

# MEEP 2022

## Book of Abstracts

Special Symposium on  
**Microbial, Enzymatic & Bio-Photovoltaic  
Electrochemical Reactors, Fuel Cells and  
Electrolyser Systems**



### Sessions

- M03: Microbial Reactors: Fuel Cells & Hydrogen Syntrophy**
- M04: Bioelectrochemical systems: Reactors, design and insights**
- M05: Biofilms with a Keynote**
- M06: Microbial dynamics: traits and fuel cell reactions**
- M08: Electrode materials and surface interactions**
- M09: Bioelectrochemical Systems with a Keynote on Up-scaling**

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**Sessions M03, M04, M05, M06, M08, M09**

Content	Page
<b>M0104</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Technologies and nature-based solutions in sustainable actions on European I b ] c b Ð ` W ] h ] Y g</b> Minas Angelidis <i>National Technical University of Athens, Athens/Greece</i>	
<b>M0105</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>A bioelectrochemical system for flexible biogas production</b> Janek R. Weiler <sup>1,*</sup> , Melanie T. Knoll <sup>1,*</sup> , Nikolai Jürgensen <sup>2</sup> , An-Ping Zeng <sup>2</sup> , Johannes Gescher <sup>1</sup> <i>1 Institute of Technical Microbiology, University of Technology Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany</i> <i>2 Institute of Bioprocess and Biosystems Engineering, University of Technology Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany</i>	
<b>M0301</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Revealing hydrogen syntrophy of human gut microbes with a bioelectrochemical system</b> Ulrike Biehn (1), Dr. Sofia Esquivel-Elizondo (2), Dr. Tianran Sun (1), Nils Rohbohm (1), Prof. Dr. Ruth E. Ley (2) , Prof. Dr. Ir. LARGUS T. ANGENENT (1) <i>(1) Center for Applied Geosciences, Environmental Biotechnology, University of Tübingen, Tübingen/Germany</i> <i>(2) Max Planck Institute for Biology Tübingen, Tübingen/Germany</i>	
<b>M0302</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Dynamic configuration assessment of a Microbial Fuel Cell stack/cascade fed on human urine.</b> George Papaharalabos (1), John Greenman (2), Andrew Stinchcombe (1), Ioannis A. Ieropoulos (1)* <i>(1) Bristol BioEnergy Centre, Bristol Robotics Laboratory, University of the West of England, Bristol BS16 1QY, United Kingdom</i> <i>(2) Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom</i>	
<b>M0303</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Comparative study of different cathode strategies in single chamber microbial fuel cells</b> Asimina Tremouli (1), Theofilos Kamperidis (1), Pavlos K. Pandis (1), Christos Argirusis (1), Vassilis N. Stathopoulos (2), Ioannis Ieropoulos (3), Gerasimos Lyberatos (1,4) <i>(1) School of Chemical Engineering, National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece.</i> <i>(2) Laboratory of Chemistry and Materials Technology, Department of Agricultural Development, Agrofood and Management of Natural Resources, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Psachna Campus, 34400 Evia, Greece.</i> <i>(3) Civil, Maritime and Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Building-178, Boldrewood Campus, Southampton, SO16 7QF, UK</i> <i>(4) Institute of Chemical Engineering Sciences, Stadiou Str, Platani, 26504 Patras, Greece</i>	
<b>M0304</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Assessment of different configuration of microbial fuel cells to enhance bioelectricity production</b> Carlotta Cosentini, Gabriele G. Gagliardi, Domenico Borello <i>University of Rome, La Sapienza, Rome/Italy</i>	
<b>M0305</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Comparative analysis of electrical performance and degradation rate in PMFC exposed to Malachite Green contamination</b>	

Domenico Borello (1), Gabriele Gagliardi (1), Andrea Pietrelli (1,2), Naoufel Haddour (2), Michele Martone (1,2), Grégory Bataillou  
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(2) Université de Lyon, UCBL, INSA, ECL, CNR UMR 5005, Lyon/France

**M0306** ..... 17

**A scalable Rotating Disc Bioelectrochemical Reactor (RDBER) suitable for the cultivation of both cathodic and anodic biofilms**

Max Hackbarth (1), Johannes Reiner (2), Harald Horn (1,2)  
(1) DVGW Research Centre, Water Chemistry and Water Technology, Karlsruhe/Germany  
(2) Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Engler-Bunte-Institut Water Chemistry and Water Technology, Karlsruhe/Germany

**M0310** ..... 18

**Ultra-low power consumption charge pumps for electrochemical reactors**

P. López (1), Ó. Pereira-Rial (1), L. Vicente-García (1), Juan M. Carrillo-Calleja (2)  
(1) Centro Singular de Investigación en Tecnoloxías Intelixentes (CiTIUS), Santiago de Compostela/Spain  
(2) Universidad de Extremadura, Badajoz/Spain

**M0311** ..... 19

**Investigation of the optimal design to produce biosurfactants and electricity from waste vegetable oil in air-cathode microbial fuel cells**

Aleksander de Rosset, Grzegorz Pasternak  
Wroclaw University of Science and Technology, Wroclaw, Poland

**M0312** ..... 20

**Describing polarization curves and potential changes of a Microbial Electrolysis Cell**

Nikolai Jürgensen (1,2), An-Ping Zeng (1), Johannes Gescher (2)  
(1) Institute of Bioprocess and Biosystems Engineering, University of Technology Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany  
(2) Institute of Technical Microbiology, University of Technology Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

