



Technical Photosynthesis, employing Single Step Direct Electrocatalytic Reduction of CO₂ Toward CO and Hydrocarbons

Günter Schmid, Ralf Krause and Team

Definition of Technical Photosynthesis

Technical photosynthesis is a **process** or **process sequence**, that converts **renewable energy**, **CO₂** and/or **water** into **chemical feedstock, chemicals** or **fuels** in a **doable, profitable** and **efficient** way.

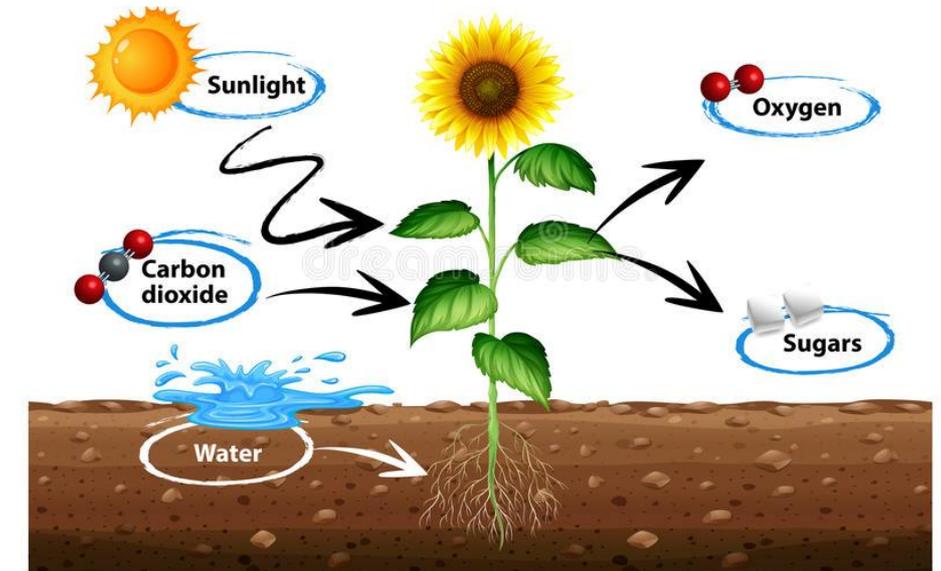
Renewable energy “**electrons as feedstock**”

- solar
- wind
- geothermal
- ...

Processes

- photo catalysis
- **electro catalysis**
- **sequences *i.e* electrolysis (up-stream) & fermentation (down-stream)**
electrolysis & classical thermal chemistry
(*i.e.* Fischer Tropsch)

Natural Photosynthesis



... but, we don't copy nature

- Industrial perspective
- What is CO₂ electrolysis ?
- Market considerations: CO₂ & electricity → chemical feedstock
- Electro reduction of CO₂ to CO (use case & results)
- *Perspectives* Electro reduction of CO₂ to C₂H₄; Electro refineries
- Conclusions

Prerequisites for **Electrons as Feedstock**

Conversion / Storage of **ELECTRONS** in chemical **COMPOUNDS** leads to different **ECONOMY** scenarios

Electrification of process industry

- **Decoupling of oil and electricity prices**
(1.78 US cent/kWh lowest bid Oct. 2017 in Saudi Arabia 300 MW plant)
- **Coupling of energy sector and chemistry sector**
- **Electrochemical feedstock production vs. traditional petro chemistry**

Chemistry follows energy market

Radical new production processes for chemicals

- Production of intermediates such as H₂, CO and Ethylene via electrolysis out of electricity, water, and CO₂

Future scenario of the chemical industry

- Independence from chemical parks allows **decentralization** of the chemical production locations
- New technology developments of electrolysis are pushing these process solutions into the existing chemical parks – it will be **common to see electrolyzers in chemical plants**

<https://www.pv-magazine.com/2017/10/04/saudi-arabias-300-mw-solar-tender-may-conclude-with-lowest-bid-ever/>

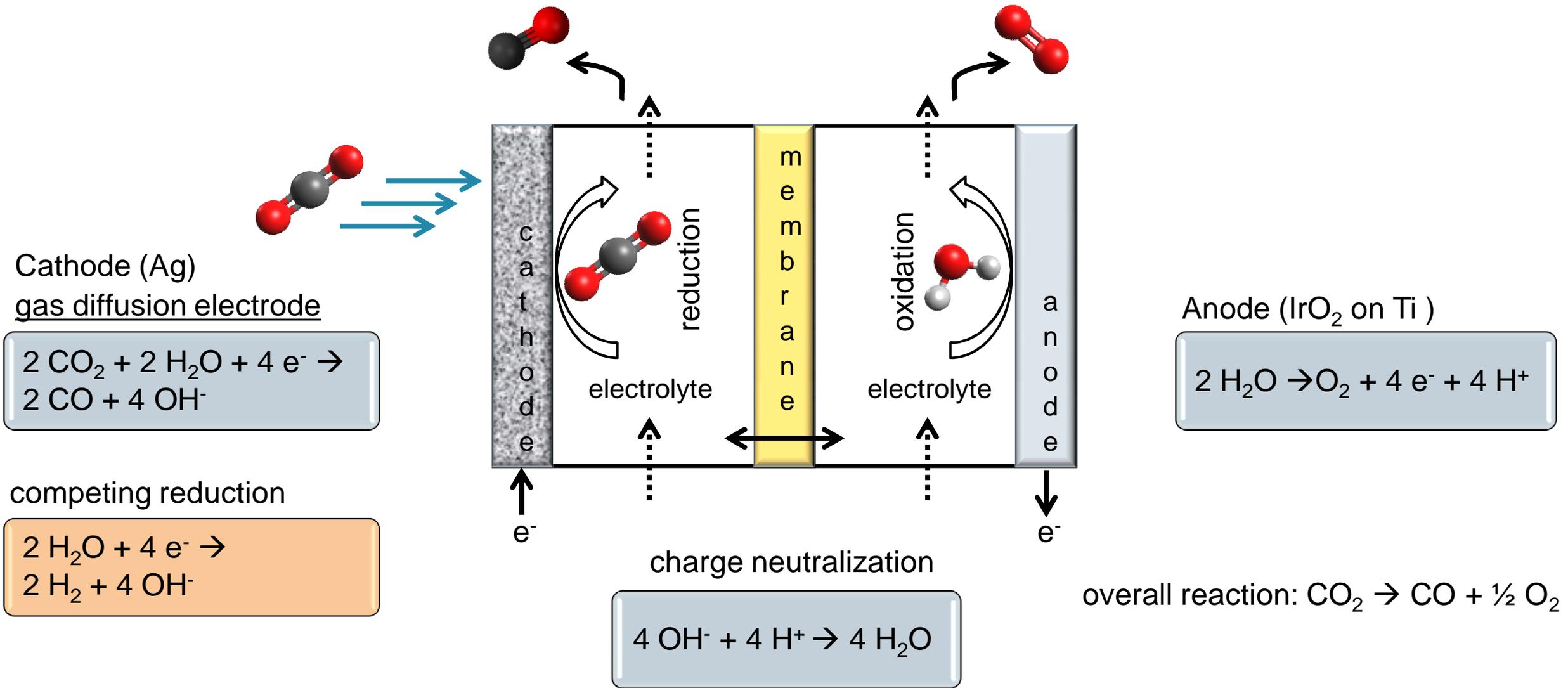
CO₂ Reduction on Metal Electrodes in aqueous Electrolytes

Electrode	CH ₄	C ₂ H ₄	C ₂ H ₅ OH	C ₃ H ₇ OH	CO	HCOO ⁻	H ₂	Total
Cu	33.3	25.5	5.7	3.0	1.3	9.4	20.5	103.5
Au	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	87.1	0.7	10.2	98.0
Ag	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	81.5	0.8	12.4	94.6
Zn	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	79.4	6.1	9.9	95.4
Pd	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.3	2.8	26.2	60.2
Ga	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	23.2	0.0	79.0	102.0
Pb	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	97.4	5.0	102.4
Hg	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	99.5	0.0	99.5
In	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	94.9	3.3	100.3
Sn	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1	88.4	4.6	100.1
Cd	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.9	78.4	9.4	103.0
Tl	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	95.1	6.2	101.3
Ni	1.8	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	88.9	92.4
Fe	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	94.8	94.8
Pt	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	95.7	95.8
Ti	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	99.7	99.7

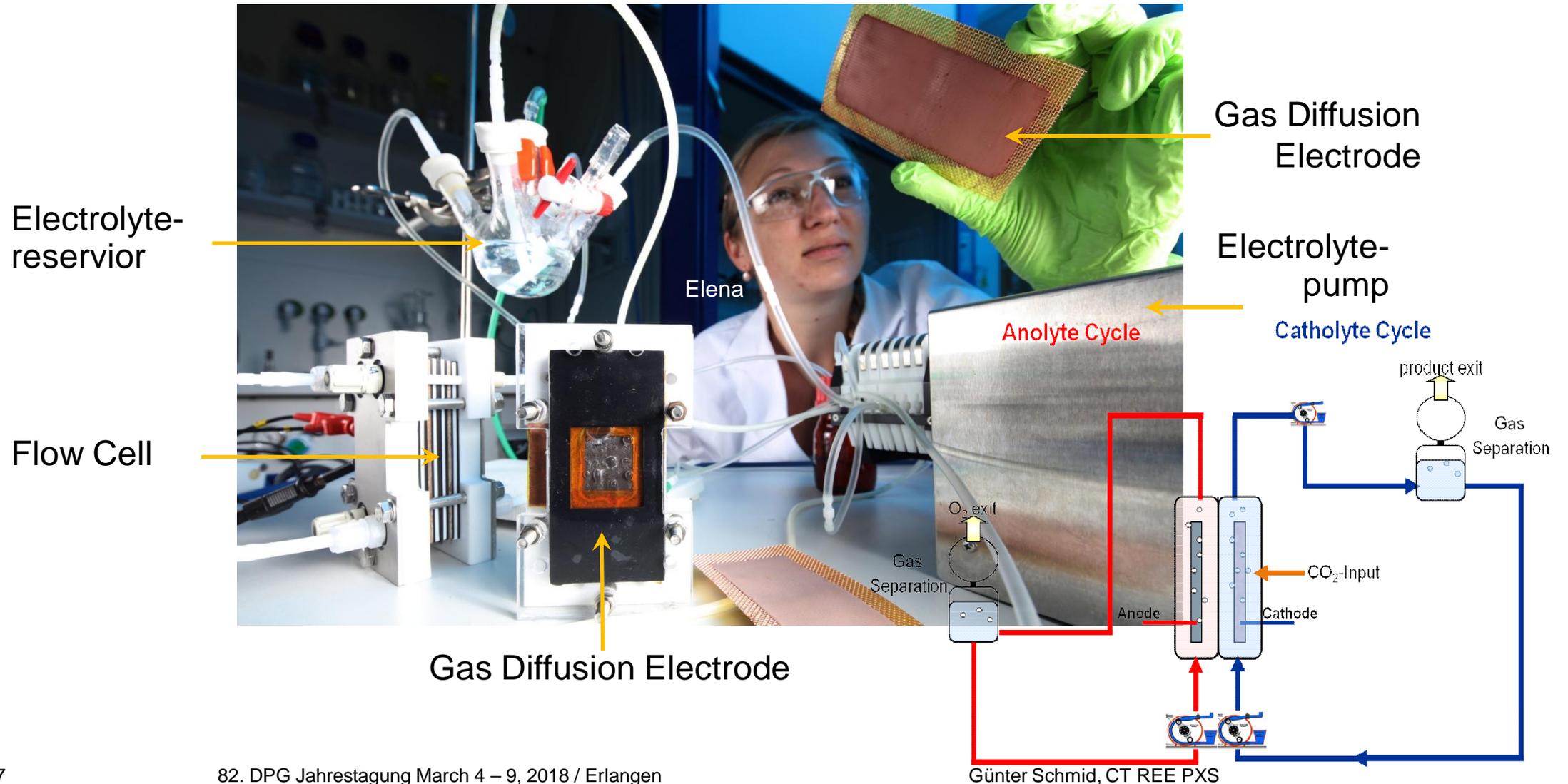
CO₂- Reduction product formation is strongly dependent on the electrode / electro catalyst material

