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## HYDROGEN SENSOR OF TiO<sub>2</sub>-BASED NANOMATERIALS

### SENSOR WODORU NA BAZIE NANOMATERIAŁÓW TiO<sub>2</sub>

The aim of this research was to examine gas sensing properties of TiO<sub>2</sub> based nanomaterials. Nanopowders of Cr doped TiO<sub>2</sub> with constant Specific Surface Area, SSA, were obtained using Flame Spray Synthesis technique, FSS. Nanomaterials were characterized by Brunauer – Emmett – Teller adsorption isotherms, BET, X – ray diffraction, XRD, Transmission Electron Microscopy, TEM, optical spectrometry UV – vis with the use of an integrating sphere as well as impedance spectroscopy. Detection of hydrogen was carried out over the concentration range of 50 - 3000 ppm at the temperatures extending from 200 to 400°C and synthetic air working as a reference atmosphere. As a result of experiments it appeared that incorporation of 5 at.% of Cr into TiO<sub>2</sub> improved hydrogen sensing features due to small crystallite size and predominance of rutile polymorphic phase.

*Keywords:* TiO<sub>2</sub> nanomaterials, Cr dopant, hydrogen sensor

Przedmiotem pracy są nanomateriały na bazie TiO<sub>2</sub> do zastosowań sensorowych. Nanoproszki TiO<sub>2</sub> domieszkowane chromem o stałej powierzchni właściwej SSA (ang. Specific Surface Area) otrzymano przy pomocy techniki syntezy w płomieniu FSS (ang. Flame Spray Synthesis). Materiały poddano charakteryzacji z wykorzystaniem: izoterm adsorpcyjnych Brunauer – Emmett – Teller, BET, dyfraktometrii rentgenowskiej, XRD, transmisyjnej mikroskopii elektronowej, TEM, spektroskopii optycznej UV – vis oraz spektroskopii impedancyjnej. Pomiar własności sensorowych został przeprowadzony dla koncentracji H<sub>2</sub> w zakresie 50-3000 ppm w przedziale temperatur 200-400°C. Wykazano, że najlepiej na wodór odpowiada próbka TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5at.% Cr charakteryzująca się małym rozmiarem krystalitów oraz przewagą fazy rutylu.

### 1. Introduction

Titanium dioxide is commonly used within different fields of science and industry due to its unique physical and chemical features such as high refractive index, thermal stability, high dielectric constant, non - toxicity, photocatalytic properties. Among many possible applications of TiO<sub>2</sub> one can specify: pigments (cosmetics, toothpaste, paints) [1, 2], self – cleaning and sterilizing surfaces [3, 4], water and air cleaning devices [5, 6], microelectronic devices [7, 8], food industry [9, 10], systems of solar energy conversion [11, 12], water splitting, hydrogen production and storage [13, 14], photochromic devices [15] and gas sensors [16-20].

The interest in TiO<sub>2</sub> based materials for resistive gas sensors began around 1980s due to the promising features such as: large and reversible changes in the electrical resistance along with the exceptional chemical stability. In order to improve TiO<sub>2</sub> sensor characteristics doping with metal ions can be applied. Recently, it has been reported that Cr addition improves sensitivity and response time of TiO<sub>2</sub> based sensors due to the increase in concentration of oxygen vacancies [21, 22]. It

has been also proved that chromium additive affects anatase to rutile transformation [23-26]. The kinetics of this irreversible conversion is influenced by many factors, e.g., temperature, sample elaboration procedure, morphology, as well as impurities present in the structure [27]. According to Hanaor and Sorrell [27] the positive effect of Cr dopant on accelerating anatase to rutile transformation can be attributed to the additional oxygen vacancies which are formed upon substitutional incorporation of Cr<sup>3+</sup> into TiO<sub>2</sub> lattice.

Furthermore, Cr dopant modifies electronic structure of TiO<sub>2</sub>, influences its conductivity and can induce n to p transition as it was observed previously [28-32].