**M0313** ..... 21

**Microbial Gardens: A design-led proposal for the creation of a human-bacteria cohabitation unit for inhabiting extreme environments based on microbial fuel cell and benthic fuel cell technologies.**

Anna Vershinina, Rachel Armstrong  
KU Leuven, Dep. of Architecture, Campus Sint Lucas, Ghent/Belgium

**M0314** ..... 22

**Plant microbial fuel cells: a sustainable engineering biosystem for recovering contaminated soils**

Giorgia Aimola<sup>1</sup>, Gabriele Gagliardi<sup>2</sup>, Paola Grenni<sup>3</sup>, Carlotta Cosentini<sup>2</sup>, Anna Barra Caracciolo<sup>3</sup>, Domenico Borello<sup>2</sup>, Andrea Pietrelli<sup>4</sup>, Valeria Ancona<sup>1\*</sup>  
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<sup>4</sup>Université de Lyon, UCBL, INSA Lyon, ECL, CNRS, Lyon, France

**M0315** ..... 23

**Research on biofilm/biofilter systems efficiency on pollutant-removal from municipal wastewaters**

Nicoleta-Oana Nicula (1), Carmen Mateescu (1), Gimi Rîmbu (1), Marius Lungulescu (1), Ortansa Csutak (2)  
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(2) University of Bucharest, Faculty of Biology, Bucharest/ Romania

**M0316** ..... 24

**Microbial Fuel Cell Capacity for Distributed Computing Wireless Sensor Networks**

Fabien Mieyeville (1), Andrea Pietrelli (1) and Vincenzo Ferrara (2)  
(1) Univ Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, INSA Lyon, Ecole Centrale de Lyon, CNRS, Ampère UMR 5005, 69622 Villeurbanne, France

(2) *Dep. of Information Engineering, Electronics and Telecommunications, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy*

- M0317** ..... 25  
**BABYN YAR: A design-led proposal for a memorial site where bioelectrical technologies form an active symbiosis between the soil systems and rituals of loss producing visible acts of regeneration**  
Tria Amalia Ningsih, Rachel Armstrong  
*Department of Architecture | Faculty of Architecture, Ghent/Brussels, Belgium*
- M0318** ..... 26  
**Plant-Microbial Fuel Cells to power environmental sensors in Green Walls**  
Ana Cristina Rodrigues (1,2), Ana Ferraz (1,2), Patrícia Moreira da Fonte (1,2), Gilberto Martins (2), Luciana Peixoto (2)  
*(1) proMetheus, Research Unit on Materials, Energy and Environment for sustainability, Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, Viana do Castelo/ Portugal*  
*(2) Centre of Biological Engineering, University of Minho, Braga/Portugal*
- M0401** ..... 27  
**Multiscale computational modelling as enabler for the rational design of microbial electrosynthesis reactors for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction to C2-C6 organics**  
Oriol Cabau-Peinado, Adrie J.J. Straathof, Ludovic Jourdin  
*Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Department of Biotechnology, Delft/Netherlands*
- M0402** ..... 28  
**Microbial electrosymbiosis for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction using a co-culture of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* and *Sporomusa ovata***  
Suman Bajracharya, Adolf Krige, Leonidas Matsakas, Ulrika Rova, Paul Christakopoulos  
*Biochemical Process Engineering, Department of Civil, Environmental and Natural Resources Engineering, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden*
- M0403** ..... 29  
**An interesting insight into growth kinetics and energy efficiency for a microbial electrosynthesis process with *Kyrpidia spormannii***  
Leonie Rominger (1), Max Hackbarth (2), Tobias Jung (1), Harald Horn (2), Johannes Gescher (1)  
*(1) Hamburg University of Technology (TUHH), Dep. of Technical Microbiology, Hamburg*  
*(2) Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Dep. of Water Chemistry and Water Technology, Karlsruhe*
- M0404** ..... 30  
**Process control of autotrophic *Acetobacterium woodii* culture via lactate dependent in situ water electrolysis**  
Jan Herzog (1), An-Ping Zeng (1), Alexander Mook (2), Frank R. Bengelsdorf (2)  
*(1) Institute of Bioprocess and Biosystems Engineering / Hamburg University of Technology, Hamburg / Germany*  
*(2) Institute of Microbiology and Biotechnology / Ulm University, Ulm / Germany*
- M0405** ..... 31  
**Improved performance and overpotential reduction through electrode modification in Microbial Electrolysis Cells**  
Rahul Gautam(1,2), Chyntol Kanhimbe(1), Neil V Rees(1), Robert Steinberger Wilckens(1), Uttam K Ghosh(2)  
*(1) University of Birmingham, United Kingdom*  
*(2) Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India*
- M0410** ..... 32  
**Glycine production during microbial electrosynthesis with *C. ljungdahlii***  
Santiago T. Boto (1,2), Miriam A. Rosenbaum (1,2)  
*(1) Leibniz Institute for Natural Product Research and Infection Biology - Hans Knöll Institute (HKI), Jena/Germany*  
*(2) Faculty of Biological Sciences - Friedrich Schiller University, Jena/Germany*