Y. Hori, "Electrochemical CO₂ reduction on metal electrodes" in Modern Aspects of Electrochemistry, Vol. 42, published by C.G. Vayenas, R.E. White and M.E. Gamboa-Aldeco, Springer, NY, 2008, pp. 89-189

Electrode Processes in Electrochemical CO₂ Reduction (Simplest Case)



CO₂-Electrolysis in the Laboratory



Renewable Electricity
“unabsorbed by the net”



Storage of volatile energy in chemical bonds

CO₂ from any Source



Maximize economical value of available stranded energy

Electrocatalysis

Synthetic fuels or chemical feedstock

Methane
(CH₄)



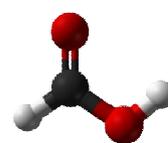
Market price: 100 -150 EUR/t
Market volume: >2,400 Mt/y

Ethylene
(C₂H₄)



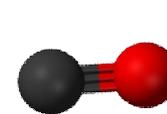
1,000 EUR/t
141 Mt/y

Formic acid
(HCOOH)



0.7 Mt/y

Carbon monoxide (CO)



650 EUR/t (+H₂ > gasoline)
>300 Mt/y

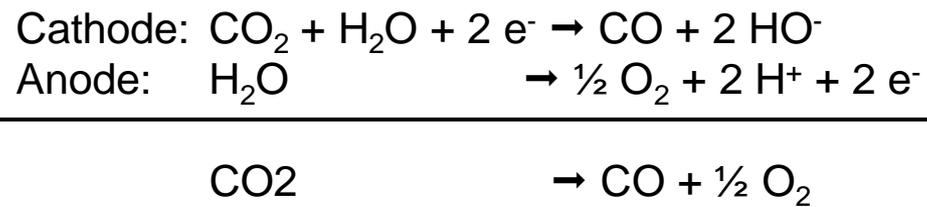
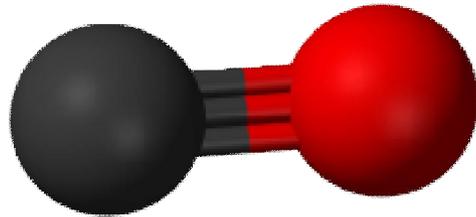
Alcohols
C₂, C₃



Electroreduction of CO₂ to CO

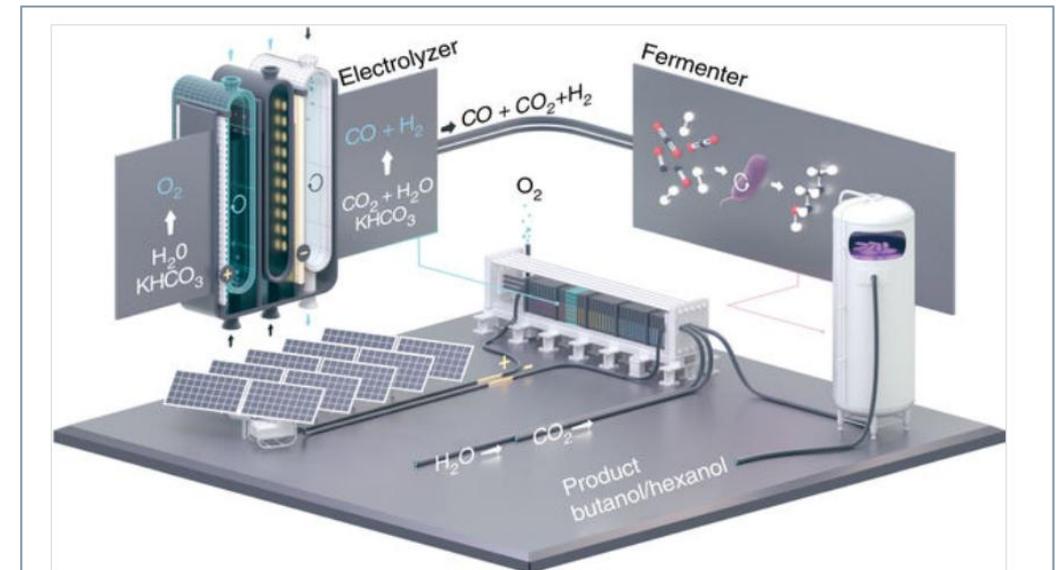
Targets

- Upscaling,
- Lifetime
- Application Development



<https://www.nature.com/natcatal/videos/photosynthesis>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VK-dULEK-rc&feature=youtu.be>



Article | 08 January 2018

Technical photosynthesis involving CO₂ electrolysis and fermentation

The generation of useful chemicals from CO₂ and renewable energy is an attractive—but challenging—endeavour. This work reports on the long-term operation of commercial electrodes for efficient CO₂ reduction, with subsequent fermentation of the syngas product completing the technical photosynthesis of alcohols.

Thomas Haas, Ralf Krause [...] & Guenter Schmid

Nature Catalysis , Vol 1, Jan. 9, 018, 32–39



eChemical/eFuel production A joint industrial effort out of Kopernikus P2X



SIEMENS

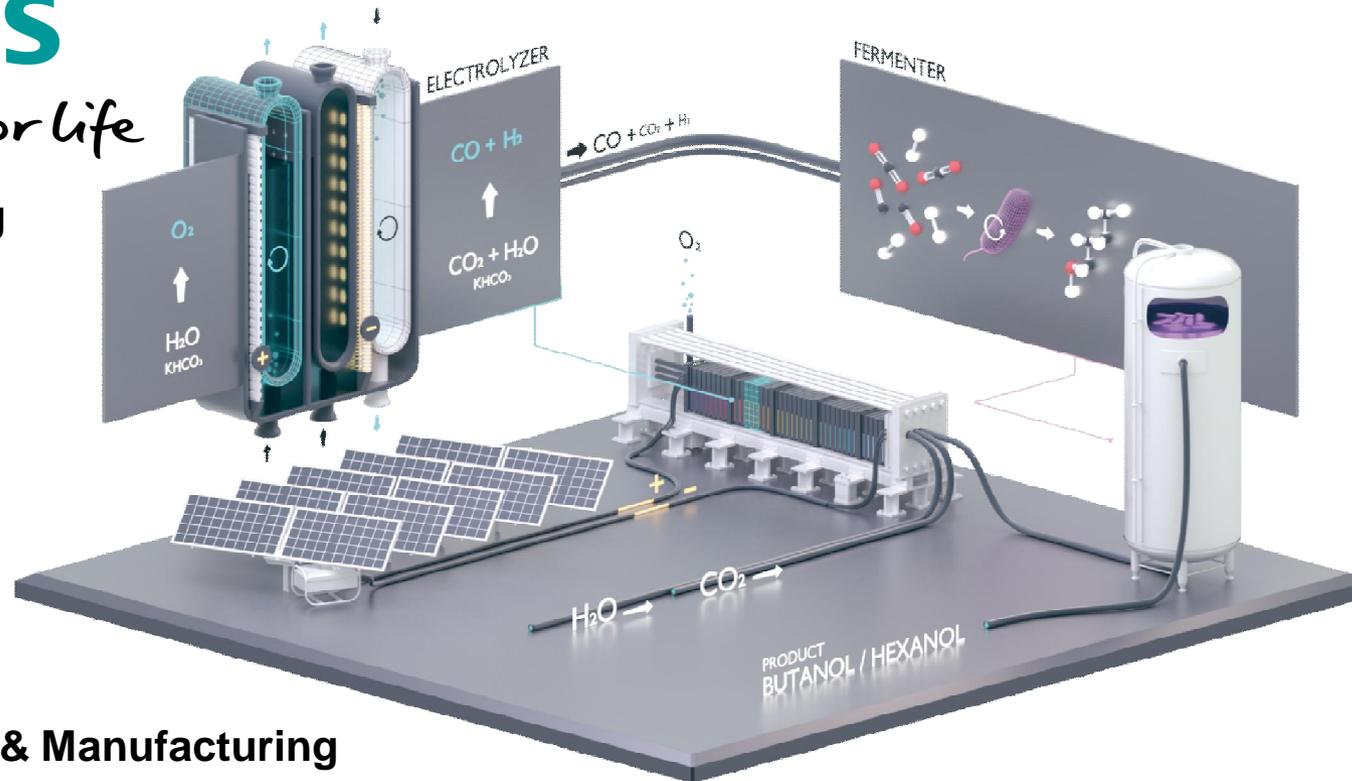
Ingenuity for life

**Developing & Building
Electrolyzers**

- H₂O to H₂
- CO₂ to CO



**Developing & Manufacturing
Gas Diffusion Electrodes**



**Developing & Operate
Fermentation Processes**

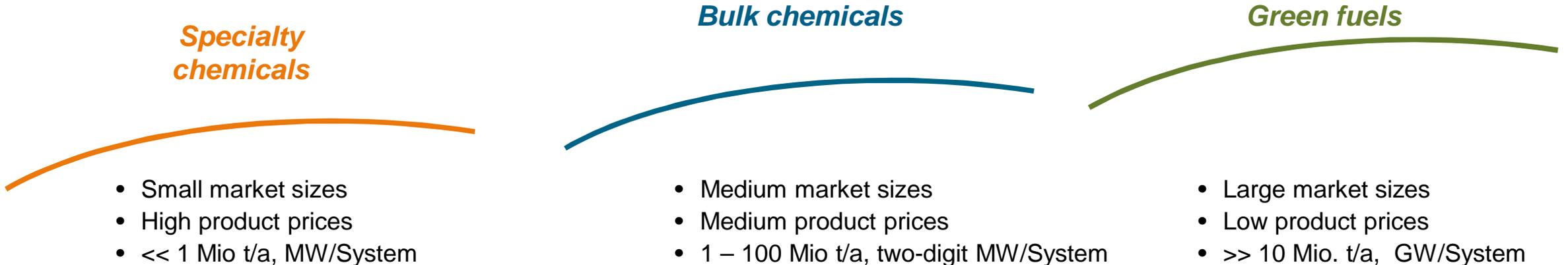
Rheticus

To date, ~ 8% Solar-to-Chemical total system efficiency is possible at industrial relevant conversion rates

How to get into a renewable economy ?