The aim of this work is to study the influence of Cr dopant on TiO<sub>2</sub> nanopowders used for H<sub>2</sub> sensing applications. The subject of our research is to study possible changes in crystallographic, electronic structure, electrical properties as well as gas sensing characteristics of TiO<sub>2</sub>. Previously, our research on TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr took into account both the influence of grain size and dopant amount [33]. In this work, the grain size was controlled so as to study the impact of Cr concentration, only.

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## 2. Experimental

In order to synthesize Cr doped TiO<sub>2</sub> nanopowders with a controlled grain size, the Flame Spray Synthesis technique was used as described in [33]. Pure TiO<sub>2</sub> was obtained from titanium – 2.4 – pentanedionate (C<sub>16</sub>H<sub>28</sub>O<sub>6</sub>Ti) dissolved in ethanol, whereas in the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr titanium tetraisopropoxide Ti(C<sub>3</sub>H<sub>7</sub>O)<sub>4</sub> and chromium acetylacetonate C<sub>15</sub>H<sub>21</sub>CrO<sub>6</sub> dissolved in m – xylene were used as metal organic precursors. In order to investigate the influence of Cr dopant only, Specific Surface Area, SSA, was kept constant at the level of about 60 m<sup>2</sup>/g. However, in the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5 at.% Cr this objective was not reached due to the increased density of oxygen vacancies, which influence anatase to rutile transformation.

Brunauer – Emmett – Teller adsorption isotherm, BET, were obtained with Beckman – Coulter SA 3100 analyzer. BET technique was used to determine Specific Surface Area, SSA, from which the equivalent particle diameter,  $d_{BET}$ , was calculated according to the formula:

$$SSA = \frac{6}{d_{BET} \cdot \sum_i (\rho_i V_i)} \quad (1)$$

where  $\rho_i$  and  $V_i$  are the density and volume fraction of possible polymorphic forms, respectively. In the case of TiO<sub>2</sub> the calculations were carried for the following values:  $\rho_{anatase} = 3.894 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ,  $\rho_{rutile} = 4.250 \text{ g/cm}^3$ .

X – ray diffraction measurements, XRD, were performed with X'Pert MPD Philips diffractometer in Bragg – Brentano configuration. The crystallite size,  $d_{XRD}$ , was calculated according to Scherrer's formula [34].

Transmission electron microscopy, TEM, investigations were carried out using FEI TECNAI TF 20 X-TWIN (FEG) 200kV microscope.

Optical spectra of diffuse reflectance  $R_{diff}(\lambda)$  were obtained with a double beam spectrophotometer Lambda 19 Perkin Elmer using integrating sphere. On the basis of these experiments fundamental band gap of TiO<sub>2</sub> as well as energies of optical transitions were calculated.

The electrical properties were investigated using impedance spectroscopy. The measurements were performed in air at 420°C with Solatron system (FRA 1260 + dielectric interface 1294).

Hydrogen sensing experiments consisted in measuring dynamic changes in the electrical resistance of TiO<sub>2</sub>-based materials upon exposure to H<sub>2</sub>. The sensors were prepared in a form of circular tablets which were formed from nanopowders by pressing under 25 MPa and subsequent heating up to 400°C for 18 h in a synthetic air atmosphere. The measurements were performed at a constant temperature chosen within the range of 200-400°C in the synthetic air working as a reference atmosphere and H<sub>2</sub> concentration in the range of 50 – 3000 ppm as it is described in [33].

## 3. Results and discussion

X – ray diffraction measurements performed for TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr reveal that nanomaterials are well – crystallized and two poly-

morphic forms, namely anatase and rutile are present as it can be concluded from Fig. 1. For the samples with 0.1 and 1 at.% Cr anatase form dominates. However, rutile fraction rises as the chromium amount increases, as it can be seen in the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5 at.% Cr.

