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Angelo Angelini

Photon Management Assisted by Surface Waves on Photonic Crystals



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A Deliana, compagna di una vita.

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Contents

1 Bloch Surface Waves on A One Dimensional Photonic Crystal	1
1.1 Bloch Surface Waves: General Properties	5
1.2 Ultrathin Refractive Structures for 2D Optics	14
1.3 Resonant Coupling Assisted by Surface Diffractive Structures	20
References	26
2 Coupling of Spontaneous Emitters with Bloch Surface Waves	29
2.1 Tunable Coupling of BSWs with the External Environment: Influence of the Multilayer Thickness	34
2.2 Directional Extraction of Luminescence Assisted by Surface Relief Gratings	35
2.3 Enhanced Fluorescent Signal in Bio-Sensing Experiments	39
References	43
3 Ring Antennae: Resonant Focusing and Collimated Extraction of Luminescence	45
3.1 In-Plane Focusing by Concentric Corrugations	46
3.2 Beaming of Fluorescence from Localized Sources	51
3.2.1 Experimental Quantification of the Extraction Enhancement Factor	55
References	59
Conclusions	61
References	63

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Schematic view of photonic crystals with different dimensionality	2
Figure 1.2	In the <i>upper</i> homogenous region, a scheme that defines the plane of incidence when an electromagnetic plane wave impinges on a surface. The surface is characterized by its normal vector \hat{S} . The plane wave is characterized by a wave-vector (k_{inc}) and the electric field, whose orientation can be decomposed in two orthogonal states: TM (<i>red arrow</i>) and TE (<i>green point</i>). In the <i>lower</i> region: sketch of an exemplary multilayer stack composed by high ($n = 2$) and low ($n = 1.5$) refractive index layers each 100 nm thick.	3
Figure 1.3	Exemplary TE and TM reflectance maps associated to a one dimensional photonic crystal. The maps show a region of high reflection corresponding to the band gap of the photonic crystal	4
Figure 1.4	TE reflectance map of the ML sketched in Fig. 1.2 grown on a glass substrate. The map clearly shows the region of Total Internal Reflection beyond the critical angle	5
Figure 1.5	a Cross-sectional view of the 1DPC grown on a glass substrate. b Calculated TE reflectance map as function of λ and θ . The inset shows an intensity profile extracted along the <i>green dashed line</i> (at $\lambda = 532$ nm). c Electric field distribution across the multilayer of the BSW mode calculated at $\lambda = 532$ nm. The <i>black arrows</i> indicate the in-plane orientation of the electric field. d Normalized intensity profile of the electric field extracted along the <i>black dashed line</i> in (c)	7
Figure 1.6	Schematic view of the customized Leakage Radiation Microscope employed in the experiments	9

Figure 1.7 BFP image (on the *top*) of the NA = 1.49 objective illuminating a flat 1DPC with incoherent, unpolarized light (filtered at $\lambda = 532 \pm 1$ nm). On the *bottom*, the cross-sectional intensity profile extracted along the *red dashed line* (*solid green line*) and calculated reflectivity profile for an s-polarized plane wave at $\lambda = 532$ nm (*solid blue line*). Reprinted from [32] 11

Figure 1.8 Back Focal Plane images of incoherent light filtered at $\lambda = 532$ nm and polarized along x (image on the *left*) and y (image on the *right*). The images show dips of reflectance associated to the coupling of light with the surface mode. 12

Figure 1.9 Cross-sectional view of the electric field distribution of the BSW mode within the polymeric structure (on the *left*) and on the bare multilayer (on the *right*). 13

Figure 1.10 Reflectance profile calculated by TMM method at fixed wavelength ($\lambda = 532$ nm) on the bare surface (*black line*) and on the coated surface (*red line*). 13

Figure 1.11 Sketch of the experimental setup employed to observe the fluorescent trace of BSW coupled through a prism oil contacted in the Kretschmann configuration. Illumination is provided by a quasi-collimated laser beam. 14

Figure 1.12 Reflectance profile as function of the normalized incident wavevector calculated at $\lambda = 532$ nm for different multilayers with the same elementary cell but different number of layers 16

Figure 1.13 Measured (*blue*) and calculated (*green*) normalized intensity profile of fluorescence excited by the BSW coupled at $y = 0$. The *red dashed line* has been obtained by fitting the experimental data with Eq. 1.8. In the inset, the fluorescent trace of the BSW as imaged on the CMOS camera reported in false colors 17