Scaling

Implementation strategy for an electrolyzer business



Short term

- To be realized under existing conditions
- Learn about markets, customers, and business models
- Learn about technology and processes
- Select further specialty chemicals for business

Today: Butanol market is between Speciality & Bulk

Mid term

- Addressable with more mature technology and higher scales
- Industrialize technology and business processes and setup

Long term

- Market entry into large scale plants with green fuels
- Production plants may include own power production
- Need of favorable market condition

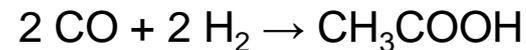
Tomorrow: Butanol is a more preferred fuel compared to Methanol / Ethanol (see ARAL Website: <http://www.aral.de/de/forschung/zukunft/ottokraftstoff/butanol.html>)

A ramp up starting today leads to new business opportunities tomorrow

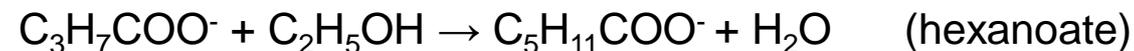
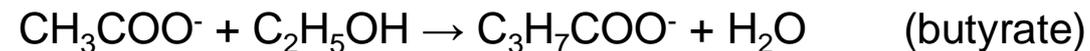
Down-Stream Fermentation Process

- Anaerobic bacteria from black smokers can built complex molecules from H_2 , CO , H_2O and CO_2 while gaining their energy to reproduce and live
- Carbon selectivity is very high avoiding large amounts of side products (different to thermo chemical synthesis)
- Products are of very high economical value
- H_2 , CO , CO_2 concentrations can vary in a wide range

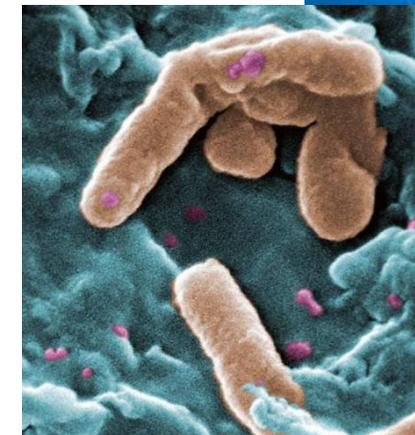
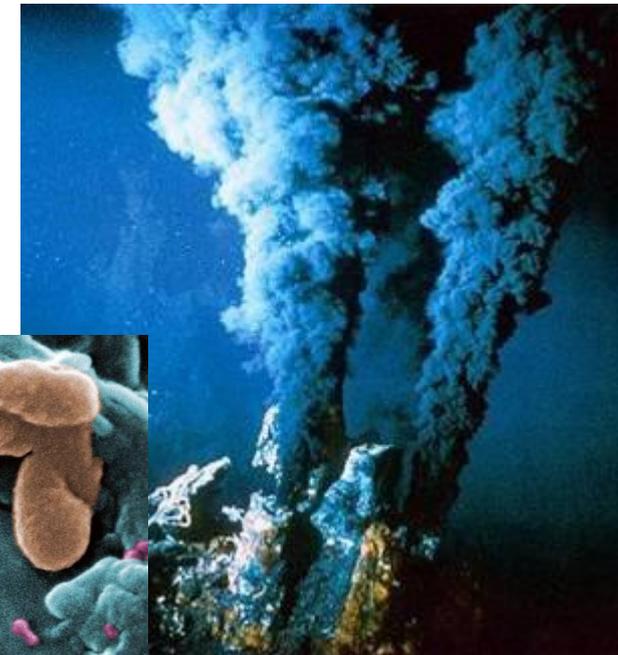
1. *C. autoethanogenum* ("the reducer / C-H – bond former")



2. *C. kluyveri* ("the condenser / C-C – bond former")



3. *C. autoethanogenum*

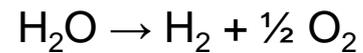


<https://oceanography101.wikispaces.com/Black+Smoker>

Up-Stream Electrolysis Process

- Conversion of volatile electrical energy in materialized energy carriers
- Energy storage in CO and H₂
- Electrochemistry is almost isothermal (no losses in „Entropy“)
- CO is preferred due to higher thermodynamic potential and carbon content
- Potential use of commercial electrodes for CO₂-to-CO electrolyzer
- Upstream processes have efficiencies << 100% (Thermodynamics)

1. *Silyzer 200 (product)*



2. *CO₂-to-CO Electrolzer (under development)*



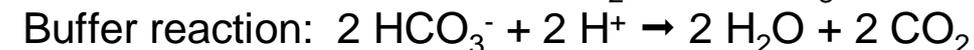
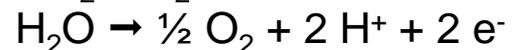
Towards Continuous Operation of a CO₂-to-CO Electrolyzer

Continuous operation requires management of all charge carriers / ions, their ion concentration and pH

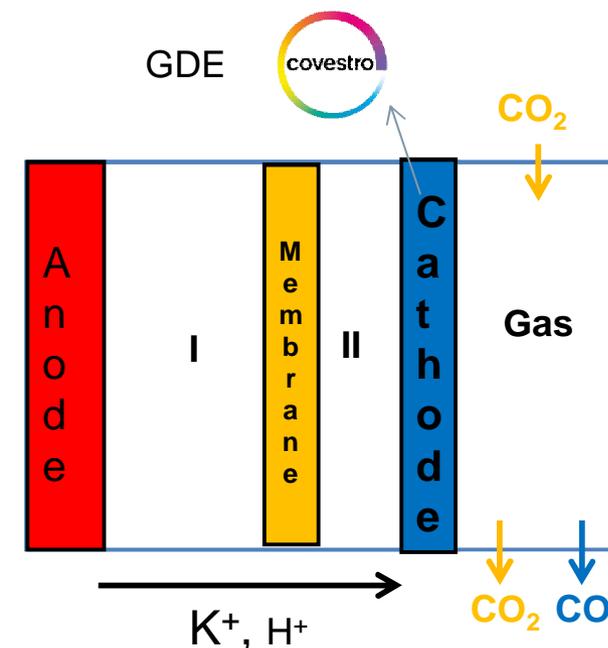
Cathode:



Anode:

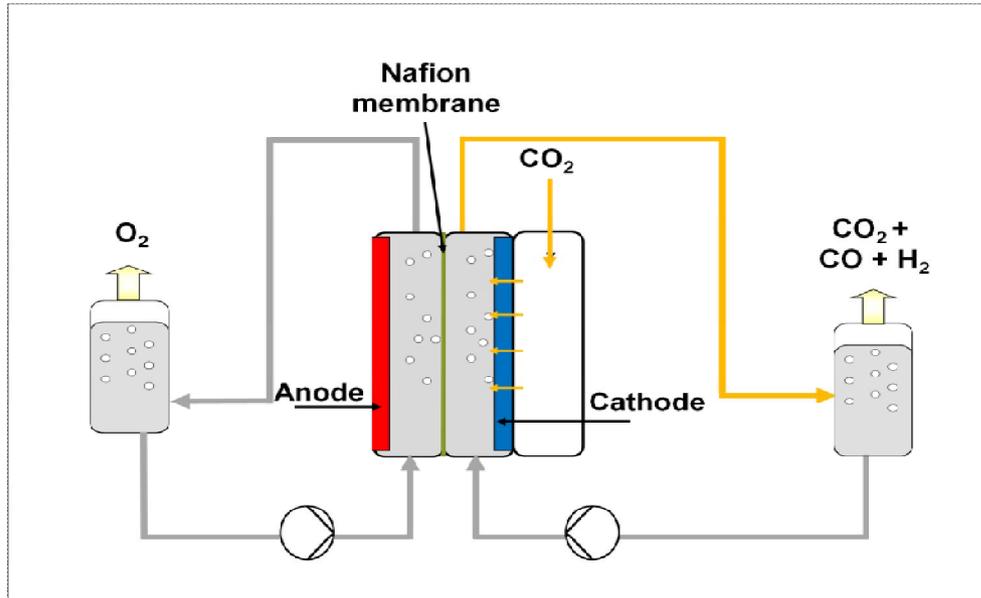


- Ion transport within the cell is accomplished not only by protons but also other cations such as potassium, even if membranes like Nafion are used
- Stable continuous operation requires active equilibration of ions
- Two methods are discussed in the following
 - Mode 1: Separate electrolytes, charge equilibration by protons
 - Mode 2: Mixing of catholyte and anolyte

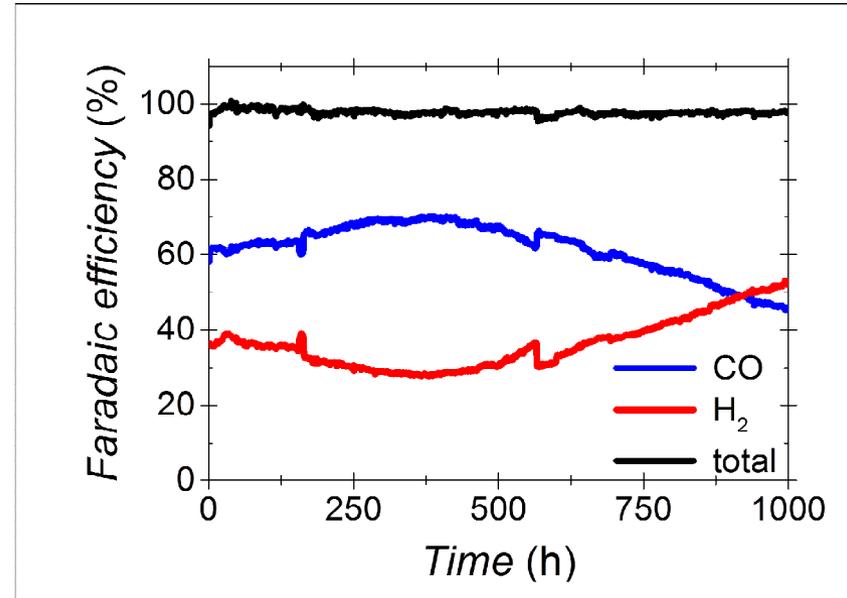


Mode 1: Separated electrolytes, Charge equilibration by protons

Setup



Result

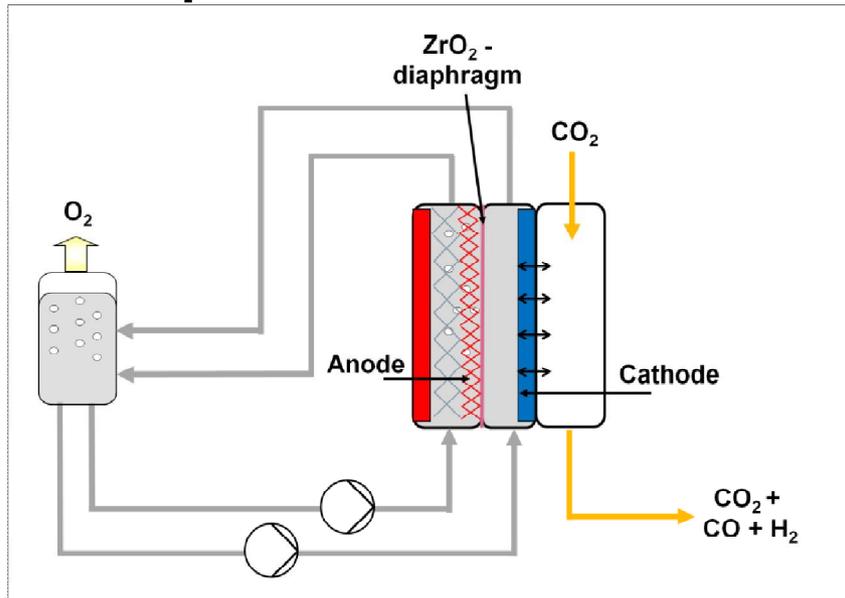


- Anolyte and Catholyte are fully separated
- Catholyte: 0.4M K_2SO_4 + 1M $KHCO_3$
- Anolyte: **1M H_2SO_4**
- Electrode area: 10 cm²
- Cathode Ag-GDE, Anode IrO_x
- Membrane: Nafion (cation conductor)
- Current density: 50mA/cm²

