IPCC, 2018), particularly to decarbonize industrial emissions, there is a huge gap between the current global CCS deployment and that which will be ultimately required to achieve the global mitigation targets (Global CCS Institute, 2018; Sun et al., 2020). CCS deployment has stalled in most countries due to various barriers (Scott et al., 2013), such as a high development cost perception, lack of market mechanisms and incentives, potential safety and environmental issues (Leung et al., 2014; Budinis et al., 2018; Alcalde et al., 2019; Tsvetkov et al., 2019), and low public acceptance (Seigo et al., 2014; Witte, 2021). Ensuring the safety and efficiency of the CO₂ geological storage (CGS) operations is essential to make CCS commercially and environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable.

Once the captured CO₂ is injected into a geological reservoir, different trapping mechanisms (i.e., structural, residual, dissolution and mineralization trapping) act on it at different rates to keep the CO₂ trapped in the subsurface (Bachu et al., 2007; Shukla et al., 2010; De Silva and Ranjith, 2012). Structural trapping dominates the early storage stage (first decades), and depends on the caprock integrity to resist the injection

pressure during the injection stage and the buoyancy pressure in the early post-injection period (Shukla et al., 2010; Espinoza and Santamarina, 2017; Iglauer, 2018). The other trapping mechanisms do not rely on caprock efficiency, but on the physical-chemical interactions between fluids and/or rocks. These mechanisms are controlled by various factors, including temperature, pressure, fluid and rock compositions, wettability, and pore structure, among others (Riaz and Cinar, 2014; Raza et al., 2015; Romanov et al., 2015). Mineralization trapping is considered the safest mechanism, but its action is limited in most candidate reservoirs even after thousands of years, except in reservoirs with sufficient divalent cation-bearing minerals and rapid dissolution rates of these minerals (Zhang et al., 2013; Zhang and DePaolo, 2017). Under these circumstances, capillary trapping and dissolution trapping mechanisms play a critical role in ensuring storage security in the short-medium term (tens to hundreds of years).

Apart from engineering factors, such as the combination of injected fluids, injection rate, and well configuration (Raza et al., 2015; Al-Khdheawi et al., 2017a, 2018; Ren and Jeong, 2018), the geological characteristics of the reservoir determine CO₂ trapping efficiency. For instance, heterogeneous fluvial architectures (lithofacies and their associations) not only control the CO₂ storage capacity and injectivity (Ambrose et al., 2008; Issautier et al., 2014, 2016) but also the spatial distribution and fractions of different CO₂ phases (Gershenzon et al., 2015; Ershadnia et al., 2021, 2022). Previous studies suggest that most regions have sufficient geological storage capacity for CO₂ (Kearns et al., 2017; Ringrose and Meckel, 2019; Sun et al., 2020), indicating that it seems not to be a limiting factor for CGS deployment. However, having a high storage capacity is still a primary requirement in the selection of suitable sites. Sufficient storage capacity helps to guarantee that the selected storage site is economically viable by reducing the unit cost while more stored CO₂ shares similar capital costs, i.e., the economy of scale (Alcalde et al., 2019, 2021). The presence of low porosity and permeability deposits within the target reservoir (e.g., in the form of overbank deposits in fluvial systems) can reduce the storage capacity and thus the trapping efficiency. Furthermore, with the increasing fraction of these flow barriers, the overall reservoir (mainly channel deposits) quality and connectivity deteriorate. This results in decreasing reservoir injectivity, such as a lower injection rate at a given injection pressure or a higher injection pressure at a constant injection rate. Excessive injection pressure can potentially damage the well (Bai et al., 2016; Gholami et al., 2021) and rock integrity (Rutqvist et al., 2008; Li et al., 2022), thus resulting in leakage risk.

Heterogeneous deposits can also create asymmetric distributions of the injected CO₂ (Xu et al., 2020; Kou et al., 2021). The different lithofacies forming a heterogeneous reservoir may present varying capillary pressure values, which can locally produce areas of enhanced capillary trapping. These areas may develop larger gas saturation than the residual gas saturation (Saadatpoor et al., 2010; Krevor et al., 2011), and can prevent CO₂ migration towards the caprock. The larger this contrast in capillary pressure is, the larger the

proportion of local capillary trapping can be produced (Gershenzon et al., 2017c). However, local capillary trapping can partially fail to retain the CO₂ in the reservoir due to the accumulated buoyancy forces acting on the CO₂ plume, or completely fail due to rock fracturing. The influence of fluvial stratigraphic architectures on residual and dissolution trapping mechanisms has been extensively investigated (Gershenzon et al., 2015). For example, due to the heterogeneous relative permeability in different lithofacies, a small amount of residual trapping occurs during the injection stage, in addition to the large proportion existing in the post-injection period (Gershenzon et al., 2017b). Compared to relatively homogeneous reservoirs, dominated by the vertical migration of the CO₂ plume with limited lateral migration, the CO₂ plume in heterogeneous reservoirs can propagate farther in the horizontal direction due to the existence of low-permeable layers in the vertical direction. This can result in a larger contact area between the CO₂ plume and the pore-filling brine, leading to a larger ratio of dissolution trapping (Gershenzon et al., 2015, 2016). Larger contrast in permeability between different rock types can increase the volume of the CO₂ plume, increasing the efficiency of dissolution and residual trapping mechanisms (Gershenzon et al., 2017c). This prevents the CO₂ plume migration to caprocks or surfaces and thus reduces the risk of CO₂ leakage. However, reservoir heterogeneity can also produce other effects on the storage performance, such as a reduction in sweep efficiency of the CO₂ plume produced by low-permeable units (Yang et al., 2020). Although the reservoir heterogeneity enhances the lateral flow of the CO₂ plume, it also inhibits the vertical migration of CO₂. Thus, the effects of reservoir heterogeneity on CO₂ plume migration and CO₂ phases depend on the specific reservoir structure. An overall decreasing sweep efficiency of CO₂ plume caused by a high fraction of flow barriers can also reduce the efficiency of residual trapping (Han et al., 2010) and dissolution trapping (Al-Khdheawi et al., 2017b).

In summary, heterogeneous reservoir architectures exert significant but varied effects on different aspects of CO₂ storage. Compared to relatively homogeneous reservoirs, heterogeneous reservoir architectures generally feature lower storage capacity and injectivity for CO₂. However, under certain circumstances, the presence of low-permeable layers can hinder the vertical migration of the CO₂ plume and reduce the fraction of free CO₂ in the pores, which can reduce the risk of CO₂ leakage. It is still controversial whether heterogeneous reservoir architectures can enhance the overall efficiency of CO₂ storage. In this study, we use the Puig-reig anticline, in the SE Pyrenees (Spain), as a heterogeneous fluvial reservoir analog. Based on the previous field studies on outcrop sedimentology and reservoir characteristics (Cruset et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2021b, 2021c, 2022), we summarize the sedimentary and reservoir characteristics of typical lithofacies associations. Through systematic reservoir modeling and numerical simulating, this study aims to determine the overall effects of different fluvial lithofacies associations on the efficiency of CO₂ storage based on a comprehensive consideration of storage capacity, injectivity, distribution and phases of CO₂.

2. Sedimentology background

The Puig-reig anticline is located in the SE Pyrenean fold and thrust belt (Spain) (Fig. 1A), and developed along the footwall of the frontal Vallfogona thrust emplaced over the Ebro Foreland Basin (Fig. 1B) (Vergés, 1993). This anticline is a km-scale gentle anticline with a flat hinge. Its upper part is characterized by the Berga Group and the Solsona Formation deposited from alluvial-fluvial systems during the Late Eocene and the Oligocene (Williams et al., 1998; Barrier et al., 2010). This study focuses on the well-exposed and well-preserved outcrops of the Middle Berga Group and the Solsona Formation along several roads in the Puig-reig anticline (Fig. 1C, D). These sequences were interpreted as the result of sedimentation in a proximal to medial fluvial system, and present gradual changes of lithofacies associations from the foreland basin margin inwards (Sun et al., 2021b). The proximal fluvial lithofacies associations (LAp) represent sedimentary environments of unconfined flash floods and wide-shallow channel streams, and are characterized by major conglomerates and minor coarse-medium sandstones with limited fine deposits (Fig. 2A, B). The medial fluvial deposits represent sedimentary environments of channel streams and overbank areas, and include the proximal-medial fluvial lithofacies associations (LApm) and the medial-distal fluvial lithofacies associations (LAmD). The LApm is characterized by interbedded conglomerates, coarse-medium sandstones, and fine deposits (Fig. 2C, D). The LAmD consists of coarse-medium sandstones and more fine deposits (Fig. 2E, F). The distal fluvial deposits (LAd) are located southward of our study area, and are composed of terminal lobes or fluvial-dominated deltas and interdistributary bays (Sáez et al., 2007).

