

An Overview of Waste Gasification and Syngas Upgrading Processes

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Editorial

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An overview of waste gasification and syngas upgrading pro-					
cesses					
Valentina Segneri ¹ , Jean Henry Ferrasse ² , Antonio Trinca ¹ and Giorgio Vilardi ^{1*}					
1	"Sapienza" University of Rome, Dept. of Chemical Engineering Materials Environment, via Eudossiana				
	18, 00184, Rome, Italy				
2	Aix Marseille Univ, CNRS, Centrale Marseille, M2P2, Marseille, France				
*	Correspondence: giorgio.vilardi@uniroma1.it; Tel +390644585580, Fax: +390644585451				

The increasing attention towards climate change and greenhouse gas emissions makes the exploitation of renewable energy sources one of the key pathways for sustainable power generation or chemicals production.

The valorisation and disposal of municipal and industrial wastes is one of the chal-14 lenges of the next generation and must have a key role in the energy transition, in order 15 to reduce the carbon footprint of the human being activities. Landfilling is the most tradi-16 tional and easiest way for waste disposal, but it is also characterized by significant impacts 17 from both environmental and socio-economic viewpoints, hence landfilling should be 18 avoided and replaced with waste reutilization techniques. 19

The use of waste or residual material as raw material for chemical production can be 20 considered a smart solution for waste disposal, managing to give a new life to a carbon 21 source. Thermochemical treatment is seen as an emerging technology that can help reduc-22 ing the volume of waste by recovering energy and/or matter by obtaining products with 23 high added value during the final treatment of municipal solid waste (MSW). The ther-24 mochemical conversion of waste aimed at the synthesis of new chemical products repre-25 sents a valid solution and is one of the pillars of the circular economy philosophy. 26

Gasification transforms low-value materials, converting them into gaseous products 27 with usable calorific value and/or marketable products. Syngas, also called synthesis gas, 28 is mainly composed of carbon monoxide (CO) and hydrogen (H2), besides CO2. After 29 proper cleaning and upgrading processes, the syngas can be used as an alternative fuel in 30 turbogas to generate heat and electricity, or as a raw material for a large number of prod-31 ucts in the petrochemical industry and in refinery, such as methanol, plastic monomers, 32 oxo alcohols, ammonia, synthetic gasolines, etc. 33

This high gasification flexibility, both in terms of raw material type and power gen-34 eration or chemicals production options, is what drives the expansion of research and 35 implementation opportunities for biomass and waste gasification. 36

Although these technologies are commercially available, research work on optimizing and exploring its further potential is still ongoing. In particular, in recent years, new pyrolysis and gasification technologies have emerged, with the aim of increasing the possible feedstocks improving energy recovery and reducing the environmental impact. A number of theoretical studies on these kinds of processes are currently available in the 41 scientific literature, mainly focused on the development of thermodynamic models or on computational fluid dynamics (CFD) process simulation, in some cases with the experi-

mental model validation in pilot units. Several studies are available on pilot-scale experimental development of the process for waste gasification.

In this editorial, an essential scenario of several aspects regarding the waste gasifica-46 tion and syngas upgrading will be reported with reference to selected papers published 47

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in the journal Energies during the last two years, thus providing an updated vision of 48 what is being currently studied in the field. 49

The topics covered are numerous, and although the contributions include leading 50 innovative elements in the field of waste gasification, the most important aspects have 51 been reported following a common guideline among the studies analyzed. The selected 52 papers are strongly interrelated among each other in several points, as quite different 53 problems converge in the area of advanced waste to syngas plant challenge. Therefore, 54 selecting the proper keywords that, according to the authors, characterize the research, 55 allows to build the correlation matrix reported in Table 1, which helps the reader to have 56 a global view of the arguments of the considered advanced research papers. Moreover, a 57 short summary of all the papers is reported. The order of the discussed papers has been 58 accurately chosen as follow. 59

Table 1: Correlation matrix of the selected keywords.

