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Chemical Looping Gasification for Sustainable Production of Biofuels – The CLARA Project

Jochen STRÖHLE^{1*#}, Paul DIERINGER¹, Amir H. SOLEIMANISALIM², Juan ADANEZ³, Ibai FUNCIA⁴, Andrea DI GIULIANO⁵, Florian LEBENDIG⁶, Frank BUSCHSIEWEKE⁷, Konstantinos ATSONIOS⁸, Nadine GÜRER⁹, Ye HUANG¹⁰

¹ Technical University of Darmstadt, Energy Systems and Technology, 64287 Darmstadt, Germany

² Division of Energy Technology, Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg 412 58, Sweden

³ Instituto Carboquímica (CSIC), 50018 Zaragoza, Spain

⁴ National Renewable Energy Centre, 31621 Sarriguren, Spain

⁵ DIIE, University of L'Aquila, 67100 L'Aquila (AQ), Italy

⁶ Forschungszentrum Jülich GmbH, IEK-2, 52428 Jülich, Germany

⁷ RWE Power AG, 45141 Essen, Germany

⁸ Centre for Research & Technology Hellas, 57001 Thessaloniki, Greece

⁹ Institute of Energy Systems and Electrical Drives - Energy Economics Group, 1040 Wien, Austria

¹⁰ School of the built environment, University of Ulster, U.K.

*Corresponding Author, jochen.stroehle@est.tu-darmstadt.de, #Presenting Author

Abstract – Within the scope of the Horizon 2020 project CLARA, a novel biomass-to-biofuel process chain is being developed. The fuel production plant consists of a chemical looping gasifier for the production of a raw syngas, a gas treatment train to provide the required syngas composition for the subsequent synthesis, and a Fischer-Tropsch (FT) reactor to convert the syngas into liquid FT-crude. This crude can then be purified and upgraded to ready-to-use second generation drop-in biofuels in existing state-of-the-art refineries. So far, various oxygen carrier materials were evaluated through lab-scale test regarding their suitability for chemical looping gasification. Ilmenite proved to be the most promising candidate and was therefore selected for further investigations. Successful test campaigns in a small CLG pilot unit supported the findings made in lab-scale units. A novel pre-treatment concept of wheat straw based on pelleting and additivition was developed, which allows for an economic decentralized production and avoids bed agglomeration in a chemical looping gasifier. Furthermore, a novel sour gas separation concept, allowing for an efficient removal of H₂S from sour gases, was successfully tested at lab-scale. Based on the underlying technologies, the project partners derived an optimized process layout of the entire biomass-to-liquid chain, achieving competitive figures for the most important key performance indicators, such as attaining negative CO₂ emissions and achieving an energetic fuel efficiency of 55 % for the entire process chain. The full process chain has been demonstrated within four weeks of pilot testing at the Technical University of Darmstadt. Currently, the full-chain BtL concept is being assessed by means of risk studies as well as techno-economic and environmental considerations.

1 Introduction

Significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are required to prevent a surge in global average temperatures, exceeding the much discussed 1.5 °C threshold of the Paris Agreement. Here, the de-carbonization of the transport sector, which utilizes over a third of the global final energy [1] and is responsible for almost one quarter of the European greenhouse gas emissions [2], is a key concern on the route to achieve this goal. Particularly, the substitution of fossil fuels in transport sectors for which electrification is presently not viable (e.g. road transport and aviation), remains a major challenge. To tackle this issue, the European Union has set a target of a share of 14 % renewable energy in the transport sector by 2030 in the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) in 2018 [3]. This requires the large-scale deployment of biofuels in addition to electrification and the increased deployment of rail transport. Since the wide-spread utilization of energy crops is being strongly criticized publicly, the utilization of biogenic residues, which do not impact food availability and prices negatively, in the energy and transport sector is to be intensified. Therefore, substantial advances in renewable fuel generation are required. One route to achieve these objectives is the synthesis of advanced biofuels through thermochemical conversion of biomass-based residues. Gasification is a well-established thermochemical biomass conversion technology. Yet, its primary use is the production of heat and electricity, whereas industrial scale gasifiers for the synthesis of advanced biofuels are not available, hitherto [4].

Within the scope of the *Horizon 2020* project CLARA (<https://clara-h2020.eu/>), an efficient technology for the production of liquid fuels based on chemical looping gasification (CLG) of biogenic residues is being developed [5]. Here, the advantages of utilizing locally available biogenic residues and the economy of scale are combined, through decentralized feedstock pre-treatment facilities and a centralized fuel production plant in the scale of 100-300 MW_{th}. The fuel production plant itself consists of a chemical looping gasifier for the production of a raw syngas, a gas treatment train to provide the required syngas composition for the subsequent synthesis, and a Fischer-Tropsch (FT) reactor to convert the syngas into liquid FT-crude. This crude can then be purified and upgraded to ready-to-use second generation drop-in biofuels in existing state-of-the-art refineries. By focusing on biological non-food-grade precursors, CLARA contributes not only to a sustainable shifting from fossil to renewable resources, but also facilitates the large-scale economic production of biofuels, without detrimental effects on food availability and prices arising. This aspect, in combination with the projected advances in terms of process scalability, CO₂-reduction potential (net negative CO₂ emissions) and projected biofuel costs of 0.7 €/l, make the process investigated within the scope of CLARA an auspicious candidate for a key industry of the 21st century.

The major objective is to further investigate and test CLG up to 1 MW_{th} scale in an industrially relevant environment, elevating the process to market maturity. Furthermore, the project aims at devising and optimizing innovative, cost-efficient technologies for biomass pre-treatment and syngas cleaning. These novel process steps will be supplemented by established fuel synthesis technologies (e.g. Fischer-Tropsch process), yielding the full biomass-to-biofuel process chain. Through cutting-edge research and interdisciplinary cooperation, the CLARA consortium, consisting of thirteen international members including universities, research

institutes and industrial partners, aims to investigate the complete process chain and bring the suggested technologies to market maturity.

