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(54) **PROCESS AND DEVICE FOR PRODUCING  
BLOCKS OF MATERIAL**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

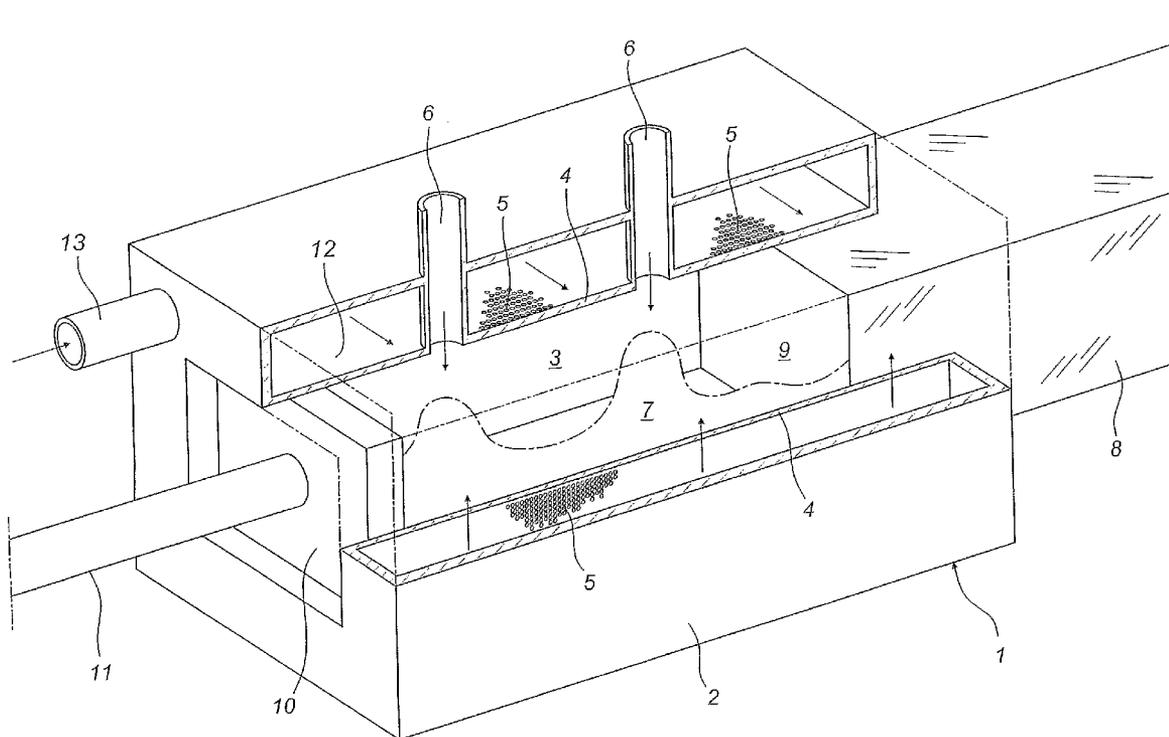
In a process and a device for producing blocks of expanded polystyrene, a loose mass (7) of polystyrene spheres is expanded in a mould (2-3), where a rear surface (9) of the polystyrene block (8) previously produced delimits the mould forming chamber. Therefore, through adherence the newly formed block (7-8) is joined to the rear end (9) of the block previously formed, and the block (8) made in this way is fed forward until it forms the rear end (9) for another newly expanded block (8), and so on to produce a sort of continuous block (8), which can be formed for cutting to any desired size, without producing any waste.