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]
Gasification	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	Х
Hydrogen	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	Х
CO ₂	х		х			х	х	Х	Х
Decarbonization	х					х	Х	Х	Х
Syngas	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	Х
Thermochemical Conversion	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	Х
MSW & Plastic Waste				х			х		х
Upgrading Processes	х				х	х			х
- 10 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0						-			

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Gasification technologies for small- and medium-scale combined heat and power 64 (CHP) generation from waste biomass have been significantly developed in the last dec-65 ades. Most of the attention is focused on fixed-bed downdraft processes, but few studies 66 also consider bubbling or circulating fluidised-bed gasification processes, sometimes pro-67 moted with specific catalysts or integrated with hydrothermal carbonisation to treat high-68 moisture biomass or waste. With respect to these technologies, fixed-bed updraft gasifi-69 cation allows a better conversion efficiency (thanks to the countercurrent heat exchanges) 70 and it is typically characterised by simple construction, easy operation, fuel flexibility in 71 terms of type (biomass, coal, wastes, etc.), particle size (5 to 100 mm) and moisture content 72 (up to 60%), but also involves a relatively high production of pyrolysis liquids (i.e., oils 73 and tar). 74

Cali G. et al. [1] present the experimental development at demonstration scale of an integrated gasification system fed with wood chips. This paper aims to establish the baseline performance of a 5 MWth demonstration-scale updraft gasifier, operating since 2014 at the Sotacarbo Research Centre in Sardinia, Italy, and tested for some 1500 h with different kinds of coal and biomass. In particular, the experimental results here reported are focused on the gasification of two kinds of local waste biomass, with the aim to assess operating conditions, syngas composition and properties and the whole 81

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plant performance. In addition, the syngas cleaning and wastewater treatment process performance is also evaluated, on the basis of a novel configuration of a tar management system optimised to minimise water consumption and sludge disposal and recirculate part of the separated tar and exhaust activated carbon to the gasification unit (thus improving the efficiency of the whole project).

The gasification unit is characterized by a high cold gas efficiency (about 79-80%) 87 and an operation stability during each test. Particular attention has been paid to the opti-88 mization of an integrated double stage wastewater management system-which includes 89 an oil skimmer and an activated carbon adsorption filter-designed to minimize both liq-90 uid residues and water make-up. Syngas has a very stable composition during the whole 91 run, with a mean lower heating value in the order of 4.3-4.6 MJ/kg (syngas being com-92 posed of 52-53% by nitrogen from the gasification air). Moreover, the optimal process 93 parameters for the operation of the syngas cleaning section have been identified and the 94 configuration has been modified, with the result of a 60% reduction of wastewater dis-95 posal. 96

To meet the global demand for energy and to reduce the use of fossil fuels, alternative 98 system such as the production of syngas from renewable biomass gasification have been 99 investigated by Muhammad et al. [2]. To design such gasification systems, model equations can be formulated and solved to predict the quantity and quality of the syngas produced with different operating conditions (temperature, the flow rate of gasifying agent, 102 etc.) and with different types of biomasses (wood, grass, seeds, food waste, etc.). 103

The modelling of biomass gasification generally involves the formulation and solv-104 ing of sets of equations, including mass and energy balances, in addition to either rate-105 based or equilibrium-based expressions to determine the effect of the reactions occurring. 106 To simplify this approach, various assumptions can be made, and correlations 107 can be utilized relating to experimentally measured properties (e.g., feed compo-108 sition and operating conditions). The more complex approaches include the use of com-109 putational fluid dynamics (CFD) models and kinetic rate expression models, which re-110 quire knowledge of the reaction and diffusion parameters and potentially require rela-111 tively longer computational times than the simpler modelling methods available. Several 112 models can be obtained using different correction factors, model parameters, and assump-113 tions, and these models are compared and validated against experimental data and mod-114 elling studies from the literature. 115

In this study, several different stoichiometric thermodynamic models are compared 116 to determine which are the most suitable and reliable. The analysis has been carried out 117 for the prediction performance to predict the syngas composition. To correct some of the 118 errors associated with thermodynamic models, correction factors are utilized to modify 119 the equilibrium constants of the methanation and water gas shift reactions, using the data 120 from 27 experimental values published in the literature, which allows them to better pre-121 dict the real output composition of the gasification reactors. The models are formulated 122 and optimized in MATLAB. These models also have the ability to estimate the perfor-123 mance of biomass gasification for different operating conditions, such as temperature and 124 moisture contents. In this study we show that similar results and model accuracies can be 125 achieved with a simpler model where the correction factors are fixed parameters. 126

Thermodynamic equilibrium models are based on the assumption that the system of chemical reactions involved in the process reaches a state of thermochemical equilibrium inside the gasifier reactor. Equilibrium models are able to predict the producer gas composition, the maximum yield and the optimal conditions of energy efficiency and syngas heating value for the operation of each specific reactor according to biomass feedstock properties.