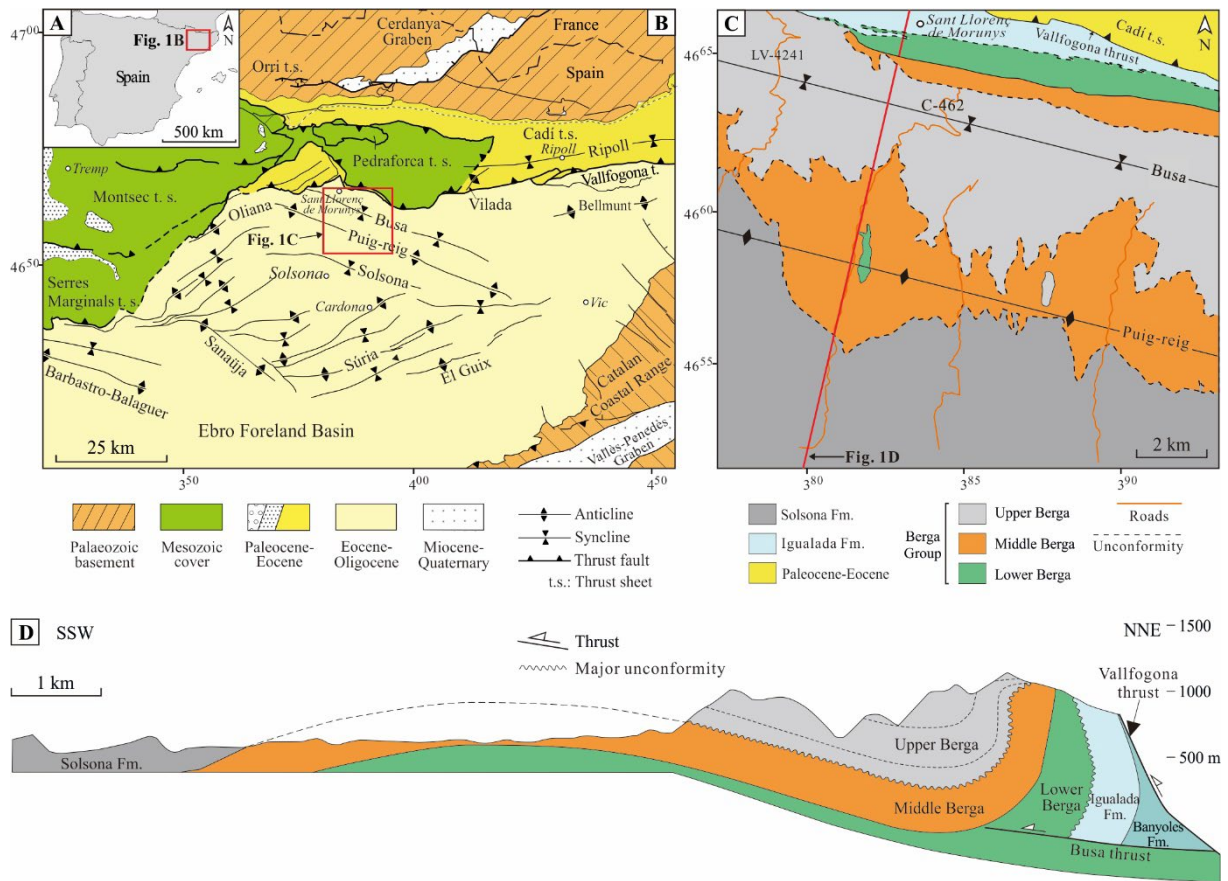


Fig. 1. (A-B) Geographical location and main structural units of the SE Pyrenean fold-and-thrust belt and the Ebro Foreland Basin (Vergés, 1993). (C-D) Distribution of the Berga Group and the Solsona Formation. Fig. 1D is modified from Williams et al. (1998) and Barrier et al. (2010).

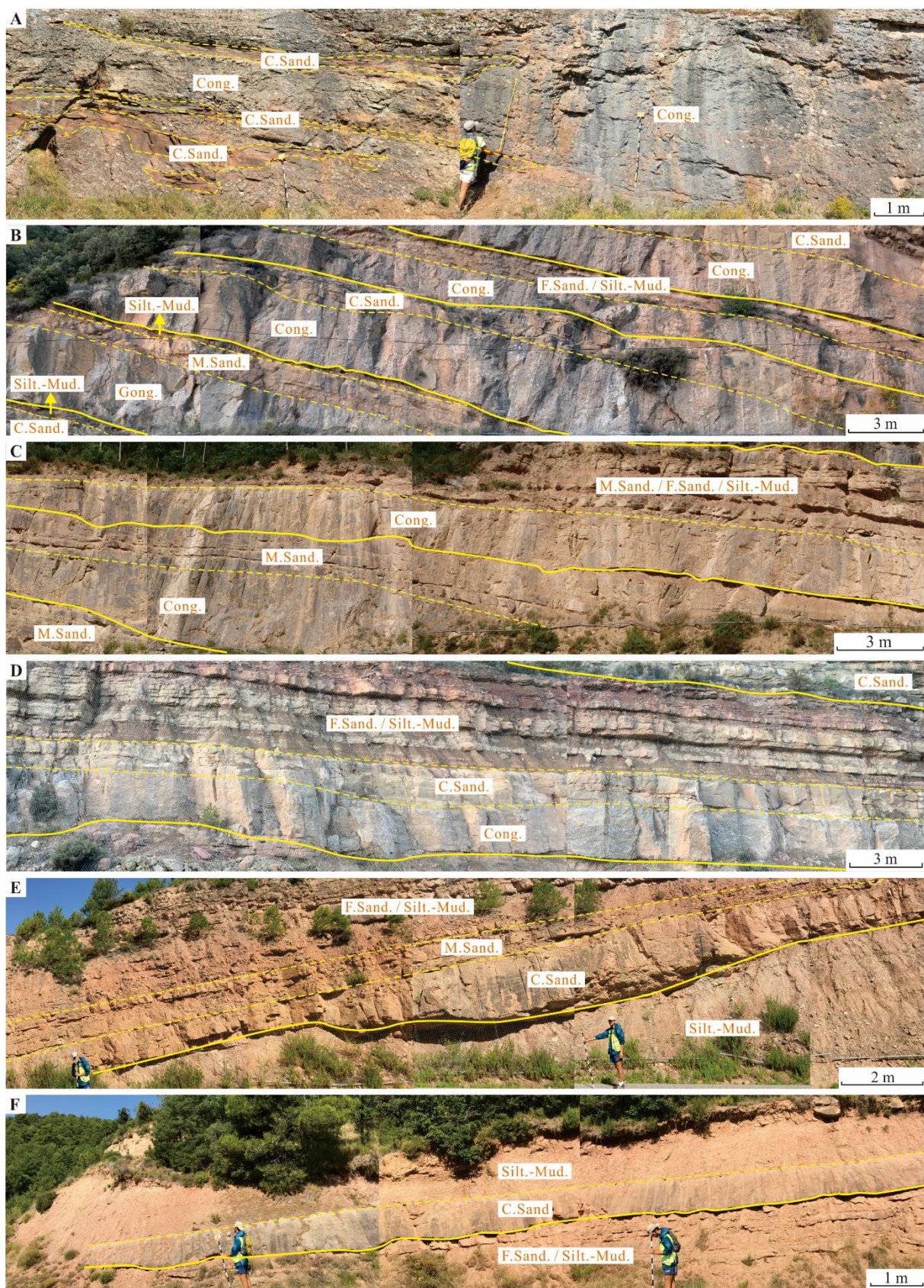


Fig. 2. Field photos of typical lithofacies associations in the Puig-reig anticline, modified from Sun et al. (2021b): (A-B) proximal fluvial lithofacies associations (LAp); (C-D) proximal-medial fluvial lithofacies associations

(LApm); (E-F) medial-distal fluvial lithofacies associations (LAmD) (Cong.: conglomerate; C.Sand.: coarse sandstone; M.Sand.: medium sandstone; F.Sand.: fine sandstone; Silt.: siltstone; Mud.: mudstone).

3. Methodology

3.1. Reservoir modeling

Reservoir models have been built using the Petrel E&P Software Platform (by Schlumberger). The three-dimensional model size is 5000 m×5000 m×50 m, with 125,000 cells with a size of 100 m×100 m×1 m each. For each lithofacies association, lithofacies have been grouped in the lower high-permeable facies of fluvial channel deposits and the upper low-permeable facies of overbank deposits. High-permeable facies consist of conglomerates and coarse-medium sandstones, and low-permeable facies consist of mudstones, siltstones, and fine sandstones. The fractions and thicknesses of high-permeable facies were measured from the studied outcrops. The LAp is generally characterized by a high fraction ($\geq 80\%$) and large thickness (≥ 8 m) of high-permeable facies. Compared to the LAp, the LApm features a lower fraction and smaller thickness of high-permeable facies. The LAmD is generally characterized by a relatively low fraction ($\leq 40\%$) and small thickness (≤ 4 m) of high-permeable facies. To represent the gradual changes of geometric characteristics from proximal to distal fluvial lithofacies associations, ideal model scenarios were designed with regularly decreasing fractions and thickness of high-permeable facies (Table 1). The width/thickness ratio of high-permeable facies was assigned as a constant value of 100 to represent general fluvial channels (Gibling, 2006). The channel tortuosity, defined as the ratio of the channel length to the direct axial length, was assigned gradually increasing values from 1.08 to 1.40 to represent the generally increasing channel tortuosity from proximal to distal fluvial systems (Friend and Sinha, 1993). In total, 11 model scenarios were designed, with model scenarios 1 to 3, 4 to 6, and 7 to 9 representing the LAp, LApm, and LAmD of the Puig-reig anticline, respectively, and scenarios 10 and 11 representing the LAd outside this anticline.