This paper presents the latest results of the CLARA project. Section 2 provides insights into the process definition, optimization, and upscaling, before a deep-dive into the technological development of the individual technologies, being under investigation in the CLARA project, is presented in Section 3. The advances made with regard to the full-chain testing of the entire process chain in the 1 MW_{th} scale are summarized in Section 4, while the analysis of the entire process chain in terms of economics and risks is provided in Section 5.

2 Process Definition

A schematic illustration of the entire suggested biomass-to-biofuel process chain, highlighting the four main sub-units, biomass pre-treatment, chemical looping gasification, syngas cleaning, and fuel synthesis, is given in Figure 1.

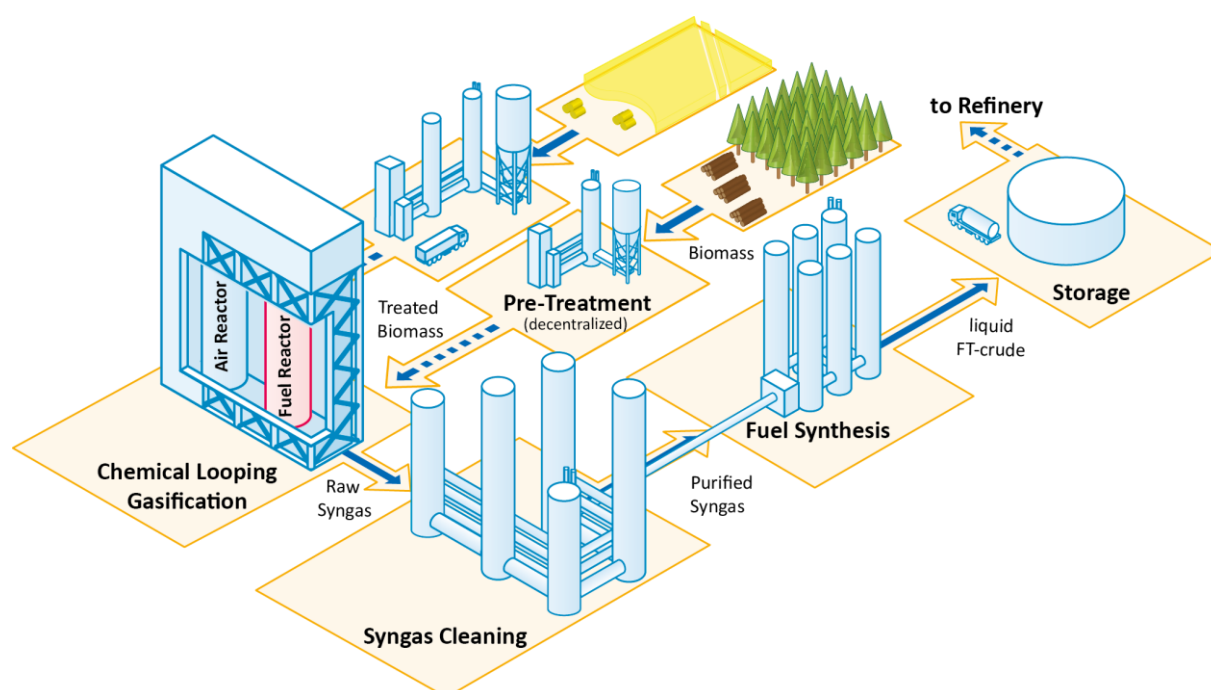


Figure 1: Schematic illustration of the process chain investigated within the CLARA project.

Based on this layout, the full process chain, including all major plant components, was defined in detail, using the insights gathered during technology development (see Section 3), in order to calculate the heat and mass balances for the entire process chain. In the first sub-unit, the raw biomass is prepared for transport to the centralized BtL plant site and subsequent gasification. Thereafter, the pre-treated biomass pellets are converted into a raw producer gas containing large fractions of syngas (H₂ & CO) inside the 200 MW_{th} chemical looping gasifier (CLG, more details see Section 3.2). In the downstream gas cleaning unit, the raw gas is compressed and purified, using water and amine scrubbing as well as an oil-based tar removal unit. This procedure yields a pure syngas which is fine cleaned using a caustic wash, before being converted into the end product, a FT-crude, inside the fuel synthesis unit. The crude is then transported from the BtL plant site to local refineries for final fuel upgrading and refining to drop-in standards. To attain a better utilization of all gaseous species in the fuel synthesis unit,

it is equipped with a steam methane reformer (SMR) converting gaseous hydrocarbons to H₂ and CO. Sulphur species (i.e. H₂S) contained in the sour gas coming from the amine wash, which mainly consists of CO₂ (>95 vol-%), are removed using a new cleaning technology (see Section 3.3), so that the captured CO₂ can be used for carbon capture and storage or utilization (CCU/S) purposes.

For process optimization, the entire process chain was evaluated using two performance indicators. Firstly, the carbon utilization (CU), which relates the carbon contained in the final FT-crude to the carbon contained in the pre-treated feedstock:

$$CU = \frac{\dot{m}_{\text{carbon,FT-crude}}}{\dot{m}_{\text{carbon,feedstock}}} \quad (1)$$

And secondly, the energetic fuel efficiency (EFE), which is given by the fraction of the energy contained in the pre-treated feedstock and the energy contained in the final FT-crude:

$$EFE = \frac{\dot{m}_{\text{FT-crude}} \cdot LHV_{\text{FT-crude}}}{\dot{m}_{\text{feedstock}} \cdot LHV_{\text{feedstock}}} \quad (2)$$

The heat and carbon balance for the optimized BtL plant layout for the model feedstock pine forest residue (PFR) are illustrated in Figure 2 and Figure 3, respectively. Inside the CLG unit, a cold gas efficiency (CGE) of around 80 % is achieved. A total of 1 % of the energy accounts for heat losses, while the remaining energy is used for pre-heating of the inlet streams (~10 %) and for steam generation (~9 %) for usage in other plant units (e.g. gas cleaning). The heat losses of the gas cleaning & conditioning unit are minor, while the main heat losses of the process are observed in the FT-synthesis unit (~23%), due to the highly exothermic Fischer-Tropsch reactions as well as the partial syngas combustion for steam reforming of longer hydrocarbons in the fuel synthesis unit. In summary, an EFE around 52-53% is achieved, meaning that more than half of the chemical energy contained in the initial feedstock is found in the final product of the process (i.e. FT-crude).

