

# 1 Application of Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy to evaluate 2 cathodically protected coated steel in seawater

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7 Abstract:

8 Two types of organic coated carbon steel (S235JR2 grade) electrodes were exposed to artificial  
9 seawater environment. One prepared type was defect free while the other one had an intentionally  
10 introduced  $\phi 0,5$  cm coating defect. Both kinds of samples were polarized during the exposure to four  
11 potentials corresponding to four different cathodic protection levels. Evolution of their EIS spectra is  
12 presented in this paper. Results obtained in the experiment indicate that protective organic coating  
13 condition could be estimated and monitored in time based on EIS investigations. If a sample is defected  
14 EIS allows a recognition of overprotected and unprotected sample. Distinguishing a fully protected  
15 sample from partially protected sample based on EIS was troublesome.

16 Keywords: Organic coatings; Cathodic Protection; Seawater; Electrochemical Impedance  
17 Spectroscopy; Steel.

## 18 **1. Introduction**

19 Organic coatings are the most often and commonly used anti-corrosion technique [1-2]. Coatings  
20 provide passive barrier against the aggressive environment. However, coatings provide protection as  
21 long as they remain intact and active pigments are not replenished [3-4]. On the other hand, cathodic  
22 protection (CP) system is capable of reducing corrosion rate even if a coating fails. CP is an  
23 electrochemical technique thus it's not capable of stopping corrosion completely but it significantly  
24 reduces its rate [5-6]. Organic coatings and CP are jointly used to provide a holistic anti corrosion  
25 protection [7]. Without a coating current demand of CP system could be so great that it might be  
26 technically impossible to implement. A proper coating system may reduce current demand by over  
27 99 %. Even after years of operation coatings can reduce cathodic current demand by 70-80% or more  
28 [8]. However, it is important to remember that certain coatings are not compatible with CP systems.  
29 Therefore it remains a factor which has to be taken into account when a complex corrosion protection

30 system is designed [9]. A working CP system produces OH<sup>-</sup> ions at the cathode increasing the alkalinity  
31 of the environment. There is always a risk that an ill-working CP system may cause coating  
32 deterioration and disbondment [10-12]. Especially if a critical potential is reached and water  
33 decomposition and hydrogen evolution occurs [13-15]. A cathodic protection system can rapidly  
34 increase coating deterioration if it has been not been properly supervised.

35 Modern CP rectifiers are often controlled by microcomputers. Unlike old manually adjustable units  
36 functionality of the modern rectifiers can be easily extended. CP rectifiers could be equipped with  
37 automatic on/off switcher, GPS time stamp, data logger and transmission unit, a watchdog, electric  
38 resistance corrosion coupon probe electrode, array of reference electrodes for stray current detection  
39 or other devices [16-21]. Due to the rapid electronic device development even Electrochemical  
40 Impedance Spectroscopy (EIS) module could be fit [22]. EIS is a technique capable of yielding  
41 information about impedance of the investigated system in the investigated frequency bandwidth. EIS  
42 data can be linked to the occurring electrochemical processes or physical properties of the investigated  
43 system [23-25].

44 In this paper an experiment involving EIS investigation of S235JR2 grade steel samples coated with  
45 organic coating under several cathodic protection conditions has been proposed. The coatings have  
46 been immersed in seawater for as long as 9 months. EIS data has been collected in order to verify its  
47 usefulness as a supplementary CP evaluation technique.

## 48 2. Materials and methods

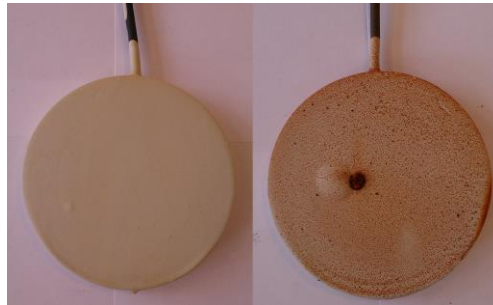
49 A set of circular steel electrodes made of S235JR2 was manufactured. Composition of S235JR2 is  
50 presented in Tab. 1. Their radius equalled 6 cm and surface area 28,25 cm<sup>2</sup>. Steel substrates and cable  
51 connectors were embedded in epoxy resin and insulated from environment.

Element Ultimate Tensile Strength	C [%]	Mn [%]	Si [%]	P [%]	S [%]	N [%]	UTS [N/mm <sup>2</sup> ]
S235JR steel	0,17- 0,20	Max 1,3	-	0,045	0,045	0,009	360-490

52 Tab. 1 Composition and ultimate tensile strength of S235JR2 steel.

53 Specimen were sandblasted to the Sa3 NACE “white metal blast cleaning” surface roughness [26].  
54 Substrates have been covered with a commercially available epoxy coating. According to the product  
55 specification the coating was designed to be applied as a single or multi-layer system. The coating was  
56 also confirmed to be CP compatible. Average coating thickness equalled 350 μm and its standard  
57 deviation 13 μm. Two sets of samples were prepared. One type of specimen was defect-free, the other  
58 one had a Φ0,5 cm holiday (Fig. 1).

59 Furthermore, weight loss coupons made of 100 cm<sup>2</sup> S235JR2 steel grade were manufactured and were  
 60 exposed under the same conditions as the test specimens. They were prepared accordingly with EIS  
 61 specimen.



62  
 63 Fig. 1 Samples after exposure. A defect-free sample (left) and a sample with  $\Phi$  0,5 cm holiday (right).