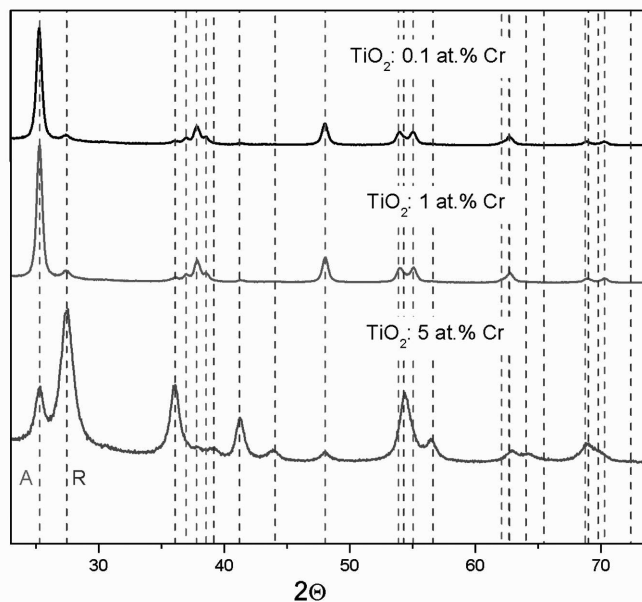


Fig. 1. XRD patterns of Cr – doped TiO<sub>2</sub> nanopowders; A – anatase R – rutile

Transmission Electron Microscopy, TEM, was applied to investigate morphology of TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr nanopowders. Fig. 2 presents selected TEM images of TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr nanopowders together with the grain size distributions obtained on the basis of the series of TEM results. As it can be seen, the grains of pure TiO<sub>2</sub> as well as those of TiO<sub>2</sub> doped with 0.1 and 5 at.% Cr are spherical in shape and the grain size decreases as chromium fraction rises.

TABLE 1. summarizes the results obtained from BET, XRD and TEM measurements for TiO<sub>2</sub> based nanostructures. As it can be seen, the intention to synthesize TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr with constant SSA in order to investigate the influence of Cr dopant was realized for the pure sample as well as for those doped with 0.1 and 1 at.% Cr. In the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5 at.% Cr, the obtained SSA reached 102.9 m<sup>2</sup>/g. This effect can be attributed to the increased density of oxygen vacancies in the structure. In the literature, one can find information on FSS procedure to obtain TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr with constant SSA even for highly doped samples [35].

On the basis of TABLE 1. one can also observe that the crystallite size remains the same for the samples up to 1 at.% Cr, as determined from XRD measurements. No significant impact of Cr dopant on the lattice parameters  $a$  and  $c$  of TiO<sub>2</sub> was observed as discussed previously [28, 29]. The reason might be in the similarity between ionic radii of Cr<sup>3+</sup> and Ti<sup>4+</sup> which are equal to  $r_{Cr^{3+}} = 0.062 \text{ nm}$ ,  $r_{Ti^{4+}} = 0.061 \text{ nm}$ , according to [36].