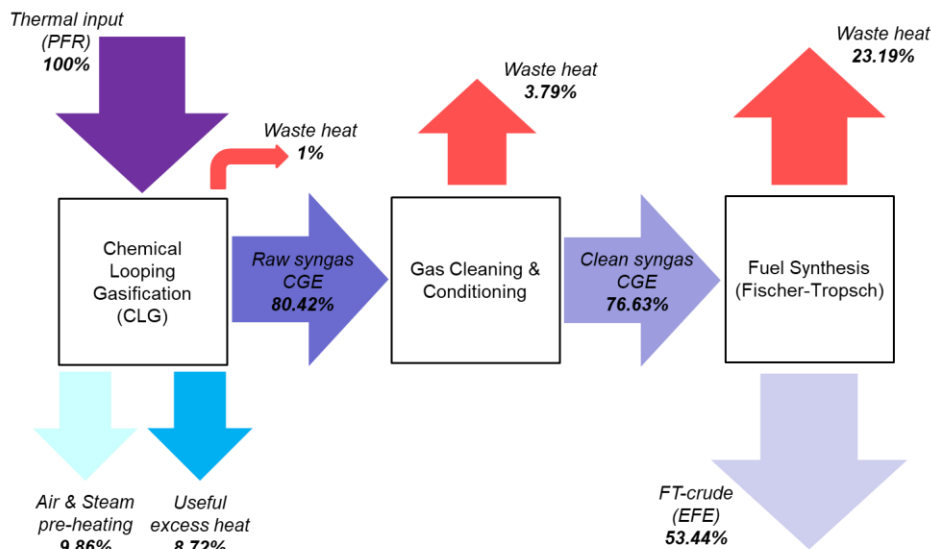


Figure 2: Heat balance for the entire BtL process chain for the model feedstock PFR.

In terms of the carbon balance, the majority of carbon (~87.5%) contained in the pre-treated feedstock is transferred to the producer gas inside the industrial-scale CLG unit, while the

remainder (~12.5%) is combusted in the air reactor of the CLG unit, providing necessary process heat. Subsequently, after a significant carbon transformation from CO to CO₂ via the CO-shift reaction in the gas treatment unit, a high percentage of carbon (~45%) is captured in the form of pure CO₂ in the acid gas removal unit. A small part of the captured CO₂ is recycled back to the CLG unit along with any tars removed via oil washing, while the carbon left in clean syngas (i.e. CO & CH₄) is directed to the FT-synthesis unit. There, partial syngas/carbon combustion for the heat demands of the SMR takes place (~10%), while the remaining carbon is integrated into long-chained hydrocarbons during FT-synthesis and is thus found in the valuable FT products, yielding a CU equal to around 32.5 %.

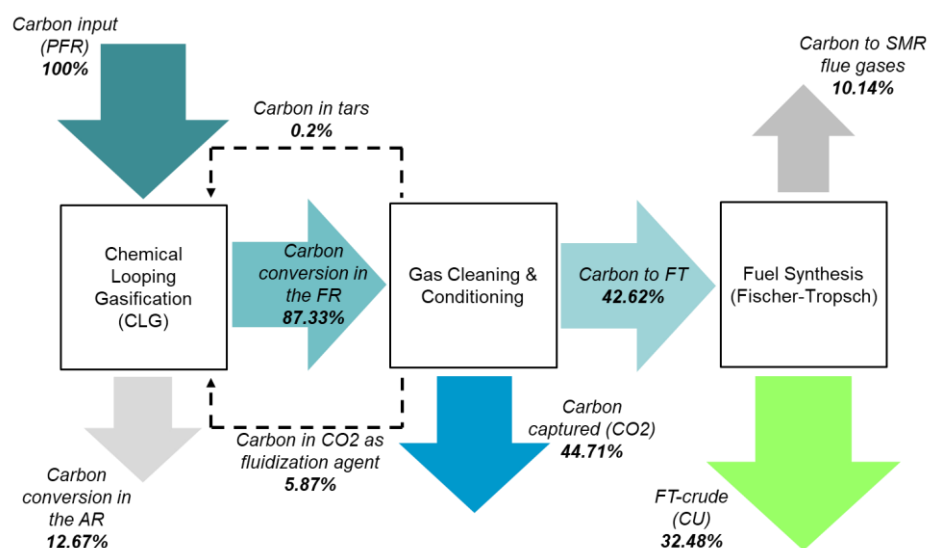


Figure 3: Carbon balance for the entire BtL process chain for the model feedstock PFR.

Table 1 summarizes the key performance indicators (KPI) for the BtL process chain. It can be seen that for the model feedstock PFR, values within the range of the project targets are obtained. Approaches to further optimize the KPIs, will be investigated within the on-going up-scaling studies using the latest findings from technology development (see Section 3) and the pilot tests (see Section 4), carried out within the CLARA project.

Table 1: KPIs for the full-scale BtL process for PFR pellets.