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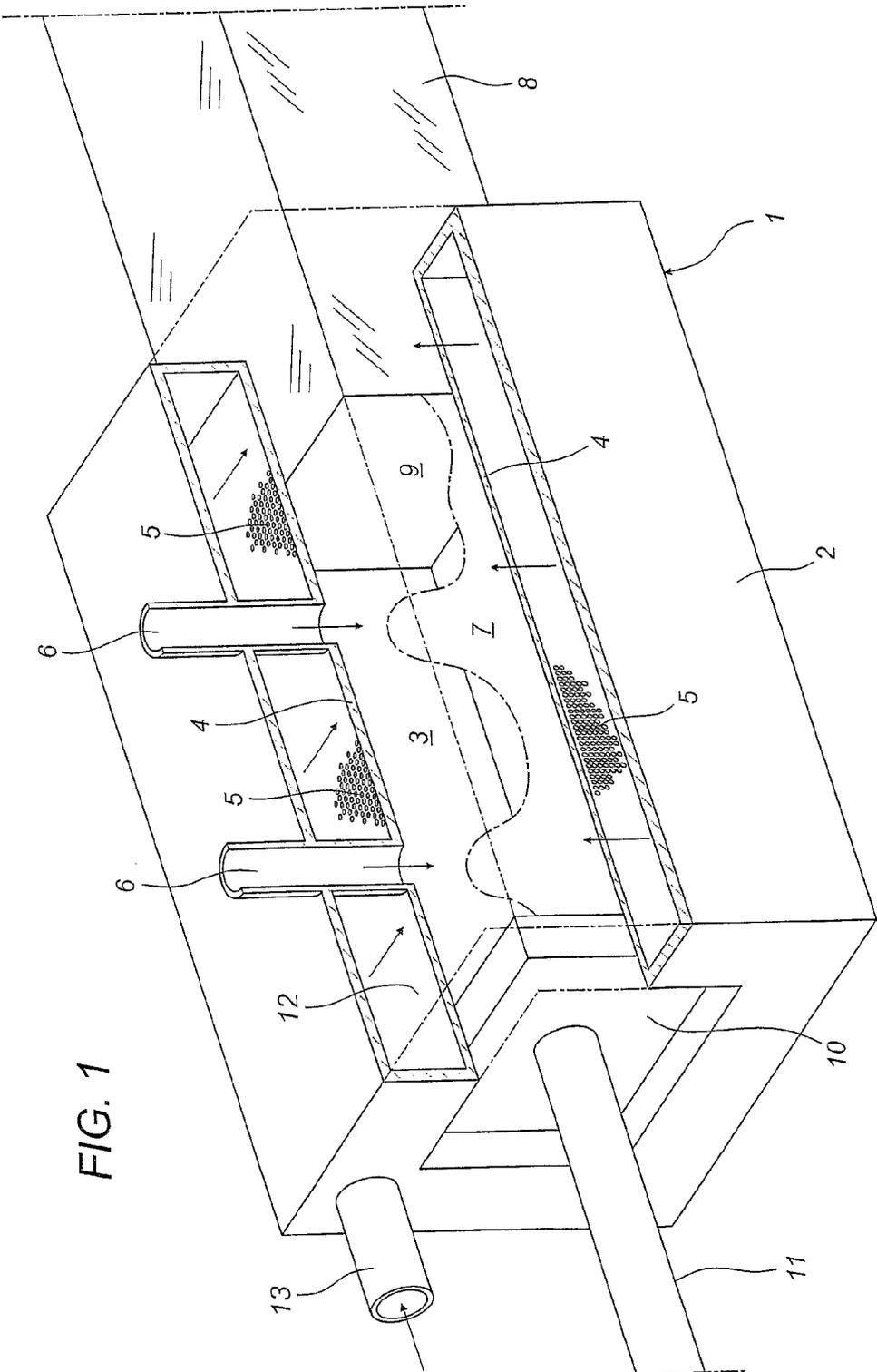
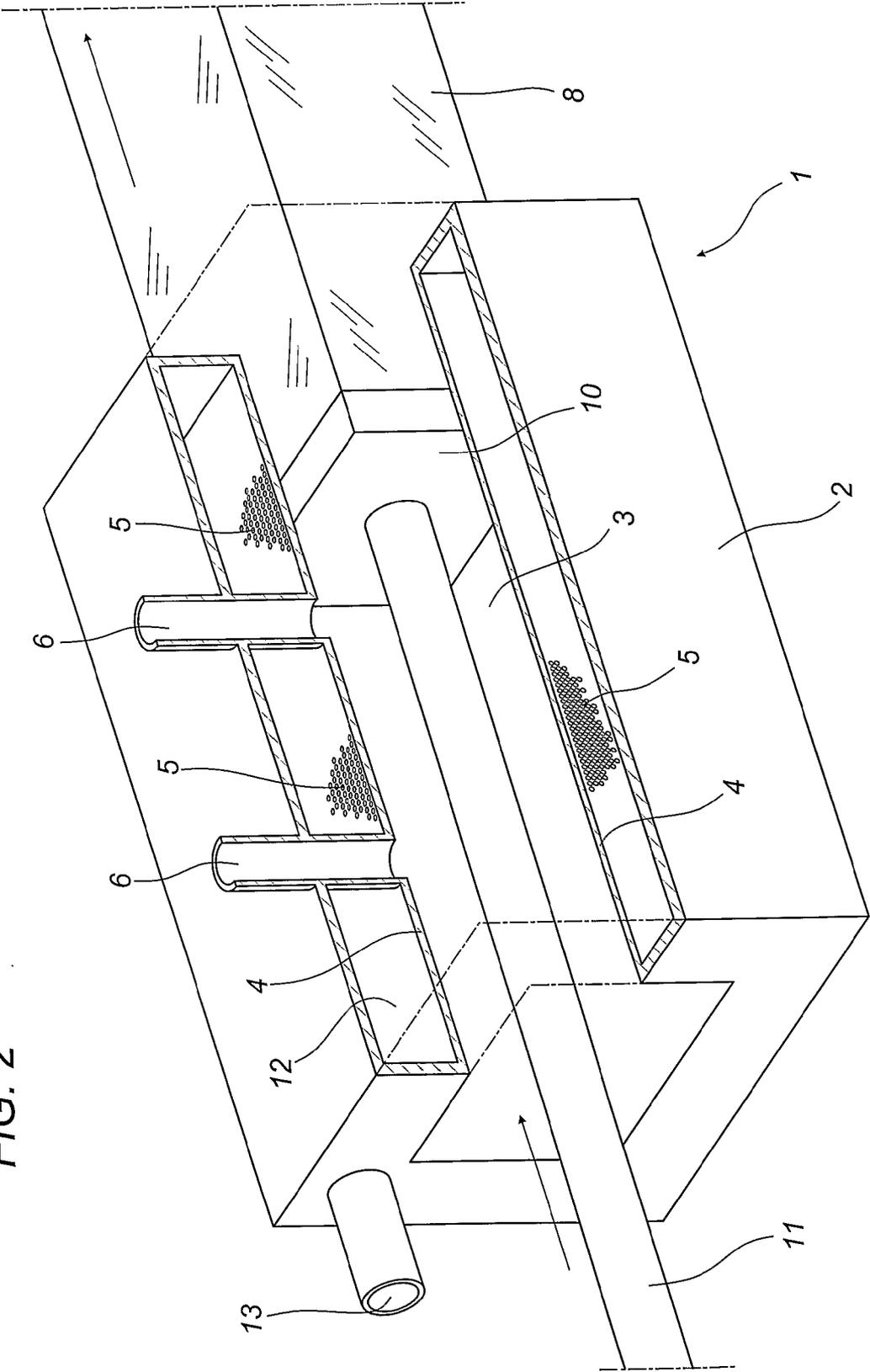
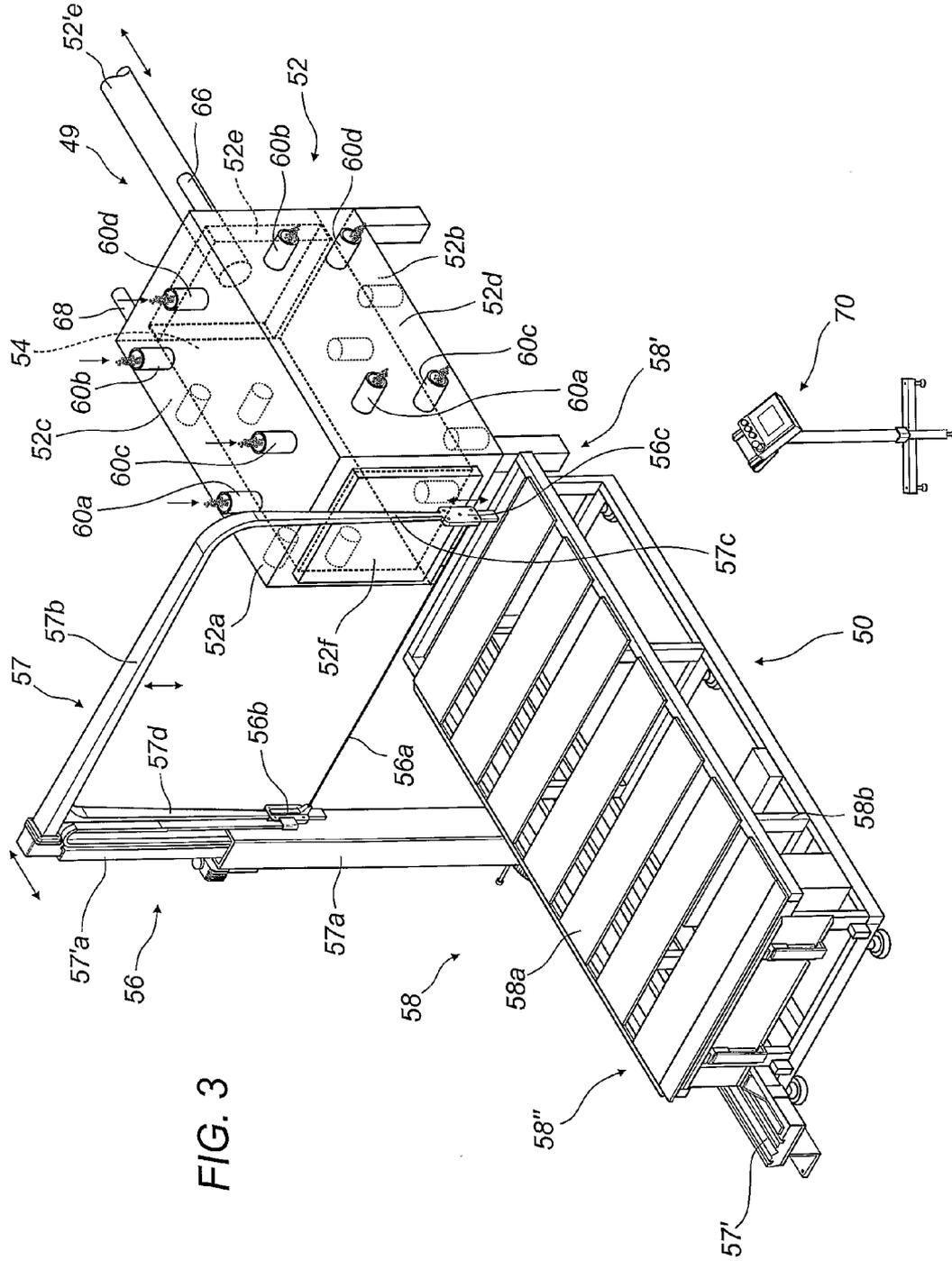