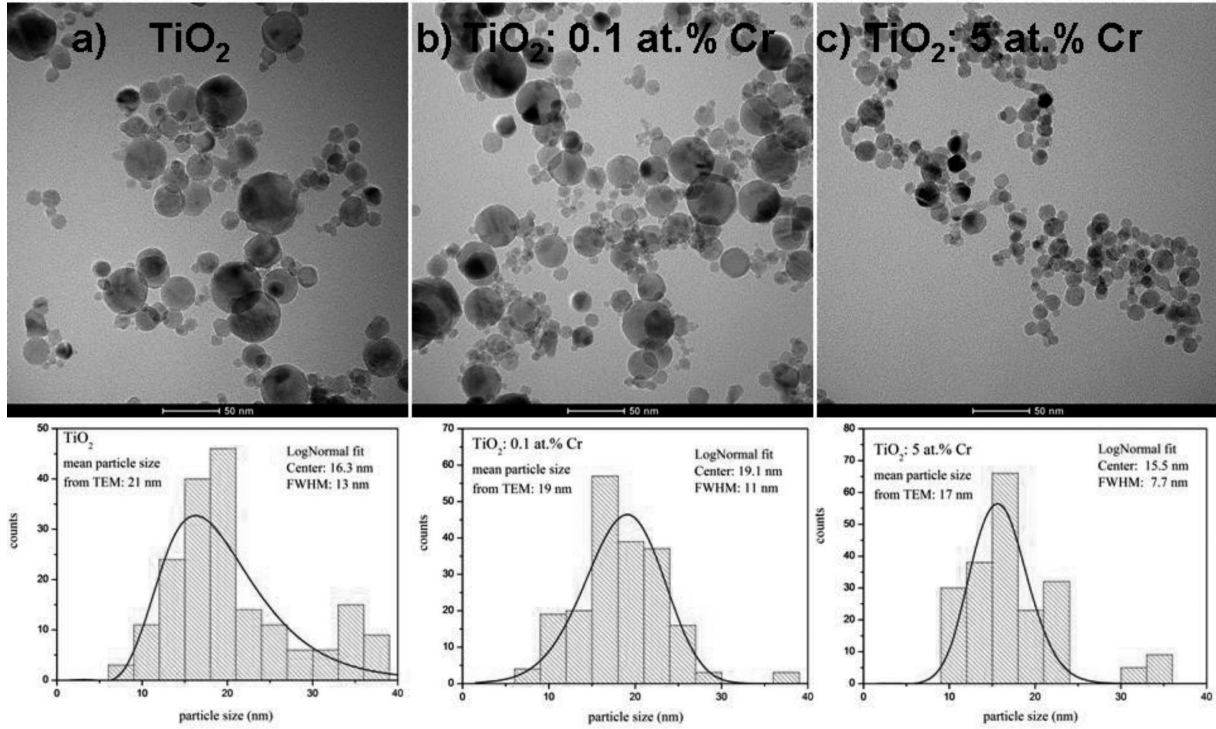


Fig. 2. TEM images of: (a)  $\text{TiO}_2$ ; (b)  $\text{TiO}_2$ : 0.1 at.% Cr; (c)  $\text{TiO}_2$ : 5 at.% Cr nanopowders along with particle size distributions obtained on the basis of the series of TEM images

TABLE 1

Results of BET, XRD and TEM measurements for Cr doped  $\text{TiO}_2$  nanopowders

at. % Cr	SSA ( $\text{m}^2/\text{g}$ )	$d_{\text{BET}}$ (nm)	Crystallite size from XRD (nm)		Lattice parameters (nm)		Weight % of rutile	$d_{\text{TEM}}$ (nm) mean value
			anatase (A)	rutile (R)	a	c		
0	62.7	24.5	19.9	15.9	0.3789 (A) 0.4599 (R)	0.9505 (A) 0.2957 (R)	7	21
0.1	65.3	23.5	18.6	12.2	0.3788 (A) 0.4602 (R)	0.9501 (A) 0.2958 (R)	6	19
1	60.2	25.5	18.0	12.9	0.3788 (A) 0.4598 (R)	0.9501 (A) 0.2958 (R)	6	-
5	102.9	14.0	12.1	10.9	0.3791 (A) 0.4603 (R)	0.9502 (A) 0.2953 (R)	77	17

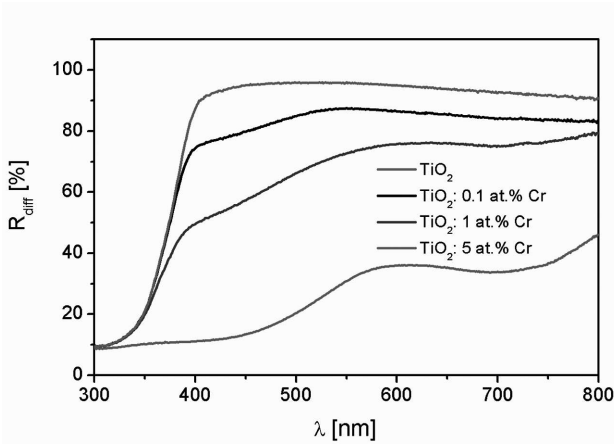


Fig. 3. Optical diffuse reflectance  $R_{\text{diff}}$  of as a function of wavelength  $\lambda$  obtained of  $\text{TiO}_2$ : Cr nanopowders as a function of wavelength