For each model scenario, a facies model was created using the object modeling algorithm based on the geometric characteristics of different facies. This method can create a stochastic facies model and present the representative geometric characteristics of reservoirs, especially fluvial channels. The fluvial channel object was used as the high-permeable facies using the aforementioned geometric parameters. Because all sediments have been grouped into two categories of facies, the low-permeable facies was set as the background object to fill the remaining model space between the fluvial channel objects. Abundant fractures, developed in these fluvial deposits in the Puig-reig anticline (Sun et al., 2021c), were not included in the subsequent petrophysical modeling because it is out of the scope of this study, focusing on the effects of different fluvial lithofacies associations on CO₂ storage. For each facies model, a porosity model was created using the Gaussian random function algorithm, because this method can create a facies-controlled porosity model

constrained by the geometric characteristics of the high-permeable and low-permeable facies. For all model scenarios, theoretical porosity ranges were set as 0.2 to 0.3 for high-permeable facies and 0.1 to 0.2 for low-permeable facies. These porosity ranges can represent relatively high-quality reservoirs, which are the prior targets for CGS at the present stage due to their larger storage capacity and higher injectivity than low-porosity reservoirs. Permeability (k) and irreducible water saturation (S_{wi}) were calculated using the empirical formulas proposed by Holtz (Holtz, 2002), which have been widely used and proved to be effective for CO₂ storage simulation in fluvial sequences by previous studies (Gershenson et al., 2015, 2016, 2017c; Ershadnia et al., 2021). Horizontal permeability was calculated from porosity (Φ) using the empirical formula (Holtz, 2002), while vertical permeability was calculated based on a ratio of vertical k to horizontal k of 0.2 to represent the permeability anisotropy in sedimentary rocks:

$$k=7\times 10^7\times\Phi^{9.61} \quad (1)$$

Based on the average porosity and permeability, the average S_{wi} was calculated using the empirical formula (Holtz, 2002) for high-permeable and low-permeable facies, respectively (Table 2):

$$S_{wi}=5.159\times\left(\frac{\log k}{\Phi}\right)^{-1.559} \quad (2)$$

The ratio (R) of the theoretical storage volume (V_r) to the total rock volume (V_t) of each model scenario was calculated using a volumetric method:

$$R=\frac{V_r}{V_t}=\Phi\times(1-S_{wi}) \quad (3)$$

Table 1 Key geometric parameters used for facies modeling.

Model scenarios	High-permeable facies: fluvial channels				Low-permeable facies: overbank deposits	
	Fraction (%)	Thickness (m)	Width (m)	Channel sinuosity	Fraction (%)	Geometric
LAp	1	100	/	/	/	0
	2	90	9	900	1.08	10
	3	80	8	800	1.12	20
LApm	4	70	7	700	1.16	30
	5	60	6	600	1.20	40
	6	50	5	500	1.24	50
	7	40	4	400	1.28	60
LAmd	8	30	3	300	1.32	70
	9	20	2	200	1.36	80
LAd	10	10	1	100	1.40	90
	11	0	/	/	/	100

Background facies

3.2. Numerical simulation of CO₂ storage

Reservoir simulations of 11 model scenarios were carried out using the Eclipse 300 numerical simulator (by Schlumberger) with the CO2STORE option. Eclipse 300 is fully compatible with Petrel, and it is a multi-

dimensional compositional simulator with a cubic equation of state, pressure-dependent permeability, or black oil fluid treatment (Class et al., 2009; Schlumberger, 2018). Its CO2STORE option can simulate different CGS processes and consider free, residual and dissolved CO₂ phases, which have been widely used in CO₂ injection simulation in previous studies (Gershenzon et al., 2015, 2016, 2017b; Abbaszadeh et al., 2020). These CO₂ phases represent the main CO₂ trapping mechanisms acting in the relatively short-medium period (injection stage to a few hundred years), and determine whether the injected CO₂ will remain within the reservoir for subsequent mineralization trapping in the longer term. Based on different model scenarios, reservoir simulations in this study aim to determine the overall effects of different lithofacies associations on the injectivity, distribution and CO₂ phases. The key parameters for reservoir simulations are summarized in Table 2. Considering the distinct physical properties of the high-permeable and low-permeable facies, different relative permeability curves and capillary pressure curves were used (Fig. 3). The facies-based curves were used rather than totally scaled cell-based curves, because the latter situation will significantly increase simulation time to be impractical for these large 3D models. Based on the average porosity of each facies, the maximum residual gas saturation (S_{gr-max}) was calculated using the empirical formula proposed by Holtz (Holtz, 2002), which has been widely used in previous studies on CO₂ storage (Gershenzon et al., 2015, 2016, 2017c; Ershadnia et al., 2021):

$$S_{gr-max} = -0.969 \times \Phi + 0.5473 \quad (4)$$

For relative permeability, the Brooks-Corey relation in the form proposed by Dullien (Dullien, 1992) was used to calculate the relative permeability curves:

$$K_{rw} = \left(\frac{S - S_{wi}}{1 - S_{wi}} \right)^{N_w} \quad (5)$$

$$K_{rg} = K_{rg}(S_{wi}) \left(1 - \frac{S - S_{wi}}{1 - S_{gr} - S_{wi}} \right)^2 \left(1 - \left(\frac{S - S_{wi}}{1 - S_{gr} - S_{wi}} \right)^{N_g} \right) \quad (6)$$

where S is the water saturation. N_w and N_g are the pore-size distribution index for water and CO₂, and were assigned values of 5 and 4, respectively, following Krevor et al. (Krevor et al., 2012). $K_{rg}(S_{wi})$ is the maximum gas relative permeability when S is equal to S_{wi} , and was assigned values of 0.95 and 0.65 for high-permeable and low-permeable facies, respectively, following Gershenzon et al. (Gershenzon et al., 2015). S_{gr} is the residual gas saturation, which was assigned as 0 for the drainage curve and as S_{gr-max} for the boundary imbibition curve (Fig. 3A). In Eclipse 300 simulation, Killough's hysteresis model was selected to calculate the history-dependent imbibition curve for non-wetting phase, i.e., the relative permeability hysteresis.

For capillary pressure, the Brooks-Corey relation was used to calculate the drainage curves (Brooks and Corey, 1966):

$$P_c = P_e \left(\frac{S - S_{wi}}{1 - S_{wi}} \right)^{-1/\lambda} \quad (7)$$

where P_e is the capillary entry pressure, and λ is the pore-size distribution index for the Brooks-Corey model.

For high-permeable facies, P_e and λ were assigned values of 0.046 bar and 0.55, respectively, following Krevor et al. (Krevor et al., 2012). For low-permeable, P_e was scaled based on the Leverett J-function as proposed by Saadatpoor et al. (Saadatpoor et al., 2010):

$$P_e^{nr} = P_e^r \left(\frac{k^{nr} \times \Phi^r}{k^r \times \Phi^{nr}} \right)^{-0.5} \quad (8)$$

where the superscripts of r and nr represent high-permeable and low-permeable facies, respectively. For imbibition process, a curve analog to drainage was used as the boundary imbibition curve, following Gershenzon et al. (2015). For each facies, the imbibition curve and the drainage curve cross the saturation axis at $S = I - S_{gr-max}$ and $S = I$, respectively, while their other segments are the same. (Fig. 3B).

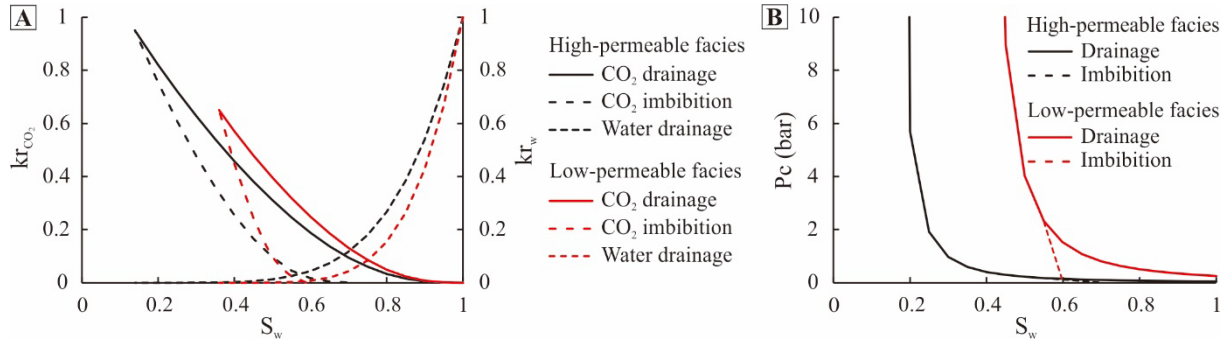


Fig. 3. (A) Relative permeability curves and (B) capillary pressure curves (versus water saturation) for drainage and boundary imbibition processes of high-permeable and low-permeable facies.