KPI	Results from Heat & Mass Balance	Project Targets
Carbon conversion in the CLG (CC)	100%	98%
Cold Gas Efficiency (CGE)	80.42%	82%
Carbon utilization (CU)	32.48%	33%
Energetic Fuel Efficiency (EFE)	53.44%	55%
FT-crude yield (kg/kg _{feedstock})	0.206	nA

3 Technology Development

3.1 Biomass Pre-Treatment

Different representative feedstocks for the CLARA project were selected based on technical and market criteria in order to identify biogenic residues that maximize the chances for reaching a higher technological readiness level (TRL) while at the same time being representative as feedstocks with high European sustainable sourcing potentials. The selected representative feedstocks for the CLARA project were wheat straw (agricultural residues), pine wood residues (forestry residues) and industrial wood pellets of considerable low grades.

It is well known that Chemical Looping Gasification (CLG) is rather flexible with respect to the feedstock used and particularly suited for fuels with a high content of impurities. Hence, biogenic residues from agriculture and forestry could be applicable as a cheap and abundant feedstock for biofuel production using CLG.

Cereal straw is, in particular, an attractive lignocellulosic material for use in energy production, since it is one of the most abundant renewable resources whose potential is similar to the sum of both forest and non-forest woody residues. However, straw residues are especially problematic feedstocks, due to their undesired properties with regard to their gasification in fluidized beds:

- Low energy density leading to increased costs for transport and problems with feeding
- Low ash melting point leading to agglomeration and slagging
- High content of volatile inorganics such as alkali and chlorine that promote corrosion and fouling

This makes it difficult to handle, transport and store efficiently limiting its commercial use being necessary to perform some pre-treatment prior to the gasification step. Therefore, the aim of the feedstock pre-treatment is to improve wheat straw residues characteristics for CLG obtaining a solid feedstock with a high calorific value and a high energy density, while at the same time avoiding ash-related operational issues considering technical, economic and environmental impacts in the value chain. Hence, an efficient and cost-effective pre-treatment concept is being derived within the CLARA project, allowing for a large-scale utilization of wheat straw in industrial gasification processes.

In order to accomplish this development, an experimental study was performed regarding pre-treatment of straw based on the combination of different technologies such as heat treatment (torrefaction), washing and use of additives. The underlying goal was to obtain optimized feedstock properties. The quality of wheat straw after processing with the different pre-treatment steps and combinations of them was comprehensively studied to allow for inferences regarding its performance during gasification. Since inorganics behavior in solid fuels is a complex topic, pre-treated fuel samples produced by CENER were characterized not only based on biofuel standards but also by advanced techniques. On the one hand, Forschungszentrum Jülich has tested the influence of pre-treatment on the release of volatile inorganics during gasification as well as the melting behavior of the residual ashes by hot stage microscopy. On the other hand, the University of L'Aquila performed continuous steady-state

gasification tests and dynamic pressure measurements to evaluate gas yield and its composition as well as the sintering phenomena and interactions with different oxygen carriers.

Finally, physical pre-treatments such as chopping and/or pelleting should be considered as part of the pre-treatment concept since these allow an easier handling, storage, and transportation reducing overall costs. Pelleting, for example, raises the volumetric energy density of the feedstock and improves its handling properties, which will facilitate gasifier feeding and gasification process control, impacting the value chain from a technical and economical operation point of view.

Since the improvement of each pre-treatment step on biomass performance for CLG application should have a clear effect, the final selection for the optimized pre-treatment process conditions was based in the following criteria: suitability for CLG gasification (fluidization behavior and interactions with oxygen carrier), feasibility/cost of transport, feeding requirements for CLG plant and production cost.

Therefore, the selected pre-treatment concept established for wheat straw in order to develop a concept for production of advanced liquid biofuels based on chemical looping gasification (CLG) was finally based on chopping, pelleting and additivition.

Feedstocks preparation for all subsequent small-scale CLG test campaigns in the CLARA project has been carried out inside the pre-treatment pilot plant of CENER. Additionally, the pre-treatment concept is being applied in the (semi-)industrial scale at the facilities of AB Torkapparater, for the pilot tests conducted at TU Darmstadt (TUDA). Based on the findings of these CLG test campaigns, the merit of the suggested pre-treatment concept will be evaluated, allowing for further advances towards its large-scale application in industrial environments.

3.2 Chemical Looping Gasification

Chemical looping gasification (CLG) requires in-depth analyses of multiple phenomena to attain a stable and efficient process allowing for continuous conversion of solid biomass-based feedstocks to a high-quality syngas. Using lab and bench scale chemical looping units, Chalmers University of Technology (CTH) and CSIC have the possibility to investigate CLG at realistic conditions, using different fuels and oxygen carriers at varying boundary conditions (e.g. reactor temperatures, air-to-fuel equivalence ratio, etc.).

During the third year of the project, CTH and CSIC were focused to investigate the performance of the selected oxygen carriers, from the pre-screening task, in the 10 kW_{th} at CTH, and 1.5 kW_{th} and 50 kW_{th} at CSIC. The selected OCs from the prescreening tests were ilmenite, LD slag and Tierga iron ore. For evaluation of these selected oxygen carriers during continuous operation in the pilot plants, a total of 600 hours of CLG operation has been carried out in the pilot plants at CTH and CSIC at realistic conditions, using different fuels at various operating conditions (e.g. reactor temperatures, air-to-fuel equivalence ratio, etc.). After a vast experimental evaluation, summarized in Table 2, it has been confirmed that using oxygen carriers in CLG has a positive effect on gasification of biomass by reducing tar formation, increasing syngas yield, biomass conversion, and H₂/CO ratio compared to conventional steam gasification using silica sand as bed. Among the tested oxygen carriers, Ilmenite ilmenite, and LD slag showed

better biomass gasification performance compared to Manganese ores (Elwaleed B and Moanda) and Tierga ore. LD slag has a lower lifetime than ilmenite and needs heat pretreatment, but a higher syngas yield and H₂/CO.