<b>M0411</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Enzymatic formation of oxaloacetate to supply the substrate for bioelectrochemical malate production</b>	
Nicholas Reimer, Ralf Dringen <i>Universität Bremen, Bremen/Germany</i>	
<b>M0412</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>A bioelectrochemical reaction cascade with unspecific peroxygenase immobilized on Globugraphite electrode</b>	
Victoria S. Bueschler (1), Giovanni V. Sayoga (2), Hubert Beisch (3), An-Ping Zeng (2), Bodo Fiedler (3), Andreas Liese (1) (1) <i>Hamburg University of Technology (TUHH), Institute of Technical Biocatalysis, Hamburg/Germany</i> (2) <i>TUHH, Institute for Bioprocess and Biosystems Engineering, Hamburg/Germany</i> (3) <i>TUHH, Institute of Polymers and Composites, Hamburg/Germany</i>	
<b>M0413</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Bioelectrochemical Methanation of Power Plant Off gas from a Steel Plant</b>	
Sabine Spiess (1), Amaia Sasiain (1), Sophie Thallner (1), Nina Kieberger (2), Georg M. Guebitz (3,4), Marianne Haberbauer (1) (1) <i>K1-MET GmbH, Linz/Austria</i> (2) <i>voestalpine Stahl GmbH, Linz/Austria</i> (3) <i>acib GmbH (Austrian Centre of Industrial Biotechnology), Graz/Austria</i> (4) <i>University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna BOKU, Dep. of Agrobiotechnology, Inst. of Environmental Biotechnology, Tulln/Austria</i>	
<b>M0414</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Biodegradation potential of fenthion and disulfoton on inoculated biochar through alluvial Danube sediment</b>	
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences, Novi Sad/Republic of Serbia	
<b>M0415</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Desulfuromonas acetoxidans: unraveling the extracellular electron transfer processes to power microbial desalination cells</b>	
Ricardo Soares (1,2), Alexandra Alves (1), Ricardo O. Louro (1), Catarina M. Paquete (1) (1) <i>Instituto de Tecnologia Química e Biológica António Xavier, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal</i> (2) <i>Instituto Nacional de Investigação Agrária e Veterinária, Portugal</i>	
<b>M0416</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Bioelectrochemical degradation of crude oil by microbial consortia derived from contaminated sites</b>	
Natalia Tyszkiewicz, Grzegorz Pasternak University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences, Novi Sad/Republic of Serbia	
<b>M0502</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>Sprayable biofilm Agarose hydrogels as 3D matrix for enhanced Productivity in Bioelectrochemical Systems</b>	
Melanie T. Knoll, Johannes Gescher <i>University of Technology Hamburg (TUHH), Institute of Technical Microbiology, Hamburg/Germany</i>	
<b>M0503</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Zooming in on the biocatalyst performance in biofilm-driven microbial electrosynthesis</b>	
Marijn Winkelhorst, Dr. Adrie Straathof, Dr. Ludovic Jourdin <i>Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Applied Science, Department of Biotechnology, Delft/The Netherlands</i>	
<b>M0504</b> .....	<b>41</b>

**Pore Network Extraction from Simulated Biofilms**

Lars Beyer (1), Katja Bettenbrock (2), Robert Dürr (3), Emad Aamer (1), Achim Kienle (1,2), Nicole Vorhauer-Huget (1)

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(3) Anhalt University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg/Germany

**M0505** ..... **42**

**Carbon surface structure effects on biofilm formation and subsequent electrochemistry observed for Pseudomonas fluorescens under anodic microbial fuel cell conditions.**

Chyntol Kanhimbe, James M Courtney, Neil V Rees, Robert Steinberger Wilckens

University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

**M0510** ..... **43**

**Palladium Platinum Nanocomposites as Glucose Oxidation Electro-catalysts in Biofuel Cells**

Ziad Khalifa

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El Sherouk City - Cairo - Suez Desert Road

Postal No. 11837 - P.O. Box 43

**M0511** ..... **44**

**Cedar-wood based biochar as a performant anode material in Soil Microbial Fuel Cell**

Grégory Bataillou, Naoufel Haddour, Sébastien Cecillon, Christian Vollaire

Laboratoire Ampère Ecole Centrale de Lyon

Université Claude Bernard Lyon I, INSA Lyon, Lyon, France

**M0512** ..... **45**

**In situ electrogeneration of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> using highly porous Globugraphite in a chemoenzymatic reaction system**

Giovanni V. Sayoga (1), Hubert Beisch (2), Victoria S. Bueschler (3), Bodo Fiedler (2), Andreas Liese (3), An-Ping Zeng (1)

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(3) TUHH, Institute of Technical Biocatalysis, Hamburg/Germany

**M0601** ..... **46**

**Biosurfactants production from oily wastewater using a newly isolated Pseudomonas bacterium: a biodegradation process with potential to be used in bio-electrochemical systems**

Argyro Tsipa, Constantina Varnava, Eftychia Pinakoulaki

University of Cyprus, Nicosia/Cyprus

**M0602** ..... **47**

**Characterization of advanced exoelectrogenic biofilms using microfluidic reactors and an autonomous robotic imaging platform**

René Wurst, Edina Klein, Johannes Gescher

Institute of Technical Microbiology (TMI), Hamburg/Germany

**M0603** ..... **48**

**Microfluidic BES for online physiology investigations of the model organism Shewanella oneidensis MR 1**

Zubaish Saghir (1,2), Falk Kemper (3), Stefan Schwinde (3),

Miriam A. Rosenbaum (1,2)

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(3) Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Mechanics (IOF) Jena/Germany

**M0604** ..... **49**

**Prediction of organic pollutant removal from leachate in an earthen microbial fuel cell using neural networks**

Rishi Gurjar, Manaswini Behera

*School of Infrastructure, Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar  
Argul, Bhubaneswar 752050, Odisha/India***M0605** ..... **50****Electroactive consortia produce biosurfactants to degrade waste crude oil and cooking oil in microbial fuel cells**