In order to study energies of optical transitions for the samples of  $\text{TiO}_2$ : Cr, the UV – vis spectrometry was applied. Fig. 3 demonstrates optical diffused, reflectance  $R_{\text{diff}}(\lambda)$  obtained for  $\text{TiO}_2$ : Cr nanopowders with different chromium loading.

As it can be seen, the fundamental absorption edge shifts towards longer wavelengths as chromium incorporates into  $\text{TiO}_2$  structure and forms localized acceptor levels within  $\text{TiO}_2$  band gap. With the increasing dopant concentration, the fundamental absorption edge disappears gradually due to enlarged density of states related to the impurities in the band gap.

On the basis of the optical diffused reflectance, taking into account its derivative  $dR_{\text{diff}}/d\lambda$ , one can determine energies of optical transitions corresponding to the wavelength at which the function  $dR_{\text{diff}}/d\lambda$  reaches maximum value. Fig. 4 displays the fitting procedure. For the pure  $\text{TiO}_2$  sample there

are two optical transitions  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  which correspond to the band gap energies of anatase and rutile, respectively.

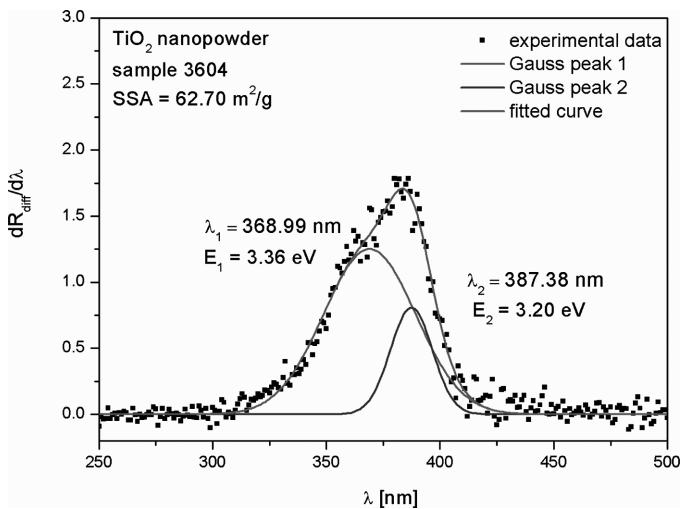


Fig. 4. Analysis of the optical transitions from reflectance spectra of  $\text{TiO}_2\text{: Cr}$  nanopowders;  $dR_{diff}/d\lambda$  is the first derivative of the spectrum;  $\lambda_1$  and  $\lambda_2$  represent wavelengths at which  $dR_{diff}/d\lambda$  attains the maximum, whereas  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are energies of the optical transitions

The values of determined optical transition energies are given in TABLE 2. As one can see, the energies of optical transitions are shifted towards larger values as compared with literature data. In the case of single crystal,  $E$  is in the range of 3.20-3.26 eV for anatase and 3.02-3.05 eV for rutile [37, 38]. The observed size – dependent shift,  $\Delta E$ , can be explained on the basis of quantum confinement of the charge carriers in nanometric – size grains [39]. For the sample with Cr loading equal to 5 at.%, the energies of optical transitions are not easy to distinguish. Energy  $E_{dop}$  in the range of 2.40-2.65 eV can be attributed to Cr levels [28-31].

