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David Tomás Sánchez Martínez
Lourdes García Rodríguez
(coordinadores)

Proceedings of the 7th International Seminar on

ORC

Power Systems

Editorial Universidad de Sevilla

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Diseño de cubierta y maquetación: los autores

INDEX OF CONTRIBUTIONS

ID3 - Additive manufacturing for fast prototyping of a velocity compounded radial re-entry turbine Authors: Dominik Stümpfl, Karel Ráž, Philipp Streit, Andreas P. Weiß.	13
ID4 - Thermodynamic concept of a novel recuperative two-phase power cycle process Authors: Benedikt G. Bederna, Riley B. Barta, Christiane S. Thomas.	23
ID7 - Performance analysis of a 1.5 MW Organic Rankine Cycle in a Carnot battery system for grid balancing services Authors: Robin Tassenoy, Hannes Van De Velde, Kenny Couvreur, Michel De Paepe, Steven Lecompte.	33
ID8 - Calibration of multi-hole probes for measurements in compressible organic vapor flows Authors: Leander Hake, Stephan Sundermeier, Stefan Aus Der Wiesche, Maximilian Passmann.	43
ID9 - pocketORC: A browser-based calculator for teaching organic Rankine cycle power systems Authors: Martin White.	53
ID10 - Evaluation of existing supercritical heat transfer correlations for designing the vapor generator in low-temperature transcritical Organic Rankine Cycle systems Authors: Jera Van Nieuwenhuyse, Anastasios Skiadopoulos, Dimitris Manolakos, Steven Lecompte, Michel De Paepe.	61
ID12 - A novel combined cooling and power cycle integrated ejector refrigeration and composition adjustment for stationary engine waste heat recovery Authors: Xiaocun Sun, Lingfeng Shi, Hua Tian, Gequn Shu.	71
ID14 - Design and construction of a reversible ORC test rig for geothermal CHP applications Authors: Florian Kaufmann, Christopher Schifflachner, Christoph Wieland, Hartmut Spliethoff.	81
ID15 - Robust and fast meanline methodology for radial inflow turbines with non-ideal gases for system level optimisation of organic Rankine cycles Authors: Carola Freytag, Eva Alvarez-Regueiro, Pablo Ale-Martos, Esperanza Barrera-Medrano, Ricardo Martinez-Botas.	91
ID16 - Shape optimization of a sCO ₂ centrifugal compressor stage Authors: Alessandro Romei, Paolo Gaetani, Giacomo Persico.	101
ID17 - Optimizing the performance of a hybrid solar-biomass micro-CHP system with a TFC engine as the prime mover for domestic applications Authors: Anastasios Skiadopoulos, Xander Van Heule, Steven Lecompte, Michel De Paepe, Dimitrios Manolakos.	109
ID19 - Systematic and multi-criteria optimisation of subcritical thermally integrated Carnot batteries (TI-PTES) in an extended domain Authors: Antoine Laterre, Olivier Dumont, Vincent Lemort, Francesco Contino.	119

ID20 - ORC technology used in a heat removal system for an advanced nuclear power plant Authors: Guillaume Lhermet, Benoit Payebien, Nicolas Tauveron, Nadia Caney, Franck Morin	130
ID22 - Assessment of trilateral Organic Rankine Cycle for solar applications with innovative turboexpander concept Authors: Alessandro Romei, Andrea Giostri, Andrea Spinelli.	140
ID25 - Evaluation of the performance of an axial one-stage 10kW turbogenerator through experimental testing Authors: Piotr Klimaszewski, Piotr Klonowicz, Lukasz Witanowski, Tomasz Suchocki, Piotr Lampart, Eugeniusz Ihnatowicz, Lukasz Antczak, Dawid Zaniewski, Lukasz Jedrzejewski	149
ID26 - Investigation of the turbulence level and the vortex shedding in a turbine cascade working with an organic vapor at subsonic Mach numbers Authors: Leander Hake, Stephan Sundermeier, Stefan Aus Der Wiesche, Camille Matar, Paola Cinnella, Xavier Gloerfelt	159
ID27 - A novel approach to district heating: using a two-phase expander in a reversible heat pump-Organic Rankine Cycle system Authors: Sindu Daniarta, Attila R. Imre, Piotr Kolasinski	169
ID28 - Optimization of a partially evaporating Organic Rankine Cycle with thermal non-equilibrium expansion Authors: Xander Van Heule, Tasos Skiadopoulos, Dimitris Manolakos, Michel De Paepe, Steven Lecompte	176
ID29 - Cost-effective option of cold energy utilization in pharmaceutical industry Authors: Sindu Daniarta, Dawid Sowa, Ádám Havas, Attila R. Imre, Piotr Kolasinski	184
ID30 - Numerical investigation of a transonic dense gas flow over an idealized blade vane configuration Authors: Aurelien Bienner, Xavier Gloerfelt, Paola Cinnella, Leander Hake, Stefan Aus Der Wiesche	193
ID31 - Comprehensive analysis of ORC-VCC system for air conditioning from low-temperature waste heat Authors: Lukasz Witanowski	203
ID33 - Pareto front analysis for the design and the working fluid selection in ORC-based pumped thermal energy storage technology in both pure electric and cogenerative applications Authors: Marco Astolfi, Dario Alfani, Andrea Giostri	214
ID36 - Evaluating the waste heat sources in a very large crude carrier and the potential integration of Organic Rankine Cycle configurations Authors: Amalia Stainchaouer, Christopher Schiffler, Christoph Wieland, Hartmut Spliethoff	224
ID37 - Investigating R1234ze and R1234yf as replacements to R134a in waste heat recovery ORC applications Authors: James Bull, James Buick, Jovana Radulovic	234