Grzegorz Pasternak, Natalia Tyszkiewicz, Aleksander de Rosset, Bartosz Widera

*Science and Technology, W i [ & y æ , Ê Á Ú [ | æ } á***M0606** ..... **51****Investigation of electricity generation together with PAH degradation in Microbial Fuel cells**

Domenico Borello (1), Gabriele G. Gagliardi (1), Carlotta Cosentini (1), Valeria

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Óscar Santiago (1), Isaac Vázquez (1), Julia Harders (1), Ivonne Petit (2), Christoph Hank (2), Sven Kerzenmacher (1)

(1) *Center for Environmental Research and Sustainable Technology (UFT), University of Bremen, Bremen/Germany*(2) *Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE, Freiburg im Breisgau/Germany***M0802** ..... **53****Biomethanisation of CO<sub>2</sub> using Boron Doped Diamond Anode and Biocathode in a Dual-chamber Cell**

Thitirat Ditkaew (1), Yue Zhang (1), Carlos Ponce De Leon Albarran (2)

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Hubert Beisch (1), Giovanni V. Sayoga (2), Victoria S. Bueschler (3),

Andreas Liese (3), An-Ping Zeng (2), Bodo Fiedler (1)

(1) *Hamburg University of Technology (TUHH), Institute of Polymers and Composites, Hamburg/Germany*(2) *TUHH, Institute of Bioprocess and Biosystems engineering, Hamburg/Germany*(3) *TUHH, Institute of Technical Biocatalysis, Hamburg/Germany***M0804** ..... **55****Reduction Oxidation of mineral by bacteria via oxygen switch**

Fan Yang, Yue Zheng, Huan Wang, Feng Zhao

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Maira Anam, Helena Gomes, Geoffrey Rivers, Rachel Gomes, Ricky Wildman



University of Nottingham, Faculty of Engineering, England

<b>M0902</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>Bioelectrochemical systems for sustainable treatment of acid mine drainage coupled with resource recovery</b>	
Annie Modestra Jampala, Suman Bajracharya, Adolf Krige, Leonidas Matsakas, Ulrika Rova, Paul Christakopoulos	
<i>Biochemical Process Engineering, Department of Civil, Environmental and Natural Resources Engineering, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden</i>	
<b>M0903</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Energy security and resilience of cities, new challenges. Case study: Greece.</b>	
Agisilaos Economou	
<i>National Technical University of Athens, Athens/Greece</i>	



M0104

# Technologies and nature-based solutions in sustainable actions on European Urban Wicked Young

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## Abstract

Scope of the presentation is to discuss: (a) the role of technologies in sustainable city sustainability. Both constitute important points of the COST PHOENIX rationale. The investigation refers to the smart and green city actions implemented in Urban Wicked Young cities.

At first, we present and comment briefly the conceptual framework of smart cities and green cities as well as the relationships among them.

Next, we discuss the concept of nature-based city solutions and what advantages they present compared to other city solutions. Then, we look at the classifications of smart and green city actions by categories and sub-categories (see, for instance, the classification proposed by Vienna University of Technology / VUT) and distinguish those in which the role of technologies is more important. Next, from the subcategories selected we present in detail some examples of city actions and we comment on their environmental footprint on cities and their socioeconomic impact as well. We are taking similar steps regarding nature-based city solutions.

The whole investigation has as a starting point (based on the relevant state of the art) the fact that urban actions based on appropriate technologies and leading to nature-based city solutions have a better environmental footprint and a better socioeconomic impact on cities. Therefore, it is worth giving them priority in funding and support from local and national authorities as well as by the respective EU programs. Consequently, research in the above fields also needs to be supported as a priority.

From this point of view, it is worth examining whether EU policies (especially for cities and in general) follow this priority. To this end, we proceeded to a critical evaluation of the EU both the above strategies and the relevant tools have weaknesses and need appropriate adjustments.

M0105

## A bioelectrochemical system for flexible biogas production

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### Abstract

Biogas plants in which biomass is converted by microorganisms to biogas are already widely applied. However, the biogas production is rather sensitive to an accumulation of organic acids that inhibits methanogenesis. To optimize this process, one approach is to integrate microbial electrolysis cells (MEC) into existing biogas plants. In the envisioned MEC-biogas-hybrid reactor, exoelectrogenic organisms will oxidize organic acids in a respiratory process to carbon dioxide. The terminal electron acceptor of the microorganisms is the MEC-anode while hydrogen is produced on the cathode side. By adjusting the potential of the anode it will be possible to direct electron flow from organic acids in the biogas reactor either towards cathodic hydrogen or biogas production.

A 10 L MEC-reactor was developed for scalable process development. The reactor was constructed according to the blueprint of a biological contactor with rotating discs as anodes of the MEC system. A model biofilm was pre-grown on the rotating discs consisting of the exoelectrogenic organisms *Shewanella oneidensis* and *Geobacter sulfurreducens*. After reaching a stable current production, linear sweep voltammetry was used to determine the limits of potential-controlled electrode transfer. Here, a potential below -0.24 V vs. normal hydrogen electrode (NHE) led to a complete inhibition of anodic electron transfer. Alternating potentials of -0.2 V and 0.2 V vs. NHE were applied over different time periods to determine how exoelectrogenic organisms can cope with rapid changes in the applied anode potentials. The conducted experiments revealed that these rapid potential variations did not interfere with long-term activity of the anode biofilms as it was possible to regain maximum current densities shortly after readjusting the potential towards maximum electron transfer kinetics. The experimental data is currently evaluated to identify kinetic parameters for the development of a mathematical MEC model that can be integrated into existing models for anaerobic digestion.