Figure 1.14 **a** Calculated BSW focusing by means of a 30-nm-thick lens having a radius of curvature of 6 μm and diameter 10.4 μm . **b** Fluorescence image of BSW as focused by the polymeric lens (marked with the *black dashed line*). The *blue dashed lines* indicate the focal plane. **c** Intensity profile extracted along the *blue lines* in **(a)** (*red line*) and **(b)** (*blue line*). The *black dashed line* represents the calculated profile convolved with the PSF of the collection system. Copyright OSA. Reprinted from [51] 18

Figure 1.15 **a** Calculated and **b** measured intensity distribution of a BSW injected into a polymeric ridge waveguide (contour, *dashed white line*) by means of a 2D lens.

c Experimental intensity profile along the *y* axis extracted from **b**. The vertical *dotted lines* indicate the waveguide terminal ends. Inside the waveguide the profile is well fitted by an exponentially decaying function (*dashed red line*). Copyright OSA. Reprinted from [51] 20

Figure 1.16 **a** Sketch of the one-dimensional photonic crystal with a linear grating patterned on the surface. The *top* layer of the 1DPC is a SEM image of the grating. **b** LRM image of the BFP when the grating is enlightened from the air side with a NA = 0.95 objective. The light comes from an halogen lamp and is filtered with a Laser Line Filter ($\lambda = 532$ nm). **c** Intensity profile extracted from **b** along the *red dashed line* (*green solid line*). For comparison, also the intensity profile extracted form Fig. 1.7 (*green dashed line*) is reported. **d** Wide field fluorescence image of the BSW launched by the grating on the flat surface. 21

Figure 1.17 Schematic view of the leakage radiation interference microscope. Copyright OSA. Reprinted from [53] 23

Figure 1.18 **a** Detailed sketch of the photonic structure and the experimental arrangement used for sample illumination and leakage radiation collection. **b** scanning electron microscope image of the grating coupler for a Bloch surface wave (BSW). **c** BFP image of grating coupled BSW upon illumination with a NA = 0.15 beam. **d** Experimental (*green*) cross-sectional intensity profile of BFP along the *dashed white line* and calculated angularly resolved TE-polarized reflectance at $\lambda = 532$ nm revealing BSW resonances as indicated. Copyright OSA. Reprinted from [53] 24

Figure 1.19 **a** Direct plane image of BSW launched from a grating coupler. **b** Corresponding BSW phase distribution retrieved. **c** Real part of the obtained BSW complex field. **d** $|FFT|^2$ profile of the measured complex field along the propagation direction of BSW. Copyright OSA. Adapted from [53] 25

Figure 2.1 **a** Calculated TE reflectance map for the multilayer design sketched in the *inset*. **b** Calculated electric field distribution of the BSW along the multilayer cross-section. The *black line* indicates the truncation interface position. The intensity has been normalized with respect to the propagating radiation in the glass. The *red line* is

associated to the BSW sustained by the design in (a), while the *blue* one is associated to the multilayer discussed in Chap. 1. 30

Figure 2.2 **a** *Cross sectional view* of the calculated near-field distribution of the electric field radiated by a point like source. **b** Calculated far-field radiation pattern corresponding to the near-field distribution in (a) for different wavelengths. **c** Sketch of the experimental setup in the reverse Kretschmann configuration. Adapted from [10] **d** Experimental fluorescence intensity map function of (λ, θ) . In the *inset*, a vertical cut integrated over a narrow wavelength range (*yellow band*) is reported. Adapted from [10]. 31

Figure 2.3 **a** Schematic view of the customized fluorescence leakage radiation microscope. **b** Example of real color fluorescence BFP obtained when fluorescence is excited on the flat surface of a 1DPC. The external *white dashed ring* indicates the NA of the oil immersion objective, while the internal one signs the air/glass light line. The light polarization state is indicated by the *white arrows*. An intensity cross-section is reported in (c), where the normalized intensities collected by the R and G channels of the CMOS camera are reported. In the *inset* a detail about the angular position of the two peaks 33