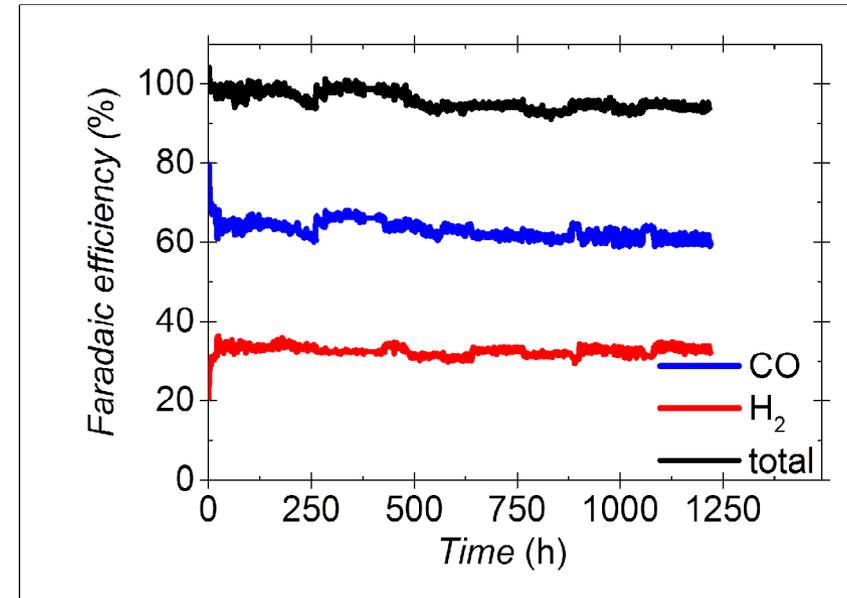
- The ion transport in the cell is driven by protons from the anolyte to the catholyte through the cation selective Nafion membrane
- Protons are stoichiometrically produced at the anode, and neutralized by OH^- from the cathode
- Electrolysis is running for 1000 h, however some changes are visible
- Protons pull also H_2O molecules through the membrane (anolyte gets concentrated, catholyte get diluted)

Mode 2: Mixing of catholyte and anolyte

Setup



Result

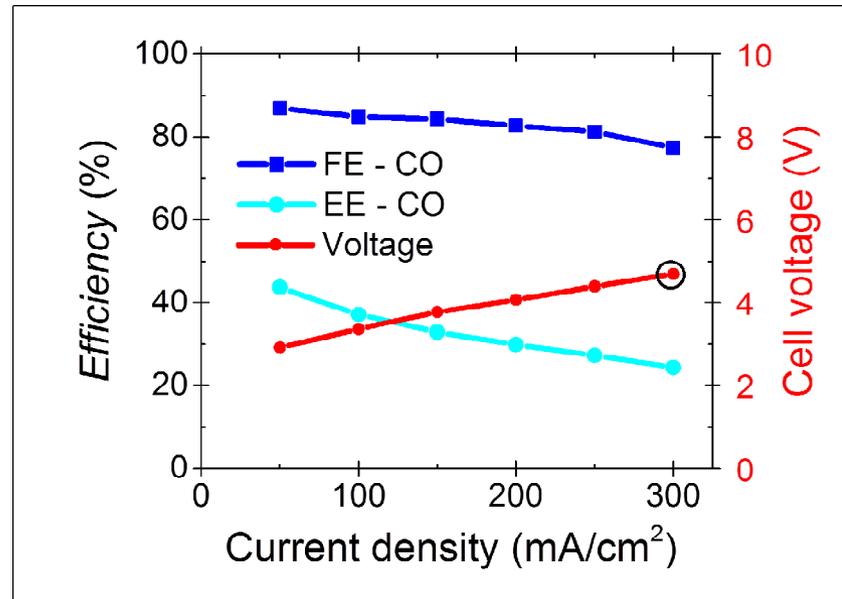
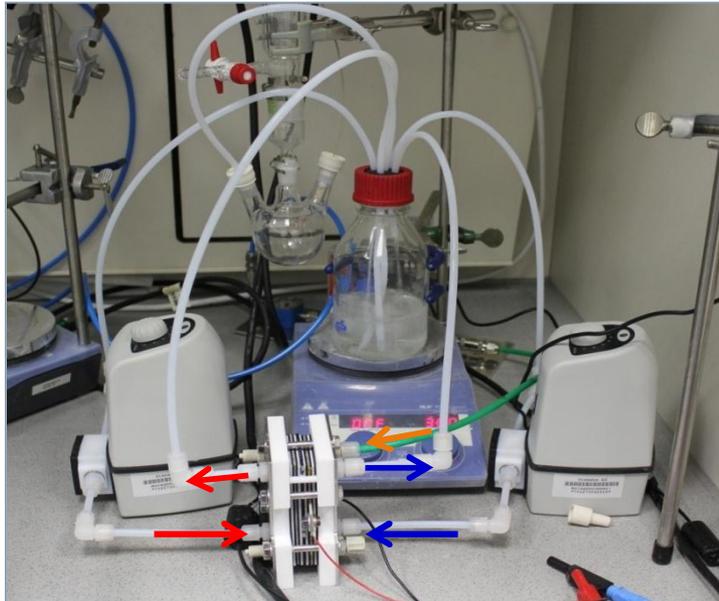


- *Anolyte and Catholyte are continuously mixed*
- Electrolyte: 0.1M K₂SO₄ + 1.5M KHCO₃
- Electrode area: 10 cm²
- Cathode Ag-GDE, Anode IrO_x
- Membrane: Diaphragm separator
- Stromdichte: 300mA/cm²

- Charge transport is mainly accomplished by potassium cations (proven by experiment)
- Changes in concentration are equilibrated by continuous mixing
- The electrolysis process is running stable
- Current densities up to 300 mA/cm²
- Industrial application is feasible

Mode 2: Energy Efficiencies

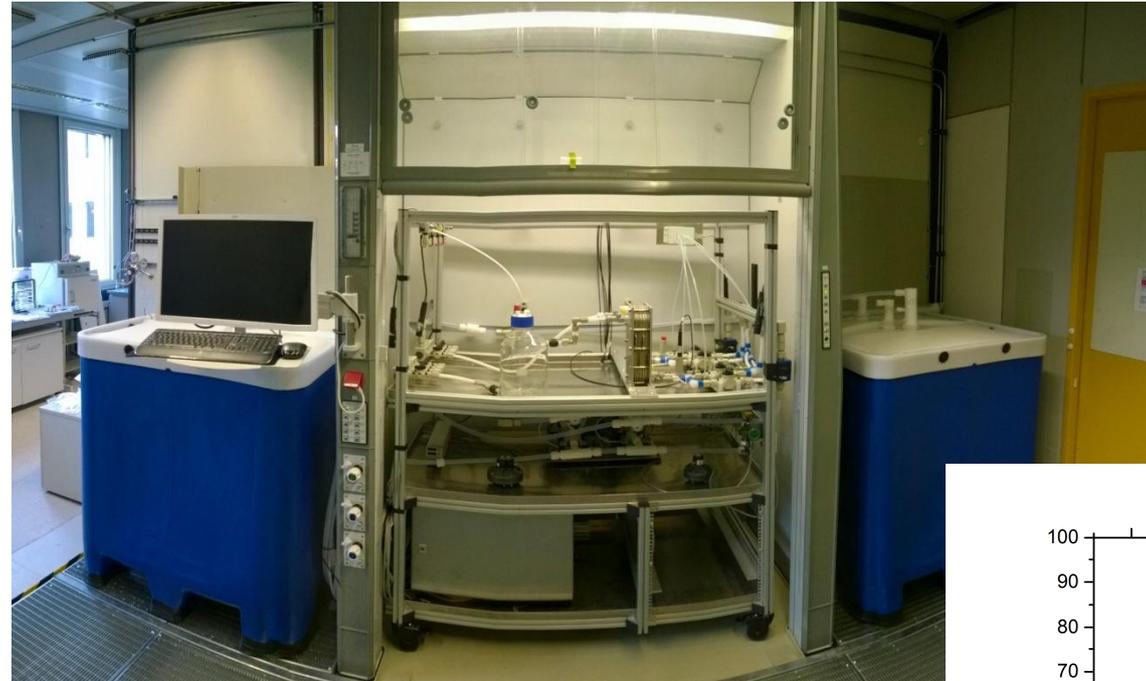
Setup



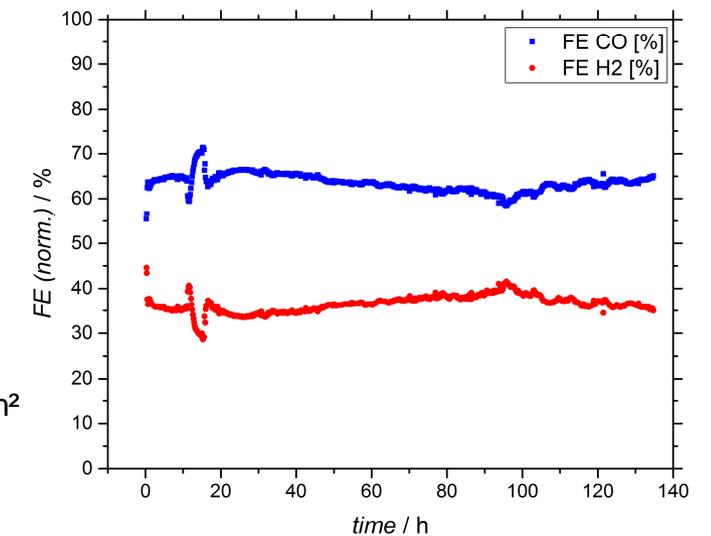
- Two continuous operation modes on lab scale identified (10cm²)
- Mixing of catholyte and anolyte has significant advantages over separated electrolytes (concentration management and accessible current density)
- The non-optimized cell design (distance between cathode & anode) requires at a current density of 300mA/cm² cell potentials of 4.8V. At FE_{CO} of ~80%, an energy efficiency of 25% for CO were achieved (incl. H₂ 28%).
- Increasing temperature from 30°C to 60°C will decrease ohmic losses and increase energy efficiency

Next step: Scaling

- Up to 8 x 100 cm² electrode area
- Up to 3 l/min CO
- Power consumption total <1 kW
- Electrolyte volume up to 1,000 l
- Gas separation
- Online gas analysis
- Temperature controlled
- Automated operation for long life term measurements



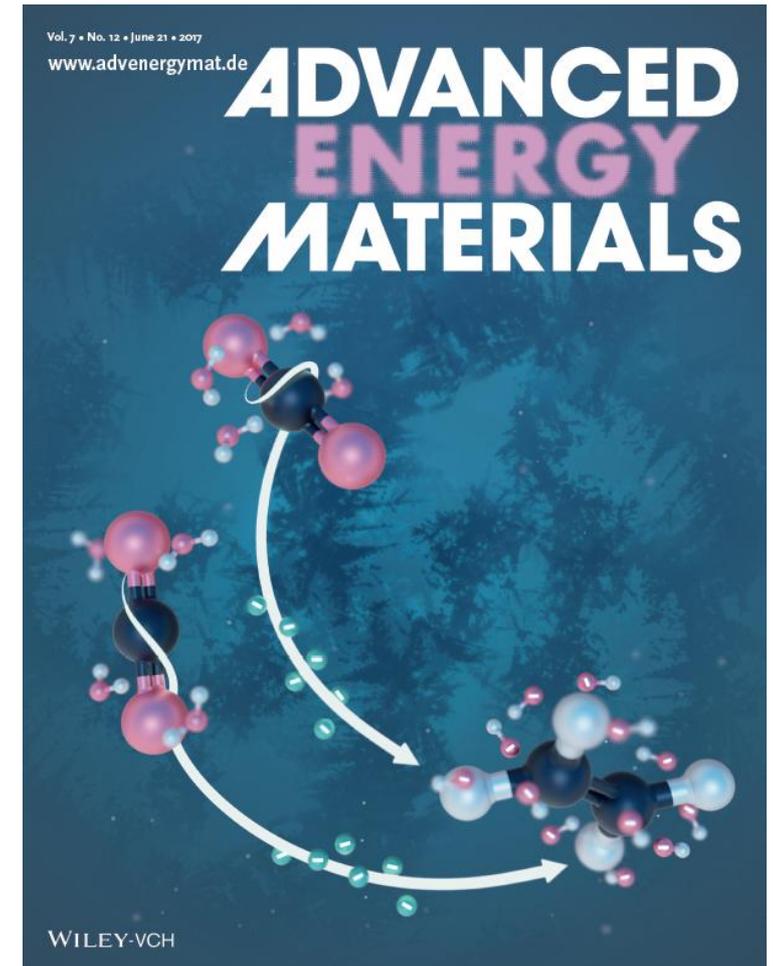
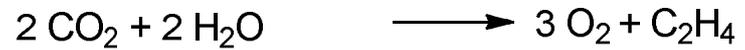
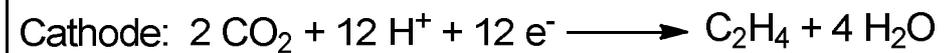
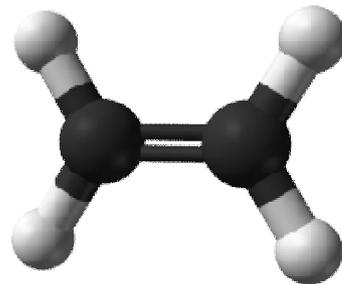
Current density 150 mA/cm²
Single cell