Table 2: Summary of CLG results for Ilmenite and LD slag during continuous operation.

			Oxygen Carrier			
			CTH		CSIC	
Unit			S/B=0.95, T=970°C, λ=0.2, Fuel=PFR		S/B=0.6, T=950°C, λ=0.35, Fuel=PFR	
			Ilmenite	LD slag	Ilmenite	LD slag
Gas Composition	CO ₂ , CO	% vol, % vol	37, 22	35, 20	41.5, 21.1	38.1, 23.1
	H ₂ , CH ₄	% vol, % vol	29, 8	34, 8	23.6, 10.2	29.5, 8.1
	C2-C3	% vol	4	3	3.4	1.2
Biomass conversion, X _b	%	93	95	98.9	97	
H ₂ /CO Ratio		1.5	1.7	1.1	1.3	
Syngas yield, Y	m ³ /kg dry biomass	0.65	0.71	0.53	0.70	
Tar	g/Nm ³	8-18	2-5	1-2	2-3	
Lifetime	hour	850	800	630	275	
Cost*	USD/Ton	200	NA	200	NA	

Therefore, ilmenite has been selected for subsequent tests in larger CLG pilots and the final demonstration at TUDA (WP5), considering the operational performance, availability of the material at multi-ton scale, lifetime and pretreatments required for the material prior to CLG operation. In a first step towards large-scale demonstration, CSIC has performed a first test campaign in their 50 kW_{th} pilot unit using ilmenite as oxygen carrier and pre-treated straws as fuel. The layout of 50 kW_{th} unit is illustrated in Figure 4. In the 50 kW_{th} pilot unit at CSIC, CH₄ and C₂, C₃ concentrations were similar to those found in the 1.5 kW_{th} unit. Also, no agglomerates were found and pellets maintained the shape inside the fuel reactor. Currently, CTH is modifying the 100 kW_{th} unit for safe handling of CLG. The risk assessment report for CLG operation has been prepared and the fuel feeding system has been modified. The plan is to further investigate the performance of ilmenite during continuous CLG operation in the 100 kW_{th} unit using pine forest residue and pretreated straw (see also Section 3.1).

Apart from the testing of CLG in the pilots of CTH and CSIC, gasification kinetics for pine forest residue pellets and industrial wood pellets were determined, to allow for modelling of the conversion of the biomass char inside the CLG unit. In order to do so, the resistance to the gas diffusion happening in the pellets of the biomass char has been determined by CSIC. In addition, the kinetics of the selected oxygen carrier, ilmenite, has been established under CLG conditions. Kinetic equations and parameters regarding both the reduction and oxidation reactions to be used in the CLG process have been established, paving the way for future modelling endeavors in the CLARA project.

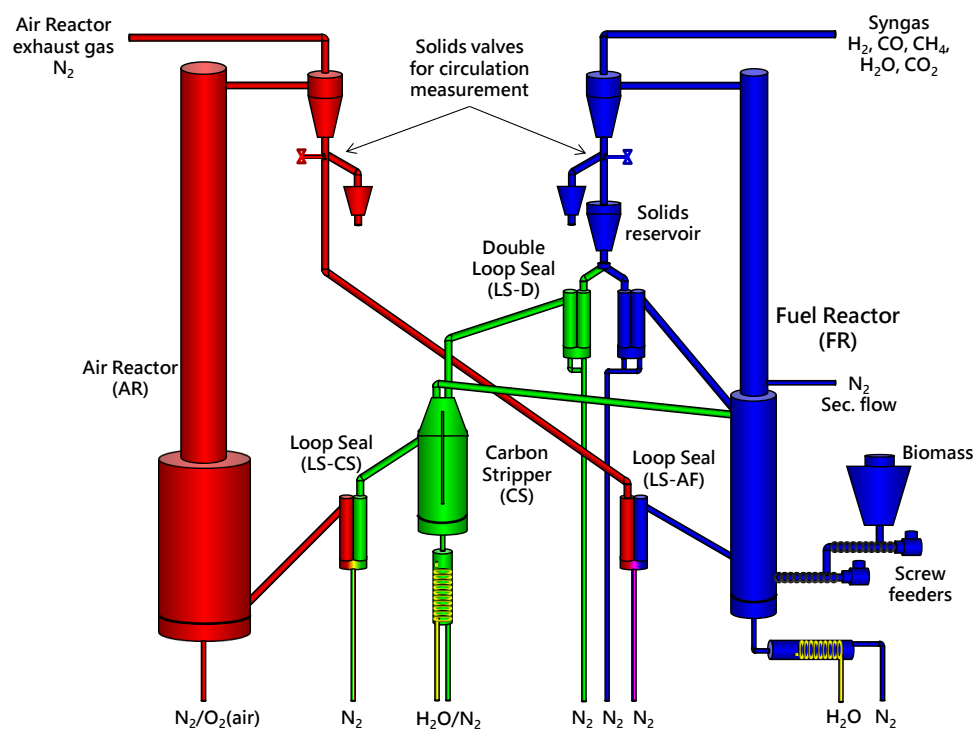


Figure 4: Layout of the CSIC facility (50 kW_{th}) used for biomass fuelled CLG.

Lastly, CSIC developed a 1.5D fluidized bed model for the entire CLG reactor system considering the core/wall structure along the height of the circulating fluidized beds. This model includes both the fluid-dynamic of the solids present in the bed and the kinetic parameters for the biomass char and oxygen carrier (ilmenite). Moreover, TUDA is currently preparing 3D CFD models for the 50 kW_{th} unit of CSIC and the 1 MW_{th} CLG pilot plant in Darmstadt. In the coming months, simulations will be carried out, using data both CLG units, to validate and optimize the given modelling approach. Based on this, further fine tuning of the full-scale unit will be carried out.