64 In accordance to European Standard EN 12473 “General principles of cathodic protection in sea water”  
 65 four potentials corresponding to four different cathodic protection levels were chosen (Tab. 2) **Błąd!**  
 66 **Nie można odnaleźć źródła odwołania..** For every protection level a separate set of samples (no  
 67 holiday/  $\Phi$ 0,5 cm holiday) was prepared. During the entire exposure duration for every cathodic  
 68 protection level a dedicated potentiostat was assigned to control electrochemical potential of  
 69 specimen. Specimen were immersed in 50x20x30 cm tanks filled with 30 l of artificial seawater.  
 70 Artificial sea water composition was prepared in agreement with ASTM D1141-98 standard. Details are  
 71 presented in Tab. 3 [27]. Salts with content lower than KBr were not used.

Cathodic protection level	Potential vs Zn/ZnSO <sub>4</sub> (saturated) [mV]	Potential vs Ag AgCl Seawater [mV]
No protection	Free corrosion potential On average +363	Free corrosion potential, On average -675
Under protection	+288 mV	-750
Full protection	+88 mV	-950
Overprotection	-162 mV	-1200

72 Tab. 2 Cathodic protection levels and potentials of specimen.

73 Anodes – auxiliary electrodes made of 20x15 cm mixed metal oxide covered titanium mesh were  
 74 utilized. Saturated Zn|ZnSO<sub>4</sub> reference electrodes were chosen and placed as close as possible to the  
 75 specimen in order to reduce IR drop. In order to ensure a good cathodic current distribution anodes  
 76 were located as far away from the working electrodes as possible. During the exposure weigh loss  
 77 coupons and samples were electrically shortened. For EIS experiments Ag|AgCl|Seawater reference  
 78 electrode was used. Every sample was then electrically disconnected and evaluated separately.

Salt	NaCl	MgCl <sub>2</sub>	Na <sub>2</sub> SO <sub>4</sub>	CaCl <sub>2</sub>	KCl	NaHCO <sub>3</sub>	KBr
Concentration [g/dm <sup>3</sup> ]	24,53	5,20	4,09	1,16	0,695	0,201	0,101

79 Tab. 3 Artificial seawater composition according to ASTM D1141-98.

80 Every few days Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy experiments were performed. In the  
81 beginning of the exposure intervals between experiments were short: ranging from 2 to 7 days. Once  
82 specimen condition stabilized measurements were taken less often – and intervals increased from 7  
83 to 30 days. Perturbation amplitude equalled 15 mV and frequency bandwidth ranged from 0,05 Hz to  
84 10 kHz. All tests were carried out using Gamry 1000 potentiostat.

### 85 **3. Results and discussion**

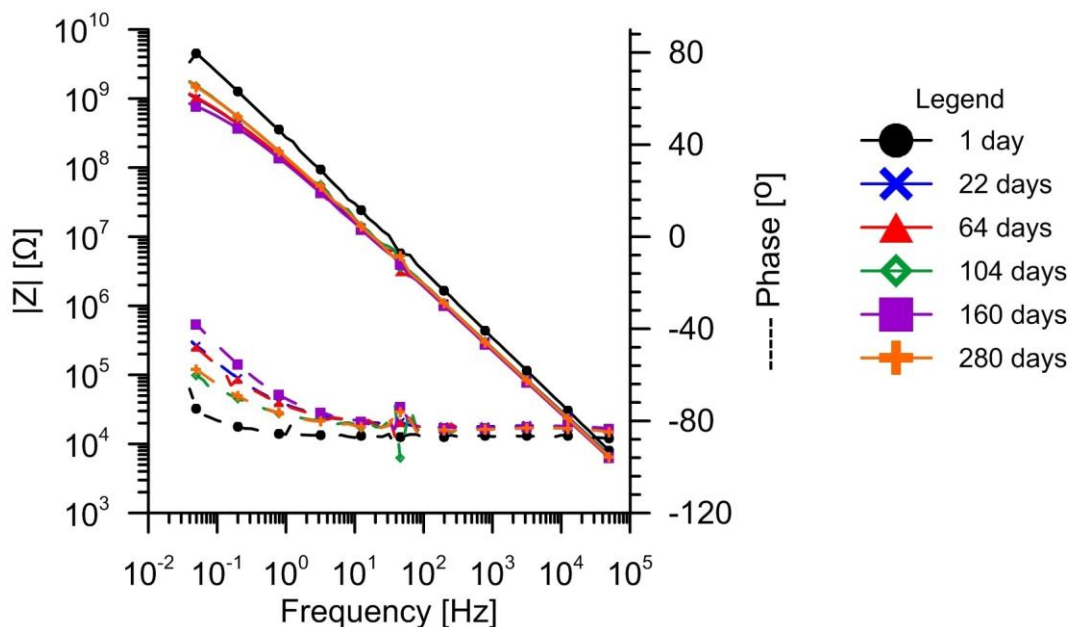
86 Long term exposure of coated specimen were performed in order to review applicability of EIS to  
87 investigate changes of cathodically protected systems in time. Specimen without a holiday were  
88 treated as a reference samples. Differences between samples without coating disruptions and  
89 intentionally defected samples and their time evolution under four CP protection levels regimes were  
90 anticipated to be observed.