Figure 2.4 Calculated far field radiation pattern for two multilayers with same design and four pairs of layers (*blue line*) and ten pairs of layers (*red line*). **b, c** Experimental fluorescence measure showing the BFP collected when fluorescence is excited on the flat area of a four pairs **b** and ten pairs **c** 1DPC. The two images are merged in (d) for easier comparison 35

Figure 2.5 Cross sectional sketch of flat (a) and patterned (c) multilayer; calculated near-field intensity distribution of light radiated by an emitter close to the surface of a flat (b) and patterned (d) multilayer ($N = 10$); e expanded view of the intensity distribution of BSW-coupled diffracted fluorescence; f angular pattern of emitted light in the case of flat and corrugated 1DPCs, highlighting the BSWassisted beaming effect. Adapted from [22] 37

Figure 2.6 **a** Schematic view of the linear grating patterned on top of the 1DPC. The *top layer* is a SEM image. Adapted from [23] **b** Fluorescence BFP image obtained by collecting fluorescence coming from the patterned area. The two diffracted branches superimposing in the center confirm

the BSW-coupled fluorescence diffraction. The *bright green spot* in the center is the residual laser radiation.

c Same of **(b)** collected with a polarization filter (oriented according to the *white arrow*) along the collection path that puts in evidence the TE polarization of both the BSW-coupled fluorescence and the diffracted BSW-CE. **d** Intensity profile extracted along the *red dashed line* in **(b)**, that evidences the normal beam due to the grating effect 38

Figure 2.7 Picture of the fluorescence microscope used in the sensing experiments. Adapted from [20]. 40

Figure 2.8 Schematic view of the patterned 1DPC. **b** Picture of the four groups of linear gratings under white light illumination. **c** Image of the photonic crystal sample employed in the sensing experiments. Adapted from [20] 41

Figure 2.9 Fluorescence image (*in false colors*) of a sub-group of 4 gratings either non-resonantly **(a)** or resonantly **(b)** excited by the incident laser beam (incidence is 1.6°) upon polarization rotation; **c** comparison of intensity profiles across one grating (*yellow dashed line* in **(a,b)**) under on-resonance and off-resonance conditions. Adapted from [20] 42

Figure 2.10 Fluorescence titration curves collected for different miRNA-16 concentrations, inside and outside the gratings. The reported concentration refers to the miRNA-16 molarity in the incubating solution. Adapted from [20]. 43

Figure 3.1 **a** SEM image of the concentric ring structure patterned on the surface of a 1DPC. The structure is etched in the last SiO_2 layer. **b** Schematic cross-sectional view of the diffractive structure engraved in the last layer of the photonic crystal. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 46

Figure 3.2 Schematic view of the beam blocker placed in the BFP of the collecting objective to filter out the directly transmitted light. 46

Figure 3.3 SEM image of the concentric ring diffractive structure employed to couple far-field radiation to BSW and localize it in the center of the ring array. The concentric grating is patterned on the surface of the 1DPC by EBL 47

Figure 3.4 In sequence: white light image of the patterned surface superposed to the intensity distribution obtained by collecting only the leakage radiation. Amplitude and phase

distributions of the optical fields collected at the surface with the same field of view of the first image. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 48

Figure 3.5 **a** amplitude and **b** phase distribution of the leakage radiation associated to a converging laser BSW. Coupling is performed by illuminating a circular grating ($D = 5 \mu\text{m}$, $L = 520 \text{ nm}$) on a “regular” multilayer with a linearly polarized (y -direction) laser ($\lambda = 532 \text{ nm}$). The *dashed circle* indicates the boundary on the inner spacer. **c** Cross-sectional field amplitude profile along the *horizontal line* shown in **(a)**. **d** Cross-sectional field phase profile and **e** its corresponding Fourier spectrum amplitude along the *horizontal line* shown in **(b)**. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5]. 49

Figure 3.6 **a** Fluorescence image of a laser BSW coupled and focused by a circular grating ($D = 8 \mu\text{m}$, $L = 520 \text{ nm}$) on “low leakage” multilayer. Illumination is a collimated, circularly polarized laser beam. **b** cross-sectional fluorescence intensity along the *dashed line* in **(a)**. **c–e** same as in **(a)** with an incident laser beam linearly polarized as sketched by the *arrows* in the figures. All images are collected by means of the setup sketched in Fig. 1.17. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 50