ID38 - Performance and economic assessment of a thermally integrated reversible HP/ORC Carnot battery applied to data centers Authors: Chiara Poletto, Andrea De Pascale, Saverio Ottaviano, Olivier Dumont, Maria Alessandra Ancona, Michele Bianchi	244
ID39 - Evaluation of the performance of multiple supercritical CO ₂ power cycles in Waste Heat Recovery applications Authors: Hicham Chibli, Matthew Read, Abdalnaser Sayma	254
ID40 - Design and modeling of a demonstration-scale ORC cycle for the Liquid Air Combined Cycle Authors: Owen Pryor, William Conlon, Aaron Rimpel, Milton Venetos.....	264
ID41 - Guidelines and optimization criteria of a machine learning-based methodology for mixture design in ORC systems Authors: Valerio Mariani, Saverio Ottaviano, Andrea De Pascale, Giulio Cazzoli, Lisa Branchini, Gian Marco Bianchi	273
ID45 - Potential of trigenerative Waste Heat Recovery CO ₂ -mixture transcritical power plants for increasing the sustainability of district heating and cooling networks Authors: Mattia Baiguini, Michele Doninelli, Ettore Morosini, Dario Alfani, Gioele Di Marcoberardino, Paolo Giulio Iora, Giampaolo Manzolini, Costante Mario Invernizzi, Marco Astolfi	282
ID46 - Thermodynamic analysis of a novel pumped thermal energy storage system with waste heat integration Authors: Meiyang Zhang, Lingfeng Shi, Peng Hu, Gang Pei, Gequn Shu	294
ID48 - Pressure profile optimisation of a nozzle for wet-to-dry expansion Authors: Pawel Ogrodniczak, Abdalnaser Sayma, Martin T. White.....	304
ID51 - Thermodynamic modification of CO ₂ -based combined cooling and power cycle with ejector Authors: Yonghao Zhang, Lingfeng Shi, Gequn Shu	313
ID53 - Selection of suitable working fluid and storage material for ORC coupled with Thermal Energy Storage Authors: Dawid Sowa, Sindu Daniarta, Piotr Kolasinski	323
ID54 - Influence of dopant fluorination on the heat transfer behaviour of CO ₂ -based mixtures in transcritical power cycles Authors: Michele Doninelli, Gioele Di Marcoberardino, Costante Mario Invernizzi, Paolo Giulio Iora	333
ID57 - On air-cooled condensers for ORC systems operating with zeotropic mixtures Authors: Lorenzo Galieti, Carlo De Servi, Dario Alfani, Paolo Silva, Paola Bombarda, Piero Colonna	344
ID58 - Experiments on supersonic ORC nozzles in linear cascade configuration Authors: Marco Olivetti, Marco Manfredi, Giacomo Persico, Andrea Spinelli, Paolo Gaetani, Vincenzo Dossena	354
ID59 - Numerical analysis of aerodynamics and performance of a radial-inflow micro-ORC turbine Authors: Fatemeh Ardaneh, Marta Zocca, Antti Uusitalo, Teemu Turunen-Saaresti.	363

ID61 - ORC system using R1233zd(E) for waste heat recovery from the upstream process Authors: Meng Soon Chiong, Bemgba Nyakuma, Nur Izwanne Mahyon, Srithar Rajoo, Eva Alvarez-Regueiro, Maria Esperanza Barrera-Medrano, Ricardo F. Martinez-Botas, Yossapong Laoonual	373
ID63 - Experimental investigation of a small-scale reversible high temperature heat pump – Organic Rankine Cycle system for industrial Waste Heat Recovery Authors: Rahul Velanparambil Ravindran, Donal Cotter, Christopher Wilson, Ming Jun Huang, Neil Hewitt.	381
ID64 - Technical comparison and evaluation of a Pumped Thermal Energy Storage with two different designs Authors: Márcio Santos, Jorge André, Ricardo Mendes, José Ribeiro.	391
ID68 - The potential of CO ₂ -Plume Geothermal (CPG) Systems for CO ₂ component manufacturers: opportunities and development needs Authors: Christopher Schiffler, Jasper De Reus, Hartmut Spliethoff, Martin O. Saar, Sebastian Schuster, Dieter Brillert	400
ID69 - Development of a generalised low-order model for twin-screw compressors Authors: Florian Kaufmann, Ludwig Irrgang, Christopher Schiffler, Hartmut Spliethoff.	410
ID71 - Decision-making matrix for the selection of mixture in ORC applications Authors: William Combaluzier, Nicolas Tauveron, Michel Beaughon, Aldo Serafino	420
ID72 - Reversible heat pump-ORC pilot plant – Experimental results and fluid charge optimization Authors: Maximilian Weitzer, Sebastian Kolb, Dominik Müller, Jürgen Karl	430
ID73 - Performance of Organic Rankine Cycle system in combination with residual municipal solid waste gasification: a simulation analysis Authors: Luca Cioccolanti, Giovanni Biancini, Ramin Moradi, Luca Del Zotto, Matteo Moglie	439
ID74 - Enhancing knowledge of engineering students at all levels on organic rankine cycle systems for their application in the built environment Authors: Luca Cioccolanti, Ramin Moradi, Ermira Abdullah, Syamimi Saadon, Mohamad Yusof Idroas, Teoh Yew Heng, Kwanchai Kraitong	449
ID75 - Studying carbon dioxide and acetone mixtures in a single-stage absorption-compression cycle for heating and cooling applications Authors: Jesús Gómez-Hernández, Ali Kholghi, Mercedes De Vega, Javier Villa, Ronan Grimes	458
ID77 - Valorising thermal composite recycling processes using Organic Rankine Cycles for combined heat and power applications Authors: Ramin Moradi, Liu Yang	466
ID80 – Prediction of the ideal maximum operational temperature of hydrocarbon and HFCs as working fluids of Organic Rankine Cycle power plants based on transition state theory Authors: Wei Yu, Chao Liu, Xijie Ban, Zhirong Li, Tianlong Yan	476
ID82 - Comparison of different evaporator topologies for industrial heat pumps Authors: Sanjay Vermani, Nitish Anand, Johan Van Bael, Evgueni Toulankine, Aldo Serafino, Carlo De Servi	486