Electroreduction of CO₂ to C₂H₄

Target

Development of a selective ethylene electro catalyst

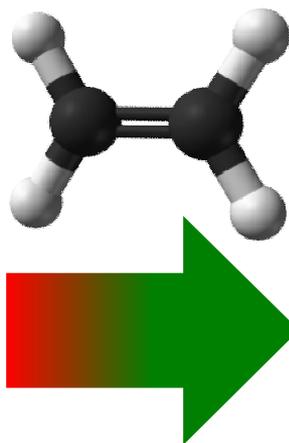
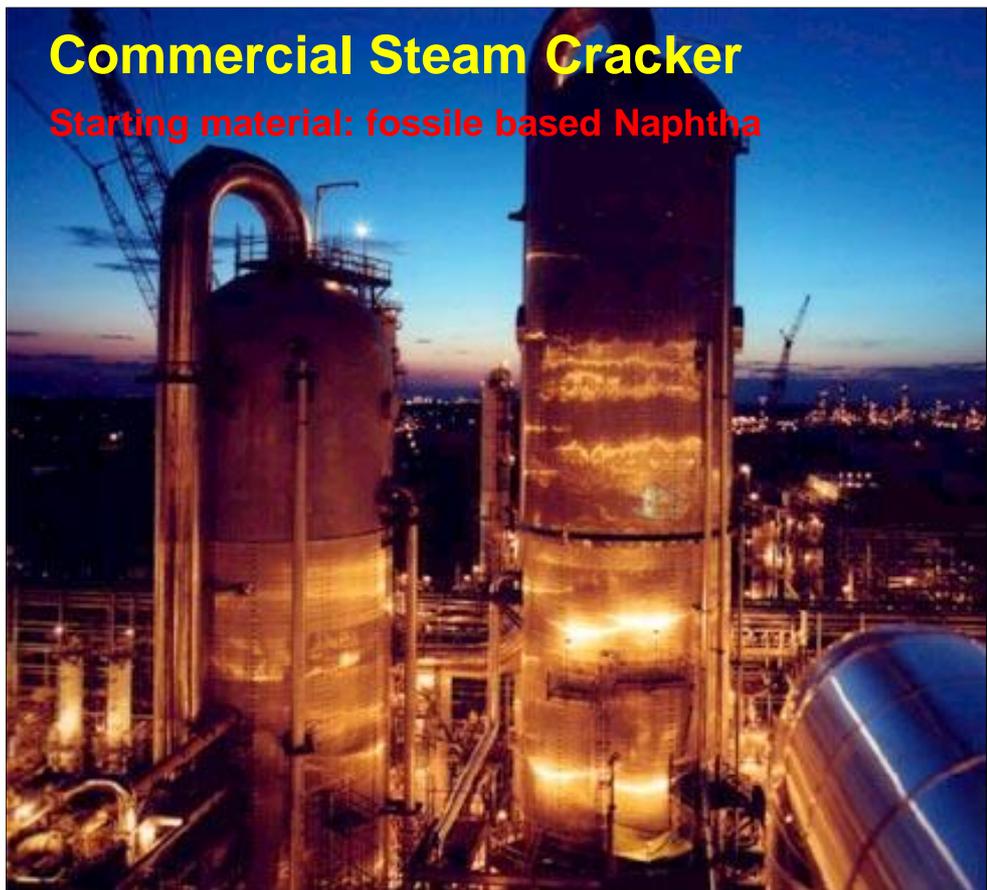


DOI: 10.1002/aenm.201602114

Günter Schmid, C. Reller et al. *Adv. Energy Mater.* 2017, 1602114

eEthylen: the Vision

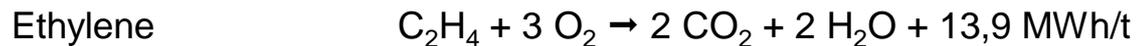
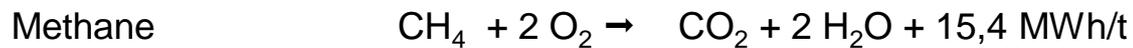
Substitution of a Steam-Cracker by a CO₂-to-Ethylene electrolyser in a 140 Mio. t/year ~ 140 Bill. €/year market



What product should we produce – Profitability- ? (*Rule of Thumb*)

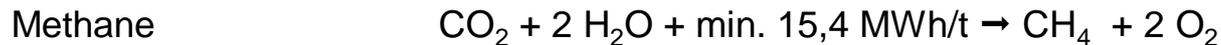
Ratio between the **Economical Value** and the **Heating Value** for a given point in time

Burning Processes



Thermodynamic considerations with
100 % efficiency assumption

Synthesis by Single Step Electrochemical CO₂ Reduction



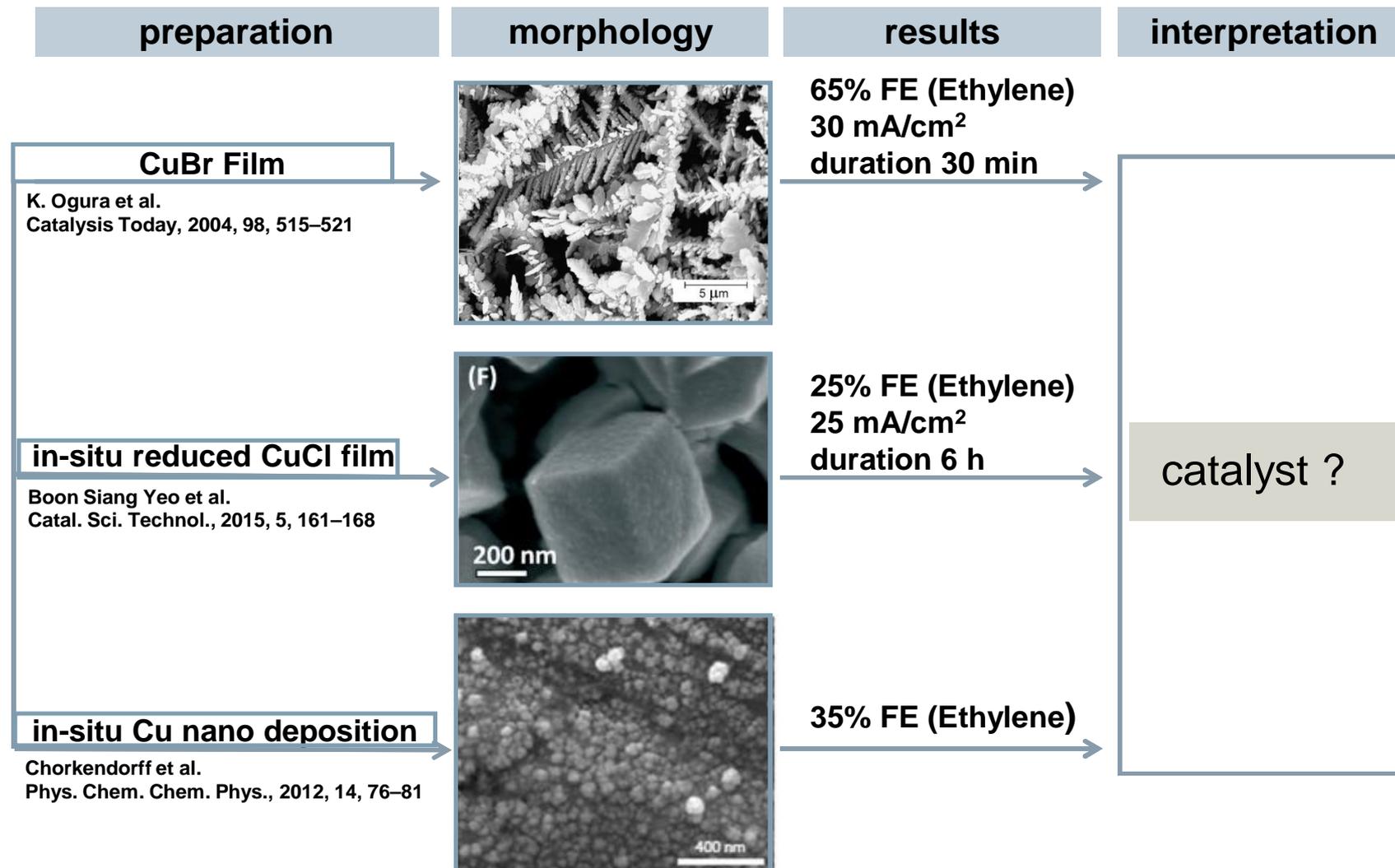
A factor of 4 – 6 might be enough
to compensate for all losses

	Energy Demand	Min. Energy Cost ¹	Product Value	Cost Covering min. System Efficiency
	MWh / t	€ / t	€ / t	%
Methane	15,4	463 - 694	150	308 - 463
Ethylene	13,9	419 - 629	1000	42 - 63

Data taken from BMBF-Project eEthylen

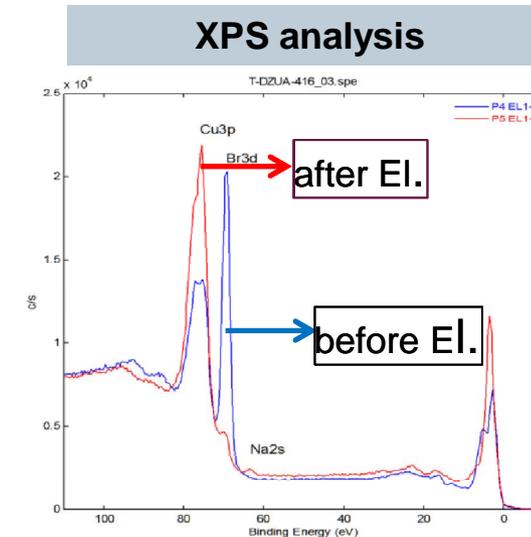
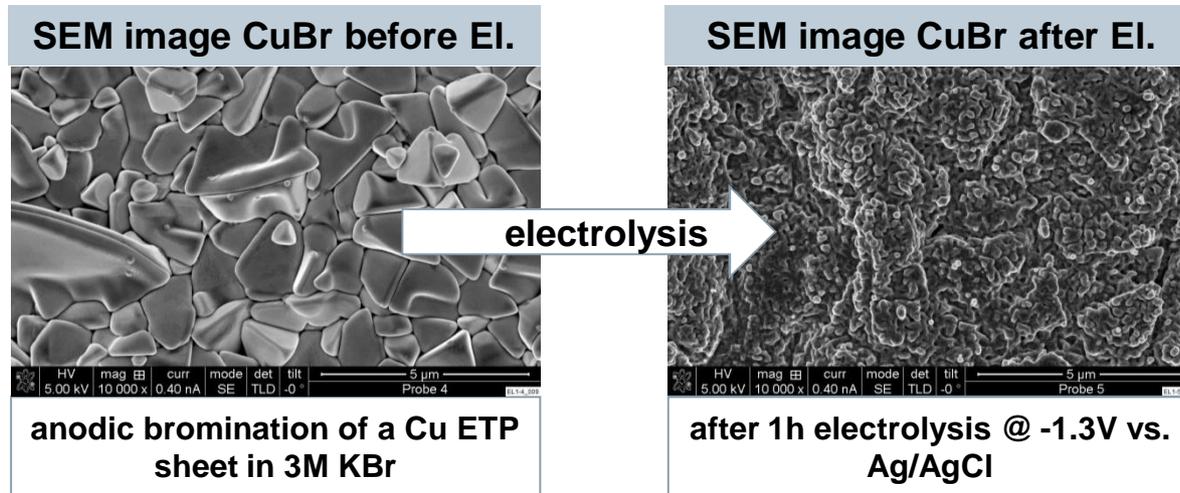
¹ electricity cost 30 €/MWh; tax & net use 15 €/MWh
(there is no excess energy)

Ethylene Catalysts Described in Literature



Evaluation of the Selective Cu-Electrocatalyst for Ethylene Formation – CuBr Film

Hypothesis: CuBr is the active species for selective ethylene formation (K. Ogura et al.)