91 Defect free specimen without CP during the experiment exhibited a straight-like line in their Bode  
92 spectrum (Fig. 2). Phase angle was very close to  $90^\circ$  in the entire frequency range. A slight shift towards  
93 lower phase angles was observed in the low frequency range only, approaching a DC limit. A capacitive  
94 nature of the response suggests that the coating remains intact during entire exposure. Positive phase  
95 angle shift at the lowest frequencies indicates slow coating deterioration. Its character became more  
96 resistive. Impedance modulus at low frequencies remained higher than  $10^9 \Omega$ . If a surface area of the  
97 specimen is taken into account it translates to approximately  $2,8 \cdot 10^{10} \Omega \text{cm}^2$ . The impedance modulus  
98 and phase angle measured were characteristic for an unbroken, intact and fully protective coating (2).

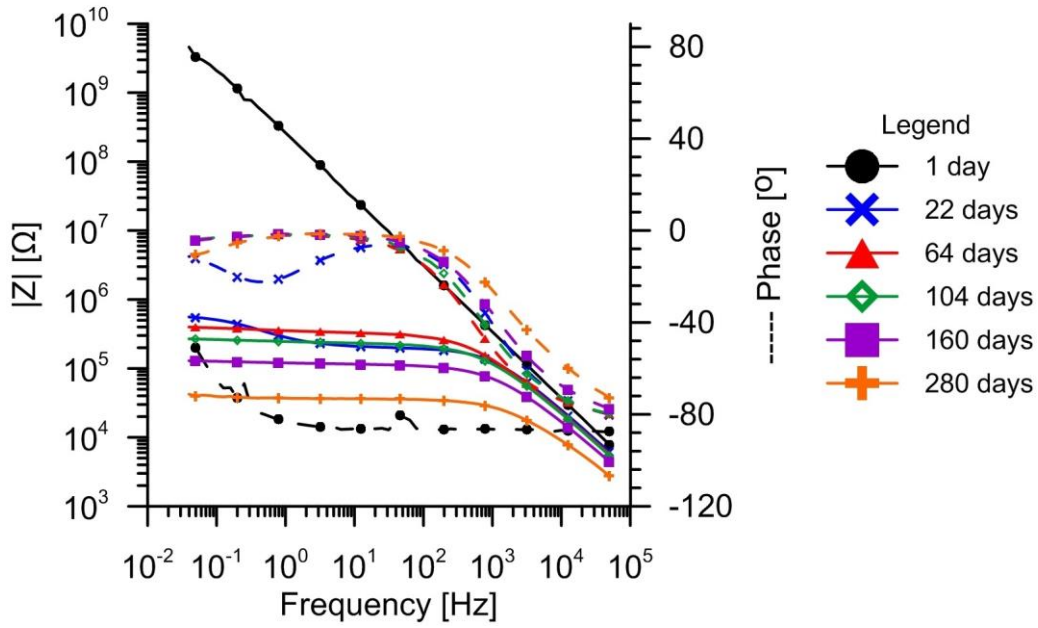
99 Unlike in the case of the unprotected sample, the other specimen show indications of coating  
100 deterioration. It is more than likely that the cathodic protection accelerates coating deterioration.  
101 Characteristic spectra evolution of the fully coated specimen were observed for all samples with any  
102 degree of cathodic protection (Fig. 3-5). In the first spectrum taken (at the beginning of the  
103 experiment) impedance modulus forms an almost straight line. Phase shift was lower than  $-40^\circ$  even  
104 at the lowest frequencies. The coating had a capacitive character. During the exposure an impedance  
105 modulus plateau had formed. Once the plateau was observed a distinctive phase shift became visible.  
106 Impedance of the system had a  $0^\circ$  phase angle at the lowest frequencies and  $-90^\circ$  at higher frequencies.  
107 It indicated that coating nature had changed from purely capacitive (an intact coating) to resistive.  
108 When time passed the phase shift from  $0^\circ$  to  $90^\circ$  started occurring at higher and higher frequencies.  
109 The impedance modulus plateau value decreased. Plateau bandwidth was greater too, as the phase  
110 shift 'moved' towards higher frequencies. After the exposure the CP protected samples still exhibited  
111 some degree of protection.



112 Equivalent circuits with either one or two time constants fitted measured EIS spectra. Values of chi  
 113 squared ( $\chi^2$ ) which is a measure describing discrepancies between measured values and a model under  
 114 investigation are presented for every figure which involves EIS model fitting. A model with two time  
 115 constants was chosen for spectra which showed an indication of a second semicircle formation.  
 116 Evolution of coating resistance is presented in Fig. 6. After quick initial breakdown all of the coatings  
 117 reached a resistance plateau. Calculated coating capacity is presented in Fig. 7. Initial capacity and  
 118 resistance of all coatings is almost the same – they have been applied in the same manner and had a  
 119 similar thickness. All of them quickly increased their capacity due to water uptake. Then coating  
 120 capacity did not increase any further and it remained stable for the entire duration of the experiment.  
 121 The under protected sample exhibited impedance lower than  $10^6 \Omega\text{cm}^2$  – a border line value for a  
 122 protective coating.