ID83 - On the plant improvement of Solar-driven ORC based power unit for domestic microcogeneration Authors: Fabio Fatigati, Marco Di Bartolomeo, Arianna Coletta, Diego Vittorini, Giammarco Di Giovine, Davide Di Battista, Roberto Cipollone.	496
ID84 - Mapping the techno-economic potential of next-generation CSP plants running on transcritical CO ₂ -based power cycles Authors: Pablo Rodríguez-deArriba, Francesco Crespi, Sara Pace, David Sánchez.	505
ID86 - Achieving 45% micro gas turbine efficiency through hybridization with Organic Rankine Cycles Authors: Antonio Escamilla, David Sánchez Martínez, Lourdes García-Rodríguez.	515
ID88 - Operational optimisation of the main heat rejection unit of CSP plants based on carbon dioxide mixtures Authors: Francesco Crespi, Pablo Rodríguez-deArriba, Lourdes García-Rodríguez, David Sánchez.	525
ID89 - Mechanical design and rotor-dynamic analysis of the ORCHID turbine Authors: Matteo Majer, Steven Chatterton, Ludovico Dassi, Alessio Secchiaroli, Edoardo Gheller, Carlo De Servi, Paolo Pennacchi, Piero Colonna, Matteo Pini.	535
ID91 - Thermodynamic feasibility of a pumped thermal energy storage driven by ocean temperature gradient Authors: Alessandra Ghilardi, Andrea Baccioli, Guido Francesco Frate, Lorenzo Ferrari.	545
ID92 - Exergy-based methods for heat pumps Authors: Mathias Hofmann, Jonas Freißmann, Malte Fritz, Jeremias H. Alexe, Francesco Witte, George Tsatsaronis.	553
ID93 - Reduced order modelling of optimized heat exchangers for maximum mass-specific performance of Airborne ORC Waste Heat Recovery units Authors: Fabio Beltrame, Dabo Krempus, Piero Colonna, Carlo De Servi.	563
ID97 - Basic design of an ORC demonstrator system for implementation in an Iron & Steel plant through the DECAGONE project Authors: Magnus Windfeldt, Han Deng, Trond Andresen, Christopher Schiffler.	574
ID98 - Analytical estimation of the presence of non-condensable gases in the condensate tank of an Organic Rankine Cycle Authors: Radheesh Dhanasegaran, Antti Uusitalo, Juha Honkatukia, Teemu turunen-Saaresti.	584
ID101 - Advanced control of compressor inlet temperature in supercritical CO ₂ Brayton cycle Authors: Rui Wang, Xuan Wang, Hua Tian, Gequn Shu.	596
ID103 - Potential for surplus-heat-to-power conversion in current and future aluminium production processes with off-gas recycling Authors: Jonas Bueie, Magnus Windfeldt, Trond Andresen.	605
ID104 - Investigating the application range of ORC power plants for the exploitation of two-phase geothermal resources Authors: Tristan Merbecks, Claudio Pietra, Paola Bombarda, Martin O. Saar, Paolo Silva, Dario Alfani.	615
ID109 - Cold Energy Recovery in LNG plants with Organic Rankine Cycle Authors: Gabriele Marchiori, Marta Giudici, Giorgia Ruffato, Marco Astolfi.	626

ID110 - Numerical investigation of organic vapor flow effects on a micro-scale radial turbocompressor Authors: Andrés Sebastián, Rubén Abbas, Manuel Valdés	636
ID112 - Design, modeling and simulation of an experimental Rankine PTES system Authors: Mario Petrollese, Giorgio Cau, Matteo Marchionni, Marcello Lorenzo Marroccu, Rosa Merchan	645
ID113 - Small-scale turbopumps for Waste Heat Recovery applications based on an Organic Rankine Cycles, modeling, analytical and experimental investigation Authors: Sajjad Zakeralhoseini, Jürg Schiffmann	655
ID116 - Double-stage ORC system based on various temperature waste heat sources of the negative CO2 power plant Authors: Kamil Stasiak, Pawel Ziolkowski, Dariusz Mikielewicz	665
ID117 - Optimization of organic Rankine cycle in ocean thermal energy conversion based on NSGA-II Authors: Zheng Hu, Jiufa Chen, Bing Guo, Chengbin Zhang	679
ID118 - TES4Trig: Development of a demonstrator for the production of electricity, heating and cooling based on an Organic Rankine and an Ejector Cooling Cycle driven by high-temperature parabolic trough collectors with thermal energy storage Authors: Konstantinos Braimakis, Dimitrios Tziritas, George Stavrakakis, Julio Terrón Gutiérrez, Siddhart Dutta, Christos Xynos, Panagiotis Zervas, Sotirios Karellas	689
ID119 - Simulation and operation of a CSP that works with a HRB Cycle Authors: Antonio J. Subires, Antonio Rovira	701
ID123 - Towards a green energy community: integration of micro-ORCs combined with renewable energy technologies in buildings Authors: Diego Antonio Rodríguez Pastor, Víctor Manuel Soltero Sánchez, Elisa Carvajal Trujillo, José Antonio Becerra, Ricardo Chacartegui	713
ID129 - Assessment of high temperature heat pump layouts equipped with a bladeless turboexpander Authors: Matteo Passalacqua, Simone Maccarini, Stefano Barberis, Alberto Traverso	723
ID133 - Selection of the optimal working fluid in an Organic Rankine Cycle for Waste Heat Recovery through multi-objective optimization and decision making Authors: Bipul Krishna Saha, El Mouatez Billah Messini, Syed J. Hoque, B Aneesh Bhat, Pramod Kumar	733
ID139 - Dual condensing pressure ORC for cryogenic energy storage Authors: William M. Conlon, Milton J. Venetos	743
ID141 - Optimum coupling of thermal energy storage and power cycles for Carnot batteries Authors: Salvatore Guccione, Rafael Guede	751
ID142 - Aerodynamic design and numerical analysis of a counter-rotating centrifugal compressor Authors: Cheikh Brahim Abed, Arthur Leroux	761

EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF MULTIPLE SUPERCRITICAL CO₂ POWER CYCLES IN WASTE HEAT RECOVERY APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to systematically evaluate the common supercritical carbon dioxide power cycles that are suitable for low to high grade waste heat recovery applications, with source temperatures ranging from 450 to 850 °C. A number of cycles varying from the simple to the fully cascaded split cycles are investigated against a predefined waste heat source for multiple temperatures and flow rates with a target power net yield of the order of 1 MWe. The conditions at the inlet to the main compressor in the sCO₂ loop are also varied to quantify the role of the environmental heat sink in effective heat recovery. The sCO₂ cycle parameters including the mass flowrate and split ratio as well as the effectiveness of the individual heat exchangers are optimized for multiple pressure ratios. Additionally, a detailed exergy analysis is conducted to identify the sources of entropy generation in the various components and enable a detailed comparison of the various cycle configurations reviewed. Improving the quality of the heat source from 450 to 850 °C yielded ~30% increase in cycle performance, while degrading the heat sink quality from 15 to 35 °C reduced the net output power by ~30%. The cascaded and split cycles were determined to achieve the highest performance across all conditions considered.

254

1 INTRODUCTION

The ever-rising cost of fossil fuels and increasing demand for power generation, have incentivized the implementation of bottoming cycles to extract an improved overall system performance. The elevated density and heat capacity of sCO₂ compared to air allow for an increased efficiency at a reduced footprint, without the limitations of a condensing steam cycle. Consequently, interest in designing and building power cycles that use sCO₂ as a working fluid surged in the last few decades. Feher (1968) pioneered the research in this field, when he proposed a pseudo-supercritical cycle that alleviates the shortcomings of the readily popular Rankine and Brayton cycles. While the former features heat addition and removal at constant temperatures, leading to an improved cycle efficiency, it suffered from a limited temperature range and excessive wetness formation in the low pressure turbine stages. The Brayton cycle allows a wider range of working temperatures, and better use of heat recuperation technologies, at the cost of notably exaggerated compression work intrinsic to the gaseous nature of air. Feher recognized that the abundance, chemical stability and inert nature of CO₂, in addition to its low critical pressure and temperature and high density all contribute to its suitability for use in modern power cycles. Angelino (1968) independently researched the use of CO₂ in recuperated transcritical power cycles to achieve the low compression work of condensing steam cycles, while taking advantage of the elevated turbine inlet temperatures of closed Brayton cycles. Additionally, he identified the recovered heat from the low to high pressure side of the cycle as the largest source of internal irreversibility and devised a series of modifications involving flow splitting to reduce losses and improve performance.