TABLE 2  
Energies of optical transitions obtained from differential reflectance spectra for  $\text{TiO}_2\text{: Cr}$  nanopowders

Sample $\text{TiO}_2\text{: Cr}$ (at. % Cr)	$E_1$ (eV)	$E_2$ (eV)	$E_{dop}$ (eV)
0	3.36	3.20	–
0.1	3.39	3.24	2.65
1	3.44	3.29	2.60
5	2.40		

The electrical properties of  $\text{TiO}_2$  doped with Cr nano-materials were investigated using impedance spectroscopy at  $420^\circ\text{C}$  in air. In order to study the influence of chromium dopant on the electrical conductivity, having in mind that the Specific Surface Area affects electrical properties, three samples with similar SSA were chosen. Fig. 5 presented below demonstrates the influence of Cr dopant on the impedance of  $\text{TiO}_2\text{: Cr}$  nanosensors.

As it can be seen from Fig. 5, increasing Cr concentration improves conductivity of  $\text{TiO}_2$ -based nanosensors. As chromium levels are localized relatively high above valence band (0.5-1.5 eV) of  $\text{TiO}_2$  [28-31] it appears that in the range of

temperatures below  $400^\circ\text{C}$  chromium is non – active dopant. Instead of ionized  $\text{Cr}'_{\text{Ti}}$  centers neutral  $\text{Cr}^x_{\text{Ti}}$  centers are formed according to the equation:

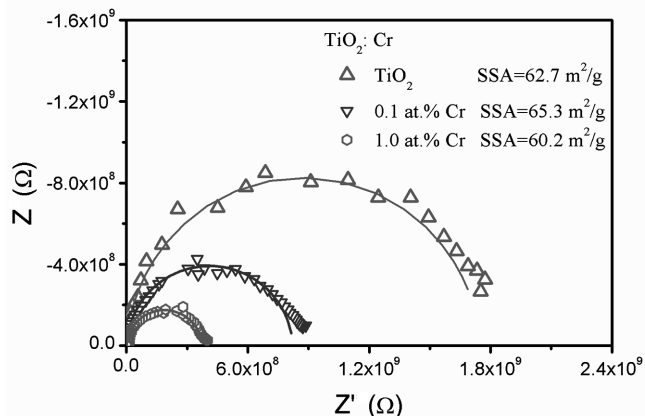
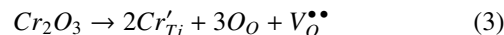
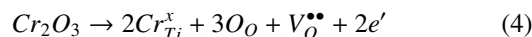


Fig. 5. Impedance spectra of  $\text{TiO}_2\text{: Cr}$  sensors with the increasing concentration of dopant measured in air at  $420^\circ\text{C}$

Increasing temperature shifts the equilibrium of the above mentioned equation to the left hand side, whereas decreasing temperature promotes neutral  $\text{Cr}^x_{\text{Ti}}$  centers formation. Taking into account the reaction of Cr incorporation into  $\text{TiO}_2$  structure:



where  $\text{Cr}'_{\text{Ti}}$  represents chromium substituted in Ti position,  $V_\text{O}^{\bullet\bullet}$  is an oxygen vacancy and  $\text{O}_\text{O}$  denotes oxygen at its lattice site, respectively, one can write:



As it can be seen in this case, Cr dopant improves electrical conductivity of n – type  $\text{TiO}_2$  nanosensor.

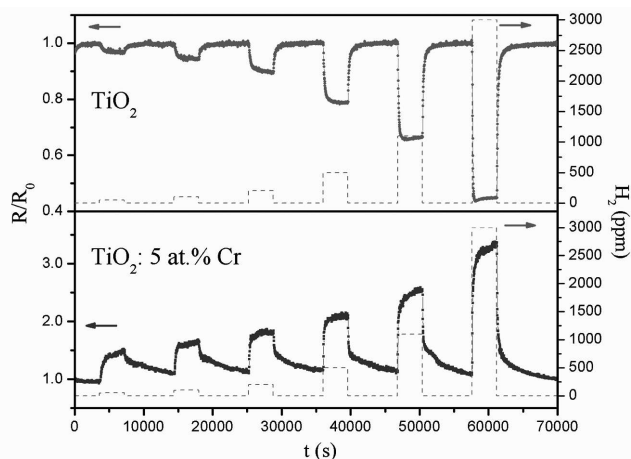


Fig. 6. Dynamic changes in the electrical resistance of  $\text{TiO}_2$  and  $\text{TiO}_2\text{: 5at.\% Cr}$  sensing tablets upon interaction with  $\text{H}_2$  at  $250^\circ\text{C}$