Figure 3.7 **a** Reflection bright-field image of a circular grating made through a top objective ($\text{NA} = 0.95$) and laser focusing in the central spacer; **b** direct plane fluorescence image collected by the $\text{NA} = 0.95$ objective operating in air. Reprinted from [8]. 51

Figure 3.8 Back focal plane images for BSW-coupled fluorescence. **a** Fluorescence BFP images collected from a planar *regular* multilayer. **b** Fluorescence BFP collected from a circular grating ($D = 5 \mu\text{m}$, $\Lambda_g = 520 \text{ nm}$) fabricated on *regular* multilayer. **c** Fluorescence BFP collected from a circular grating ($D = 5 \mu\text{m}$, $\Lambda_g = 520 \text{ nm}$) fabricated on *low leakage* multilayer. Illumination is a laser beam focused onto the center of the inner spacer. For each colour image, the corresponding R-channel (*red*) and G-channel (*green*) images are separately shown in a *row on top* of the figure. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 52

Figure 3.9 Back focal plane image showing the fluorescence collected upon local illumination of the flat inner spacer of the polymeric grating. The dielectric loading

mechanism due to the deposition of the thin polymeric layer produces a redshift for the BSW dispersion such that a wider wavelength range of the dye emission spectrum can be BSW-coupled and then beamed. As a result, a more intense fluorescence beaming can be obtained over a larger spectral range 53

Figure 3.10 Different BFP images of circular gratings on *regular* multilayers are compared to corresponding schematic BFP patterns calculated by a simple geometrical model. All measured BFPs are obtained by locally exciting multiple fluorescent emitters in the center of several circular gratings ($D = 5 \mu\text{m}$) with different periods Λ_g . The corresponding calculated patterns are obtained by applying the Bragg law to the BSW-coupled fluorescence ring as diffracted by multiple wedges of the circular grating. For each wedge, a circular branch associated to the first order diffracted BSW is drawn. The superposition of all those diffraction branches produces a caustic circle whereon all the diffracted intensities sum up. The diameter of the caustic circle depends on the grating period Λ_g and indicates the *angular shape* of the diffracted fluorescence out of the multilayer surface. When the caustic circle collapses into a single point, the BSW-coupled fluorescence is almost completely beamed normally to the sample surface, with low divergence. **a, e** grating period $\Lambda_g = 560 \text{ nm}$. **b, f** grating period $\Lambda_g = 520 \text{ nm}$. **c, g** grating period $\Lambda_g = 500 \text{ nm}$. **d, h** grating period $\Lambda_g = 460 \text{ nm}$. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 55

Figure 3.11 Wide field fluorescence image of the surface of the 1DPC patterned with six circular gratings having different periods the same periods discussed in Fig. 3.10. The white arrows indicate two gratings with periods $\Lambda_g = 520$ and 460 nm respectively. The different fluorescence intensity is due to the different output angle of beamed fluorescence. The second one has indeed an output angle out of the NA of the collection objective. 56

Figure 3.12 **a** Direct image of fluorescence excited by a laser beam focused onto the flat inner spacer of a circular grating ($D = 5 \mu\text{m}$, $\Lambda_g = 520 \text{ nm}$) fabricated on *low leakage* multilayer. **b** cross-sectional fluorescence intensity along the horizontal dashed line in **(a)**. **c–e** same as in **(a)** with the addition of a polarization analyzer in collection, whose orientation is sketched by the *arrows* in the figures.

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Figure 3.13 Schematic view of the BFP scanning fluorescence microscope. The sample is scanned through a focused laser beam that locally excites fluorescence. Illumination is done by means of an oil immersion objective (NA = 1.49). The radiation leaking into the substrate is collected by the same objective and spectrally filtered for having only fluorescence reaching the detector. A tube lens produces a magnified BFP image over a remote plane where a collection fiber (core diameter 50 μm) can be accurately positioned. The fiber is movable along two directions, in such a way that light can be fiber collected from selected regions of the BFP image. Collected light is sent to a spectrometer equipped with a CCD camera. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 58

Figure 3.14 **a** False-color image of the circular grating as obtained by means of the BFP scanning system. Intensity values are integrated over a spectral range from $\lambda = 570$ nm to $\lambda = 595$ nm. **b** Fluorescence spectra corresponding to the grating inner spacer and outside the grating. *Colored bars* indicate spectral intervals used for further analysis. **c–g** statistical distributions of the enhancement factor calculated over the corresponding spectral ranges. Average and standard deviation are indicated for each spectral range. Copyright Nature Publishing Group. Reprinted from [5] 59