3.3 Syngas Cleaning

For removal of CO₂ and Sulphur containing components from the syngas for subsequent synthesis processes, the Rectisol® process, using methanol as solvent, is mainly applied worldwide. As this technology shows high CAPEX and OPEX due to necessary refrigeration of the solvent, an alternative novel concept will be used in this project (see Figure 5). The innovative idea is to use solvents already known partly from other applications. At first, it is foreseen to combine an amine wash (T-01) for main desulphurization with a subsequent caustic wash (T-04) for fine cleaning of the syngas. For Sulphur recovery, the sour gas from the amine regeneration (T-02) will be treated in a H₂O₂ wash (T-03), where oxidation to pure Sulphur will occur. In first investigations at RWE including mass- and energy balances with ChemCad, this combination showed significant potential for savings in CAPEX as well as in OPEX.

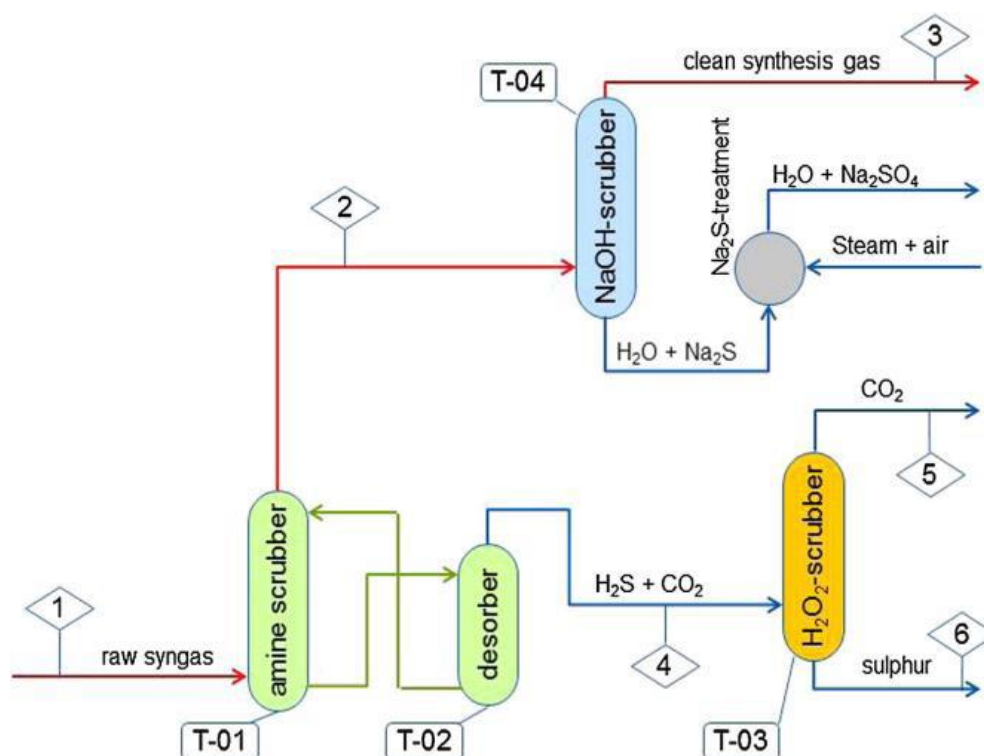


Figure 5: Block flow diagram of innovative gas cleaning concept

The new concept for acid gas (CO_2 and H_2S) removal from the CLG syngas were tested in a mobile small-scale test rig at RWE. While amine wash is a mature technology, well-known from several large-scale gas cleaning projects and can be again demonstrated during full chain test runs at pilot scale in the plant at TU Darmstadt, two main topics were defined for experimental investigations within the mobile small-scale test rig:

1. Which minimal level of Sulphur impurities can be reached in the syngas exiting the caustic wash?
2. How effective is the H_2O_2 contact, i.e. will the reaction of H_2S really end up at elemental Sulphur or will further oxidation occur. Will it be effective enough for such H_2S contents in the sour gas and what are the side-effects of the high CO_2 content?

The mobile small-scale gas washing test rig consists of three different absorption modules (see Figure 6). They have been designed for operation with all foreseen solvents and could be operated at the different conditions / gas specifications suitable for the respective cleaning steps (1, 3 and 4 in Figure 5).

A module with a pressurized metal column is applied for tests of caustic and amine wash, while two different modules – one with stirred glass bottles and one with glass column - are used for atmospheric Sulphur recovery with H_2O_2 .

In a first operation phase when basic parameters were tested at the RWE Innovation Centre Niederaußem, the needed gas compositions were supplied by mixing of synthetic pure gases from bottles. In a second operation phase, the mobile small-scale test rig will be operated at TUDA behind the already existing pilot scale gas cleaning unit of the 1 MW_{th} chemical-looping gasifier (see Chapter 4).