Fig. 6 demonstrates dynamic changes in the electrical resistance,  $R$ , of  $\text{TiO}_2$  and  $\text{TiO}_2\text{: 5 at.\% Cr}$  sensing tablets caused by interaction with hydrogen as a function of time at  $250^\circ\text{C}$ . The dashed, rectangular profiles in each case correspond to the step changes in hydrogen concentration in the reference atmosphere (synthetic air).



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As a result of the interaction between H<sub>2</sub> and TiO<sub>2</sub> sensor, the electrical resistance, *R*, of pure nanomaterial decreases, whereas in the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5 at. % Cr the electrical resistance increases, which can be treated as a proof of n – p transition induced by Cr dopant. Moreover, the changes in the electrical resistance are large and reproducible.

Fig. 7 demonstrates the sensor response, *S*, of TiO<sub>2</sub> based sensors defined as *R*<sub>0</sub>/*R* for n – type materials and *R*/*R*<sub>0</sub> in the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5 at.% Cr as a function of H<sub>2</sub> concentration at 300°C. These two definitions of the sensor response are given to facilitate interpretation and comparison between samples that exhibit n and p type conductivity. As it can be seen, 5 at.% of Cr dopant significantly improves the sensor response.

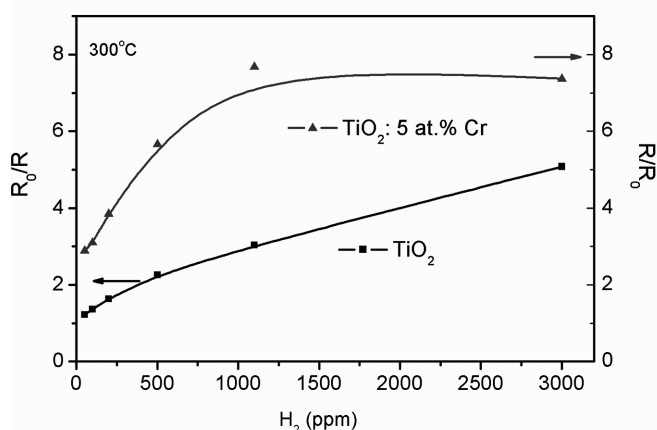


Fig. 7. Sensor response defined as *R*<sub>0</sub>/*R* for TiO<sub>2</sub> (n – type sensor) and *R*/*R*<sub>0</sub> in the case of TiO<sub>2</sub>: 5 at.% Cr (p – type sensor) as a function of H<sub>2</sub> concentration at 300°C

#### 4. Conclusions

The results of the above – mentioned experiments on TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr sensors allow to draw the following conclusions:

- Flame Spray Synthesis technique enables to obtain well crystallized TiO<sub>2</sub> nanopowders
- Cr dopant affects anatase to rutile transformation as indicated by XRD measurements
- TEM imaging reveals that TiO<sub>2</sub>: Cr grains are spherical in shape
- Cr additive improves conductivity of TiO<sub>2</sub> based materials
- The electrical resistance, *R*, decreases upon hydrogen exposure up to 1 at.% Cr while the reversed effect is observed at 5 at.% Cr
- Sensors obtained from TiO<sub>2</sub>:Cr nanopowders show promising dynamic characteristics in response to hydrogen. The sensor responses are large and reproducible especially in the case of 5 at.% Cr.

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