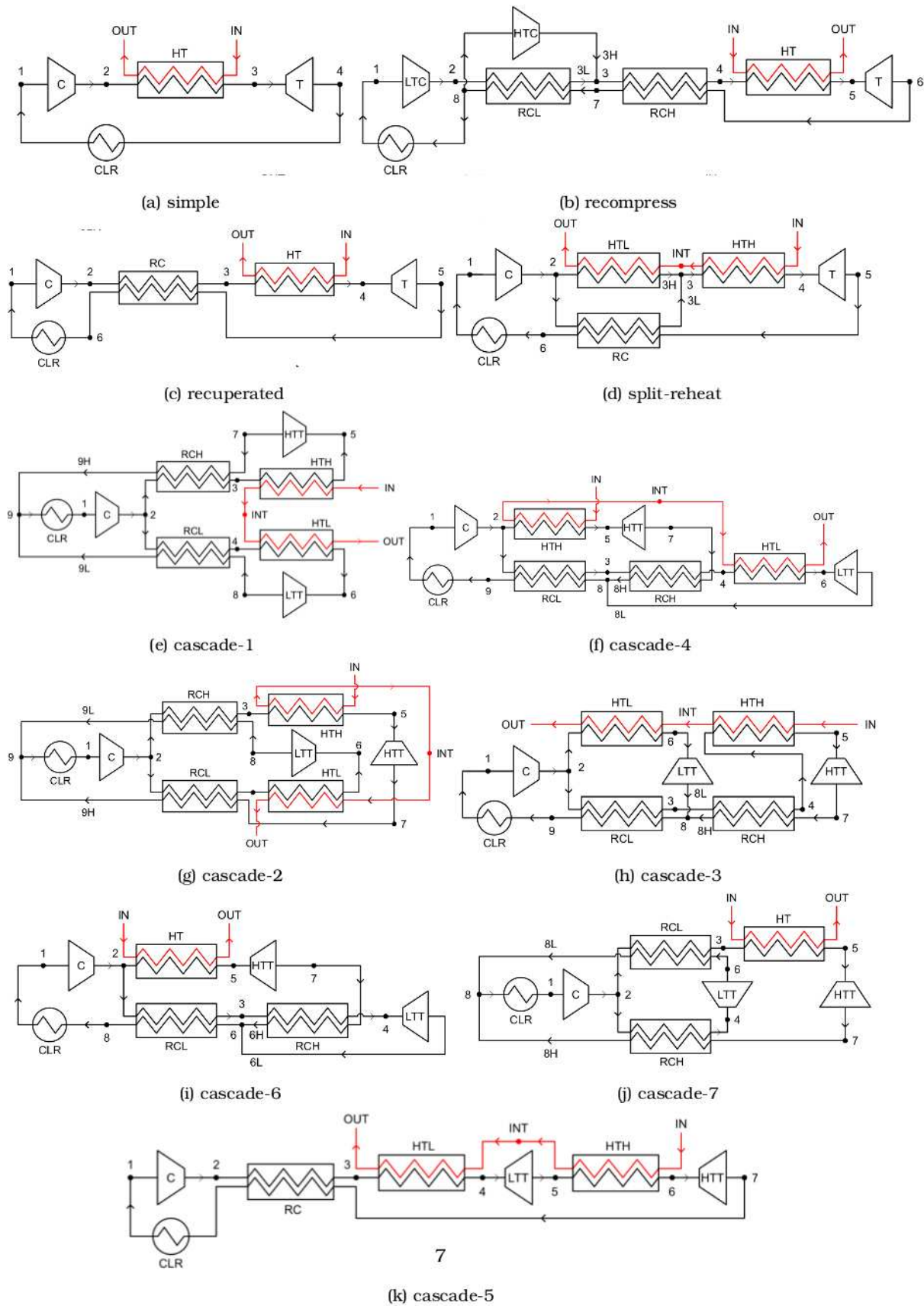


Figure 1: Schematics of the various waste heat recovery cycles considered in this study

Numerous studies have since been conducted, especially in the last decade to evaluate the implementation of sCO₂ cycles in applications ranging from nuclear and concentrated solar power to waste heat recovery. Ahn et al. (2015) reviewed the current status of research and development in Gen IV nuclear reactors, where the application of sCO₂ cycles offers several advantages over conventional water-cooled technology. Increasing the turbine inlet temperatures from the current 300 °C to 500 – 900 °C, while maintaining low compression work, at reduced size turbine stages owing to the low specific volume of sCO₂, leads to significant efficiency improvements. The authors also reviewed 12 sCO₂ cycle configurations for efficiency and heat transfer area requirements and concluded that the recompression cycle constitutes the best candidate for nuclear power applications. Additionally, they reviewed the experimental sCO₂ facilities in 5 key locations in USA, Japan and S. Korea, focusing mostly on the mechanical design aspects including bearing stability, thrust mitigation and vibrations. Crespi et al. (2017) reviewed all the published research in the field of sCO₂ power cycles up to date. The authors categorized the different investigative approaches including concepts, applications, and layouts, into a modular classification system using standard building blocks of standalone cycle components. The latter are intuitively utilized to construct more complex cycles and qualitatively evaluate and compare them. An effective quantitative comparison, however, was not provided. Since these cycles were evaluated under widely varying conditions and component parameters, as declared in their respective sources, the resulting heterogeneous performance data was not suitable for systemic review.