FIG. 1

FIG. 2





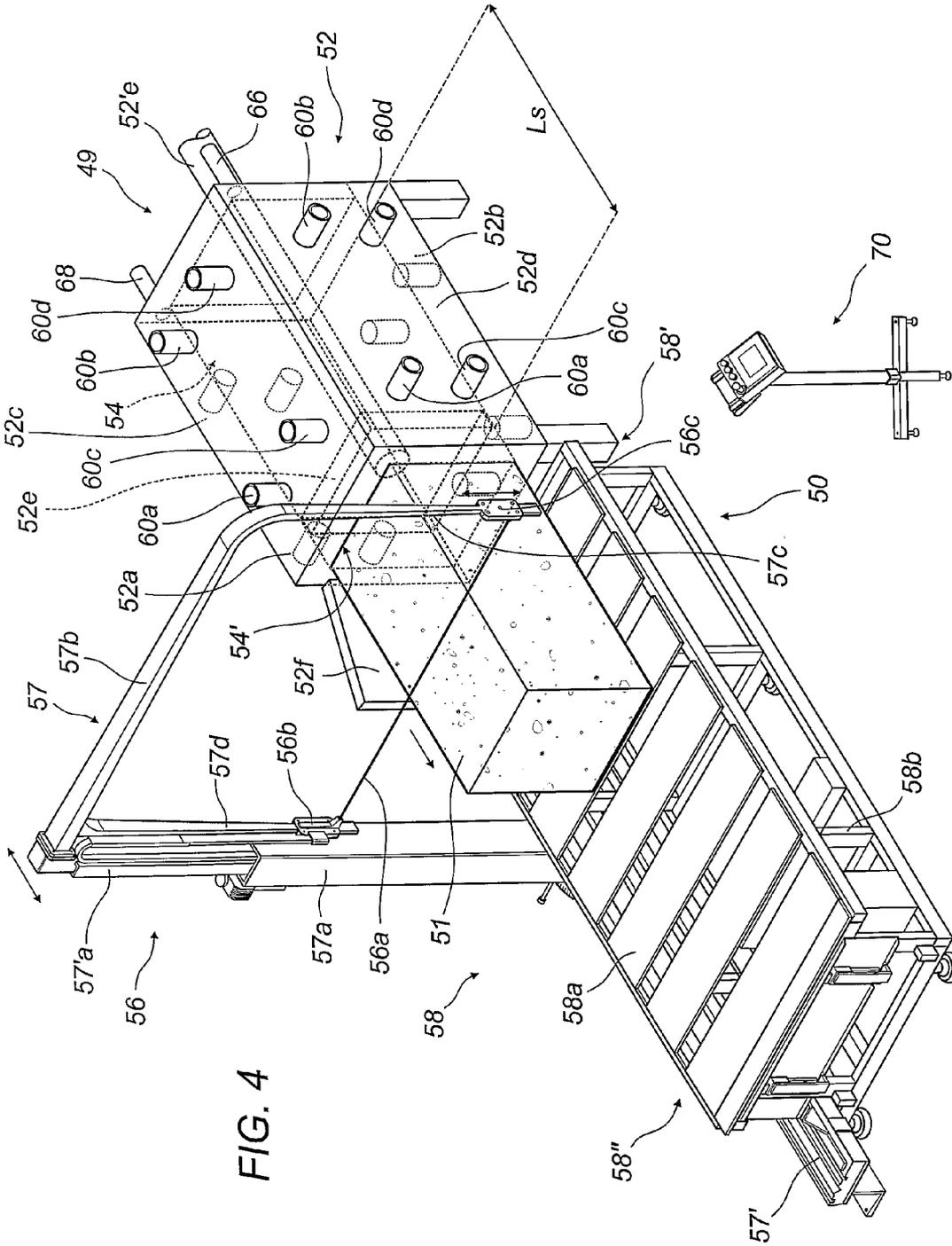
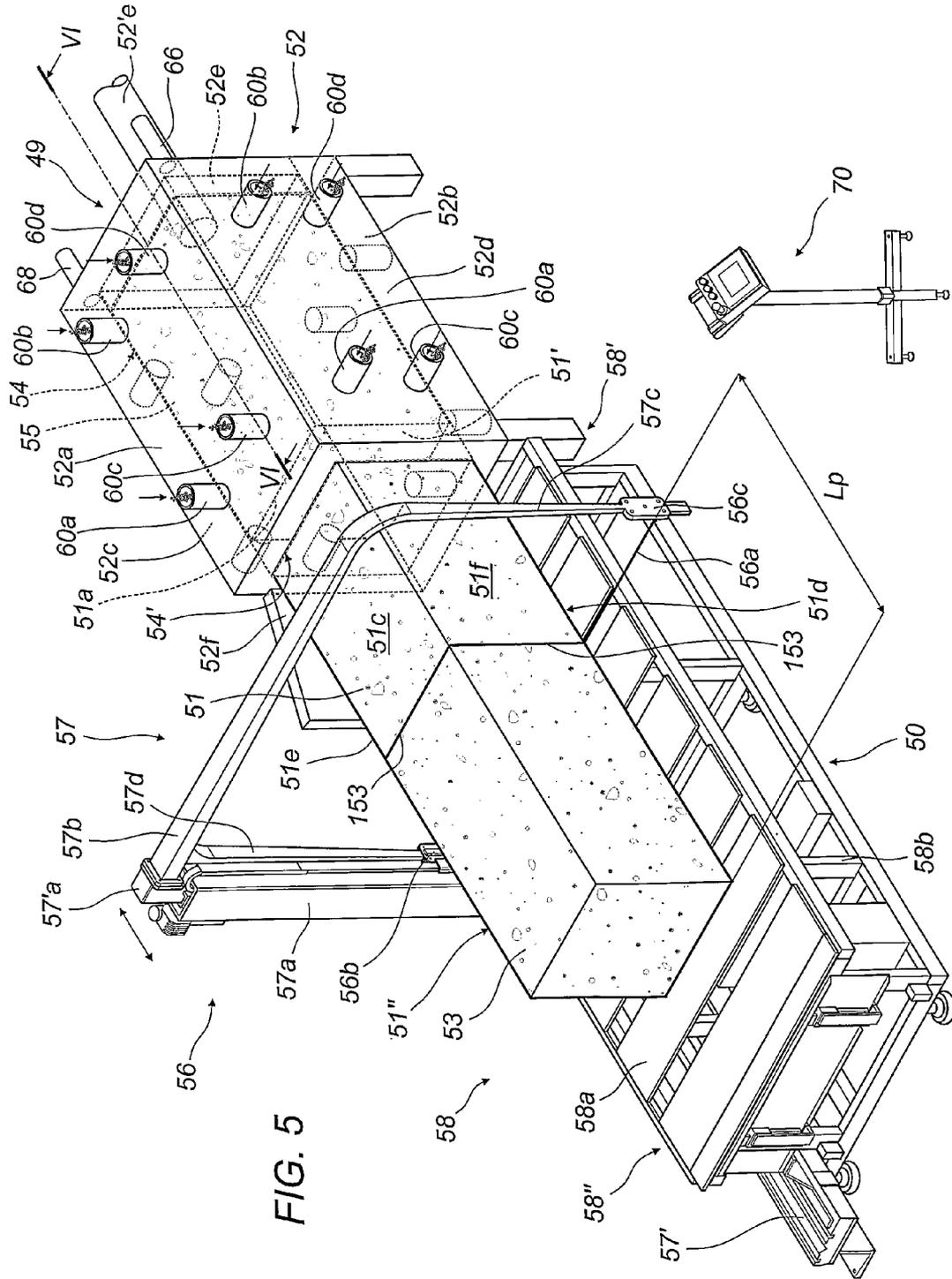