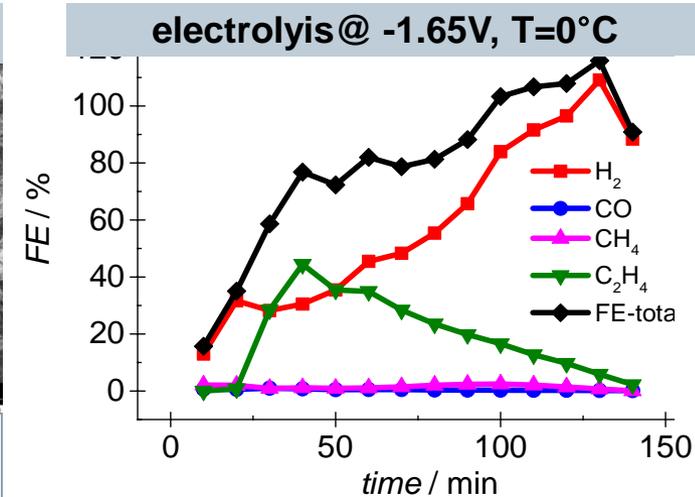
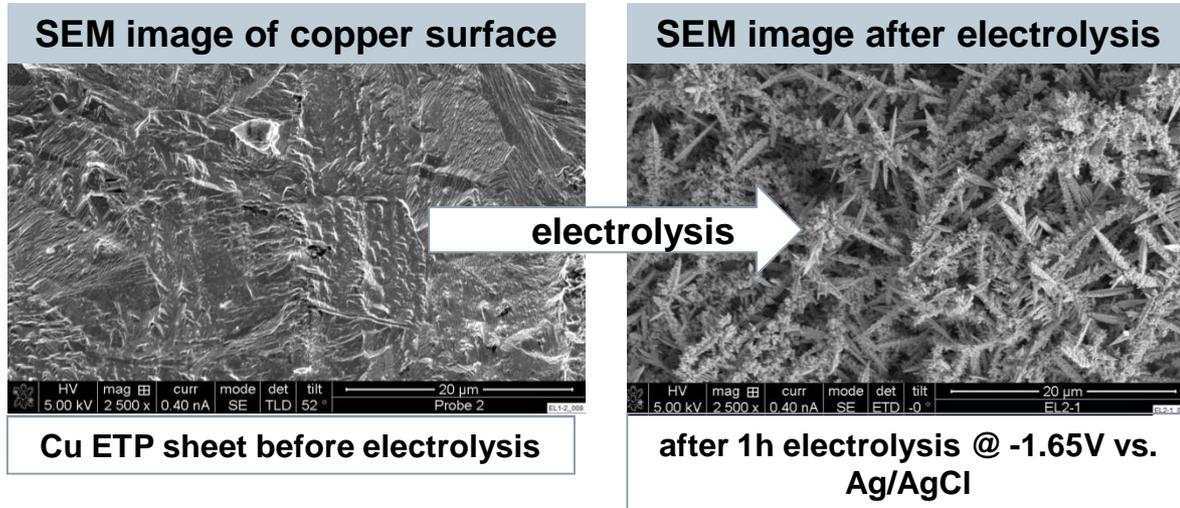
Results

- CuBr -film is not stable against reduction, only residuals were identified after electrolysis
- Cu⁰ deposits were identified after reduction
- **CuBr film is not solely the active species**

Solid Cu Electrode Modification

-Addition of Oxidizing Agents (Br_2) to the Electrolyte

Hypothesis: Copper corrosion is enhanced by bromine

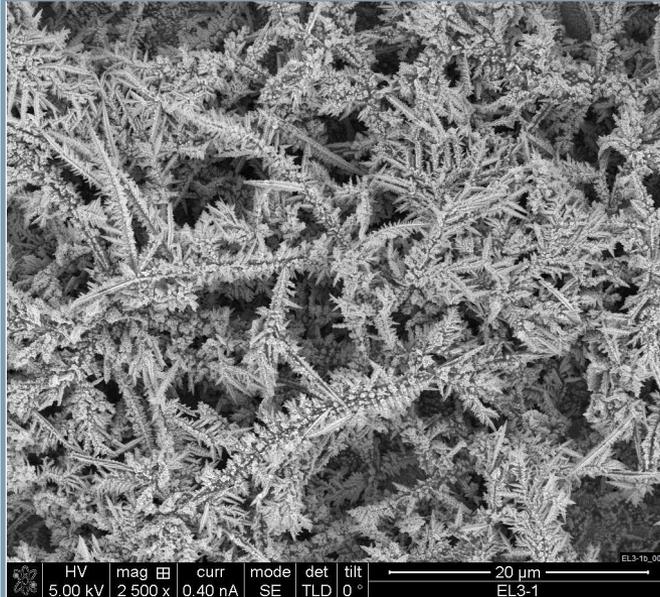


Results

- addition of bromine leads to massive copper corrosion (Cu dissolution followed by re-deposition)
- 40% FE were observed for ethylene after 50 min
- comparable results were obtained using O_2 , H_2O_2 , $\text{S}_2\text{O}_8^{2-}$
- bulk composition: Cu_2O , CuBr species were identified after EI.

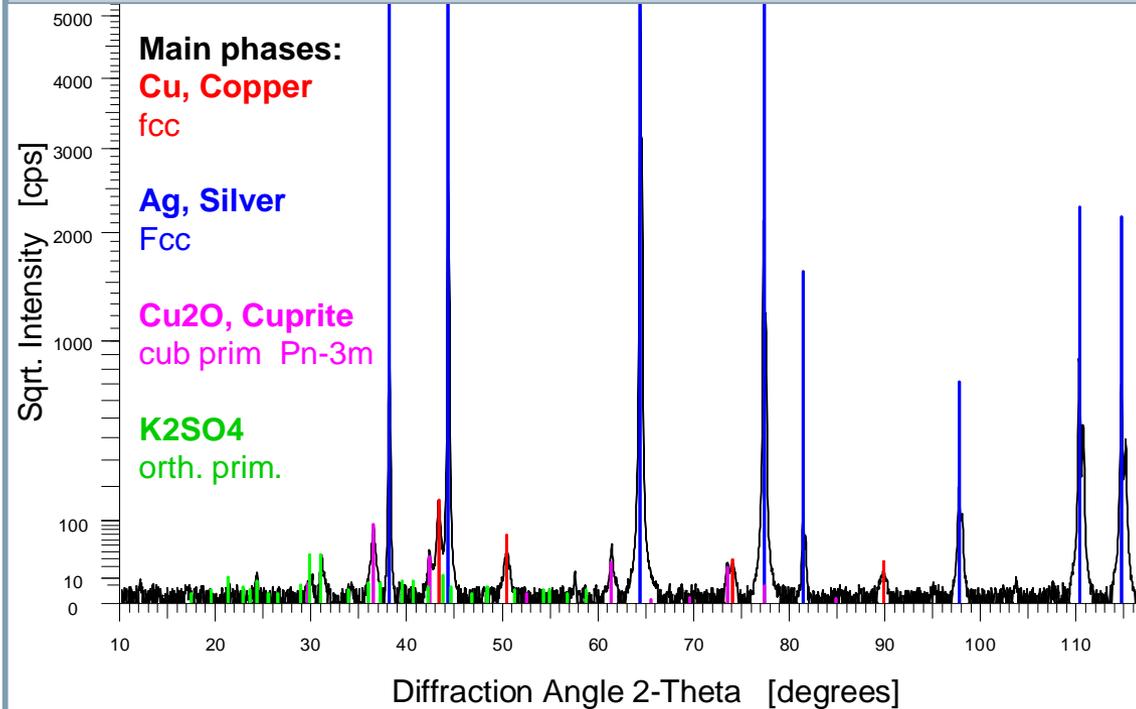
In-Situ Copper Nano-Deposition -Copper on Silver Substrate

SEM image of electrode surface



in-situ nano Cu on Ag electrode
electrolysis 150min @ -1.65V

Powder pattern of the decorated Ag electrode



Conclusion

- Cu nano-deposits were identified on the Ag electrode surface
- Cu₂O phase was present after electrolysis
- ethylene production on silver substrate (FE~20%)
- CO production was completely suppressed

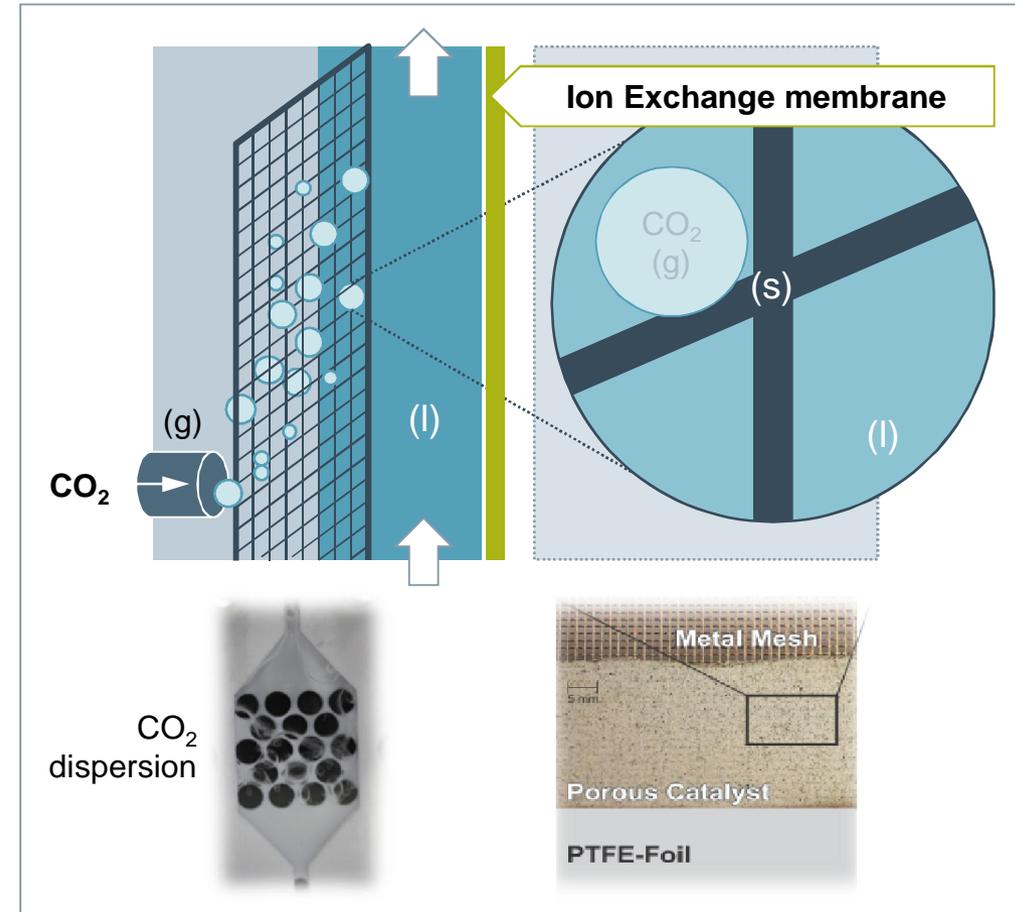
Transfer of Catalyst to a Gas Diffusion Layer *In-Situ* Copper Deposition