Introduction

In the recent past, the emerging field of nanotechnologies has stimulated intense research efforts, since it holds promise for opening new scenarios in a wide variety of fields. Although *“this field [...] will not tell us much more about fundamental physics,”* as stated by Feynman in 1959, *“it might tell us much more about all the strange phenomena that occur in complex situations. Furthermore [...], it would have an enormous number of technical applications.”* As expected by Feynman, fifty years later, nanotechnologies have become pervasive in almost all the research fields, from biology to medicine, from materials science to information technologies just to give few examples.

Within the world of nanotechnologies, nanophotonics and, more generally, technologies devoted to the manipulation of light have gained relevance in several fields. The conversion of far-field electromagnetic radiation into localized energy and vice-versa, as well as the control of the radiation angular pattern of energy emitted by localized sources, is of outstanding relevance in a wide variety of fields.

In the radio frequency regime, for example, a plethora of applications make use of antennas to transmit and receive information, from satellite communications to mobile phones. The extension of such approach to the visible range of frequencies has led to develop the novel concept of optical antennas.

A general argument in antennas theory is the scalability of parameters; that is, the antenna parameters are determined by the wavelength of incident radiation. For a long time, the main challenge in designing antennas for visible light has been related to fabrication capabilities, since the typical size of an optical antenna should be of the order of tens of nanometers, with a resolution of few nanometers.

Thanks to the development, during the last decades, of nanofabrication techniques such as electron-beam lithography (EBL) or focused ion beam (FIB) lithography, a wide variety of optical antennas have been proposed in the recent past, based on dielectric and metallic nanostructures. Particular attention have gained the metallic ones, since the exploitation of surface plasmon resonances (SPRs) allows for confining the electromagnetic field in deep subwavelength volumes and allows for controlling the radiation patter, making such structures effective optical antennas. Moreover, SPRs are localized at the interface between a

metal and a dielectric medium, making them suitable as transducers for environment variations and allowing an easy integration of photon sources with the antenna itself. Unfortunately, SPR relies on the oscillations of free electrons in metal, and it is therefore intrinsically affected by the scattering of electrons with metallic ions. The scattering results in ohmic losses that lower the performances of SPR-based devices.

Another strategy widely explored to control the light propagation is the exploitation of dielectric materials properly designed, also known as photonic crystals (PCs). Photonic crystals are periodic dielectric structures whose periodicity is comparable with the electromagnetic wavelength. Due to low intrinsic losses in dielectric materials at the visible wavelengths, photonic crystal resonators show narrow resonances with quality factors that can be orders of magnitude higher compared to metallic resonators. For this reason, PCs are widely used as high-quality cavity resonator, reflectors, or waveguides. Although the propagation of light can be strongly manipulated and finely controlled by means of PCs, the request for deep subwavelength confinement cannot be satisfied by purely dielectric structures, because of the diffraction limit. Moreover, the electromagnetic field is usually buried inside the photonic structures, making it difficult the interaction of the environment with the photonic mode. In the attempt to overcome the limitations of the two approaches, several hybrid metallo-dielectric structures have been proposed, with the aim of integrating the confining and enhancing properties of plasmonic structures with the high quality factors of photonic ones.

In this work, I will discuss the use of purely dielectric structures as a valuable alternative to metallic thin films sustaining SPRs. Properly designed one-dimensional photonic crystals (1DPCs) can indeed sustain electromagnetic modes localized at the truncation interface of periodic stacks of dielectric thin films. Their phenomenological behavior is similar to surface plasmon polaritons (SPPs) except from the lack of intrinsic ohmic losses which results in higher performances of the resulting device. Other inherent advantages such as the wide tunability in terms of resonant wavelengths and polarization state of the mode will be discussed as well.

Chapter 1 deals with a description of the basic principles underlying the physics of BSWs on 1DPC and with the interaction between BSW and surface structures. In Chap. 2, the interaction of spontaneous emitters with the photonic environment is discussed. Chapter 3 deals with a particular surface structure, i.e. a ring antenna, which is capable of focusing light, and redirects luminescence coming from localized sources into a collimated beam.