FIG. 4







## PROCESS AND DEVICE FOR PRODUCING BLOCKS OF MATERIAL

### TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to a process and an apparatus for producing blocks of material.

[0002] In particular, said material consists of an insulating material, especially a plastic material, preferably an expanded material, such as expanded polystyrene.

[0003] The predetermined block is suitable for constituting a corresponding panel for producing a structure, in particular a building.

### BACKGROUND ART

[0004] Expanded polystyrene is usually produced in blocks having the shape of a parallelepiped and is supplied in that form to users, who use cutting operations to obtain slabs or other three-dimensional shapes from it, necessary for their specific requirements.

[0005] Such blocks are fully formed, in a single operation, in moulds, fully perforated, into which a suitable quantity of loose polystyrene spheres is poured, which is then struck, substantially on all sides, by a flow of steam that penetrates from the walls of the mould in which there are openings, causing the mass to expand. In this way the polystyrene spheres are made to expand and stick to one another, forming a single body having the shape of a block or parallelepiped.

[0006] In the specific use of the material for producing panels, in particular for building, slabs are obtained from the above-mentioned blocks, by making a corresponding cut, slabs which, obviously, in terms of the longitudinal dimension (usually corresponding to the height of the panel when fitted) have the same length as the block produced in that way.

[0007] With reference to this, the blocks, and the relative moulds, have a limited range of standardised dimensions, in particular of lengths available, substantially corresponding to the most common height dimensions of the panel slabs produced.

[0008] When, as it is often the case, the height of the panels does not correspond precisely to the length of a standardised block, a corresponding portion of the block must be cut, consequently producing material waste, and as a result waste or problems and costs for disposal.

### DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

[0009] It is provided a process for producing blocks of material, the material in particular being an insulating material, especially a plastic material, preferably an expanded material, such as expanded polystyrene, the blocks preferably being for producing a structure, in particular a building, the process comprising the step of producing a working block consisting of said material, and characterised in that the working block is made by means of a plurality of forming steps.

[0010] It is also provided an apparatus for producing blocks of material, the material in particular being an insulating material, especially a plastic material, preferably an expanded material, such as expanded polystyrene, the blocks preferably being for producing a structure, in particular a building, the apparatus comprising means for forming a working block consisting of said material, and characterised in that it comprises means designed to form a working block by means of a plurality of forming steps.

[0011] In this way, a working block can be obtained having suitable and desired dimensions, preferably for producing a corresponding block of the desired length, in particular for producing corresponding panels of corresponding length, thus avoiding the production of waste material requiring appropriate treatment, as used to occur in accordance with the prior art.