In the Eclipse 300 simulations, the water compressibility was assigned a value of $4.35 \times 10^{-5} \text{ bar}^{-1}$, following Gershenzon et al. (Gershenzon et al., 2017c). Three components are included in the simulations, i.e., H_2O , CO_2 and $NaCl$ with the initial mole fractions of 0.95, 0 and 0.05, respectively. The mutual solubility of H_2O and CO_2 was obtained based on fugacity equilibration between water and CO_2 , following the method proposed by Spycher and Pruess (Spycher and Pruess, 2005). The water diffusion coefficients for all components are 0.0001, and the gas diffusion coefficients for water and CO_2 are 0.001, following Gershenzon et al. (Gershenzon et al., 2017c). The initial reservoir temperature and the equilibrium pressure at a datum depth of 2,000 m are 80°C and 250 bar, respectively. For CO_2 injection, a vertical injection well is located in the model center (model cells: 25, 25, 0 to 25, 25, 50), and is open in the lower half (model cells: 25, 25, 26 to 25, 25, 50). The maximum injection rate of CO_2 is $5.48 \times 10^5 \text{ kg/day}$, and the default value of the maximum bottom hole pressure is 600 bar in the CO_2STORE option. The injection stage is ten years with the maximum total mass of injected CO_2 of two million tons (Mt), followed by the one-hundred-year post-injection period. For boundary conditions, the top and bottom boundaries and the peripheral sides were set as no-flow boundaries to represent a close system. However, the injected CO_2 has not crossed or even approached the peripheral boundaries. This indicates that the model domain is large enough that the peripheral boundary conditions do not significantly affect CO_2 migration.

Table 2 Key physical, geometric and injection parameters used for reservoir simulation.

Simulation parameters		High-permeable facies	Low-permeable facies
Variable parameters	Average porosity, Φ	0.25	0.15
	Average permeability, k (mD)	661.05	6.73
	Average irreducible water saturation, S_{wi}	0.139	0.360
	Maximum residual gas saturation, S_{gr-max}	0.305	0.402
	CO ₂ relative permeability at S_{wi} , $K_{rg}(S_{wi})$	0.95	0.65
	Entry pressure, P_e (bar)	0.046	0.255
Constant parameters	Pore size distribution index, λ	0.55	
	Water compressibility (bar ⁻¹)	4.35×10^{-5}	
	Initial component, H ₂ O/CO ₂ /NaCl	0.95/0/0.05	
	Aquifer depth (m)	2000	
	Aquifer temperature (°C)	80	
	Aquifer pressure (bar)	250	
	Injection fluid	CO ₂	
	Maximum injection rate (kg/day)	5.48×10^5	
	Maximum bottom hole pressure (bar)	600	
	Injection stage (years)	10	
	Post-injection period (years)	100	
	Model size (m ³)	5000×5000×50	
	Model discretization (m ³)	100×100×1	

3.3. Selection of optimal lithofacies associations for CO₂ storage

Multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) deals with finding results in complex scenarios including conflicting objectives and criteria (Kumar et al., 2017), which has been applied to different aspects of the CCS chain, such as barrier analysis (Sara et al., 2015) and site selection for CO₂ storage (Llamas and Cienfuegos, 2012; Alcalde et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2021a). In this study, the MCDM method called the Technique for Order of Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) was used to quantify the overall suitability of different lithofacies associations for CO₂ storage. Four aspects (six criteria) of CO₂ storage were included in this assessment, including ratio of theoretical storage volume, injectivity (average bottom hole pressure, total mass of injected CO₂), distribution (proportion of cells percolated by injected CO₂, proportion of injected CO₂ reaching the top model layer), and phases (proportion of free CO₂) of CO₂. An ideal lithofacies association should have a large storage volume, a low bottom hole pressure, a large mass of injected CO₂, a large proportion of percolated cells, a low proportion of CO₂ in the top model layer, and a low proportion of free CO₂. All parameters were normalized and weighted based on the following method:

$$Y_{ij} = \frac{X_{ij} \times W_j}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n X_{ij}^2}} \quad (9)$$

where Y is the normalized and weighted value, X is the actual value, W is the weighting of each criterion, and i and j are the number of model scenarios and criteria, respectively. In this study, an equal weighting scenario was applied when assessing the suitability of different lithofacies associations, i.e., 0.25 of weighting for storage capacity, injectivity, distribution and CO₂ phases, respectively. Certainly, the criteria can be unequally considered using different weightings based on practical conditions in different projects and studies. A pair of positive and negative ideal solutions were hypothesized based on the best and worst values for each criterion. Finally, the distances between each model scenario to the positive (d_+) and negative (d_-) ideal solutions were calculated, which were used to calculate the TOPSIS score (T_s) (Fig. 4 from Sun et al. (Sun et al., 2021a)):

$$T_s = \frac{d_-}{d_+ + d_-} \quad (10)$$

The model scenario with the minimum TOPSIS score will be selected as the optimal lithofacies association for CO₂ storage.

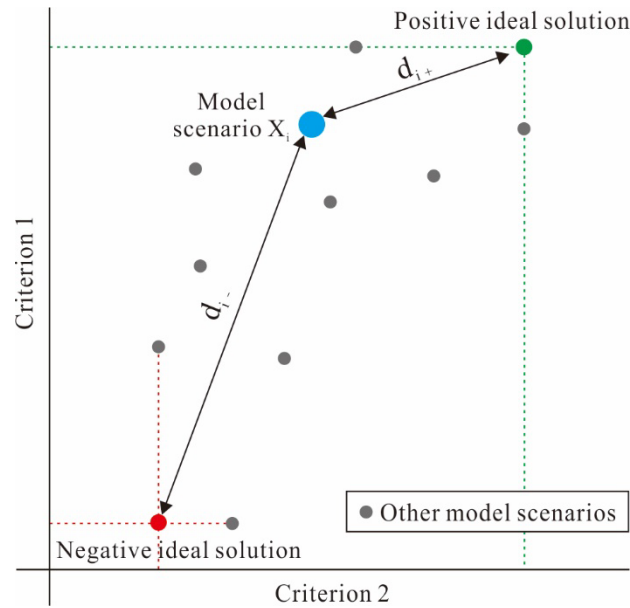


Fig. 4. Adapted scheme of the Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) method (Yoon and Hwang, 1995), from Sun et al. (2021a). Model scenarios are defined in a multidimensional space determined by their values in each criterion. The best and worst values of the models in each criterion determine the positive and negative ideal solutions, respectively. The distances to the positive (d_{i+}) and negative (d_{i-}) ideal solutions are combined into a TOPSIS score (T_s).

4. Results

4.1. Reservoir models and storage volume

From model scenarios 1 to 11, facies models present a decreasing fraction, thickness and width and

increasing tortuosity of high-permeable facies (fluvial channel deposits) and an increasing fraction and size of low-permeable facies (overbank deposits). As shown in Fig. 5A, model scenario 3 can represent the LAp in Fig. 2B, and is dominated by thick, wide and well-connected high-permeable facies ($\geq 80\%$), resulting in an overall high reservoir quality. In contrast, low-permeable facies present a low fraction ($\leq 20\%$), small size, and isolated distribution in this model (Fig. 5A). As shown in Fig. 5C, model scenario 7 can represent the LAmD in Fig. 2E, and consists of major low-permeable facies ($\geq 60\%$) and minor high-permeable facies ($\leq 40\%$) causing an overall low reservoir quality. High-permeable facies appear with relatively small size, and are compartmentalized by large low-permeable facies to a great extent (Fig. 5C). Model scenario 5 in Fig. 5B can represent the LApM in Fig. 2D, and shows a moderate fraction, size and connectivity of high-permeable facies between that of the LAp and the LAmD. With a decreasing fraction of high-permeable facies from model scenarios 1 to 11, the ratio of the theoretical storage volume to the total rock volume calculated by the volumetric method gradually reduces from 21.5% to 9.6% (Fig. 6A).