## M0301

## Revealing hydrogen syntrophy of human gut microbes with a bioelectrochemical system

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### Abstract

The fermentation of carbohydrates is one of the major functions of the gut microbiome, which results in the production of short-chain carboxylic acids and gasses such as hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>) and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) (Oh *et al.*, 2003). Fermentative H<sub>2</sub> production and interspecies H<sub>2</sub> transfer predominantly drive colonic H<sub>2</sub> metabolism rather than respiration (Waters & Ley, 2019). Accumulation of H<sub>2</sub> disrupts the gut function, is harmful for humans, and needs to be prevented. However, H<sub>2</sub> is an important energy source for gut microbes such as sulfate-reducing bacteria, acetogens, and methanogens (Carbonero *et al.*, 2012). The family *Christensenellaceae* are heritable members of the human gut and are associated with human health. *Christensenella minuta*, which is one prominent member of this family, was already isolated from the human gut and is an H<sub>2</sub>-producing microbe. In co-cultures of *C. minuta* and *Methanobrevibacter smithii*, H<sub>2</sub> production supports CH<sub>4</sub> formation by the methanogen (Ruaud *et al.*, 2020). Due to thermodynamic limitations, H<sub>2</sub> accumulation predicts a microbial syntrophy in which carbohydrate degradation can only occur when a microbial partner consumes H<sub>2</sub> simultaneously (Smith *et al.*, 2021). The major question is: how do these syntrophic microbes transfer molecular H<sub>2</sub> in the gut, and how do they benefit from it? For this investigation, we developed a bioelectrochemical system (BES) that mimics a syntrophic microbial partner that takes up H<sub>2</sub>. The BES provides a Platinum-doped carbon anode (Pt/C) and further a close interaction site of microbes with the anode where H<sub>2</sub> is actively removed by oxidation. Thus, it provides an environment favored by H<sub>2</sub>-producing, carbohydrate-degrading bacteria. For a proof-of-concept, *C. minuta* as an H<sub>2</sub>-producing microbe was used. We found a shift of the fermentation products of *C. minuta* towards more acetate and less butyrate.

Furthermore, we found that *C. minuta* attached to the Pt/C anode and formed a biofilm by scanning electron microscopy. The outcomes of this study are essential to developing an isolation approach for gut microbes without the requirement of a microbial (syntrophic) partner. The cultivation of *C. minuta* in the BES will help further technical BES development and support our ultimate goal to understand human gut microbes better.

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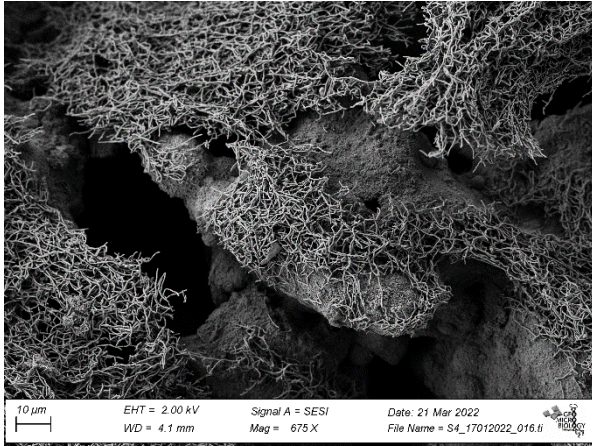
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M0302

# Dynamic configuration assessment of a Microbial Fuel Cell stack/cascade fed on human urine.

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## Abstract

Urine is an inexhaustible by-product of human metabolism. It accounts for 75% of the nitrogen, 50% of the phosphorous and 10% of the chemical oxygen demand (COD) content found in municipal wastewater, primarily involved in water eutrophication and poisoning the water table. Microbial Fuel Cells (MFCs) consist of microorganisms capable of reducing the organic content in urine whilst generating reasonable amounts of electricity with the added benefit of recycling chemicals harmful to the environment. An effective way to enhance the capabilities of individual MFC units is stacking them in fixed electrical and hydraulic configurations. A suggested approach is MFCs assembled in a cascade manner achieving a higher active surface area of microbes for processing the effluent as in a trickling filter treatment process. This study focuses on the remediation aspect of 24 MFCs reconfigured hydraulically and electrically under a fixed flow rate creating a gradual nutrient deficiency along the cascade. The stack reduced COD up to 34%, with the electrical and hydraulic shuffling revealing a correlation between  $R_{int}$  and COD removal and a feedback loop among the number of cascaded units and urine quality. Each configuration displayed performance attributes that allow the MFC stack to adapt to variable nutrient conditions, which is crucial in specifying systems design and configuration.