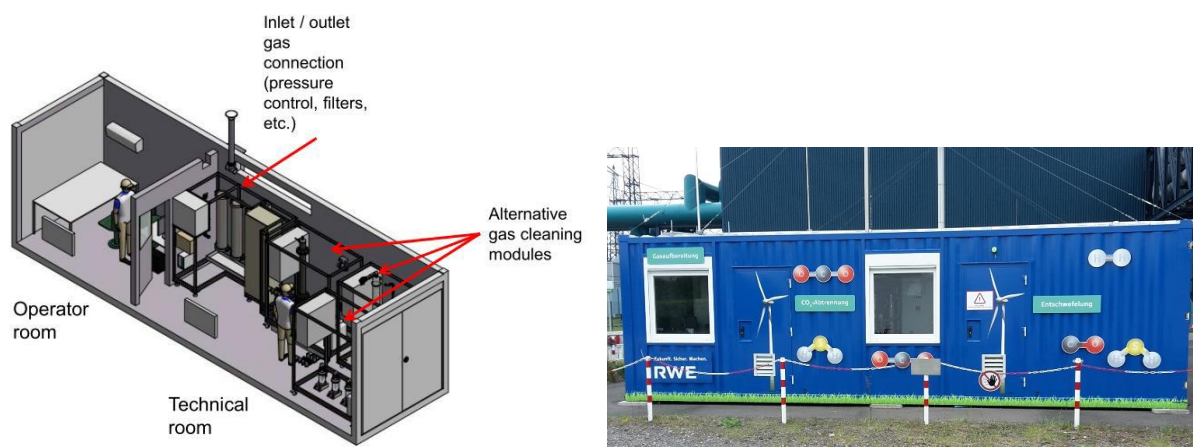


Figure 6: 3D view and photo of mobile small-scale gas washing test rig

During the first operation phase at RWE numerous trials with H_2O_2 under different operating conditions and with different parameters like H_2O_2 concentration in the liquid, H_2S concentration in the gas, operating temperature, amount of additional catalyst, etc. have been performed. Unfortunately, no significant conversion of H_2S to pure Sulphur could be found. Therefore, it was decided to use potassium permanganate (KMnO_4) as alternative chemical. Although this leads to several alterations such as the type and the composition of Sulphur containing product stream, the overall goal of saving CAPEX and OPEX is expected to be reached. This alternative combination of processes for the innovative gas cleaning has now been applied for patent and first experimental results are presented below.

Due to a tight time schedule, only a few test runs could be performed with KMnO_4 . During these, H_2S concentrations in the gas were varied up to 1500 ppm, the concentration of KMnO_4 in the liquid was set to 1 and 3 wt%. The main outcome is that especially for very small concentrations of H_2S , significant conversion rates could be found. This is important because it can be stated that full cleaning of the sour gas (H_2S containing CO_2) is possible as requested for further use of the CO_2 e.g. for solid fuel feeding to or inerting purpose of the gasifier, use in synthesis processes, venting to atmosphere, or other usage. Further on, as generally expected, it can be seen that the conversion rate depends on the concentration of KMnO_4 in the liquid.

As mentioned above, further tests will be done during full-chain test runs at TU Darmstadt. These will be carried out at the conditions shown above, yet using a “real” sour gas coming from the pilot-scale gas cleaning unit. To get a complete picture of the reaction system with KMnO_4 , more tests will be performed at RWE in subsequent projects.

4 Full-Chain Pilot Testing

The 1 MW_{th} pilot gasifier was prepared for the full-chain pilot tests at the facilities in Darmstadt [6]. This includes installation of new equipment, adaptations of existing plant sections (e.g. steam supply for the FR), as well as maintenance of the existing measurement and control systems. Moreover, the pilot plant has been extended by a syngas removal facility in order to be able to handle and dispose the raw gas produced in the gasifier safely. Thereafter, the main components, a thermal oxidizer and a hot gas filter, were installed on the base plate.

Furthermore, piping and insulation, connecting the gasifier and the syngas removal unit were installed, before commissioning of the new plant unit took place at the end of February 2022.

So far, two two-week test campaigns have been successfully performed in the pilot plant. During each of the three scheduled two-week test campaigns, roughly 75 tons of pre-treated biomass pellets were converted into a raw syngas inside the 1 MW_{th} chemical looping gasifier. During steady-state CLG operation, a slipstream of approx. 200 Nm³/h of the raw synthesis gas produced within the CLG pilot was transferred to the novel gas cleaning plant. In the gas cleaning plant, side products (e.g. CO₂, H₂O) and contaminants (e.g. tars) were removed from the raw syngas produced within the pilot gasifier. The treated syngas was then used for Fischer-Tropsch synthesis inside a test rig, provided by the project partner RWE. Moreover, a side stream of sour gas (mainly consisting of CO₂, H₂O, and H₂S) from the gas treatment plant was utilized to test the novel sour gas separation concept, investigated within the project CLARA, in the full-chain configuration for the very first time inside a second dedicated container. An image providing an overview over the novel gas treatment plant and the two containerized test rigs is shown in Figure 7. In June 2021, the entire full-chain pilot plant was in operation for the very first time, facilitating an investigation of all relevant technologies of the biomass-to-biofuel process chain. Thereby, important insights for process scale-up and the analysis and investigation of the full process chain (see Sections 5.1 & 5.2) have been obtained.

In preparation for the third test campaign, AB Torkapparater (ABT) has started pelletizing raw wheat straw according to the recipe from CENER (see Section 3.1), in their industrial scale facilities in Sweden.



Figure 7: Image of the novel gas treatment plant (background) and the two RWE test rigs (lower container behind cladding: fuel synthesis test rig, upper container: gas treatment test rig).

5 Assessment of the Full Process Chain

5.1 Risk Assessment

During the risk assessment study, the following aspects are being considered by the project consortium:

- Health and safety
- Environment
- Society
- Technology
- Economy

The health and safety issues have been assessed with respect to the full-scale biomass-to-end-use chain based on the processes defined at the beginning of the CLARA project. One focus is on the handled materials including solids (oxygen carrier, feedstock, dust, ash, etc.), liquids (biodiesel from gas cleaning unit, biofuel-products, solvents for gas washing, etc.), as well as gaseous components (H₂, CO, CO₂, etc.) and their hazardous potential for workers and local residents. Particular attention is drawn to the process itself and the potential safety risks in case of a malfunction of the unit and preventive measures.

TU Wien has developed a list of environmental risks that has been assessed by the whole project group, which include but are not limited to risks related to land use and harvesting, soil preparation, soil contamination by pesticides/fertilizers, the effects of down-stream utilization and/or deposition of residual solids and liquid, as well as the energy consumption of the Biomass-to-Liquid plant on the environment. In addition to the technology-specific risks outlined above, safety concerns that could generally result in environmental problems, such as explosions, fire hazards, and operator failures may also be included in the analysis. The analysis of the above mentioned risks is a qualitative approach that is mainly based on a literature survey and an interactive workshop.