[0012] These and other characteristics of the process and the apparatus are clearly described in the claims herein.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] The technical features and various advantageous aspects of the process and the apparatus are more apparent from the detailed description which follows, with reference to the accompanying drawings which illustrate preferred embodiments of the invention provided merely by way of example without restricting the scope of the inventive concept, and in which:

[0014] FIG. 1 is a schematic view, partly in cross-section, of a first preferred embodiment of an apparatus in particular for implementing the process in accordance with the present invention, in a first operating condition;

[0015] FIG. 2 is a schematic view, partly in cross-section, of the first preferred embodiment of the apparatus, in a second operating condition;

[0016] FIGS. 3 to 5 are perspective views of a second preferred embodiment of the apparatus in accordance with the present invention, in various operating conditions;

[0017] FIG. 6 is a longitudinal section, according to the line VI-VI in FIG. 5, of a preferred embodiment of the mould used in the second embodiment of the apparatus, and illustrating an operating step just before that of moulding the material;

[0018] FIG. 7 is a cross-section, according to the line VII-VII in FIG. 6, of the preferred embodiment of the mould used in the second embodiment of the apparatus.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0019] The present process for producing blocks of material, which for better understanding is described with reference to the apparatus illustrated in FIGS. 3 to 6, involves the production of a working block 51, consisting of said material, from which at least one corresponding predetermined block 53 is obtained.

[0020] In particular, the material is an insulating material, especially a plastic material and, preferably, an expanded material, such as expanded polystyrene.

[0021] In turn, the predetermined block is, in particular, suitable for constituting a corresponding panel for producing a structure, in particular a building.

[0022] Advantageously, according to the process, the working block 51 is produced by means of a plurality of separate forming steps.

[0023] Advantageously, the working block 51 is produced by means of a plurality of successive steps, in particular, moulding, for forming the block.

[0024] In particular, as illustrated, the working block 51 has the shape of a longitudinally extended block.

[0025] Advantageously, according to this process the predetermined block 53 is obtained by separating the predetermined block 53 from the working block 51.

[0026] Also, advantageously, the working block 51 is reconstructed, or renewed.

[0027] In particular, corresponding with the step of separating a predetermined block **53** from the working block **51** there is a step of reconstruction of the working block **51**.

[0028] In practice, the working block **51** is reconstructed by adding corresponding material, and, in particular, by adhesion of a corresponding block **55** of material to the working block **51**.

[0029] In practice, material is formed to restore the working block **51**.

[0030] This restoring material is added to the working block **51** material and takes the form of a basic block of material **55**, which is formed and, simultaneously, added to the working block **51**.

[0031] In practice, as becomes more clear below, the basic block **55**, subsequently formed, is added to the working block **51** during the step of forming the basic block **55**.

[0032] For this purpose, as it is better inferred from the following description, the basic block of material **55** is added to the working block **51**, by forming the same basic block **55** in contact with one rear end, or face **51a** of the working block **51**. In this way, the basic block of material **55**, subsequently formed, adheres to the working block **51**, forming a single body with the latter.

[0033] As it is more clearly indicated later in this description, the basic block **55** is formed in a corresponding mould **52**.

[0034] In practice, starting with a single mould **52** a working block **51** is produced whose length is greater than the length, or the corresponding dimension, of the mould **52**.

[0035] As illustrated in FIG. 3, the process involves forming a first block which constitutes the working block **51** with the mould closed.

[0036] Then, according to the process, advantageously, the subsequent basic blocks **55** are formed to produce the working block **51**, with the working block **51** previously formed constituting means for closing the mould forming chamber **54**.

[0037] For this purpose, the working block **51** extends, or is located, outside the mould **52**, having a rear end **51'** located or extending inside the mould **52**.

[0038] In practice, the working block **51** has corresponding lateral faces, in particular in the form of an upper face **51c**, a lower face **51d** and opposite side faces **51e**, **51f**, which are in contact with the opposite lateral faces of the forming chamber **54**, said faces being the upper face **54a**, the lower face **54b**, and the opposite side faces **54c**, **54d** of the chamber **54**.

[0039] In practice, the block **51** previously formed constitutes means for closing the front opening of the moulding chamber **54**, during the step of forming a subsequent block **55**, to be added to the block **51** already formed.

[0040] Material forming involves feeding, or injecting, the material into the forming chamber **54** of a mould **52**. The material is preferably in the form of polystyrene spheres to be expanded and made to adhere to one another.

[0041] Moreover, a working fluid, preferably steam, is also fed or injected into the mould **52** forming chamber, to achieve said expansion and reciprocal adhesion of the polystyrene spheres.

[0042] Moreover, advantageously, said working fluid is also extracted from the mould **52**, thus promoting and accelerating drying of the block just formed.

[0043] According to the process, the working block **51** is fed or moved forward with alternating feed-dwell stretches.

In particular, during the feed steps, the working block **51** is fed forward by one stretch, or stroke "Ls" which is less than the length of the mould **52**.

[0044] In this way, the material is not completely expelled from the moulding chamber, and during the subsequent forming step can constitute, with its rear face **51a** and the corresponding inner faces, in particular the lateral faces **54a**, **54b**, **54c**, **54d** and rear face **54e**, corresponding walls of the mould, space or compartment for forming a block of material **55**.

[0045] In particular, advantageously, material **55** is added to the working block **51** during the dwell steps in the feed movement. In practice, the basic block **55** to be added to the working block **51** is fowled during the working block dwell step.

[0046] As indicated, according to the process, advantageously a predetermined block **53** of material is separated from the working block **51**. Advantageously, said separation is substantially simultaneous with the forming and addition of the material **55** to the working block **51**.

[0047] In practice, material is continuously separated from the working block **51** and new material is continuously added to the block **51**.

[0048] The predetermined block **53** is separated from the working block **51** during the working block **51** dwell steps.

[0049] As illustrated, the working block **51** extends longitudinally and has a corresponding quadrangular cross-section. However, it shall be understood that the working block **51** could have any desired shape.

[0050] As illustrated, the predetermined block **53** separated from the working block **51** corresponds to a front longitudinal part or portion **51''** of the working block **51**.

[0051] In particular, as described in more detail below, the predetermined block **53** is cut from the working block **51**, the separating cut being labelled **153** in FIG. 5.

[0052] Moreover, according to the process, the predetermined block **53** is separated from the working block **51** in such a way that the predetermined block **53** has a predetermined and desired length, which can be varied as appropriate according to current requirements.

[0053] In practice, the length "Lp" of the predetermined block **53** can be selected as appropriate by modifying the distances of the cutting or separation means **56** from the mould **52**, as explained in more detail below.

[0054] In practice, as illustrated, the predetermined block **53** is separated at one longitudinal end side or portion of the working block **51**, whilst reconstruction material is added to the same working block **51** at the opposite longitudinal side or end.

[0055] In practice, according to the process, cutting means **56a** are used which can move between a raised position allowing free transit of the working block **51** and a lowered position for cutting the working block **51**, to produce a corresponding predetermined block **53**, at the working block **51** dwell steps.