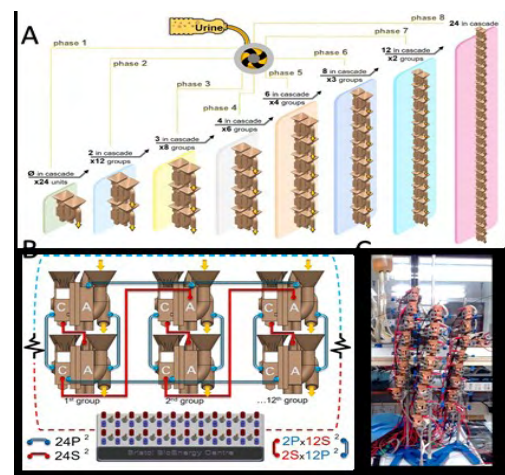


Figure 1. A) Eight cascade scenarios under constant flow rate, B) electrical interconnection of stacked MFCs with

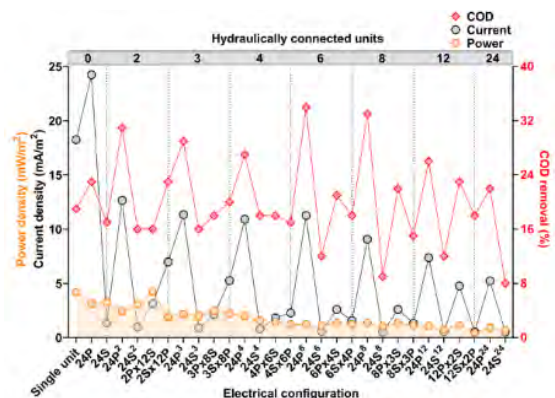


Figure 2. COD readings along with current and power output under a dynamic hydraulic and electrical

## M0303

## Comparative study of different cathode strategies in single chamber microbial fuel cells

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### Abstract

Different cathode assemblies were investigated as a means of enhancing the performance of a four air-cathode single chamber microbial fuel cell (MFC). In this context, three cells were constructed using three different cathode assemblies (C1, C2, C3). Each system consisted of one chamber filled with graphite granules with the cathode assemblies running through the chamber. For the C1 case, four mullite tubes were coated internally with MnO<sub>2</sub> catalyst. For the C2 case, four Plexiglas tubes were wrapped with GoreTex cloth coated internally with MnO<sub>2</sub>. For the C3 case, four mullite tubes were tested, using fly ash as the catalyst. Each MFC operated in batch mode using glucose (~1 g COD/L) as the substrate.

For the C1 case the MFC operated with an average cycle duration of 200 ± 60 h. The maximum current output ( $I_{max}$ ) was 2.3 mA and the lowest was 1.9 mA. The highest coulombic efficiency (CE) calculated was 40.6%. The maximum volumetric power density ( $P_{vmax}$  / calculated by dividing power output with the anodic liquid volume of 150 mL) produced during C1 was 5.5 W/m<sup>3</sup>. For the C2 case the MFC operated with an average cycle duration of 85 ± 42 h.  $I_{max}$  was 3.1 mA and the lowest was 2.7 mA. The highest CE was 11.3% whereas the  $P_{vmax}$  for C2 was 10.2 W/m<sup>3</sup>. The average cycle duration for the C3 case was 120 ± 52 h whereas the current output ranged between 1.6 mA and 2.4 mA with the highest CE being equal to 18% and  $P_{vmax}$  equal to 5.4 W/m<sup>3</sup>. The COD removal was high with an average percentage of 95 ± 4%, 89 ± 3% and 84 ± 11%, for the C1, C2 and C3 case, respectively.

### Acknowledgments

This project has received funding from the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) and the General Secretariat for Research and Technology (GSRT), under grant agreement No [862].

M0304

## Assessment of different configuration of microbial fuel cells to enhance bioelectricity production

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### Abstract

Microbial Fuel Cells (MFCs) are a promising tool that exploits microorganisms for generating electricity from a variety of reduced materials, including organic matter. Soil is a suitable substrate to be used in microbial fuel cells as it is characterized by a complex microbial community, including electrogenic bacteria needed for electron transport. Terrestrial Microbial Fuel Cells (TMFCs) are a class of MFCs operating with soil as the electrolyte and the source of organic substance.

However, this technology has some technical and operating constraints that limit its application as energy supply system. In particular, the low output voltage and the low power density are the major restrictions. Previous works demonstrated that organic matter amendment significantly increases the electricity generation of MFCs. Therefore, TMFCs were assembled with the addition of an agricultural composting product (3% by weight).

Furthermore, the scaling up can be reached by developing bigger reactors and by connecting different MFCs in series and/or parallel configurations.

In this work, two stacked configurations (series and parallel connections) have been developed and tested to analyse how the energy performances could be enhanced. This study aims to assess an optimum configuration, corresponding to the lowest internal resistance, to satisfy the energy demand of small electrical devices. Experimental tests are currently ongoing.

M0305

# Comparative analysis of electrical performance and degradation rate in PMFC exposed to Malachite Green contamination

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## Abstract

In recent years humanity is facing challenges never seen before such as geopolitical disputes, global warming, pandemics, and mounting energy requirements. In this regard the energetic engineering research, to achieve the goals that these enormous tasks impose, identifies, as one of the main solutions, the efficient use of the available energy sources even if not traditional. Among the non-conventional sources, the scientific community has identified in the Microbial Fuel Cells (MFCs), and in the Plant Microbial Fuel Cells (PMFCs), one of the smartest and most flexible solutions adoptable in the near future. These Bio-Electrochemical Systems (BES), thanks to the latest advances in low power electronics, are green energy production devices which, through the biocatalytic activity of exo-electrogenic microorganisms, convert the chemical energy stored in the organic compounds present in the soil into electrical energy by means of redox reactions. In this work, indeed, the electrical and decontamination performance of the BES are analyzed from an experimental point of view with the aim of demonstrating their effectiveness in the two different fields simultaneously. From the studies conducted on two different experimental setups of single-chamber MFC and PMFC, an in-depth analysis was carried out to evaluate the performance of the BES, with or without a highly persistent organic dye, the Malachite Green (Figure 1). This work reports the results of the electrical and decontamination performance of the BES, comparing the outputs of the MFC and PMFC. During the 30 days working period stable voltage supply has been obtained for MFCs with maximum peak power of 13,70 mW/m<sup>2</sup> realized when the *Papyrus* was used as plant. The results drawn from the results in object which see the plant as power growth driver in blank soil and the Malachite Green as feeding compound with stabilizing effects in MFCs.