Benefits of the GDE:

- no mass transport limitation (due to bad CO₂ solubility in water)
- higher active surface area
- material costs
- in-situ deposition could be applied onto the substrate

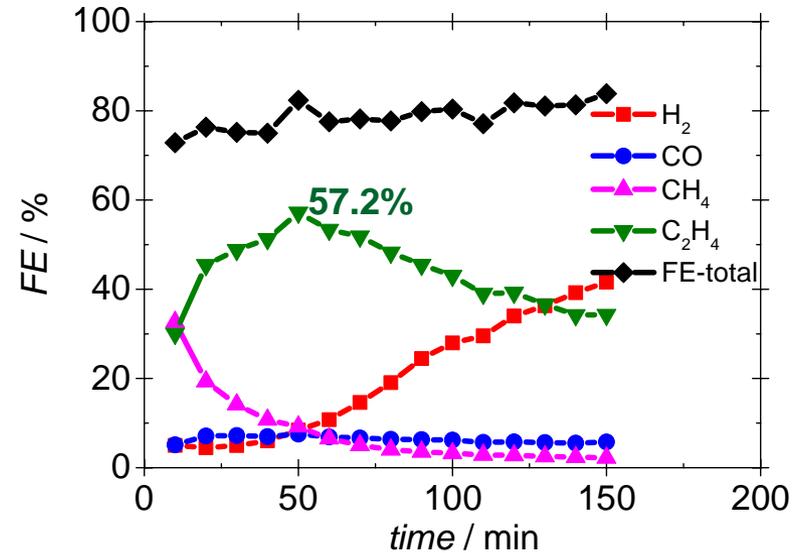
Key component: Gas Diffusion Electrode (GDE) to overcome the low solubility of CO₂ in water

- Only CO₂ can be electrochemically reduced not HCO₃⁻ or other chemically dissolved species
- 3-Phase interface ensures high CO₂ concentration at the electrode (gas-liquid-solid)
 - Key challenge to achieve industrial relevant current densities
>> 100 mA/cm²
- CO₂ is absorbed on the electro catalytic electrode
- Gas separation may be needed in subsequent processes

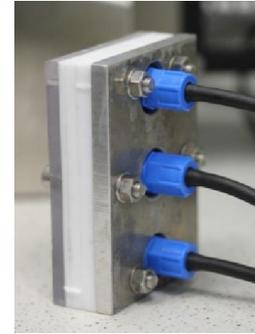


Electrochemical characterization GDE with In-Situ Grown Copper-NP-Catalyst

Faradic Efficiency over time



Experimental



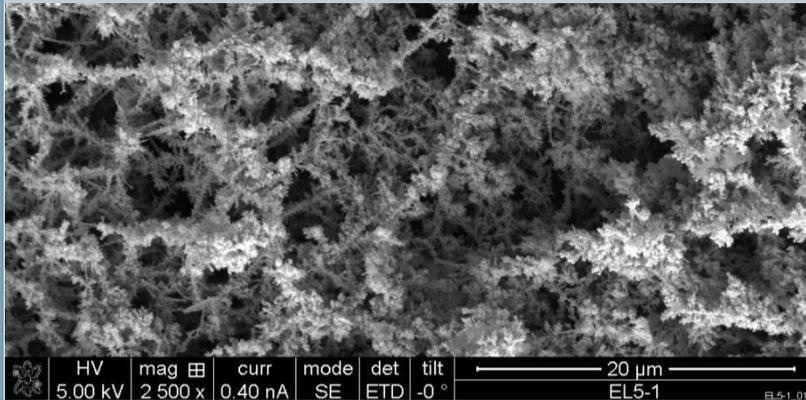
- Flow cell with GDE setup
- copper NP-catalyst is formed from Cu²⁺ ions
- pH value of the catholyte increases pH 3 to 7.5

Results

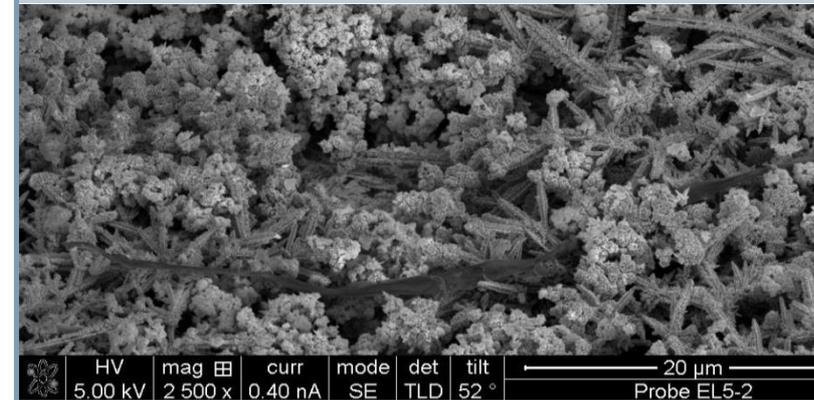
- the maximum FE for ethylene (57%) is reached after 50 min
- current density of 170 mA/cm² was achieved for ethylene
- system efficiency (SE=20% @ 10 mm cathode – anode distance) (electrical energy to chemical energy)

Degradation of In-Situ Deposited Nano Structured Catalysts

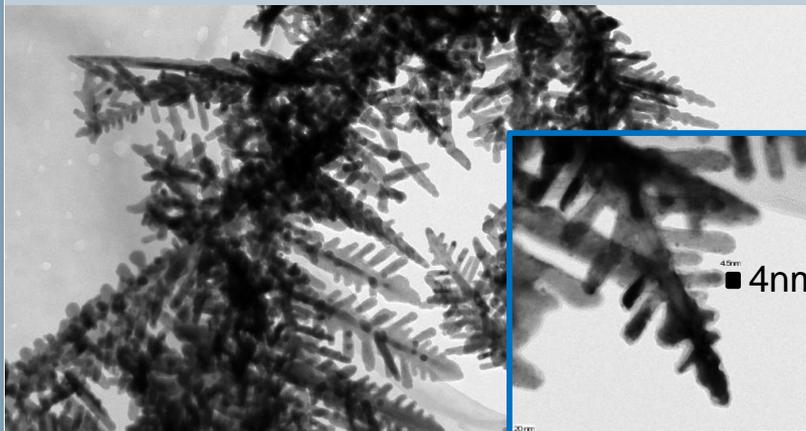
SEM image after deposition



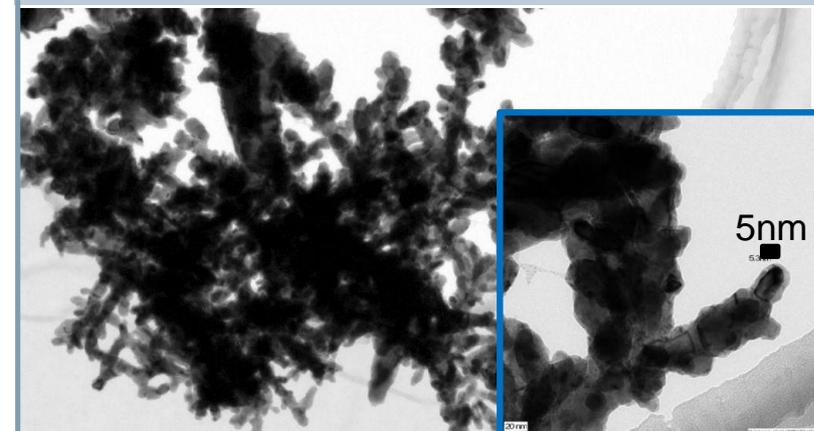
SEM image after 150 min EI. time



TEM image after deposition



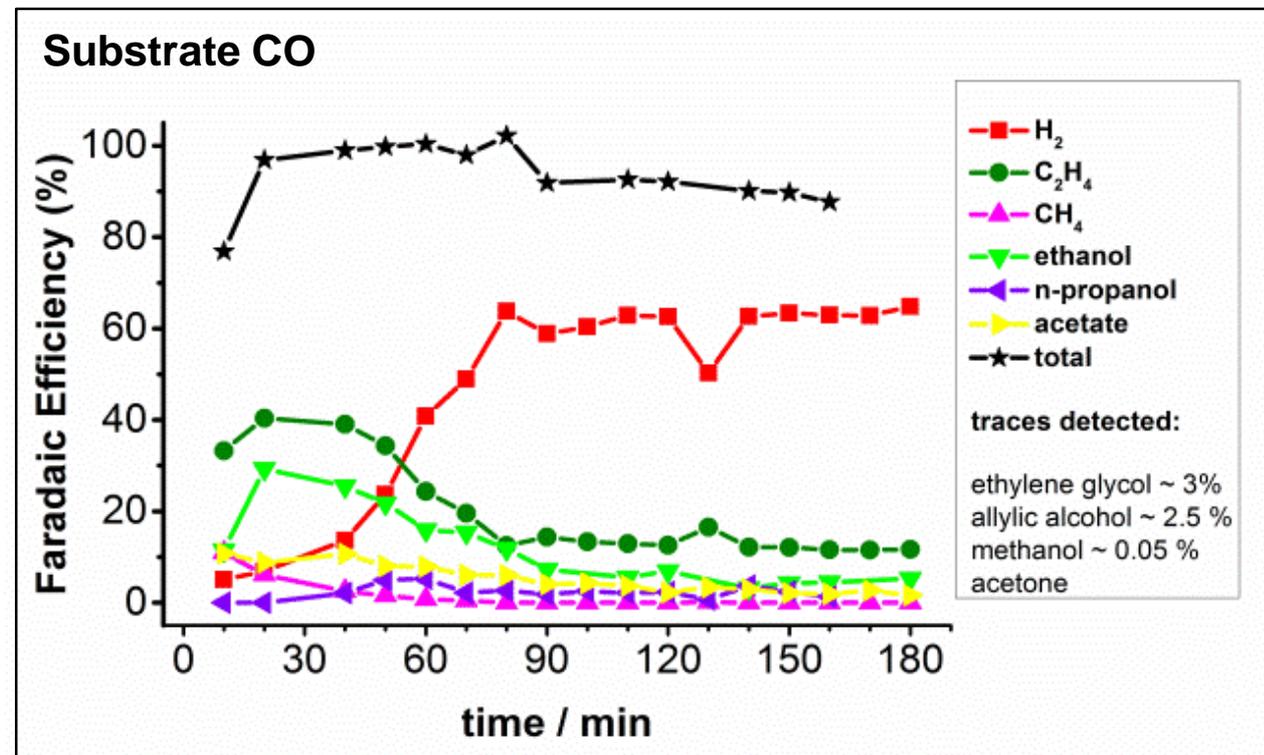
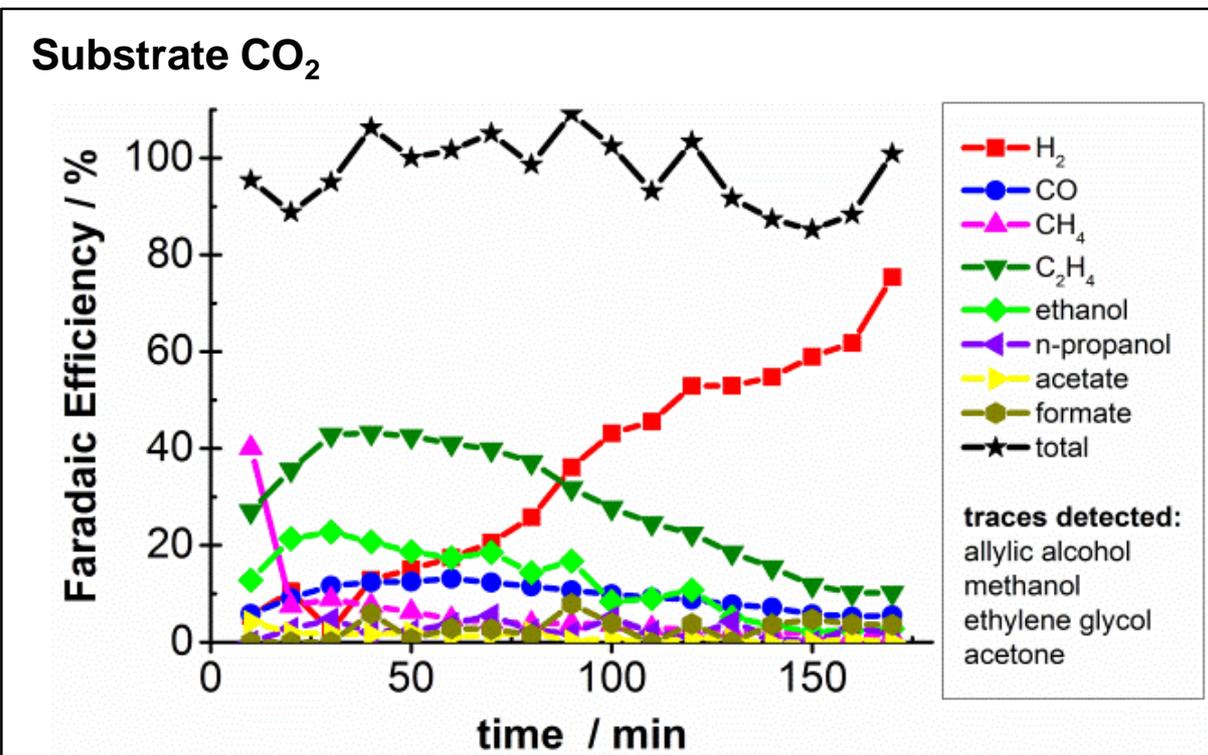
TEM image after 150 min EI. time