[0056] As illustrated, to produce the predetermined block **53** for the panel, the cutting means make a transversal cut **153** in the working block **51**.

[0057] A first preferred embodiment of the apparatus is illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2. With reference to said Figures, and in particular FIG. 1, the numeral **1** denotes as a whole an apparatus or device for producing blocks of expanded polystyrene, schematically illustrated and consisting of a mould **2** having the shape of a parallelepiped, inside which there is a similarly shaped expansion chamber **3**.

[0058] The larger sides of the mould 2 consist of plates 4 fully perforated by a network of small holes 5 over the entire extension, although in the accompanying drawings only portions of them are shown as perforated by way of example.

[0059] Upper pipes 6 lead into the expansion or forming chamber 3, to inject a pre-dosed loose mass 7 of expanded polystyrene pellets, of which two are illustrated by way of example, which as a result of the process, described in more detail below, form a single body consisting of a block 8 having the shape of a parallelepiped.

[0060] The tops of the pipes 6 are connected to the means, not illustrated, for feeding and metering the pellets, for example volumetric feeders and hoppers, whilst the bottoms of the pipes are fitted with valves or gate valves, or in any event closing means, although not illustrated, aligned with the upper plate 4.

[0061] The smaller sides of the mould 2 which has the shape of a parallelepiped consist of the base 9, or rear, of the pre-formed block 8 of expanded polystyrene and, longitudinally distanced from the base 9, of the suitably shaped plate 10 of a pusher 11, which is operated in any known way suitable for the purpose.

[0062] Around the larger sides 4 of the mould 2 having the shape of a parallelepiped there extends an air space 12 designed to allow the forced circulation of steam, injected from at least one pipe 13 leading into it, and which is generated and injected under pressure by any known device suitable for the purpose, for the functions specified below.

[0063] In practice, a measured quantity 7 of loose polystyrene pellets is fed into the mould 2 through the upper pipes 6. When the appropriate quantity is reached, the steam is injected into the air space 12, with forced circulation, and penetrates the expansion chamber 3 through the network of holes 5 made in the larger sides 4 of the mould 2.

[0064] Therefore, the mass of polystyrene spheres is struck on all sides by the flow of steam.

[0065] The loose mass 7 expands in the mould 2 in the known way, adopting the shape of a parallelepiped, matching the shape of the forming chamber 3.

[0066] Following said expansion of the polystyrene spheres, the expanded mass 7 makes contact with the rear surface 9 of the polystyrene block 8 previously produced and securely or inextricably adheres, or bonds, to the latter due to consubstantiality.

[0067] At this point, the movable plate 10 of the pusher 11 is made to move forward, displacing, or moving, the newly formed block 8 sealed to the previous block 8, until it moves it to a position in which the rear end 9 constitutes the connecting base for the creation of a new block, newly expanded or formed, and so on to produce a continuous block 8, which can be cut to any desired size without producing waste.

[0068] FIGS. 3 to 7 illustrate a second preferred embodiment of the apparatus 50 for producing blocks of material, in which the material is, in particular, an insulating material, especially a plastic material, and preferably an expanded material, such as expanded polystyrene.

[0069] The block obtained using the apparatus is, in turn, of the type suitable for constituting a corresponding panel for producing a structure, in particular a building.

[0070] The apparatus 50 is also particularly suitable for implementing the process disclosed.

[0071] As illustrated, the apparatus 50 comprises means for producing a working block 51, consisting of said material,

from which at least one corresponding block 53 with desired and predetermined dimensions is obtained.

[0072] Advantageously, the present apparatus comprises means designed to form a working block 51 by means of a plurality of material forming steps, in particular a plurality of separate material forming steps. In particular, the forming of material consists of steps of forming the material into a block.

[0073] In this way, a working block 51 is obtained, from which at least one corresponding predetermined block is obtained, having the desired dimensions which are independent of the dimensions, in particular the length, of the moulding means used. Therefore, desired blocks 53 can be obtained from the working or intermediate block 51 without creating waste, as occurred in the prior art.

[0074] In particular, the present apparatus comprises means designed to form a working block 51, operating through a plurality of successive forming steps, that is to say, a plurality of successive material moulding steps.

[0075] In practice, in a respective step, the material is formed into a block and aggregated to constitute a working block 51.

[0076] The apparatus 50 comprises means 52 for forming a block of material, consisting of a suitable mould 52 having an inner forming chamber 54.

[0077] The present apparatus also advantageously comprises means for separating a predetermined block 53 of material from the working block 51.

[0078] The present apparatus is also such that it constitutes means for restoring the working block 51, to make up for the removal from the latter of the part corresponding to the predetermined block 53.

[0079] In practice, the restoring means of the present apparatus are designed to add material to the working block 51, from which the predetermined block 53 is separated.

[0080] In particular, the means designed to form the working block, or to restore the working block, are means designed to form a material, or designed to produce a corresponding block of material 55, which is added to the working block 51, in particular and advantageously, during the basic block 55 forming step.

[0081] In particular, the means designed to form a corresponding basic block of material 55 are designed to add the basic block 55 to the working block 51, by forming the basic block 55 in contact with one end, or transversal surface—or rear face 51a—of the working block 51.

[0082] In practice, forming the basic block of material 55 in contact with the rear face 51a of the working block 51 results in the basic block of material adhering directly to the working block 51, producing a single body with the working block 51.

[0083] The forming mould 52 is a mould which extends longitudinally and has an extended chamber 54 for housing and forming the material 55.

[0084] The mould 52 comprises a plurality of lateral or outer walls, 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d, extending longitudinally and a transversal rear wall 52e.

[0085] The mould 52 is also open at the front and can be closed by a transversal door 52f, connected in such a way that it tilts, or can move, relative to the corresponding lateral wall of the mould.

[0086] In practice, in the main condition of use, the mould 52 has a material moulding and forming chamber 54 which, at a respective longitudinal end, has an opening 54' which allows the moulded material to exit the mould.

[0087] The present apparatus also comprises means 49 suitable for feeding or moving forward the working block 51.

[0088] Said feed means 49 feed the material with alternating working block 51 feed and dwell stretches.

[0089] The feed means consist of a pusher 49, which has a stroke "Ls" that is less than the length of the mould 52, in particular less than the length of the forming chamber.

[0090] The feed means comprise a working block engagement portion, consisting of at least part or, as in the present embodiment, the whole of the rear wall 52e of the mould 52.