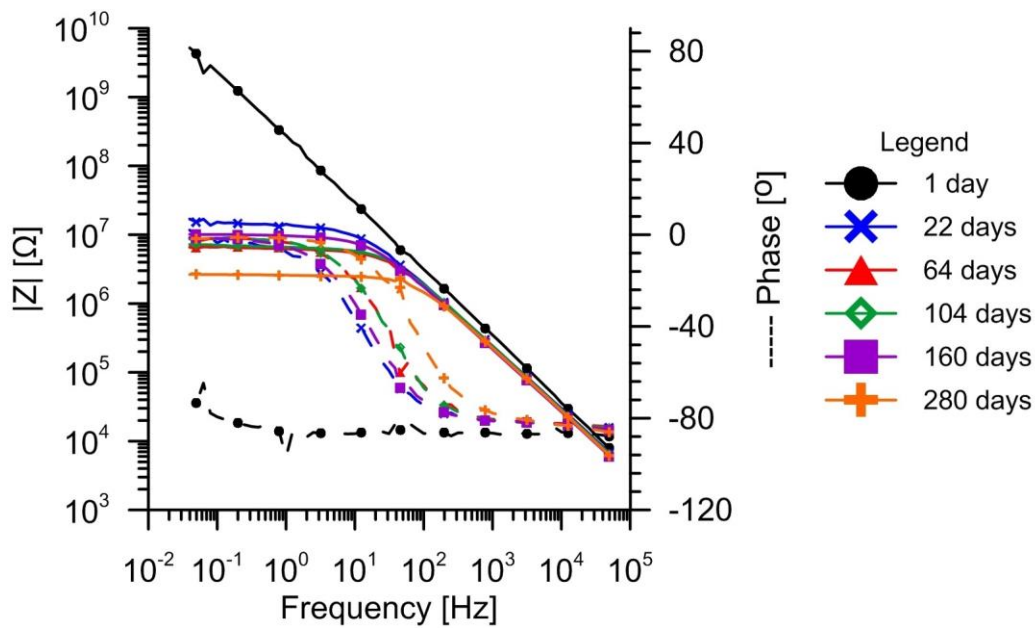


123  
 124 Fig. 2 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP unprotected defect-free organic coated specimen in time. To  
 125 clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.



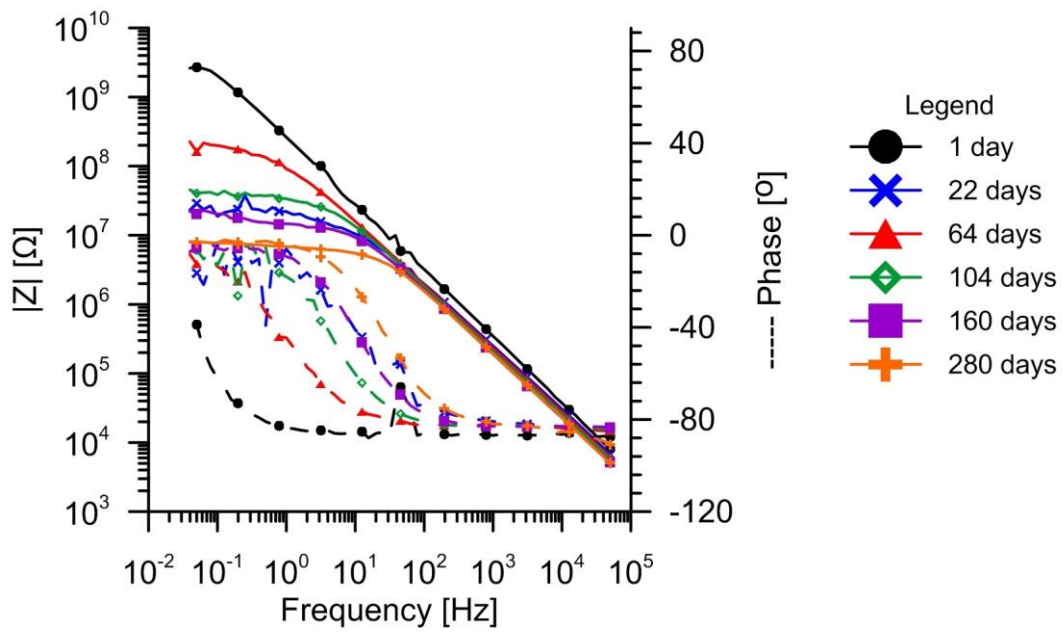
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127 Fig. 3 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP under protected defect-free organic coated specimen in time. To  
 128 clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.



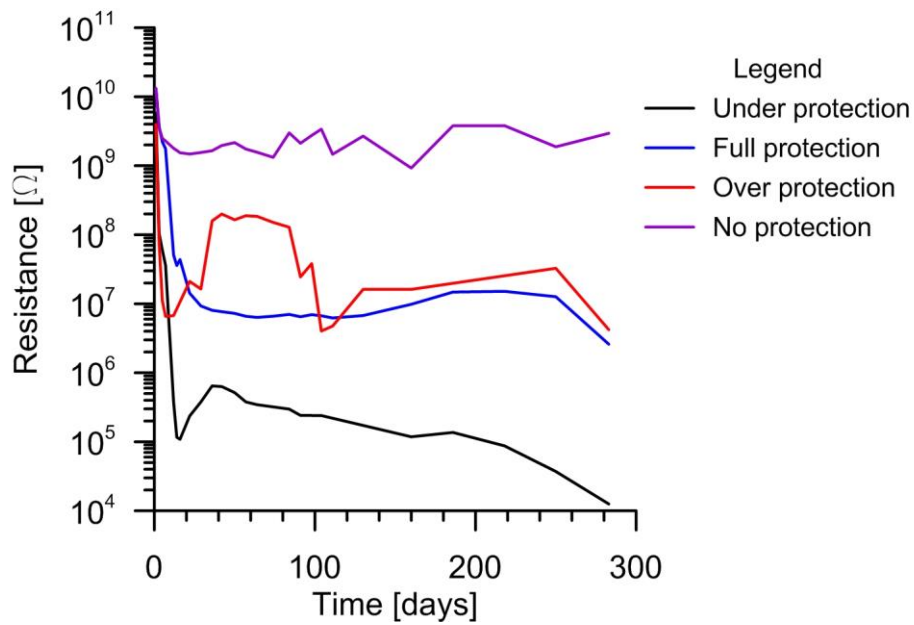
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130 Fig. 4 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP fully-protected defect-free organic coated specimen in time. To  
 131 clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.