- structural changes of the nano catalyst layer were identified by REM and TEM measurements
- coarsening of the nano dendritic structure was observed
- dendrites consist mainly of Cu and Cu₂O

Other substrates ? CO₂ vs. CO

FE vs. time for major products of bulk electrolysis at 170 mAcm⁻².



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In the high current density regime CO₂ and CO substrates yield similar results upon reduction with the dendritic *in-situ* grown copper catalyst

Observed production: **carboxylates, conjugated alcohols, alkenes, conjugated alkanes, ketones ?**

Paving the way to a new **electrochemical petro chemistry**

Conversion of C-X bonding motives with the in-situ deposited copper catalyst

SIEMENS

Reagent	Product	Faradaic Efficiency	Selectivity
C≡C triple bonds	C=C double bonds	> 60 - 90 %	> 95%
C=C double bonds	C-C single bonds	< 20% (high, if substituents are electron withdrawing)	> 99 %
C=O double bonds (aldehydes, ketones)	C-O single bonds (alcohols)	Aldehydes > 95 % Ketones < 10 %	> 99% (successive reactions to be considered)
C-O single bonds	no reaction		
carboxylates	no reaction		

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Conclusions

- Technical photosynthesis start to become an industrially feasible approach to a green economy
- Electro catalysis is able to convert CO₂ in a single step into viable carbon based feedstock
- CO₂ to CO approaches industrial applicability
- The combination of CO₂-electrolysis and anaerobic fermentation enables a selective and efficient pathway toward green chemicals
- CO₂ to Ethylen still requires deeper understanding with respect to catalyst stability

.... We started



<https://www.siemens.com/press/de/pressemitteilungen/?press=/de/pressemitteilungen/2018/corporate/pr2018010135code.htm>

<http://www.ssu.edu/academics/courses/finance/>

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 - **eEthylen** (electro catalyst development)
 - **Kopernikus Power-To-X Technologies** (operation modes CO₂-to-CO)
 - **Rethicus** (platform of electrolysis & fermentation, scaling)
 - **Re-Future** (.... which made this talk possible)

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

..... thanks for your kind attention

CO₂ Sources in Europe and Germany

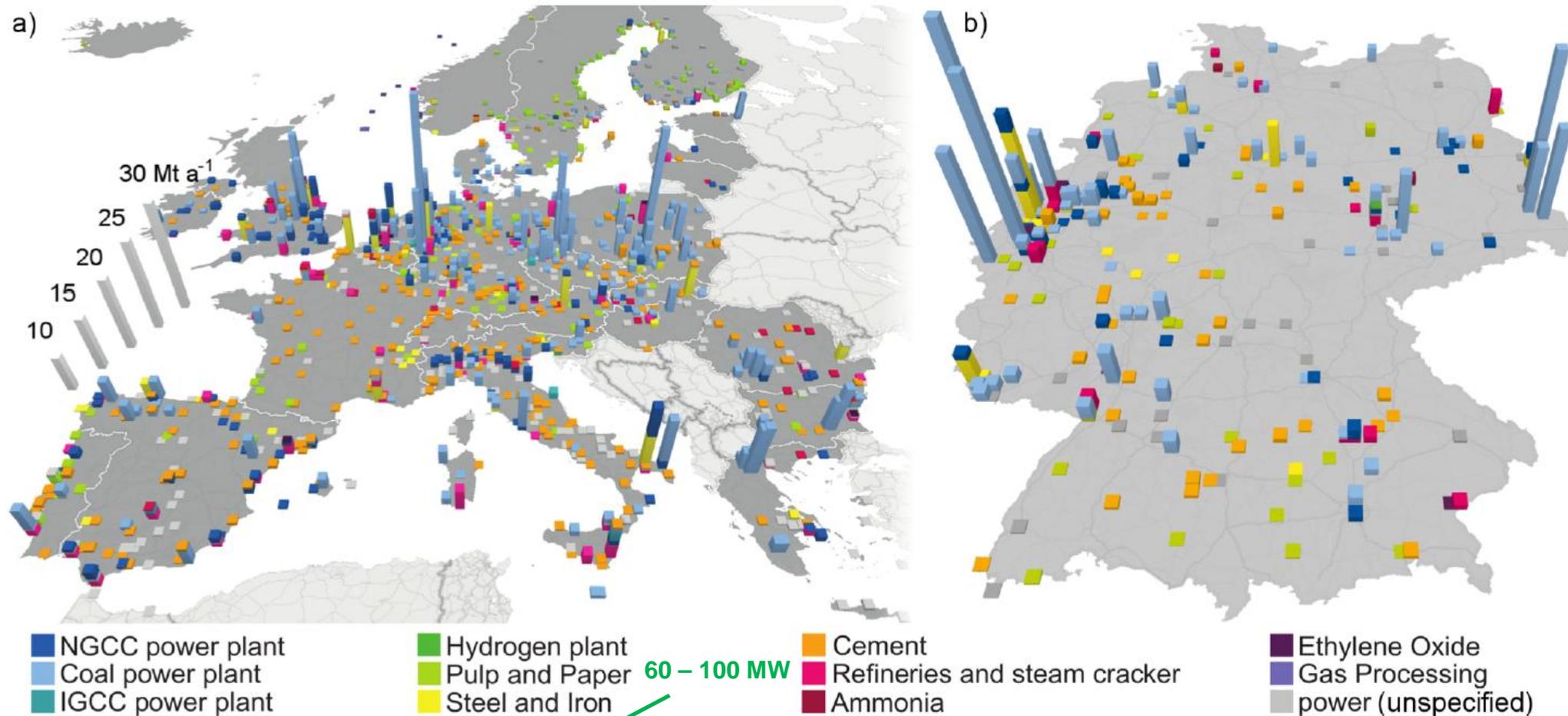
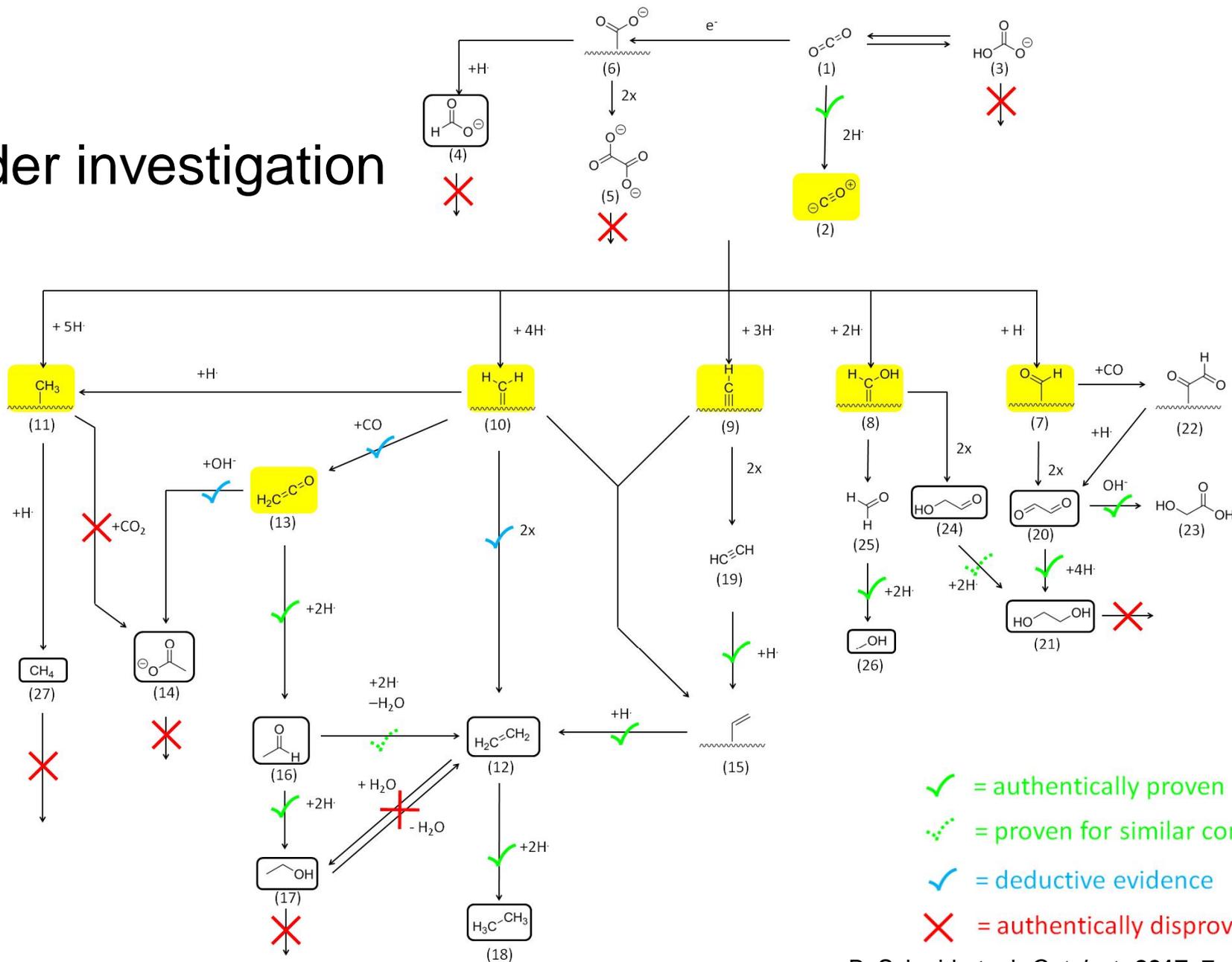


Figure 2. Distribution of CO₂ point sources (>0.1 Mt a⁻¹) in 2011 in a) Europe and b) Germany as exemplary country. The CO₂ emissions map has been created using the PowerMap Preview Plugin for Microsoft Excel 2013.⁵⁹ Color online.

<http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/acs.est.5b03474>

Routes under investigation



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