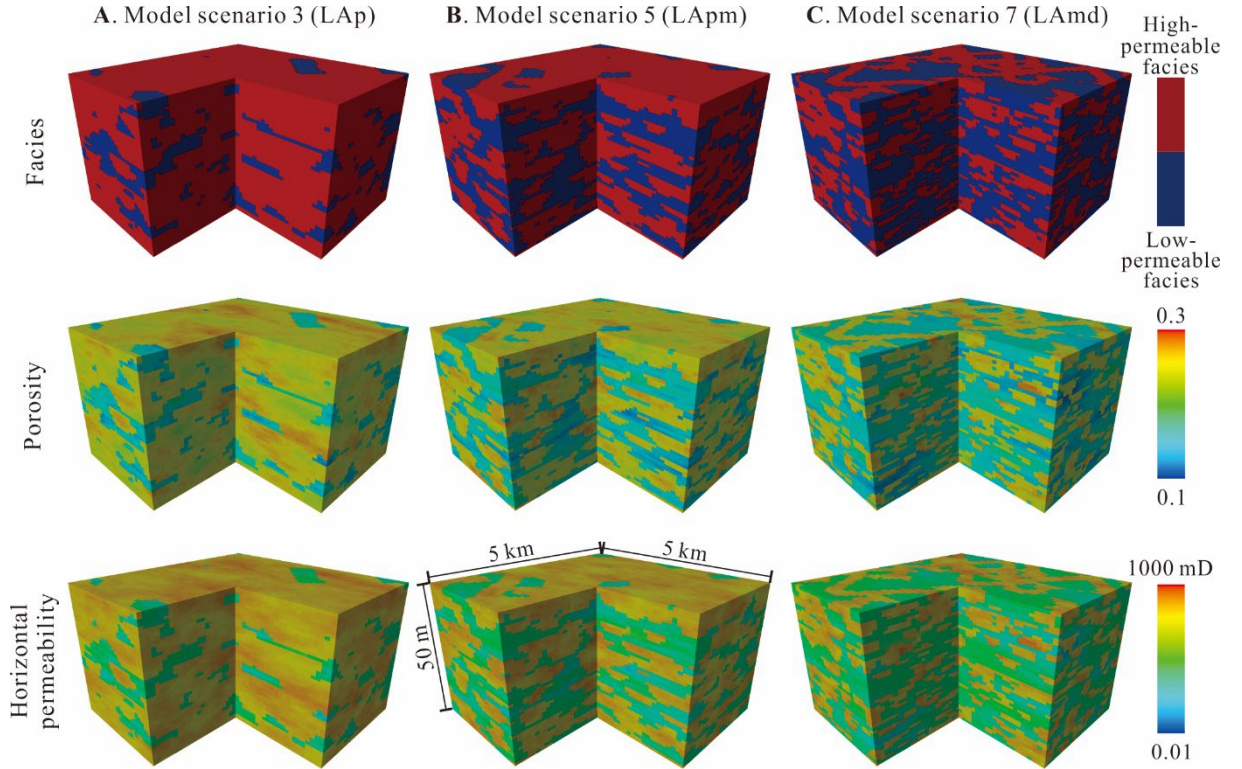


Fig. 5. Reservoir models of typical lithofacies associations: (A) model scenario 3 (high-permeable facies: 80%) – LAp in Fig. 2B; (B) model scenario 5 (high-permeable facies: 60%) – LApM in Fig. 2D; (C) model scenario 7 (high-permeable facies: 40%) – LAmD in Fig. 2E. High-permeable facies consists of fluvial channel deposits, and low-permeable facies consists of overbank deposits.

4.2. CO₂ injectivity

In this study, CO₂ injectivity is analyzed using two proxies, i.e., the bottom hole pressure (BHP) and the

total mass of injected CO₂ (Fig. 6B, C). CO₂ injectivity reduces with decreasing permeability, thickness and connectivity of reservoirs. BHP increases with decreasing injectivity, and determines the total mass of injected CO₂ when BHP reaches the upper limit during the injection stage (a default value of 600 bar in Eclipse). From model scenarios 1 to 11, the average BHP presents a gradual increment from 289 to 600 bar due to the declining reservoir quality and connectivity (Fig. 6B). For model scenarios 1 to 7, BHP remains lower than 350 bar, and the average BHP shows a slight increment. For model scenarios 8 and 9, BHP remains lower than 500 bar, but the average BHP increases significantly. In scenarios 1 to 9, CO₂ is injected at the maximum injection rate possible (5.48×10^5 kg of CO₂/day), resulting in the storage of the maximum CO₂ mass available (2 Mt; Fig. 6C). For model scenarios 10 and 11, BHP remains at the upper limit throughout the injection stage (Fig. 6B) due to the very low reservoir quality, causing a significant reduction of the total injected CO₂ to 0.7 Mt and 0.6 Mt, respectively (Fig. 6C). These results indicate that CO₂ injectivity gradually decreases from scenarios 1 to 11 but at a distinct rate.

4.3. CO₂ distribution

CO₂ distribution is analyzed here by studying two aspects of the simulation results: the proportion of cells percolated by the injected CO₂ and the proportion of injected CO₂ reaching the top model layer (Fig. 6D, E). The proportion of swept cells presents an increase from 2.8% to 3.9% in model scenarios 1 to 4, an overall slight reduction in scenarios 4 to 9, and a sharp reduction to 2.2% and 2.0% in scenarios 10 and 11 (Fig. 6D), due to lower mass of injected CO₂ input into the system (Fig. 6C). The proportion of CO₂ reaching the top model layer shows a significant decrease from 20.1% to 0.9% from model scenarios 1 to 4, and remains at low values in scenarios 4 to 9 (Fig. 6E). This proportion increases to 3.0% from scenarios 9 to 11.

As shown in the vertical cross sections and the top horizontal cross sections of CO₂ saturation at the end of the post-injection period, different lithofacies associations present distinct distribution patterns of the injected CO₂ (Fig. 7). For the LAP (Fig. 7A), the CO₂ plume is dominated by vertical migration with limited lateral migration due to the well-connected reservoirs in the vertical direction. Most CO₂ accumulates in the upper half of the model with much CO₂ reaching the top model layer. For the LAPm (Fig. 7B), CO₂ migration in the horizontal direction is larger than that of the LAP due to the vertical seepage barriers of low-permeable layers, resulting in a larger CO₂ plume. Most CO₂ maintains in the lower half model with a very small proportion of CO₂ migrating to the top model layer. Compared to the LAPm, the LAm features smaller CO₂ migration in the horizontal direction due to the smaller reservoir size and the weaker lateral connectivity. The LAm has a smaller CO₂ plume than that of the LAPm but a larger plume than that of the LAP (Fig. 7C). Furthermore, most CO₂ maintains in the lower half model, and very limited CO₂ migrates to the top model layer.

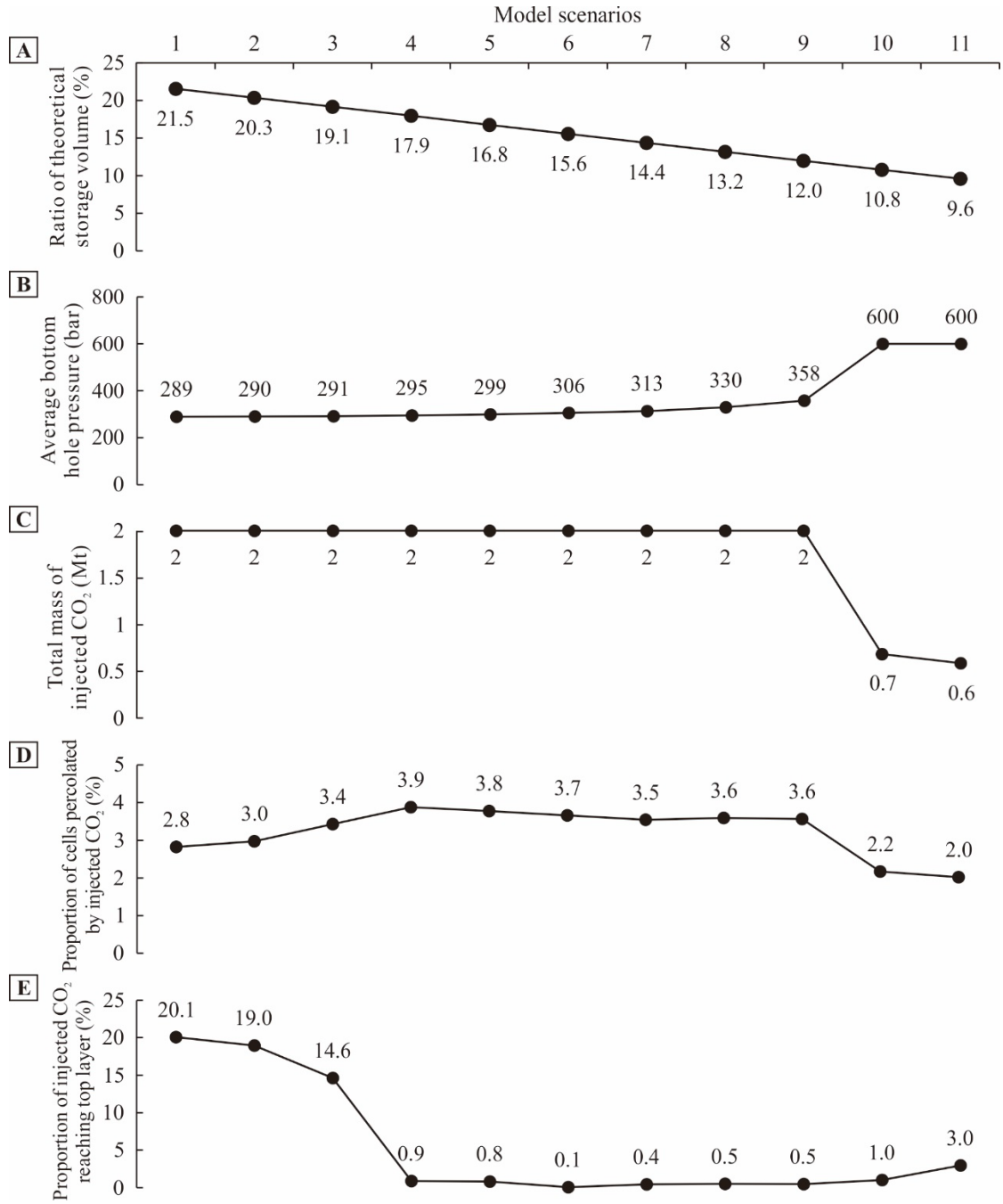


Fig. 6. Simulation results of 11 model scenarios: (A) ratio of theoretical storage volume; (B) average bottom hole pressure; (C) total mass of injected CO₂; (D) proportion of cells percolated by injected CO₂; (E) proportion of injected CO₂ reaching top layer.