In addition to environmental risks, potential risks to society have been assessed by BEST (Bioenergy and Sustainable Technologies GmbH), utilizing a qualitative approach, i.e. a literature search and stakeholder interviews. The risks related to society that have been identified can be clustered three groups; socio.economic factors, political and legal framework, and social acceptance. Selected results on risks related to socioeconomic factors include but are not limited to potential effects on demand that distort markets and a resulting competition for resources with food/feed production, unintended steering effects for biomass utilization and exacerbated competition for specific feedstocks due to subsidies and the risk of the economic exclusion of micro-scale SMEs. On the other hand, there is a major potential for regional development and added value through the CLARA plant. Selected results of the risk analysis related to political and legal framework include but are not limited to: lack of security regulations that could endanger society due to flawed approval procedures, as well as uncertainties around future political frameworks with regards to e.g. CO₂ pricing for fossil based energy technologies. The latter could result in the risk that CLARA technology may not succeed from an economic standpoint. Finally, several of the identified risks related to social acceptance include concerns about emissions, waste generation, food safety, and biodiversity

as well as concerns that increased migration and inequitable benefit sharing could lead to adverse changes in the local social structure or community. The so-called NIMBY (not in my backyard) effect could potentially also be observed for the CLARA project, as the local population may theoretically be in favor of the use of renewable feedstock but may not want a BtL plant in their neighborhood. It is important to note that the examples above merely represent a selection of risks that are being analyzed.

5.2 Techno-Economic, Socio-Economic and Environmental Assessment

The final part of the CLARA project, bringing cohesion to the research work carried out by all other project partners, consists of the following activities for selected options:

- Estimate capital investment and annual operating cost of industrial scale gasification and fuel synthesis facilities.
- Establish techno-economic models
- Calculate cost and revenue flows
- Identify and analyze economic risks derived from feedstock prices, project budget estimate and technological risks.

Based on the design and mass and energy balance of the plant (see Section 2), the cost models of the full-scale biomass chemical looping gasification process for the synthesis of liquid fuel production are developed; capital investment and operational costs for industrial sized gasification and fuel synthesis plants are estimated by using the ECLIPSE suite of the process simulation and economics software. Moreover, a realistic comparison is performed.

When implementing capital and operating costs, a comprehensive techno-economic analysis (TEA) of the CLARA BtL process chain is conducted, including revenue flows, net present value (NPV) and internal rate of return (IRR). Thus, the results provide a good basis for illustrating economic advantages and disadvantages of different biofuel production decisions and can be used to establish future applications.

The activity of economic risk analysis involves identifying potential economic risks that influence the project objectives. In addition to the technological risk assessment, more detailed economic risks are identified and analyzed for the whole CLARA process chain, including additional project cost reserves, rising feedstock prices, and component failures in operation. The aim of this risk analysis is to derive economic risk mitigation strategies to tackle the vulnerability amplified by the single chain links in the way of scaling up a pilot scale to the demonstration-scale process. To carry out economic risk assessment for the CLARA concept, the Monte Carlo simulation tool @Risk 8 is used. The results from this activity will be used assess risks emerging from the diffusion of biofuel production chains based on organic residues.

6 Conclusions

In the following, the major advances and most important findings made within the third year of the CLARA project with regard to process chain definition (see Chapter 2), technology

development (see Chapter 3), pilot testing (see Chapter 4) and the investigation of the BtL chain (see Chapter 5) are summarized.

- The entire biomass-to-liquid process chain has been defined and subsequently modelled, yielding an process exhibiting an energetic fuel efficiency of 53.4 % and a carbon utilization of 32.5 %
- Based on the findings made in terms of the advancement of CLG in the CLARA project and during the design of the 1 MW_{th} chemical looping gasifier, AE devised a design for a full scale 200 MW CLG unit.
- Using technical and economic considerations, an optimized pre-treatment concept has been developed, allowing an efficient utilization of straw for gasification processes. This pre-treatment concept is currently being implemented and tested in industrial scale.
- On the basis of lab-scale tests, the very first successful CLG campaigns in a small pilot unit were carried out. The findings made during these experiments confirm those made during lab tests. Further tests in 50 and 100 kW_{th} pilots will be conducted shortly, casting further light onto the CLG technology itself, related optimization strategies, and their technical implementation.
- A novel, patented sour gas treatment concept, using KMnO₄ as sorbent for H₂S separation from sour gases has been investigated in lab-scale. Initial findings verify excellent Sulphur removal from different sour gases, animating further investigations for potential large-scale application.
- The necessary adaptations on the pilot facilities in Darmstadt are currently being finalized in preparation of the first full-chain experiments. The first 1 MW_{th} tests campaigns will commence in March 2022, yielding important insights into all technologies under consideration in the CLARA concept.
- Investigations of the entire process chain with regard to risk analysis and techno-economic considerations have commenced and will be supplemented using insights from the other activities in the CLARA project in the upcoming months.

In summary, the CLARA consortium was able to fully define individual sub-units and further investigate the entire BtL concept during the third project year. Holistic considerations of the entire process chain have started, to allow for an assessment of the investigated process chain beyond purely technological indicators. In the fourth project year, all sub-units of the process chain will be fully defined and optimized, before being modelled and scaled to industrial size. This endeavor will be complemented by in-depth risk studies as well as socio-economic analyzes, which allow for an elaborate 360° view of the suggested BtL chain. The upcoming 1 MW_{th} full-chain tests will form the backbone of these efforts, providing important insights into the individual technologies, tested in an industrially relevant environment.

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