In [3], Moretti and co-authors present an overview of biomass gasification modeling 134 approaches in order to evaluate their effectiveness as a tool for the design and 135

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optimization of poly generation plants based on biomass gasification. The authors devel-136 oped two equilibrium models using both a commercial software and a simulation tool 137 implemented in a non-commercial script. In this paper, the reliability of equilibrium gas-138 ification models currently available in the scientific literature was investigated to establish 139 whether they can be employed to build new control and optimization schemes and oper-140 ating maps of biomass gasification systems integrated into polygeneration plants coupled 141 with energy networks. The developed thermodynamic equilibrium models were ap-142 plied to different case studies on downdraft gasifiers available in the literature in order to 143 evaluate the accuracy of the simulation results on varying the biomass type and composi-144 tion and the operating conditions of the gasification process, evidencing the advantages 145 and disadvantages of both models. 146

The obtained results highlighted strengths and limitations of using equilibrium models as a function of biomass type and composition. They showed that the analytical model predicted syngas composition with better accuracy for biomass types characterized by a low ash content, whereas the Aspen model appeared to fairly predict the syngas composition; however, its accuracy might be reduced if the properties of the treated biomass changed. The proposed overview of thermodynamic equilibrium models has significant industrial implications, allowing for selection of the most suitable and reliable model as a function of biomass properties and industrial operating conditions. Therefore, industries will benefit from this work by having a clearer view of the most reliable models for the gasification process.

Stasiek J. et al. [4] present an advanced thermal conversion system involving hightemperature gasification of biomass and municipal waste into biofuel, syngas or hydrogen-rich gas. The decomposition of solid biomass and waste by gasification was experimented with a modern and innovative updraft continuous regenerator and gasifier. A ceramic high-cycle regenerator provided extra energy for the thermal conversion of biomass or any other solids waste. Highly preheated air and steam gas (heated up to 1600 $^{\circ}\text{C}\text{)}$ was used as gasifying agent (feed gas). The preheated feed gas also improved the thermal decomposition of solid feedstock for fuel gas. However, the main objective of this work was to promote new and advanced technologies for the thermochemical conversion of biomass for the production of alternative energy. Finally, this novel and unique technology could ensure significant energy savings of more than 30%, downsizing of equipment, very low NOx emissions (around 50%) and harmful pollutants reduction (about 25%). This technology has tremendous potential for many applications, primarily energysaving and fulfills all new regulations on waste incineration proposed by the European Commission. The presented results concerning HiTAG/HiTSG technology proved to be very useful for gas fuel, hydrogen or syngas generation. The high temperature of the process generated in the preheater eliminates harmful substances such as tars, dioxins and furans which can be produced in low-temperature conversion processes. The fuel gas can be later used to produce heat and electricity, or even hydrogen by means of the separation process

In order to reach much higher efficiency, coupling systems of biomass gasification 179 with advanced power generation have been developed: the gas turbine, internal combus-180 tion engine (ICE), and solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) are the most common types of coupling. 181 These combined heat and power (CHP) units on a small scale, based on gasification, can 182 use an ICE or micro and small gas turbine with electrical efficiencies up to 25% of the 183 biomass lower heating value (LHV). Biomass gasification coupled with SOFC gives elec-184 trical efficiencies up to 60%. The SOFC has become a very important energy technology, 185 due toits clean, greener, and efficient operation. Fuel cells allow conversion of the energy 186 with high efficiency; in fact, they convert the chemical energy contained in a fuel gas di-187 rectly to electrical energy by electrochemical reactions. 188

Commenté [GV1]: A volte usate il presente, altre volte il passato, decidete il tempo verbale e usate solo quello



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In the last years, many works were carried out to study the optimal operating condi-189 tions, the overall system performance, and the limitations and the potentials of a variety 190 of SOFC power plants integrated with biomass gasification systems. However, the current 191 commercial process simulation software packages do not include built-in models for 192 SOFC. In the literature, the most common SOFC system modelling approach is to integrate 193 process simulators with a stack model in a programming language. 194 195