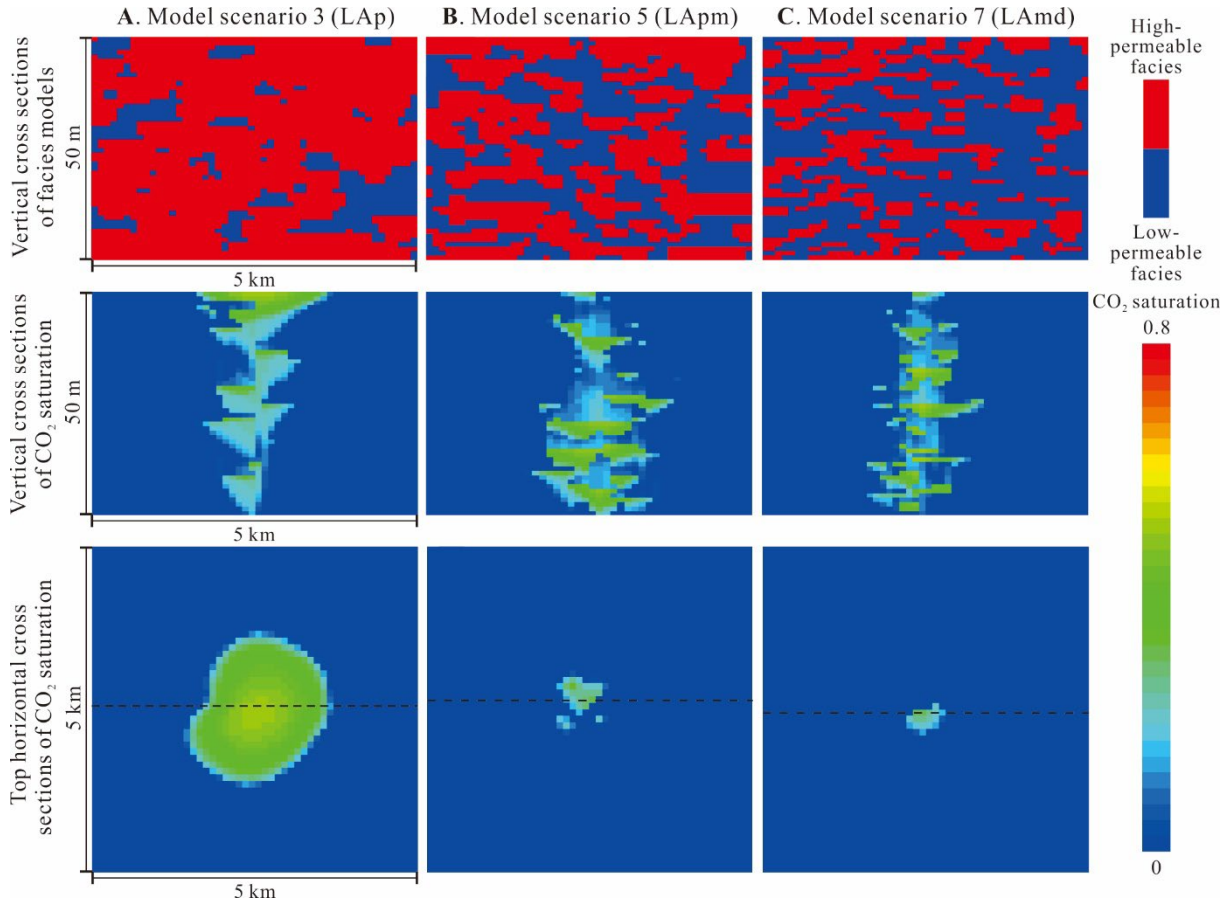


Fig. 7. Vertical cross sections of facies models and their vertical and top horizontal cross sections of CO₂ saturation at the end of the post-injection period: (A) model scenario 3 – LAp; (B) model scenario 5 – LApM; (C) model scenario 7 – LAmD. The vertical facies and saturation cross sections of each model scenario have the same orientation, as shown by the dashed line in the top horizontal cross sections.

4.4. CO₂ phases

CO₂ phase states (free, residual and dissolved phases) vary with time in different model scenarios. Initially, all injected CO₂ is in free phase. During the injection stage (first ten years), free and dissolved CO₂ phases significantly increase over time, while a very small amount of CO₂ occurs as residual phase (Fig. 8). In the early post-injection stage (ten years to around 10,000 days), residually trapped CO₂ increases rapidly while dissolved CO₂ does it slowly, with free CO₂ reducing dramatically. Subsequently, the three CO₂ phases show the similar trends as in the early post-injection stage but at much lower rates for free and residual CO₂ phases. Although most residually trapped CO₂ occurs during the post-injection stage, the small amount of residually trapped CO₂ occurs during the injection stage (Fig. 8). This is mainly because the imbibition process occurs in heterogeneous reservoirs even during the injection period because of different relative permeability characteristics for different facies (Gershenzon et al., 2017b).

The proportions of CO₂ in different phases at the end of the post-injection stage vary in the different model

scenarios (Fig. 9). The proportions of free CO₂ decrease to the minimum value of 22.8% from model scenarios 1 to 4, and then increase to the maximum value of 32.2% from scenarios 4 to 8, and finally reduce again in scenarios 9 to 11. From model scenarios 1 to 11, the proportions of residual CO₂ maintain at relatively high values of around 56% in first four scenarios, then present a continuous reduction to the minimum value of 48.0%, and finally an overall increment. The proportions of dissolved CO₂ increase from 14.9% to 21.6% from scenarios 1 to 4. Subsequently, the proportions decrease and remain at around 19.6%, which increase significantly in scenarios 10 and 11. The LAp features relatively high proportions of residual CO₂, low but increasing dissolved CO₂, and thus decreasing free CO₂ with increasing fractions of low-permeable facies (Fig. 9). The LApm presents relatively high proportions of dissolved CO₂, decreasing residual CO₂, and thus increasing free CO₂ with increasing low-permeable facies. The LAm shows moderate proportions of dissolved CO₂, low residual CO₂, and thus overall high free CO₂.

4.5. Optimal lithofacies association for CO₂ storage

The optimal lithofacies association for CO₂ storage can be selected based on the consideration of the aforementioned four aspects (six criteria), i.e., storage volume (the ratio of theoretical storage volume), CO₂ injectivity (the average BHP, the total mass of injected CO₂), CO₂ distribution (the proportion of cells percolated by injected CO₂, the proportion of injected CO₂ reaching the top model layer), and CO₂ phases (the proportion of free CO₂). Because none of the model scenarios ranks high in all six criteria, the TOPSIS method can be an effective way to quantitatively evaluate the overall suitability of each lithofacies association for CO₂ storage. As shown in Table 3, the TOPSIS scores present first a reduction and then an increment from model scenarios 1 to 11. Model scenarios 4 to 6 with the relatively low TOPSIS scores are the potential lithofacies associations for CO₂ storage. This indicates that the suitability of the LApm for CO₂ storage is higher than that of the LAp, LAm and LAd lithofacies associations.