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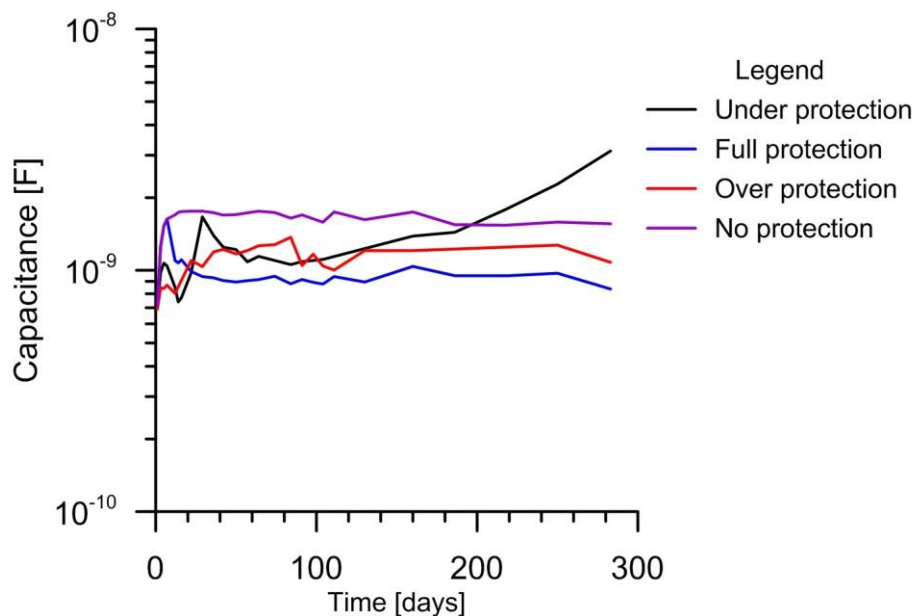
133 Fig. 5 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP overprotected defect-free organic coated specimen in time. To  
 134 clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.



135

136 Fig. 6 Coating resistance vs time plot based on equivalent circuit model fit to the measured EIS spectra.  
 137 Chi squared ( $\chi^2$ ) – goodness of fit values ranged from  $3,45 \cdot 10^{-4}$  to  $1,04 \cdot 10^{-2}$ .





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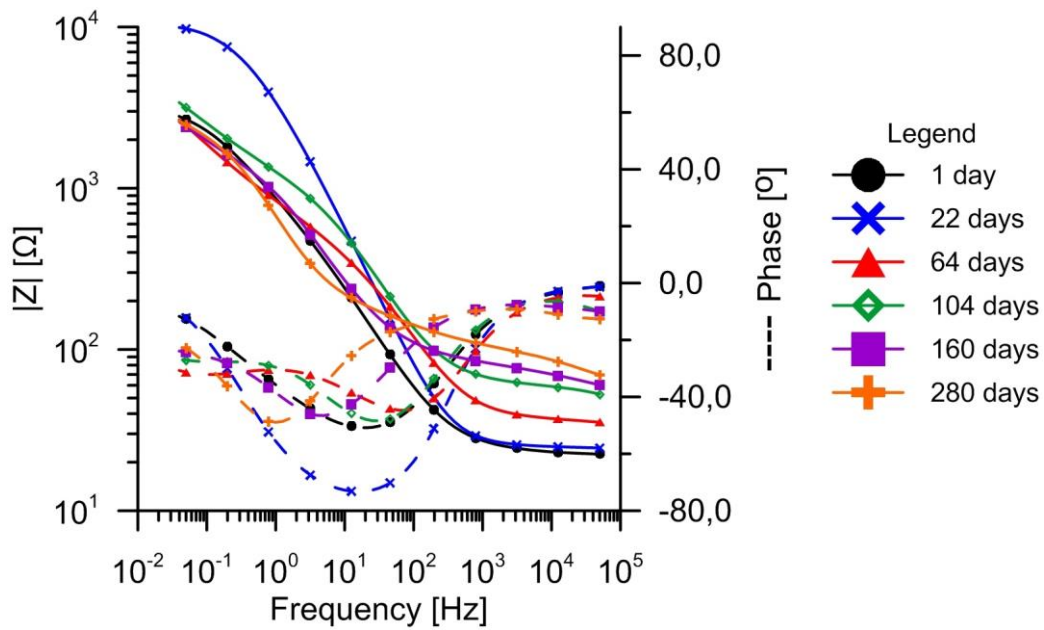
139 Fig. 7 Coating capacity vs time plot based on equivalent circuit model fit to the measured EIS spectra.

140 Chi squared ( $\chi^2$ ) – goodness of fit values ranged from  $3,45 \cdot 10^{-4}$  to  $1,04 \cdot 10^{-2}$ .

141 Spectra of an unprotected organic coated sample with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm holiday are presented in Fig. 8. All of  
 142 the spectra resemble a one time-constant system. A distinctive phase angle peak is visible, initially at  
 143 approximately  $2 \cdot 10^1$  Hz. The peak is shifted in time towards lower frequencies down to 1 Hz. However,  
 144 it must be noted that there are two reactions occurring simultaneously – iron oxidation and oxygen  
 145 reduction which cannot be distinguished with EIS.