Marcantonio et al. [5] coupled Solid Oxide Fuel Cells (SOFCs) to gasification technology. A steady-state model of a biomass-SOFC was developed using process simulation software, ASPEN Plus. The present paper showed a whole plant composed by a gasifica-197 tion part, a gas cleaning unit, and SOFC system. This is one of the few works available in 198 the literature that includes all the parts. The goal of this work was to develop a biomass-199 SOFC system capable of predicting performance in function of operating conditions. The 200 results show that there must be a trade-off between voltage, electrical efficiency, and 201 power with respect to current density and it is preferable to stay at a low steam-to-biomass 202 ratio. The electrical efficiency achieved under the operating conditions is 57%, a high 203 value, making these systems very attractive. 204 205

According to the study from Di Giuliano et al. [6] the chemical looping gasification 206 of residual biomasses, operated in fluidized beds composed of oxygen-carriers, may allow 207 the production of biofuels from syngas. The chemical looping gasification for sustainable 208 production of biofuels (CLARA)research project, funded by the EU Horizon 2020 frame-209 work program, aims to contribute to this sense. This project deals with chemical looping 210 gasification(CLG) of biogenic residues, with the obtained syngas used in the Fischer-Trop-211 sch synthesis to produce liquid fuels, as also obtained by the hydrocracking of waxes re-212 sulting from Fischer-Tropsch. The main goal of CLARA is the realization of a full biomass-213 to-fuel chain up to 1 MWth scale, in an industrially relevant environment (targets: cold 214 gas efficiency of 82%, carbon conversion of 98%, tar in outlet syngas lower than 1 mg Sm-3). 215

Devolatilization is a key step of the gasification process, and strongly influences both 216 quantity and quality of obtained syngas. At the temperatures of gasification (typically up 217 to 900°C), vapours and tars-developed by primary devolatilization reactions, undergo 218 secondary reactions, which contribute to both gaseous products (cracking and reform-219 ing)and solid products (polymerization). 220

This work aims to provide useful experimental data about the devolatilization of re-221 sidual biomasses. The study investigates wheat-straw-pellets (WSP) and raw-pine-forest-222 residue (RPR) pellets as feedstocks for chemical looping gasification presenting experi-223 mental results from devolatilizations of WSP and RPR, in bubbling beds made of three 224 different oxygen-carriers or sand (inert reference), at 700, 800 and 900 °C. Tests were per-225 formed at laboratory-scale, by a quartz reactor, using nitrogen as fluidizing agent. For 226 each test gas yield (η_{av}), carbon conversion (χ_{avC}), H₂/CO ratio (λ_{av}) and syngas composi-227 tion are determined. Temperature is the dominating parameter: at 900 °C, the highest 228 quality and quantity of syngas was obtained (WSP: η_{av} = 0.035–0.042 molgas gbiomass-1, 229 χ_{avC} = 73–83%, λ_{av} = 0.8–1.0); RPR: η_{av} = 0.036–0.041 molgasgbiomass–1, χ_{avC} = 67–71%, λ_{av} = 230 0.9-1.0), and oxygen-carries generally performed better than sand. The kinetic analysis 231 suggested that the fastest conversion of C and H atoms into gases, at tested conditions is 232 ensured by the oxygen-carrier ilmenite. 233

Collected results have an important novelty value for both experimental and model-234 ling studies, since they deal with: (i) residual biomasses with a great availability potential, 235 nowadays unexploited; (ii) devolatilization, a single step of the more complex gasification 236 process, tricky to be experimentally isolated especially at higher scales; (iii) formulation 237 of kinetic expressions of devolatilization/pyrolysis, a crucial point, often lacking, for a full-238 predictive modeling approach; (iv) chemical looping gasification by means of OCs, a ther-239 mochemical process which has not been developed vet at industrial scale. 240

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The next study [7] provides a comprehensive review of the micro-scale thermal treat-242 ment technologies for non-sewered practiced up to date in commercial/pilot and small 243 scales for various types of solid fuels. Furthermore, the challenges observed with the nom-244 inated (pyrolysis) technology are discussed in detail and addressed. This study suggests 245 rapid energy recovery from by-products primarily made up of the highest yield of syngas 246 with a desirable calorific value. The optimum operating ranges are discussed to ensure a 247 reliable thermal conversion of sludge materials considering the application constraints 248 and technology drawbacks due to the energy demand for drying. A pyrolysis temperature 249 of 400-600 °C and the heating rates pursued at low ranks could result in a sustainable 250 thermal conversion range for moist waste materials. 251

One objective of this critical review is to discuss the solid waste management/stabilisation technologies and their operational challenges. The state of the art of these thermal treatment technologies for on-site, non-sewered, sanitary applications in small scale is reviewed to clarify the specific operational challenges occurring through their implementation. The aim of this study overall is to outline the challenges for developing a suitable technology for on-site sanitary applications and to address optimum ranges of operating 257 conditions for a reliable performance.