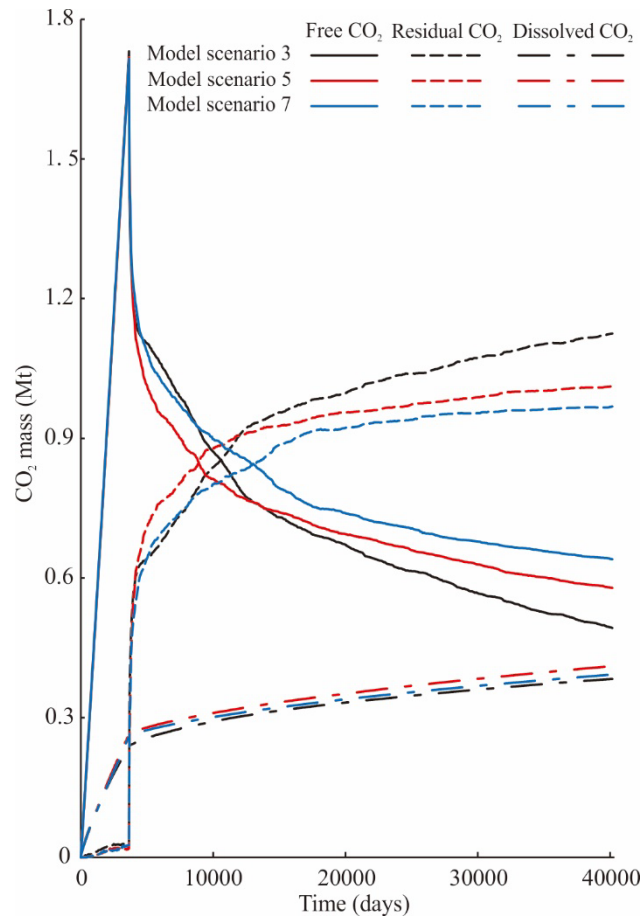


Fig. 8. Evolution of different CO₂ phases over time in model scenarios of typical lithofacies associations.

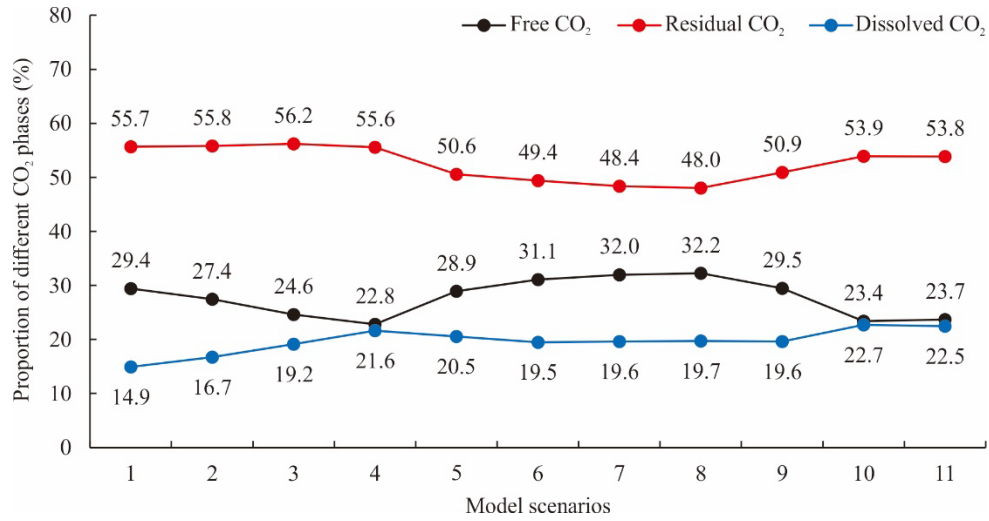


Fig. 9. Proportions of different CO₂ phases at the end of the post-injection period for different model scenarios.

Table 3 Ranking process and TOPSIS results to select the optimal lithofacies association for CO₂ storage.

				Storage volume	CO ₂ injectivity		CO ₂ distribution		CO ₂ phases
Criteria				Ratio of theoretical storage volume (%)	Average bottom hole pressure (bar)	Total mass of injected CO ₂ (Mt)	Proportion of cells percolated by CO ₂ (%)	Proportion of CO ₂ reaching top layer (%)	Proportion of free CO ₂ (%)
Data processing	Weighting			0.25	0.125	0.125	0.125	0.125	0.25
	Actual values	Model scenarios	1	21.53	289	2	2.8	20.1	29.4
			2	20.33	290	2	3.0	19.0	27.4
			3	19.14	291	2	3.4	14.6	24.6
			4	17.95	295	2	3.9	0.9	22.8
			5	16.76	299	2	3.8	0.8	28.9
			6	15.56	306	2	3.7	0.1	31.1
			7	14.37	313	2	3.5	0.4	32.0
			8	13.18	330	2	3.6	0.5	32.2
			9	11.99	358	2	3.6	0.5	29.5
			10	10.79	600	0.7	2.2	1.0	23.4
			11	9.60	600	0.6	2.0	3.0	23.7
	Normalized and weighted values	Model scenarios	1	0.101	0.029	0.041	0.032	0.080	0.079
			2	0.096	0.029	0.041	0.034	0.075	0.074
			3	0.090	0.029	0.041	0.039	0.058	0.066
			4	0.084	0.029	0.041	0.045	0.004	0.062
			5	0.079	0.030	0.041	0.043	0.003	0.078
			6	0.073	0.030	0.041	0.042	0.000	0.084
			7	0.068	0.031	0.041	0.041	0.002	0.086
			8	0.062	0.033	0.041	0.041	0.002	0.087
			9	0.056	0.036	0.041	0.041	0.002	0.079
			10	0.051	0.060	0.014	0.025	0.004	0.063
			11	0.045	0.060	0.012	0.023	0.012	0.064
Positive ideal solution			0.101	0.029	0.041	0.045	0.000	0.062	
Negative ideal solution			0.045	0.060	0.012	0.023	0.080	0.087	
Ranking result			d+	d-	TOPSIS score	Ranking			
TOPSIS ranking	Model scenarios	1	0.082	0.065	0.558	10			
		2	0.077	0.063	0.550	9			
		3	0.059	0.059	0.500	7			
		4	0.017	0.085	0.168	1			
		5	0.028	0.074	0.275	2			
		6	0.036	0.068	0.346	3			
		7	0.042	0.062	0.403	4			
		8	0.047	0.059	0.445	5			
		9	0.049	0.056	0.465	6			
		10	0.068	0.059	0.536	8			
		11	0.075	0.056	0.570	11			

5. Discussion

Based on the systematic analysis of the storage volume, injectivity, distribution and phases of CO₂, as well as the multi-criteria decision-making assessment results, this section discusses the overall effects of fluvial lithofacies associations on the efficiency of CO₂ storage, and compares our study of the reservoir analog in the Puig-reig anticline with other real projects of CO₂ storage worldwide.

The proximal fluvial lithofacies associations (LAp: model scenarios 1 to 3) present an overall high reservoir quality and connectivity in both the vertical and horizontal directions (Fig. 5A). The advantages of these lithofacies associations for CO₂ storage are the high storage volumes and injectivity (Fig. 6A-C). However, the CO₂ plume is dominated by vertical migration with limited lateral displacement due to the lack of effective seepage barriers in the vertical direction (Fig. 7A). A large proportion of CO₂ (14.6%-20.1%) migrates to the top model layer and is in direct contact with the upper caprocks, which could increase the leakage risk with the accumulating buoyancy force of CO₂ plume. Thus, the storage security in these lithofacies associations depends on the caprock integrity (Espinoza and Santamarina, 2017; Iglauder, 2018). In the LAp, the high vertical reservoir connectivity promotes the vertical migration of the CO₂ plume. Once the CO₂ injection ceases, a large amount of brine imbibes and replaces CO₂ at the plume tail, resulting in relatively high proportions of residual CO₂ in pore spaces than other lithofacies associations (Fig. 9). Moreover, with increasing fractions of low-permeable facies in the LAp (from 0 to 20% in model scenarios 1 to 3), the CO₂ plume is characterized by a wider lateral migration while maintaining the vertical migration, resulting in increasing proportions of model cells percolated by the injected CO₂ (Fig. 6D) and thus higher proportions of dissolved CO₂ (Fig. 9). Therefore, the high proportions of residual CO₂ and increasing proportions of dissolved CO₂ result in the overall decreasing proportions of free CO₂ from scenarios 1 to 3 (29.4% to 24.6%; Fig. 9). As indicated by the TOPSIS ranking results (Table 3), the proximal fluvial lithofacies associations show higher potential for CO₂ storage with increasing portions of low-permeable facies.

The proximal-medial lithofacies associations (LAp_m: model scenarios 4 to 6) show relatively lower reservoir quality and connectivity than those of the LAp (Fig. 5B). Although these lithofacies associations have lower theoretical storage volumes (Fig. 6A), the CO₂ injectivity to them only shows a very slight reduction (Fig. 6B, C). Due to the seepage barriers in the vertical direction, most of the injected CO₂ stays in the lower half model, with limited CO₂ migrating to the uppermost model layer (0.1% to 0.9%). This indicates that there is a lower leakage risk of CO₂ through caprocks. Compared to the LAp, the LAp_m features a wider lateral migration while maintaining the vertical migration, resulting in a larger CO₂ plume as shown in Fig. 6D and Fig. 7B. Thus, the LAp_m is characterized by relatively high proportions of dissolved CO₂ than other

lithofacies associations (Fig. 9) due to a larger swept area by CO₂ (Fig. 6D). In the LApm, with increasing fractions of low-permeable facies (from 30% to 50% in model scenarios 4 to 6), dissolved CO₂ decreases due to a slightly reducing swept area. Besides, brine imbibition is restricted at the CO₂ plume tail due to the vertical obstruction of CO₂ migration by the vertical flow barriers, resulting in decreasing residual CO₂. Therefore, the decreasing proportions of dissolved and residual CO₂ together lead to increasing proportions of free CO₂ (22.8% to 31.1%; Fig. 9). In terms of CO₂ distribution and phases, scenario 4 is the most suitable lithofacies association for CO₂ storage. As indicated by the TOPSIS ranking results (Table 3), the proximal-medial fluvial lithofacies show lower potential for CO₂ storage with increasing low-permeable portions.