Table 1: Summary of cases analyzed in this study with their respective conditions

Heat Source Conditions		Cycle Base Temperature [°C]	$P_{\min} / P_{\max}$ [bar]	Reference Figure
Temperature [°C]	Flowrate [kg/sec]			
450	9.00	25	74/122-250	2a
650	5.75	25	74/122-250	2b
850	4.06	25	74/122-250	2c/3a
850	4.06	35	74/122-250	3b
850	4.06	45	74/122-250	3c

Moroz et al. (2015) investigated the application of sCO₂ in a bottoming cycle for a gas turbine, using the recuperated, recompression and precompression cycle configurations. The recuperated cycle was deemed the most suitable. Kim et al (2017) evaluated the performance of the recuperated, split-reheat and cascaded transcritical cycles in heat recovery from gas turbine. For the conditions considered in this study, the split-reheat cycle achieved the best overall performance at reduced cost and complexity. Khadse et al. (2018) completed a thermodynamic optimization of the recuperated and recompression configurations for exhaust heat recovery from a next generation heavy duty simple cycle gas turbine and favored the recompression arrangement for the chosen exhaust gas mass flow rate and temperature. Wang et al. (2021) completed a thermo-economic optimization study of multiple waste heat recovery sCO₂ cycles comprised of the recuperated, split-reheat and cascaded configurations and selected the split-reheat arrangement as the best candidate due to its balanced overall performance and reduced design and operational complexity.

2 SETUP AND ANALYSIS

The supercritical CO₂ cycles considered in this study include the simple cycle (base case), the recuperated cycle, the split-reheat cycle, the recompression cycle (2 stage compression) in addition to multiple variations of the cascaded cycle (2 stage expansion). The schematics of these cycles are shown in Figure 1, with high and low temperature components and streams annotated accordingly. *MATLAB* models were prepared that allow simulating the performance of these cycles using the thermodynamic database *CoolProp* that employs the Span-Wagner Polar EOS formulation (Bell and Jäger, 2016 and Span and Wagner, 1996). The turbomachinery stages were modeled with a specified isentropic efficiency, $\eta_{is} = 75\%$ for the compressor and $\eta_{is} = 85\%$ for the turbine. The counter flow type heat exchangers were discretized to maintain a set pinch temperature $\Delta T_{min} = 10^\circ\text{C}$ between the cold and warm streams. To simulate additional mechanical losses in the respective cycles, a 1% drop of total pressure was imposed at every heat exchanger. No heat losses to the environment were considered. The minimum pressure in the cycle was maintained right at the critical point to avoid a phase change during the heat rejection process, whereas the maximum pressure was varied to accommodate both the design and performance of turbomachinery stages, not to exceed 250 bar as a reasonable limit of material properties and manufacturability. The minimum and maximum temperatures of the working fluid are dictated by the availability of a suitable heat sink and source. The former is a function of the cooler pinch temperature and cooling fluid temperature, while the latter is the function of the waste heat source temperature and the heat exchange process. To understand the effect of the cooling requirements, which vary geographically, multiple cycle base (minimum) temperatures were considered, that correspond to heat sink temperatures of 15, 25 and 35 °C. Three qualities of waste heat source were evaluated in this study: high (850 °C), medium (650 °C) and low (450 °C) with air as working fluid. In order to maintain equivalent source conditions, the mass flow of hot air was adjusted to yield a constant source rate of exergy at a nominal net cycle output power of 1 MWe. A summary of the cases analyzed in this work is provided in Table 1.

2.1 Energy and Exergy Balance

The conditions within these cycles are optimized to achieve a maximum net power output. This is reflected through the system efficiency which is the product of the cycle efficiency and the heat recovery efficiency of the cycle, as detailed in Wang et al. (2021):

$$\eta_{sys} = \eta_{cycle} \times \eta_{heat} \quad (1)$$

Where the system and cycle efficiencies are expressed as follows:

$$\eta_{cycle} = \frac{\dot{W}_{net}}{\dot{Q}_{cycle}} \text{ and } \eta_{heat} = \frac{\dot{Q}_{cycle}}{\dot{Q}_{max}} \quad (2)$$

The maximum rate of heat available from the source is defined relevant to the ambient conditions as:

$$\dot{Q}_{max} = \dot{m}_{air} (h_{in} - h_0)_{air} \quad (3)$$

The power transfer and exergy loss rate are calculated across the turbine and compressor stages using:

$$\dot{W}_{turbo} = \dot{m}_{CO_2} (h_{in} - h_{out}) \text{ and } \dot{L}_{turbo} = -T_0 \dot{m}_{CO_2} (s_{in} - s_{out}) \quad (4)$$

Similarly, the heat transfer and exergy loss rates through the heater and recuperator can be determined as follows:

$$\dot{Q}_{heater} = \dot{m}_{air} (h_{in} - h_{out})_{air} = \dot{m}_{CO_2} (h_{out} - h_{in})_{CO_2} \quad (5)$$

$$\dot{L}_{heater} = -T_0 (\dot{m}_{air} (s_{in} - s_{out})_{air} + \dot{m}_{CO_2} (s_{in} - s_{out})_{CO_2}) \quad (6)$$

$$\dot{Q}_{recuperator} = \dot{m}_{CO_2} (h_{in} - h_{out})_{warm} = \dot{m}_{CO_2} (h_{out} - h_{in})_{cold} \quad (7)$$

$$\dot{L}_{recuperator} = -T_0 (\dot{m}_{CO_2} (s_{in} - s_{out})_{warm} + \dot{m}_{CO_2} (s_{in} - s_{out})_{cold}) \quad (8)$$

Since the energy transferred to the cooling fluid is assumed lost to the environment, all the exergy removed out of the sCO₂ stream is treated as destroyed in the cooler for this analysis:

$$\dot{L}_{cooler} = \dot{m}_{CO_2} ((h_{in} - h_{out}) - T_0 (s_{in} - s_{out}))_{CO_2} \quad (9)$$

Some of the cycles involve splitting the working fluid flow to achieve better matching of the heat capacities of the warm and cold streams in the heat exchangers. This leads to additional losses when the split streams of dissimilar temperatures are merged back together at the constant pressure. This is captured as shown below:

$$\dot{L}_{mixing} = -T_0 (\dot{m}_{in,1} s_{in,1} + \dot{m}_{in,2} s_{in,2} - \dot{m}_{out} s_{out})_{CO_2} \quad (10)$$

2.2 Cycle Optimization Procedure

The *MATLAB* Global Optimization package using the parallelized *MultiStart* scheme is employed to maximize the net power output of the waste heat recovery power cycles. The heat source temperature and mass flowrate are fixed for each run, as well as the cycle base temperature and pressure and pressure ratio, while the mass flowrate of sCO₂ and the flow split ratio when applicable, are adjusted to identify the optimum performance parameters. The heat transfer effectiveness in the heaters and recuperators are also varied with the stipulation that the specified respective pinch temperature never exceeds the minimum temperature difference between the cold and warm streams along the length of the heat exchanger. The size of the pool of start points of problem variables was increased successively for each run to establish the convergence of the solver to a valid global optimum that satisfies the specified constraints.