[0091] The pusher 49 also comprises a rod 52'e, extending from the longitudinally movable wall 52e of the mould 52. The rod is designed to move the wall 52e between a retracted position, illustrated in FIGS. 3, 5 and 6, for forming or moulding the material in the chamber 54, and a forward position for material feed and partial exiting from the moulding chamber 54, illustrated in FIG. 4.

[0092] As illustrated, the movable wall 52e is located on the longitudinal side opposite the opening 54' through which the material exits the mould, where the closing door 52f is located.

[0093] According to another advantageous characteristic, not illustrated in detail in the accompanying drawings, it would also be possible to position one of the lateral or outer walls, 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d, preferably one of the side walls 52c and 52d of the mould 52 which is suitably movable, between a forward position in which the mould is closed and a back position in which the block of material is released and the material is freely fed by the thrust from the pusher 49.

[0094] As illustrated, in normal conditions of use, the forming chamber 54 is transversally delimited by an upper face 54a, a lower face 54b, opposite side faces 54c, 54d of the corresponding walls 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d of the mould. Longitudinally, the forming chamber is delimited, at the rear, by the front face 54e of the movable wall 52e, and at the front, by the rear face 51a of the block 51.

[0095] As illustrated, there are means 56 for cutting the predetermined block 53 from the working block 51.

[0096] In particular, as illustrated, the means 56 for separating or cutting the predetermined block of material 53 can move longitudinally relative to the mould 52, allowing a predetermined block of material to be cut which has the desired or predetermined length "Lp".

[0097] As illustrated, the cutting means 56 comprise a supporting frame 57, having a telescopic column 57a, a vertical movable element 57'a, supporting an upper cross-member 57b, from which there extend opposite vertical elements 57c, on the side opposite that of the supporting column 57a, and 57d, on the same side as the movable column 57'a, forming a portal frame supporting the cutting element 56a.

[0098] The vertical members 57c, 57d form corresponding supporting elements for transversally opposite supporting blocks 56b, 56c for a corresponding heated metal wire 56a for cutting the material. The metal cutting wire 56 extends transversally relative to the longitudinal direction of material feed and apparatus extension.

[0099] The supporting column 57a for the cutting means 57 can move on a corresponding track or guide 57', extending longitudinally in particular parallel with the block 51 supporting means 58.

[0100] In this way, the cutting means 56 can move longitudinally, in particular relative to the mould 52, and go to a position suitable for cutting predetermined blocks 53 having

a suitable and desired length "Lp", which may be predetermined as needed according to requirements.

[0101] As illustrated, in this embodiment, the guide 57' is also angled longitudinally to the mould 52, that is to say to its longitudinal outer walls 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d.

[0102] As may be inferred from the accompanying drawings, the cutting element 56a, that is to say, the portal frame 57, can move between a retracted position and a forward position, or between a raised position and a lowered position. In particular, the cutting element 56a can move between retracted, or raised, position allowing free transit of the working block 51 and a forward, or lowered, position for making a cut 153 in the block 51 and separating the block 53 from the working block 51, as illustrated in FIG. 5.

[0103] In particular, the cutting element moves from the raised, or retracted, position to the lowered, or forward position during the material 51 dwell steps, coinciding with the steps of forming the basic block 55 of material in a mould 52 and of adding, or adhesion, of this block 55 to the main or working block 51.

[0104] As illustrated, the numeral 58 denotes a surface for supporting the block 51. The surface is positioned downstream of the mould 52 and is designed to also constitute working block 51 supporting means at the means for separating or cutting the predetermined block 53 from the working block 51.

[0105] The supporting surface 58 comprises a plurality of horizontal elements or boards 58a on which the material rests. The horizontal elements are supported by a suitable frame 58b.

[0106] As illustrated, the supporting surface 58 has an upstream end 58' for receiving the working block from the mould 52, at the mould 52 outfeed, and a downstream end 58'' for unloading the predetermined block 53 of material, the unloading end being downstream of the separation means 56.

[0107] As illustrated, the supporting surface 58 extends downstream of the cutting or separation means 56 to such an extent that it supports at least one corresponding predetermined block 53.

[0108] Predetermined block 53 feed towards unloading from the support 58 could, advantageously, be caused by engagement with and thrust from the working block 51, fed by the pusher 49, on the block 53.

[0109] As illustrated, the supporting surface 58 is located substantially at the same height as the lower edge of the mould 52 housing chamber 54, or the lower edge of the opening through which the material exits the mould 52, so as to suitably receive the working block 51, without inducing unnecessary stresses in it.

[0110] Advantageously, there are means for feeding, in particular injecting, material into the forming chamber 54.

[0111] In particular, a predetermined quantity of material is fed into the forming chamber 54.

[0112] Advantageously, said means for feeding material into the mould are located at least at one lateral wall of the mould, and in particular, as illustrated at each lateral wall 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d of the mould.

[0113] Moreover, at a respective wall 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d, the means for feeding material into the mould comprise one or more elements for injecting the material, in particular a plurality of injecting means for the wall, distributed longitudinally and transversally to the wall.

[0114] In particular, as illustrated, there are at least four pipes for injecting or feeding material into the mould, located

close to respective longitudinal and transversal ends of the mould. For each wall the means for feeding material are labelled **60a**, **60b**, **60c**, **60d**.

[0115] There are also means for feeding a working fluid, which is injected or fed into the material forming chamber **54**.

[0116] Said means for feeding the working fluid are designed to feed steam at a preset pressure and consist of a plurality of holes **62**, at the lateral walls of the mould **52**, in particular at each of the lateral walls **52a**, **52b**, **52c**, **52d** of the mould.

[0117] As illustrated, the holes **62** for feeding steam are located at an inner portion or plate **63** of the respective lateral wall and the working fluid is conveyed towards the holes **62** thanks to corresponding chambers or air spaces **64** between the inner panel or plate and the outer panel or plate **65** of the respective lateral wall.

[0118] The working fluid, in the form of steam, is conveyed towards the air spaces **64** through a pipe at the fixed portion of the mould labelled **66**.

[0119] Another pipe **68** is suitable for extracting the working fluid, so as to promote, amongst other things, drying of the moulded material.

[0120] Moreover, the numeral **70** denotes a control unit or computer for the apparatus.

[0121] Briefly, for the operation of the present apparatus, in a condition with the door closed, illustrated in FIG. 3, the material in the form of polystyrene spheres or the like is fed into the forming chamber **54**, then the steam for heating and expanding the material is injected under pressure into the same chamber **54**. In this way a first block of material is formed in the housing chamber **54**.