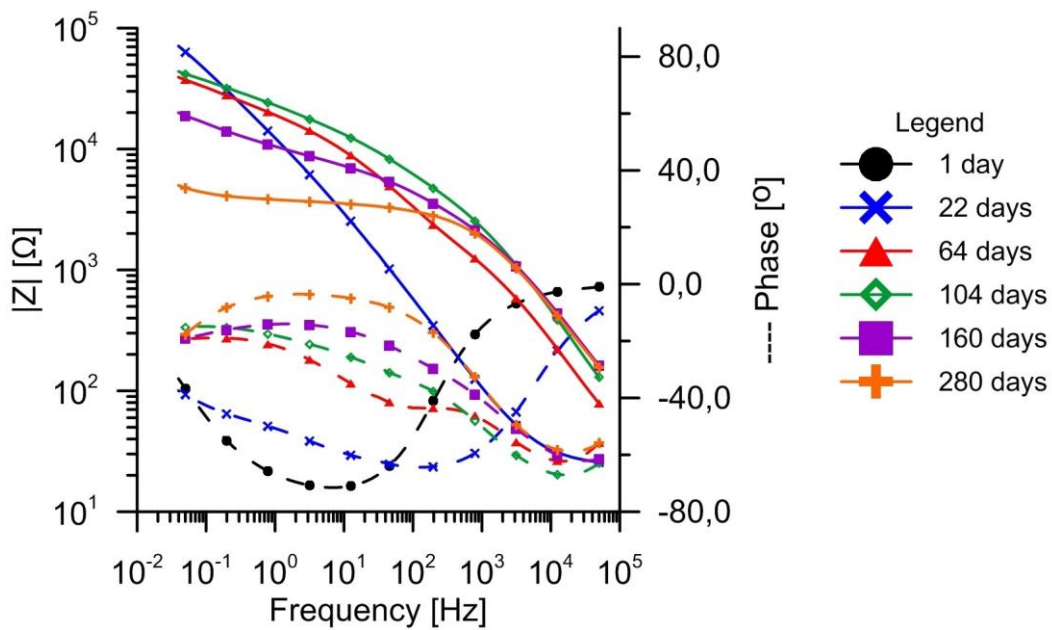
146 Spectra of an under protected and fully protected organic coated sample with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm holiday are  
 147 presented in Fig. 9 and Fig. 10. Both of these cases are described together because their similarities  
 148 can be immediately noticed. Initially, on a 1<sup>st</sup> day of exposure a phase peak is visible at frequency of  
 149 10 Hz (Fig. 9) and 100 Hz (Fig. 10). As time passed their phase angle flattened. At low and medium  
 150 frequency bandwidth the response of the system became resistive ( $0^\circ$  phase angle) and at higher  
 151 frequencies it changed became more capacitive. Impedance modulus plateau appeared when phase  
 152 angle approached zero at low and medium frequencies. It could be attributed to coating deterioration.  
 153 Rising alkalinity of the environment due to oxygen reduction and increase of  $\text{OH}^-$  content might be the  
 154 cause of this phenomenon. Accurate model fit to those EIS cases is troublesome due to the overlapping  
 155 time constants. Flat and elongated Nyquist spectra for under protected and fully protected specimen  
 156 are presented in Fig. 11.





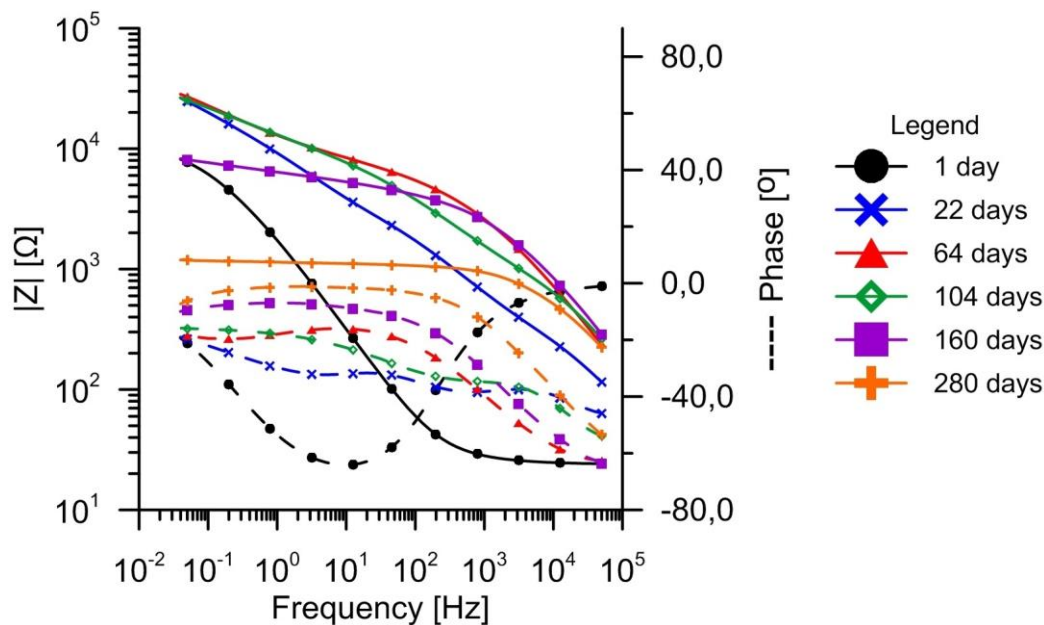
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158 Fig. 8 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP unprotected organic coated specimen with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm defect, in  
 159 time. To clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.