2.3 Comparative Cycle Analysis

The various waste heat recovery cycles are simulated over a range of pressure ratios for different heat source temperatures and shown in Figure 2. As detailed earlier, the waste heat source availability is fixed for all cases by adjusting the hot air mass flowrate. All the cycles benefit from the higher heat source *quality* as evident in the significant performance improvements. However, the more complex cycles that allow flow splitting are more capable of taking advantage of the higher available source temperatures, with the simple cycle achieving the most modest gains. Cascade-3 configuration which allows the high temperature turbine stream double recuperation before being energized from the heat source achieves the best performance over the range of source temperatures. The performance advantages of this cycle in comparison to the other cascaded cycles seem to diminish at low pressure ratios, with the trend being more evident for a lower heat source temperature. It is notable that the solver systemically converges to eliminate the low temperature heater in cascade-4 cycle by assigning a zero effectiveness to the same, rendering the latter identical to cascade-6 cycle. The same results are noted for cascade-2 and cascade-7 cycles. It is to be noted that despite no effective heat transfer in the low temperature heater for both cycles, the pressure drop in the same is still calculated, leading to a measurable drop in the availability of the sCO₂ stream, and a slight downshift of the performance curves.

The split-reheat cycle performs significantly better than the more complex cascaded cycles for a low heat source temperature, with the exception of the cascade-3 configuration. At higher heat source temperatures, the performance of cascade-4/cascade-6 matches the split-reheat cycle, however the latter continues to deliver a higher net power output than the other cascaded setups. These results are quite inconsistent with those from the classical topping cycle performance analysis, that studies the performance relative to the turbine inlet temperature variations, without correcting the results to allow quantifying the heat recovery from the waste heat source. A similar observation is made for the recuperated cycle that matches the performance of the non-split cascade-5 cycle. The solver converges to eliminate the high temperature heater, and the cascaded turbine stages effectively perform as a single

expansion stage. It should be clarified that the pressure drop in the high temperature heater, as well as the specification of isentropic efficiency in the distinct turbine stages, result in a slight variation in performance compared to the recuperated cycle. Once more, these observations are unintuitive when contrasted with the isolated cycle performance analysis of sCO₂ power cycles.

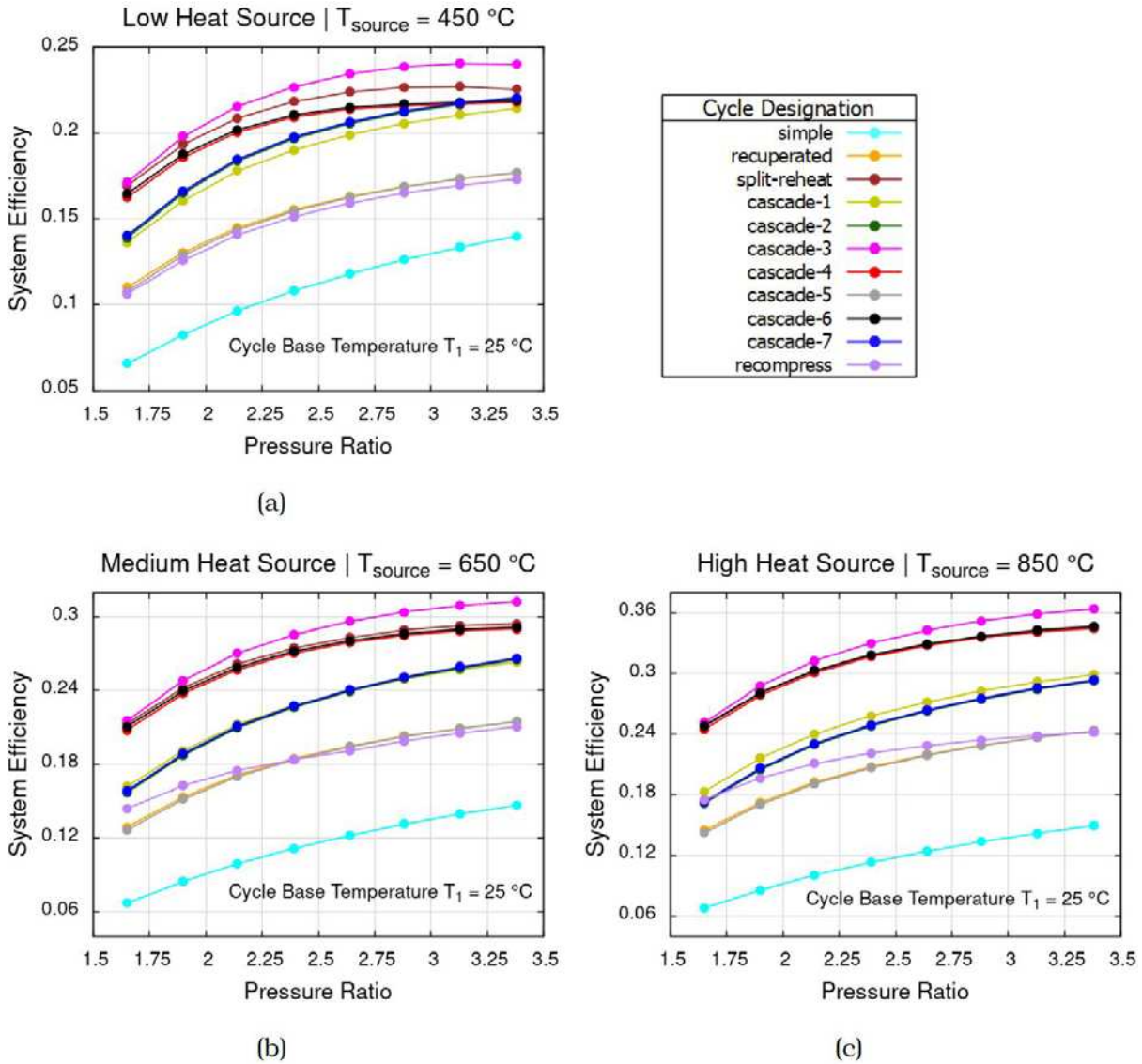


Figure 2: System performance as a function of pressure ratio for the various waste heat recovery cycles evaluated at heat source temperatures of a) 450, b) 650 and c) 850 °C with a cycle base temperature of 25 °C and pressure of 74 bar

To further qualify these findings, the exergy destruction rate in the various cycle components is computed and presented in Table 2 for each cycle at different heat source temperatures. The loss sources are categorized according to the nature of energy transfer to fall into turbomachinery (work transfer), heat exchangers (heat transfer) and stream mixing junctions (isobaric mixing, no energy transfer) groups. Since the energy/exergy transferred through the cooler is removed from the sCO₂ stream, it is grouped separately. The net work output rate of the cycle and the residual exergy rate in the heat source discharge stream (heater outlet) are also presented, all normalized by the available reversible work rate in the heat source (heater inlet).