Figure 1. Initial setup with three cells for each of the four



M0306

## A scalable Rotating Disc Bioelectrochemical Reactor (RDBER) suitable for the cultivation of both cathodic and anodic biofilms

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### Abstract

Reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> into value-added chemicals as well as the recovery of energy from waste streams is considered one of the cornerstones towards a sustainable circular economy. For this purpose, a scalable and membrane-less rotating disc bioelectrochemical reactor (Fig. 1) with a working electrode surface of 1 m<sup>2</sup> was constructed and operated as both microbial electrosynthesis (MES) and microbial electrolysis cell (MEC). In MES mode the cathodic growing thermoacidophilic Knallgas bacterium *Kyrpidia spormannii* EA-1 was cultivated on the rotating discs and visualized in situ and online via optical coherence tomography (OCT). To supply the biofilm with the gaseous substrates, the reactor was continuously pressurized with a gas mixture of CO<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub> while the cathode served as the sole electron donor. In MEC mode the model organisms *Shewanella oneidensis* and *Geobacter sulfurreducens* were cultivated to oxidize non-essential organic acids into carbon dioxide leading to a cathodic hydrogen production. Early experiments prove a significant influence of the working electrodes rotational speed on the degradation rate of the organic acids as well as on the achieved current densities. Furthermore, changes in cathode design lead to higher hydrogen yields due to less shuttling between cathode and hydrogen consuming biofilm.

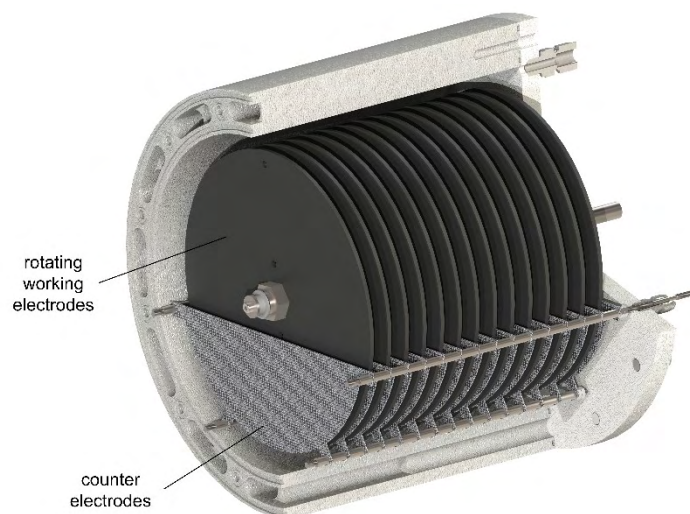


Fig. 1: RDBER equipped with 14 rotating working electrodes

## M0310

## Ultra-low power consumption charge pumps for electrochemical reactors

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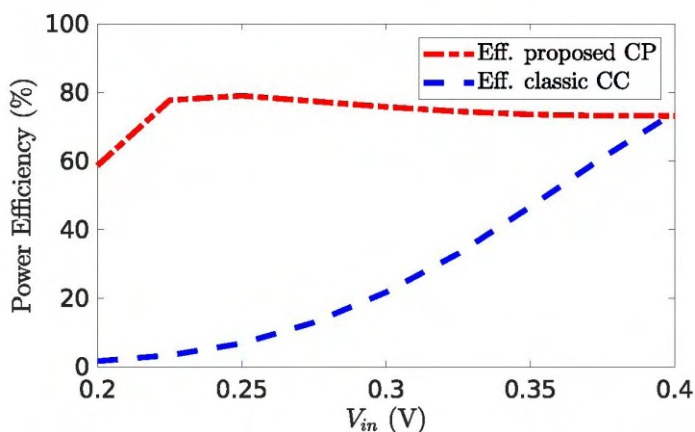
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### Abstract

Bio-photovoltaic, enzymatic and microbial fuel cells are among the different types of electrochemical reactors commonly used to harvest energy from the environment. They can produce energy by means of organic substances present in living cells and environmental wastes and hence constitute a widely-available, affordable and green source of energy with application in several fields such as wastewater and contaminated soils treatment or the production of fresh water from sea water. However, the main drawback of these techniques from a practical perspective is the small magnitude of the harvested voltages, which severely limits their applicability. Since most electrochemical reactors deliver output voltages in the range of mVs and common electronic components work at 3.3 V and above, the use of charge pumps to increase the regulated output voltage is mandatory. On the other hand, their low power density, ranging from  $\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$  to  $\text{mW}/\text{cm}^2$ , requires the use of circuitry with ultra-low power consumption characteristics as well as dedicated power management units.



