Table of contents

List of symbols[a] 8

1 Introduction 11

1.1 Nanoparticle catalysis 11

1.2 Small molecules activation on metal nanoparticle catalysts: the need for model systems 12

1.3 Computational first principles modeling of nanoparticle catalysts 16

1.3.1 Mechanistic insights for small molecule activation 16

1.4 Objectives and outline 24

2 Computational Methods 26

2.1 Periodic density functional theory 26

2.1.1 Density functional theory foundations 26

2.1.2 Exchange-correlation functionals 27

2.1.3 Periodic boundary conditions and basis sets 29

2.1.4 Pseudopotentials 32

2.1.5 From bulk to surface slabs and nanoparticle model systems 33

2.2 Electronic structure analysis via the projected crystal orbital Hamilton population 34

2.3 Nudged elastic band 36

2.4 Free energy from density functional theory and statistical mechanics 37

2.4.1 Ideal gas 38

2.4.2 Adsorbed species 40

2.5 Free energy from ab initio molecular dynamics 41

2.5.1 Ab initio molecular dynamics 42

2.5.2 Free energy calculations 43

2.5.3 Metadynamics 44

2.6 Microkinetic modeling 45

3 Reactivity of Ru step-edge sites towards the direct CO dissociation and particle size effects 48

3.1 Increased back-donation explains step-edge reactivity and particle size effect for CO activation on Ru nanoparticles 48

3.1.1 Individual contributions 48

3.1.2 Abstract 48

3.1.3 Introduction 49

3.1.4 Computational details 50

3.1.5 Results 51

3.1.6 Conclusions 74

3.2 Electronic structure-reactivity relationship on Ruthenium step-edge sites from carbonyl ^{13}C chemical shift analysis 76

3.2.1 Individual contributions 76

3.2.2 Abstract 76

3.2.3 Introduction 76

3.2.4 Results and discussion 78

3.2.5 Conclusions 83

4 Dynamic effects on Ru-catalyzed Fischer-Tropsch synthesis mechanisms 85

4.1 Adlayer dynamics drives CO activation in Ru-catalyzed Fischer-Tropsch synthesis 85

4.1.1 Individual contributions 85

4.1.2 Abstract 85

4.1.3 Introduction 85

4.1.4 Computational section 87

4.1.5 Results 90

4.1.6 Discussion 96

4.1.7 Conclusions 98

4.2 Hydrogen-transfers and C–O activation on Ru catalysts: entropy-driven mechanisms revealed by ab initio molecular dynamics 100

4.2.1 Individual contributions 100

4.2.2 Abstract 100

4.2.3 Introduction 100

4.2.4 Results and discussion 102
4.2.5 Conclusions 107
4.3 Carbon-carbon bond formation in Fischer-Tropsch synthesis: carbene coupling mechanism from ab initio molecular dynamics 109
4.3.1 Individual contributions 109
4.3.2 Abstract 109
4.3.3 Introduction 109
4.3.4 Computational section 112
4.3.5 Results and discussion 113
4.3.6 Conclusions 127
5 Multi-scale reactivity of metal catalysts for CO_2 conversion processes 129
5.1 Intrinsic reactivity of Ni, Pd and Pt surfaces in dry reforming and competitive reactions: Insights from first principles calculations and microkinetic modeling simulations 129
5.1.1 Individual contributions 129
5.1.2 Abstract 129
5.1.3 Introduction 130
5.1.4 Computational details 132
5.1.5 Results and discussion 136
5.1.6 Conclusion 153
5.2 Contrasting the role of Ni/Al_2O_3 interfaces in water-gas shift and dry reforming of methane 155
5.2.1 Individual contributions 155
5.2.2 Abstract 155
5.2.3 Introduction 155
5.2.4 Computational methods 159
5.2.5 Experimental procedures 159
5.2.6 Results 160
5.2.7 Conclusions 175
6 Conclusions 177

6.1 Summary 177
6.2 Outlook for future work 180
6.2.1 Fischer-Tropsch chemistry 180
6.2.2 First principles modeling of transition metal catalysts 181
6.3 Final remarks 183
Appendix 1 184
Appendix 2 199
Appendix 3 216
Appendix 4 228
Appendix 5 235
Appendix 6 242
Appendix 7 253
Bibliography 273