Table 2: Exergy transfer rate breakdown as percentage of the reversible available work of the heat source stream evaluated at cycle base temperature of 25 °C and pressure of 74 bar and pressure ratio of 3.38 for heat source temperatures of 450, 650 and 850 °C

Cycle Component	Exergy Destruction Rate [%]				Work Out Rate [%]	Exergy Out Rate [%]
	Turbomachinery	Heat Exchangers	Mixing	Heat Sink		
Heat Source temperature = 450 °C						
<i>simple cycle</i>	4.6	7.5	0.0	32.1	24.9	30.9
<i>recuperated cycle</i>	7.1	13.7	0.0	5.7	31.4	42.0
<i>split-reheat cycle</i>	9.8	11.3	0.0	8.2	40.1	30.6
<i>cascade-1 cycle</i>	9.0	12.8	0.0	7.4	38.1	32.7
<i>cascade-2 cycle</i>	8.3	11.0	0.0	6.7	39.1	34.9
<i>cascade-3 cycle</i>	9.4	9.1	0.0	8.2	42.7	30.6
<i>cascade-4 cycle</i>	8.9	12.4	0.0	9.4	38.7	30.6
<i>cascade-5 cycle</i>	6.8	14.3	0.0	5.7	31.5	41.7
<i>cascade-6 cycle</i>	8.9	11.9	0.0	9.4	38.9	30.9
<i>cascade-7 cycle</i>	8.3	10.5	0.0	6.7	39.3	35.2
<i>recompress cycle</i>	7.1	14.0	0.1	5.7	30.8	42.3
Heat Source temperature = 650 °C						
<i>simple cycle</i>	3.4	9.5	0.0	42.4	24.9	19.7
<i>recuperated cycle</i>	6.9	19.6	0.0	5.5	36.3	31.7
<i>split-reheat cycle</i>	9.1	14.1	0.0	7.3	49.9	19.5
<i>cascade-1 cycle</i>	7.7	16.9	0.0	6.2	44.6	24.6
<i>cascade-2 cycle</i>	6.9	14.5	0.0	5.5	45.0	28.1
<i>cascade-3 cycle</i>	8.8	11.5	0.0	7.2	53.0	19.5
<i>cascade-4 cycle</i>	9.0	14.8	0.0	7.5	49.2	19.5
<i>cascade-5 cycle</i>	6.6	20.1	0.0	5.5	36.4	31.4
<i>cascade-6 cycle</i>	9.0	14.4	0.0	7.4	49.4	19.7
<i>cascade-7 cycle</i>	6.9	14.2	0.0	5.5	45.1	28.3
<i>recompress cycle</i>	6.9	19.9	0.1	5.5	35.7	32.0
Heat Source temperature = 850 °C						
<i>simple cycle</i>	3.3	17.7	0.0	41.0	24.0	13.9
<i>recuperated cycle</i>	6.4	22.9	0.0	5.1	39.0	26.6
<i>split-reheat cycle</i>	8.3	16.0	0.0	6.6	55.3	13.8
<i>cascade-1 cycle</i>	7.2	20.3	0.0	5.7	48.0	18.9
<i>cascade-2 cycle</i>	6.5	18.6	0.0	5.1	47.0	22.8
<i>cascade-3 cycle</i>	8.0	13.4	0.0	6.4	58.5	13.8
<i>cascade-4 cycle</i>	8.2	16.0	0.0	6.6	55.4	13.8
<i>cascade-5 cycle</i>	6.2	23.3	0.0	5.1	39.0	26.4
<i>cascade-6 cycle</i>	8.2	15.6	0.0	6.6	55.6	14.0
<i>cascade-7 cycle</i>	6.5	18.4	0.0	5.1	47.1	23.0
<i>recompress cycle</i>	9.5	14.4	0.0	4.3	38.9	32.9

As predicted the simple cycle yields the highest losses in the cooler section, as the energy from the warm turbine exhaust stream is not recovered; the recuperated cycle in contrast, exhibits the lowest losses in the cooling process due to utilizing the residual energy in the turbine exhaust stream to improve the cycle efficiency. Nonetheless the sharp variations in the heat capacity of the recuperator cold and warm streams, mainly due to the thermodynamic properties of $s\text{CO}_2$ in the vicinity of the critical point, lead to the most elevated heat exchanger losses in the recuperated cycle. By splitting the flow in some of the more complex cycles, a better match of the heat capacity is achieved by the virtue of different mass flowrates of the cold and warm streams in the recuperators. As such, heat transfer occurs between fluids of less dissimilar temperatures, leading to a reduction of exergy destruction in the process. Cascade-3 cycle registers the lowest share of irreversibility creation in the heat exchanger group, consistent with the highest performance discussed earlier. All the cycles show an increase in the heat exchanger losses as the heat source temperature rises, since the temperature gradient between the cold stream, governed by fixed compressor discharge conditions and the hot air stream becomes more prevalent.