[0122] At this point the front door **52f** of the mould **52** is opened and the expulsion piston, or pusher, **49**, performing a stroke with length "Ls", expels a front portion of the material just formed from the mould, keeping a rear portion **51'** of this block in the mould forming chamber **54**, as illustrated in FIG. 4.

[0123] In this condition, the front of the block just formed rests on the supporting surface **58**.

[0124] At this point, the pusher **49** returns to its retracted starting position, with a corresponding backward return stroke, and another block **55** of polystyrene or the like is moulded or formed, as indicated above, that is to say by feeding a predetermined portion of material then injecting the expansion steam under pressure into the compartment delimited in the longitudinal direction by the front face **54e** of the rear wall **52e** of the mould and by the rear face **51'** of the block previously formed and laterally, or on the outside, by the respective inner face **54a**, **54b**, **54c**, **54d** of the lateral or outer walls **52a**, **52b**, **52c**, **52d**.

[0125] The block **55** formed in this way adheres to the face **51a** of the block previously formed, forming a joint working block **51**.

[0126] Once the second block of material is also complete, the pusher **49** again expels the material from the mould **52**, again keeping a rear end **51'** of the material inside the mould. For this purpose, the piston **49** always performs the outward stroke "Ls", which is less than the length of the forming chamber **54**. In this way the pusher **49** forms advantageous feed means for the extended working block **51**. The length of the extended working block **51** is greater than that of the mould **52**.

[0127] As shown in FIG. 5, during forming of a subsequent block **55**, to be added to the working block **51**, the cutting wire **56a** cuts a corresponding predetermined block **53** having suitable length "Lp".

[0128] The predetermined block **53** is then unloaded from the material supporting and sliding surface **58**.

[0129] The process and apparatus disclosed produce a working block **51** that is continuously reconstituted and from which, with corresponding cuts, blocks **53** having the desired length are obtained, from which panels for use in the construction sector can be obtained.

[0130] According to one characteristic of the invention, the working block **51** is produced with the desired dimensions, in particular length, and in such a way as to obtain corresponding blocks and avoid the waste material produced in accordance with the prior art.

[0131] As the detailed description above of preferred, non-limiting embodiments makes clear, the process and apparatus constitute an innovative technology for producing parts, preferably made of expanded polystyrene, preferably in the form of slabs or panels, which allow waste material to be minimized, or without waste and disposal problems.

[0132] The invention described above is susceptible of industrial application and may be modified and adapted in several ways without thereby departing from the scope of the inventive concept. Moreover, all the details of the invention may be substituted by technically equivalent elements.

1-77. (canceled)

**78.** An apparatus for producing blocks of material; the material in particular being an insulating material, especially a plastic material, preferably an expanded material, such as expanded polystyrene, and the blocks preferably being for producing a structure, in particular a building; the apparatus comprising means for forming a working block consisting of said material, and wherein it comprises means designed to form a working block by means of a plurality of forming steps.

**79.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein it comprises means for obtaining a predetermined block from the working block.

**80.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein it comprises means for separating a predetermined block of material from the working block.

**81.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein there are means for restoring the working block.

**82.** The apparatus according to claim **81**, wherein the restoring means are designed to add material to the working block.

**83.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein the means designed to form a basic block of material are designed to add the basic block of material to the working block, by forming the basic block in contact with a rear end of the working block.

**84.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein it comprises a mould for forming the basic block of material.

**85.** The apparatus according to claim **84**, wherein the mould comprises a forming chamber defined by a plurality of lateral walls, by a rear wall and open at the front.

**86.** The apparatus according to claim **84**, wherein the mould has a door which can open.

**87.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein it comprises feed means for the working block.

**88.** The apparatus according to claim **87**, wherein the feed means feed the working block of material with a movement which has feed stretches and dwell stretches.

**89.** The apparatus according to claim **87**, wherein the feed means comprise a pusher.

**90.** The apparatus according to claim **87**, wherein the feed means feed the material forward by a stretch which is less than the length of the forming chamber.

**91.** The apparatus according to claim **87**, wherein the feed means comprise a portion for engagement with the block of material, at least partly constituting the rear wall of the mould.

**92.** The apparatus according to claim **84**, wherein the mould has a lateral wall which can move between a position in which the mould is closed and a position in which the block of material is released, allowing the block of material to be fed freely.

**93.** The apparatus according to claim **80**, wherein it comprises means for cutting the predetermined block from the working block.

**94.** The apparatus according claim **80**, wherein the means for separating the predetermined block can move relative to the mould.

**95.** The apparatus according to claim **94**, wherein the means for separating the predetermined block can move relative to the mould for providing a predetermined block with a variable length.

**96.** The apparatus according to claim **94**, wherein the cutting means comprise a cutting element.

**97.** The apparatus according to claim **96**, wherein the cutting element can move to a forward position for cutting the material.

**98.** The apparatus according to claim **96**, wherein the cutting element can move from a retracted position which allows the transit of an end part of the working block.

**99.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein it comprises a supporting surface designed to receive the working block from the mould and constituting means for supporting the block at the separation means.

**100.** The apparatus according to claim **99**, wherein the supporting surface downstream of the mould has one end for receiving the working block at the mould outfeed.

**101.** The apparatus according to claim **99**, wherein the supporting surface downstream of the mould has one end for unloading the material downstream of the separation means.

**102.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein there are means for feeding the material into the forming chamber.

**103.** The apparatus according to claim **102**, wherein the means for feeding the material are present at least at one lateral wall of the mould.

**104.** The apparatus according to claim **103**, wherein the means for feeding the material are located at each lateral wall of the mould.

**105.** The apparatus according to claim **102**, wherein the means for feeding the material at the respective wall comprise one or more means for injecting the material.

**106.** The apparatus according to claim **103**, wherein the means for feeding the material comprise, for each wall, a plurality of injecting means distributed longitudinally to the wall.

**107.** The apparatus according to claim **103**, wherein the means for feeding the material comprise, for each wall, a plurality of injecting means distributed transversally to the wall.

**108.** The apparatus according to claim **78**, wherein there are means for feeding a working fluid into the mould.

**109.** The apparatus according to claim **108**, wherein the means for feeding a working fluid are located at least at one lateral wall of the mould.

**110.** The apparatus according to claim **109**, wherein the means for feeding a working fluid are present at each lateral wall of the mould.

**111.** The apparatus according to claim **108**, wherein there are means for extracting the operating fluid from the mould.

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