The classic cross-coupled (CC) voltage doubler charge pump is known to have good power efficiency for moderate and large input voltages. As we will show, a gate-boosting approach can be used to increase the drive capability of the charge pump switches when the input voltage is below the

effectively counteracting the on-resistance increase. As a result, the power efficiency for low voltage input conditions is increased. In so doing, we are able to work using input voltages below 400 mV and input powers as low as nWs while maintaining a good overall efficiency. In the figure, we show a comparison of the power efficiency of classic CC devices with our proposed charge pump. As can be seen, the gate-boosting approach offers significant improvements at low input voltage conditions. The same fly capacitors and switching additional hardware increases the charge pump power consumption by only a 5%.

M0311

## Investigation of the optimal design to produce biosurfactants and electricity from waste vegetable oil in air-cathode microbial fuel cells

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### Abstract

Microbial fuel cells (MFC) are devices that use microorganisms as biocatalysts for the oxidation of organic matter to generate electricity and/or synthesise valuable compounds. The low currents obtained in the MFC limit their use as an alternative energy production process only for low energy applications. The use of MFC for the synthesis of valuable products is currently one of the development ways. In this study, the effects of electrode alignment and agitation on power and biosurfactant production from waste vegetable oil was assessed in single-chamber air-cathode microbial fuel cells. The production of biosurfactants and electricity generation in the vertical MFC design with continuous mixing was compared to the horizontal MFC design of without agitation. The MFCs were investigated using real time temporal analysis, linear sweep voltammetry measurements, surface tension measurements, foaming properties measurements and gas chromatography with mass spectroscopy analysis. No significant change in surface tension was observed in the anolyte of the agitated vertical MFC. At the same time, the maximum power density produced was  $2.36 \text{ W m}^{-3}$ . The horizontal MFC system led to increased electricity production by 104.7% to  $4.84 \text{ W m}^{-3}$ . Furthermore, an increased production of biosurfactants was observed, which led to reduced surface tension of the anolyte to  $50.7 \text{ mN m}^{-1}$ . Therefore, we showed that production of biosurfactants through electrofermentation process can be achieved by using waste vegetable oils and through of an appropriate MFC system design, which improves contact of the organic substrate with the anode surface.

## M0312

# Describing polarization curves and potential changes of a Microbial Electrolysis Cell

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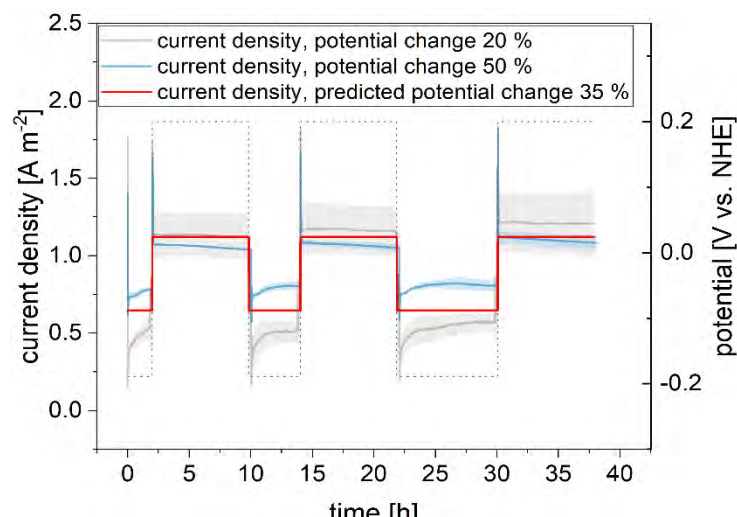
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### Abstract

A kinetic model was used to represent experimental data of polarization curves and applied potential changes within Microbial Electrolysis Cells (MEC). To describe the produced current density of electrochemically active microorganisms on a bio-anode, the Butler-Volmer-Monod model was used and compared to the Nernst-Monod model. Using the Butler-Volmer-Monod model it was possible to describe the experimental polarization curves of the MEC more accurate compared to the Nernst-Monod model. Moreover, the kinetic model was implemented for application in Matlab (The MathWorks, Inc., USA). In that software environment, parameter estimation was conducted to determine by sum of least squared error between measurements and corresponding simulation results values for the kinetic model. The fitted parameters were well applicable to describe applied potential changes of the system and could be used to even predict potential changes. Accordingly, the Butler-Volmer-Monod model was capable to predict a theoretical potential change of 35% which showed a very realistic simulation result compared to experimental data.



**Figure 2: Predicted potential change at 35% in comparison to 20% and 50%**



M0313

# **Microbial Gardens: A design-led proposal for the creation of a human-bacteria cohabitation unit for inhabiting extreme environments based on microbial fuel cell and benthic fuel cell technologies.**

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## **Abstract**

fertile soil is being lost at the rate of 24bn tonnes a year, according to the United Nations (2017), with the annual desertification rate at 1.3%. Exacerbated by climate change, the essentially man-made process of desertification is leading to further land degradation, consequently, a system for inhabiting barren areas of our land and even other planets, is pressing. This design-led paper proposes a microbial toolset for the formation of specific microbiomes implemented as microbial gardens that establish the infrastructure, metabolisms, and protocols for living that are essential for human inhabitation. Situated in Antarctica, one of the most barren areas on the Earth, the design draws on electroactive microbes via the use of microbial fuel cells and benthic microbial fuel cells to establish a human-microbial symbiosis through wastewater processing and lake sediment. Exploring a range of prototypes printed from different clays, human/microbial symbioses are optimised, where microbes provide clean water and electricity for human inhabitants in exchange for food, heat and running water, by altering the geometry and efficiency of the bioelectrical cells.



















































