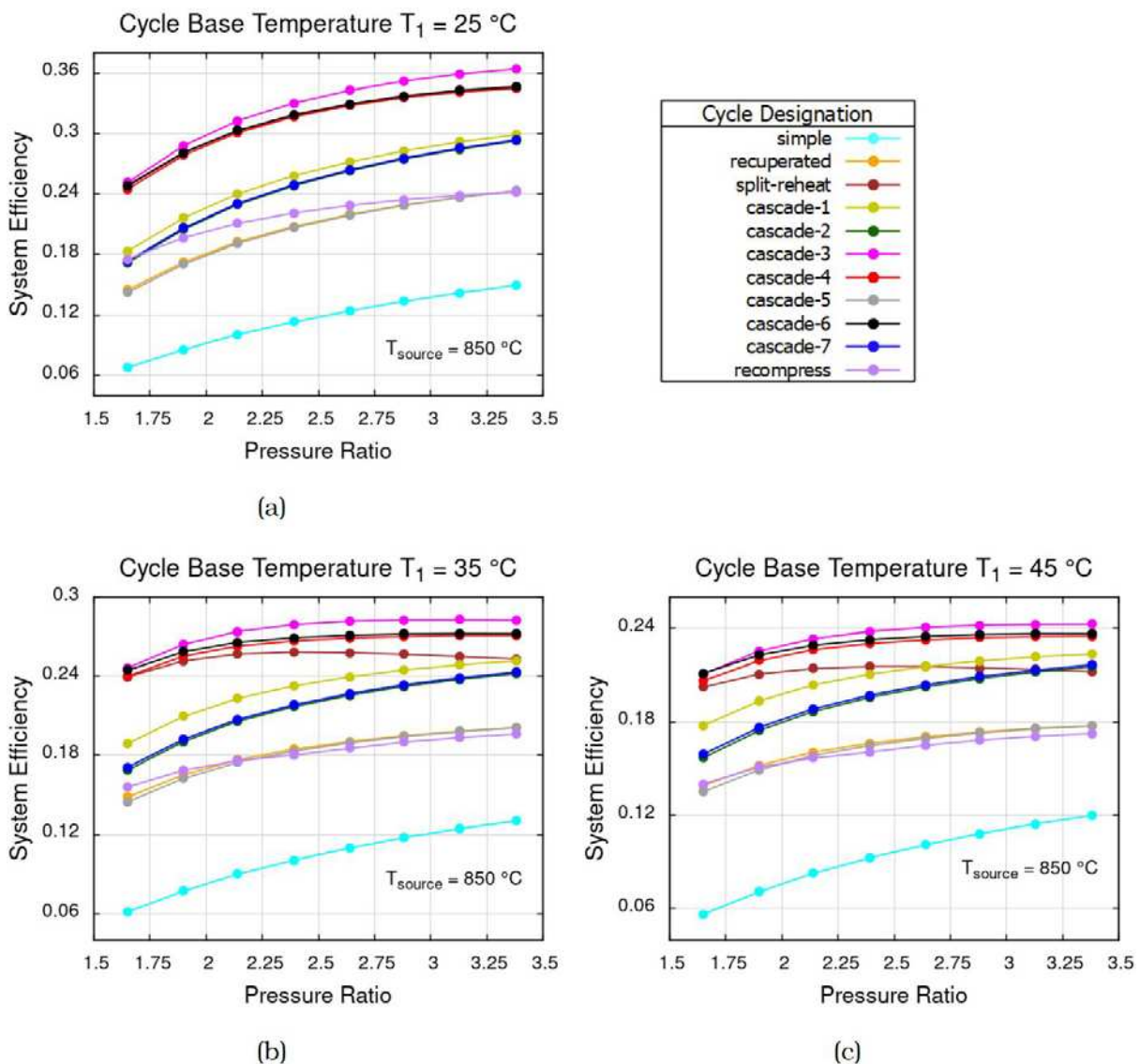


Figure 3: System performance as a function of pressure ratio for the various waste heat recovery cycles evaluated at cycle base temperatures of a) 25, b) 35 and c) 45 °C and base pressure of 74 bar with a heat source temperature of 850 °C

The results displayed in Figure 3 showcase the role of the available heat sink on the effectiveness of waste heat recovery in sCO₂ cycles. The cooling fluid temperature dictates the cycle base temperature through heat transfer across a temperature gradient, modelled in this study as a fixed pinch temperature $\Delta T_{min} = 10$ °C. A significant drop in cycle performance is noted as the base temperature increases from 25 to 45 °C, notably for the cascaded cycles with ~30% reduction in net power output. As the compressor inlet temperature increases, the fluid heat recovery capacity is reduced, together with the ability of flow splitting to reduce the exergy losses in the recuperator sections by achieving better stream matching. This is particularly evident with the split-reheat cycle that no longer outperforms the more complex cascaded cycles that can take advantage of double expansion stages to extract energy from low and high quality streams. The lack of recuperation of the simple cycle configuration causes a less detrimental effect on the performance as the base temperature is elevated.

3 CONCLUSIONS

A number of sCO₂ power cycles were investigated for waste heat recovery applications. These include the simple, recuperated, split-reheat, recompression in addition to several variations of cascaded cycles with distinct flow splitting arrangements. The roles of the heat source and sink availability in the effective cycle energy recovery were reviewed. Increasing the heat source temperature from 450 to 850 °C led to ~30% improvement in performance, while increasing the cycle base temperature from 25 to 45 °C reduced the net output power by ~30%. Detailed analysis of the energy and exergy transfer was conducted to identify the individual cycle characteristics. The cascade-3 cycle was determined to achieve the highest performance across all conditions, while the less complex split-reheat configuration mostly outperformed the rest. The recompression and non-split cascaded cycles offered no performance advantage over the basic recuperated arrangement. However, merely optimizing the cycle for thermodynamic performance is not adequate to determine the suitability of a specific cycle configuration for a given set of requirements. Extending the effort to include an economical component of such optimization is quintessential especially in the current energy market. The authors plan to address this topic in future studies.

262

NOMENCLATURE

h	specific enthalpy	(kJ/kg)
$\dot{L}$	rate of exergy loss	(kW)
$\dot{m}$	mass flowrate	(kg/sec)
P	pressure	(bar)
$\dot{Q}$	heat transfer rate	(kW)
s	specific entropy	(kJ/kg/K)
sCO ₂	supercritical CO ₂	
T	temperature	(°C)
$\dot{W}$	power	(kW)

Greek

η	efficiency
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Schematics Abbreviations

C	compressor
CLR	cooler
HT	heater
HTC	high temperature compressor
HTH	heater high
HTL	heater low
HTT	high temperature turbine
IN	waste heat source inlet

INT	waste heat source internal
LTC	low temperature compressor
LTT	low temperature turbine
OUT	waste heat source outlet
RC	recuperator
RCH	recuperator high
RCL	recuperator low
T	turbine
xH	high temperature stream
xL	low temperature stream

Subscript

0	ambient conditions
cycle	closed cycle attribute
heat	heat recovery attribute
is	isentropic
source	waste heat source
sys	system

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The ORC conference, organized biennially, stems as the only conference that is specific to ORC technology, therefore gathering a diverse community whose affiliation spans across all the interested stakeholders, not only in this particular technology but also and in a broader context, in the energy transition. Original equipment manufacturers, professional associations, end-users, investors, policy makers, academics, scientists feel at home at ORC 2023.

The almost 100 proceedings in this book cover a wide variety of topics, from fundamentals to system integration through component design, accounting for thermodynamic performance as well as component design. In addition to this, and as a new track in 2023, works on heat pump technology were also accepted in order to raise awareness of the strong ties between both technologies, specifically in energy storage applications.

This book provides an excellent overview of the current maturity of power systems based on Organic Rankine Cycle technology for applications as diverse as geothermal and waste heat recovery in industry or downstream of other prime movers (e.g., marine applications). It is also an excellent source of information to understand the current challenges faced by the technology, stemming from a very competitive market and increasingly stringent environmental regulations.

The organizers of ORC 2023 hope that the reader finds this work as exciting as the attendees to the conference and, maybe, make the decision to join the 8th edition to the conference in 2025.