Compared to the LAP and LApm, the medial-distal lithofacies associations (LAMd: model scenarios 7 to 9) present lower reservoir quality and connectivity (Fig. 5C), resulting in lower theoretical storage volume and injectivity. Although very limited CO₂ migrates to the top model layer (0.4%-0.5%), the relatively high injection pressure could potentially damage the well integrity (Bai et al., 2016; Gholami et al., 2021) and the rock integrity (Rutqvist et al., 2008; Li et al., 2022), which would result in a leakage risk increase. The LAMd features high fractions of low-permeable facies and thus low vertical and lateral reservoir connectivity. In the LAMd, the vertical obstruction of CO₂ migration caused by the flow barriers leads to relatively weak brine imbibition and thus low proportions of residual CO₂. Besides, the slightly smaller swept area of CO₂ results in the overall lower dissolved CO₂ than that of the LApm. These together lead to relatively high proportions of free CO₂ (29.5%-32.2%; Fig. 9). As indicated by the TOPSIS ranking (Table 3), the proximal-medial fluvial lithofacies show lower potential for CO₂ storage with increasing non-reservoir portions.

Based on the above analyses, the LApm (especially with an appropriate fraction of low-permeable facies ranging from 30% to 40%) would be the more promising targets for CO₂ storage compared to the LAP and LAMd lithofacies associations in fluvial systems. Although simulation results can slightly vary using different simulation scenarios, such as different CO₂ injection scenarios or seepage parameters, the take-home message is that the effects of heterogeneous fluvial reservoir architectures on the efficiency of CO₂ geological storage are not monotonic but variable, and that reservoirs with moderate heterogeneous architectures can be beneficial for CO₂ storage.

As one of the main deposit systems of clastic sediments, especially at the margins of non-marine foreland basins, fluvial fans are widely developed worldwide (Horton and Decelles, 2001; Ventra and Clarke, 2018). Many candidate reservoirs for CO₂ geological storage are located in reservoir systems characterized by fluvial sediments. Several real projects have been deployed in these fluvial sequences, such as the Frio Project (the Frio Formation) (Hovorka et al., 2006), the Cranfield Project (the Tuscaloosa Formation) (Soltanian et al., 2019) and the Decatur Project (the Mount Simon Sandstone) in the United States (Finley, 2014), as well as the CO₂CRC Otway Project (the Waarre Formation) in Australia (Dance, 2013). These fluvial deposits

tend to present heterogeneous reservoir architectures at multiple scales, which exert significant effects on CO₂ storage. In terms of small-scale fluvial stratigraphic architectures, such as cross-bedding, previous studies demonstrated that this reservoir architecture affects the distribution and phases of the injected CO₂, especially residual and dissolved phases (Gershenzon et al., 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, Ershadnia et al., 2020, 2021). For large-scale fluvial stratigraphic architectures, several works documented that reservoir architectures control the storage capacity of CO₂ (Issautier et al., 2014, 2016; Vo Thanh et al., 2020). Focusing on varied fluvial lithofacies associations, this study demonstrates that varied lithofacies associations not only control the storage capacity of CO₂ but also the distribution and phases of the injected CO₂, thus the safety of CO₂ storage. Although the increasing fractions of non-reservoir layers can result in decreasing storage volumes and injectivity of CO₂, they can prevent the direct contact between the CO₂ plume and caprocks and reduce the proportions of free CO₂ phase under certain circumstances, thus reducing the leakage risks of the injected CO₂. Previous studies and our works imply that static and dynamic modeling approaches integrating multiscale architectures of fluvial reservoirs are required for future assessments of such systems.

Heterogeneous reservoir architectures are not only present in fluvial deposition systems, but also in other clastic rocks and carbonate rocks, and thus affect the efficiency of CO₂ storage in these reservoir systems. For example, in the Sleipner Project operating since 1996, the first commercial CO₂ storage project, more than 20 Mt of CO₂ has been injected into the Utsira Sand (Global CCS Institute, 2020). These deposits were deposited in marine environments, i.e., turbidite fans or shallow shelves (Chadwick et al., 2004). The Utsira Sand is dominated by high-quality sandstone reservoirs with limited thin mudstone layers (generally around one meter except for a single 5 m thick layer close to the reservoir top) (Chadwick et al., 2004). Due to the existence of thin mudstone layers, the CO plume generally presents laterally extensive accumulations under seepage barriers, which are clearly shown by time-lapse (4D) seismic profiles (Chadwick et al., 2005; Ghosh et al., 2015). However, the erosion or faulting causes the local absence of the seepage barriers and result in the remigration of the accumulated CO₂ to the thick mudstone layer and even the reservoir top (Zweigel et al., 2004). Thus, the small number of mudstone layers can improve the lateral migration of the CO₂ plume and delay the time for the injected CO₂ to reach the reservoir top to a small extent, which is similar to the situation of proximal fluvial lithofacies associations in this study. In summary, the effect of the mudstone seepage barriers on the efficiency of CO₂ storage depends on the fraction and distribution of the mudstone layers. This study provides a methodology and process for selecting the optimal lithofacies associations for CO₂ storage.

6. Conclusions

Reservoirs of fluvial origins are characterized by heterogeneous stratigraphic architectures at different

scales. The fluvial sedimentary heterogeneities not only control the CO₂ storage capacity but also provide clues about the safety of CO₂ storage. Based on a multidisciplinary approach that integrates a field-based sedimentology study, static reservoir modeling, and numerical simulation of CO₂ injection, the overall effects of variable fluvial lithofacies associations on the efficiency of CO₂ storage of a fluvial reservoir analog at the Puig-reig anticline in the SE Pyrenees (Spain) has been evaluated. The proximal fluvial lithofacies associations are dominated by large channel-filling reservoirs with limited overbank non-reservoir deposits. These associations are characterized by a large theoretical storage volume, good reservoir injectivity, and an overall low fraction of free CO₂. However, a high fraction of CO₂ would quickly migrate toward the reservoir tops in direct contact with the top seal, increasing the leakage risk. The medial-distal fluvial lithofacies associations consist of interbedded reservoir bodies and non-reservoir barriers, with much lower reservoir fractions. These associations can significantly hinder the upward migration of CO₂, preventing it from reaching the reservoir tops. However, they feature a low theoretical storage volume, low reservoir injectivity, and a relatively high fraction of free CO₂. The proximal-medial fluvial lithofacies associations with moderately heterogeneous architecture are better suited for CO₂ storage, when considering the storage volume, injectivity, distribution and phases of CO₂ comprehensively.

The heterogeneous architectures of fluvial reservoirs can exert significant but variable effects on the efficiency of CO₂ storage. Although the specific values of static and dynamic modeling results could potentially change according to different geological settings or simulation scenarios, it is concluded that reservoirs with moderate heterogeneous architectures appear to be better targets for CO₂ geological storage compared with homogenous reservoirs. When selecting CO₂ storage sites, it is recommended that reservoir quality, caprock integrity and heterogeneous reservoir architectures should all be considered.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Xiaolong Sun: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Investigation, Writing – original draft. **Yingchang Cao:** Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Keyu Liu:** Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Juan Alcalde:** Supervision, Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation. **Patricia Cabello:** Methodology, Software. **Anna Travé:** Supervision, Validation, Project administration. **David Cruset:** Validation. **Enrique Gomez-Rivas:** Supervision, Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments

Funding was provided by the China University of Petroleum (East China) to the Independent Innovation Research Project 22CX06004A and by the Catalan Council to the Grup Consolidat de Recerca “Geologia Sedimentària” (2017SGR-824) and the DGICYT Spanish Projects PGC2018-093903-B-C22, PID2020-118999GB-I00 and PID2021-122467NB-C22 (MCIN/ AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033/ FEDER, Unión Europea). JA acknowledges funding from MICINN (Juan de la Cierva fellowship - IJC2018-036074-I). DC acknowledges MCIN/AEI /10.13039/501100011033 and European Union NextGenerationEU/PRTR (Juan de la Cierva Formación fellowship FJC2020-043488-I). EGR acknowledges funding from MCIN (“Ramón y Cajal” fellowship RYC2018-026335-I). PC acknowledges funding from the research project RTI2018-097312-A-I00 financed by MCIN/ AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033/ FEDER “Una manera de hacer Europa” and Grup de Recerca Consolidat de Geodinàmica i Anàlisi de Conques (GGAC), financed by the Generalitat de Catalunya (2017SGR596). This article also benefited from an academic license of Petrel E&P Software Platform and Eclipse 300 from Schlumberger.

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