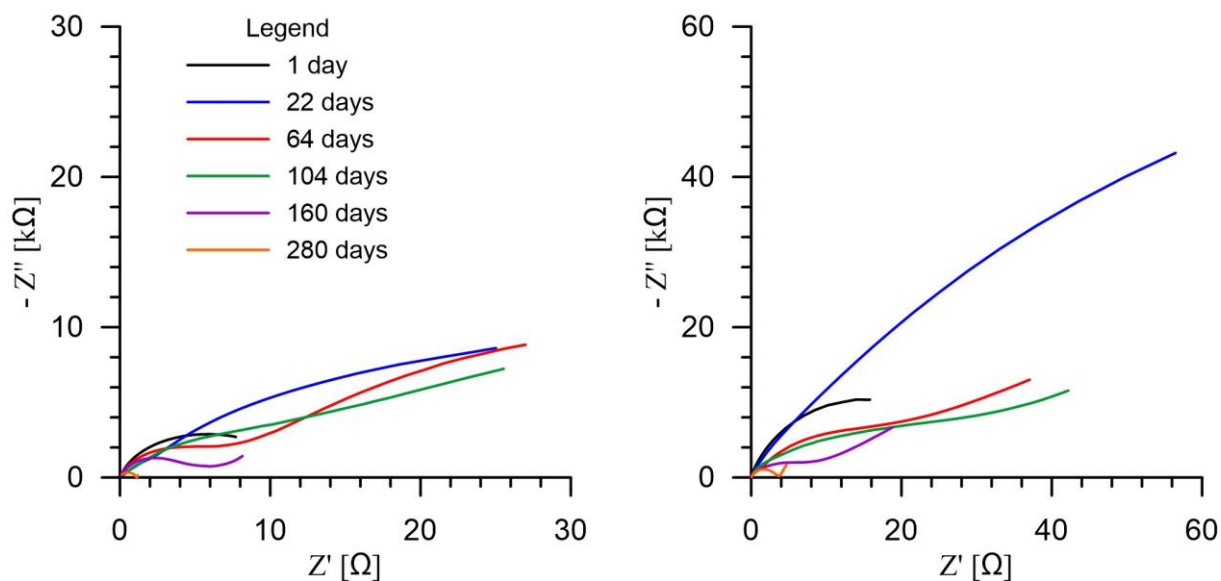
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161 Fig. 9 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP under protected organic coated specimen with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm defect,  
 162 in time. To clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.



163

164 Fig. 10 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP fully protected organic coated specimen with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm defect,  
 165 in time. To clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.

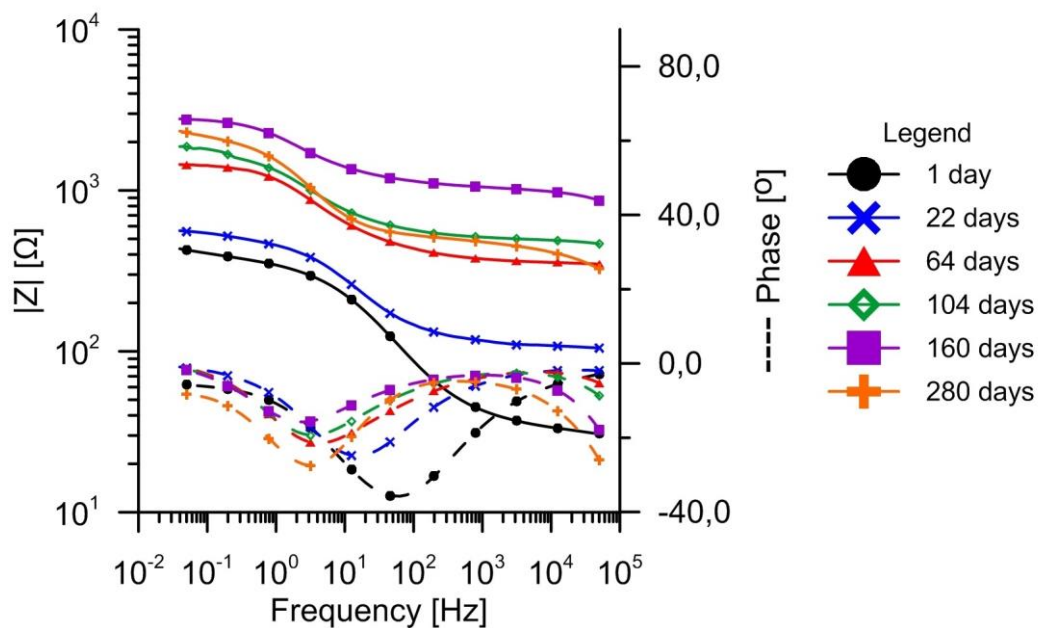


166

167 Fig. 11 Exemplary EIS Nyquist plots of CP under protected (left) and fully protected (right) organic  
 168 coated specimen with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm defect, in time. To clarify the chart no every obtained plot is  
 169 presented.