Various technologies have been employed to reduce, capture and utilise CO2 from 260 power generation. One such technique is integrated gasification combined cycle (IGCC) power generation with carbon capture and storage (CCS). CO2 generated from gasification 262 plants can be reused in the same cycle as a reactant, which helps cut costly oxygen-en-263 riched air, oxygen and steam. Furthermore, the recycling of CO2 offers a wide range of 264 CO/H2 production, which is the precursor for a wide range of chemicals. Numerous stud-265 ies on coal and biomass gasification have been conducted using CO2 as a reactant.

Shahabuddin et al. [8] evaluate the entrained-flow co-gasification characteristics of 267 coal and biomass using thermodynamic equilibrium modeling. The effect of equivalence 268 ratio, temperature, pressure and biomass to coal ratio have been investigated using CO2 269 reactant. It has been understood that the lower heating value (LHV) and cold gas effi-270 ciency (CGE) increase with increasing temperature until the process reaches the steady 271 state temperature of 1100 °C. Pressure affects syngas composition only at lower tempera-272 ture (<1100 °C). The variation in syngas composition is minor up to the blending of 50% 273 biomass (PB50). However, the PB50 shows a higher LHV and CGE than pure coal by 12% 274 and 18%, respectively. Overall, biomass blending of up to 50% favours gasification per-275 formance with an LHV of 12 MJ/kg and a CGE of 78%. Results showed that the combina-276 tion of steam and oxygen performs better compared to other reactants. The steam-oxygen 277 reactant showed the highest H2/CO ratio of 0.74, while the ratio was about 0.32 using 278 steam-CO2 and pure oxygen. The concentration of pollutants decreased consistently with 279 increasing biomass ratio. Thus, co-gasification using CO2 reactants can potentially in-280 crease gasification efficiency besides reducing pollutant emissions. 281

To achieve the goal of decreasing or even obtaining negative CO2emissions and pro-283 ducing clean energy, a proper model of biomass conversion needs to be developed. Be-284 cause of the ultimate properties of biomass (low energy density and high moisture con-285 tent), it is better to provide the thermochemical conversion of this material using processes 286 such as pyrolysis or gasification than combustion. 287

The last analyzed work [9] is focused on biomass thermochemical conversion with 288 integrated CO2 capture, investigating the impact of pyrolysis temperature (500, 600 and 289 700 °C) and CaO sorbent addition on the chemical and physical properties of obtained 290 char and syngas. In this study, a novel approach for syngas production 291 from biomass with parallel biochar production and negative carbon emission was 292 proposed. The conducted research allowed us to predict the most effective pyrolysis pro-293 cess conditions to obtain the highest yield of syngas and biochar. 294

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The pyrolysis process temperature directly influences the syngas as well as biochar 295 composition. The analysis of studied temperature range allowed us to conclude that a 296 temperature increase leads to the production of biochar with a higher carbon content and 297 lower VM, as the gaseous phase of biomass was processed and converted into syngas. 298 With the increase of process temperature, higher hydrogen and methane concentrations 299 are obtained. However, concentrations of higher hydrocarbons, such as C₂H₄, C₂H₆, C₃H₆ 301

The addition of a sorbent such as CaO for CO2 capture improves the final gas com-302 position. The presence of sorbent allows the capture of carbon dioxide from produced 303 syngas. As the process temperature increases, the concentration of CO2 in syngas de-304 creases. The conducted tests and analysis prove the ability of capturing the CO2 released 305 during the pyrolysis process and transforming it into a carbonate phase by CaO. The pro-306 cesses of tar cracking are promoted by the presence of CaO with parallel removal of $\ensuremath{\text{CO}_2}$ 307 and lead to an increase in H2 production. In particular, the concentration of CO2 in syngas 308 decreased with increased temperature, and the highest decrease occurred in the presence 309 of CaO from above 60% to below 30% at 600 °C. 310

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