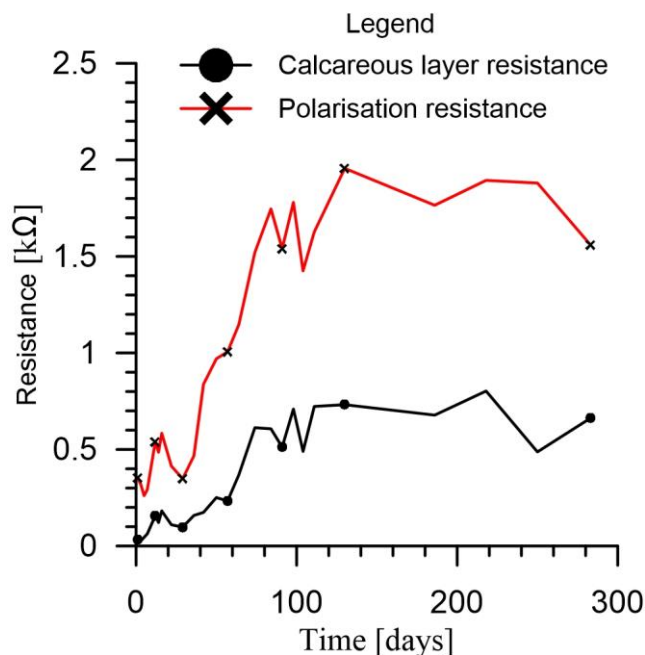
170 Bode phase spectra of overprotected sample with a coating have a distinct peak (Fig. 12). Initially the  
 171 peak appeared at approximately  $10^2$  Hz. Naturally overprotection (sample's potential of  $-1200$  mV vs  
 172  $\text{Ag}|\text{AgCl}|\text{seawater}$ ) involves occurrence of a fast reaction – water decomposition. In time the phase  
 173 angle peak shifted towards lower frequencies, up to approximately 1 Hz. This phenomena could be

174 linked to the calcareous sediment layer evolution. Expanding calcareous layer reduces the active  
 175 surface and the reaction eventually slows down. The phase peak is shifted towards lower frequencies.  
 176 Unlike other specimen the impedance modulus spectra is shifted up in time. A new high frequency  
 177 phase shift became more distinct later on. In a Nyquist plot it is visible as part of a second semicircle  
 178 (Fig. 12). Its appearance can be most likely linked to the calcareous layer. It proves that the sediments  
 179 reduce the reaction rate as the overall impedance modulus is increased. In case of the unprotected  
 180 sample there is no distinct shift of the impedance modulus (with an expectation of the initial increase  
 181 due to corrosion products formation). It can be assumed that the system response in the investigated  
 182 frequency range is associated with water decomposition reaction and evolution of calcareous layer. In  
 183 order to determine the evolution of polarisation resistance and calcareous layer resistance equivalent  
 184 circuit model was fitted to the experimental data. Those quantities are presented in Fig. 13. The fact  
 185 that sediment layer resistance increased in time proved its development and reduction of reactive  
 186 surface area. As a result rate of water decomposition reaction declined and fitted polarisation  
 187 resistance increased.



188  
 189 Fig. 12 Exemplary EIS Bode plots of CP overprotected organic coated specimen with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm defect,  
 190 in time. To clarify the chart not every obtained plot is presented.





191  
 192 Fig. 13. Plot of polarisation resistance and calcareous layer resistance in time based on equivalent  
 193 circuit model fit to the measured EIS spectra. Overprotected  $\phi 0,5$  cm defected coating specimen. Chi  
 194 squared ( $\chi^2$ ) – goodness of fit values ranged from  $2,13 \cdot 10^{-5}$  to  $7,45 \cdot 10^{-3}$ .

195 Corrosion rates determined from weight loss coupons for unprotected, under protected, fully  
 196 protected and overprotected were as follows: 0,073 mm/year, 0,007 mm/year, 0,003 mm/year,  
 197 0,002 mm/year. Obtained corrosion rates and their relative relations are reasonable and in accordance  
 198 with values reported in literature for corresponding cathodic protection degrees.

#### 199 4. Conclusions

200 Long term exposures of defect-free and  $\phi 0,5$  cm defected epoxy coated specimen in four different  
 201 cathodic protection conditions in artificial seawater were performed. Exposures lasted for over 9  
 202 months. Time evolution of spectra of investigated coatings was recorded.

203 An evolution of EIS spectra of a defect-free sample in all four CP conditions was similar and was  
 204 characteristic for a deteriorating coating. However the coating deterioration with any degree of  
 205 cathodic protection underwent quicker than in conditions without cathodic polarization. A CP  
 206 unprotected coating retained its protective properties for the entire experiment without any major  
 207 signs of a coating failure. Protective organic coating condition could be estimated and monitored in  
 208 time based on EIS investigations.

209 Both overprotected and unprotected samples with a  $\phi 0,5$  cm defect had a characteristic impedance  
210 spectra in the investigated frequency range. Their time evolution was described. If a sample is defected  
211 EIS allows a recognition of overprotected and unprotected sample.

212 Under protected and fully protected samples have similar spectra. Their evolution in time is also akin,  
213 same features are observed in their spectra and they evolve in the same pattern. However, the spectra  
214 evolution of a fully protected sample is significantly quicker. Distinguishing a fully protected sample  
215 from under protected sample based on EIS only is troublesome.

216 EIS is capable of providing additional information complementary to ordinary current and potential  
217 measurements. Based on the laboratory experiments a test electrode could be applicable as an  
218 additional information source of coating's sample condition. However the EIS data is troublesome to  
219 be analysed in situ. Data could be easily transferred from multiple measurement units and  
220 stored/transferred for analysis.

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