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MODELING AND SIMULATION OF THE PRODUCTION OF HYDROGEN USING HYDROELECTRICITY IN VENEZUELA*

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The purpose of this work is to develop and evaluate a mathematical model for the process of hydrogen production in Venezuela, via electrolysis and using hydroelectricity, with a view to using it as an energy vector in rural sectors of the country. Regression models were prepared to estimate the fluctuation of the main variables involved in the process: the production of hydrogen, the efficiency of energy conversion, the cost of hydroelectricity and the cost of the electrolyser. Finally, the proposed model was applied to various different time-horizons and populations, obtaining the cost of hydrogen production in each case. The results obtained are well below those mentioned in the references, owing largely to the low cost of the electricity used, which accounts for around 45% of the total cost of the system.

Keywords: hydrogen production; electrolysis; hydroelectricity; Venezuela.

МОДЕЛИРОВАНИЕ ПРОЦЕССА ПРОИЗВОДСТВА ВОДОРОДА С ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ ГИДРОЭЛЕКТРИЧЕСТВА В ВЕНЕСУЭЛЕ

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Целью этой работы является разработка и оценка математической модели процесса производства водорода в Венесуэле путем электролиза и с использованием гидроэлектричества, для того чтобы с помощью

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водорода передавать энергию в сельские районы страны. Были подготовлены регрессионные модели для оценки флуктуации основных переменных, участвующих в процессе: получение водорода, эффективность преобразования энергии, стоимость гидроэлектричества и стоимость электролизера. Наконец, предлагаемая модель была применена к разным временным горизонтам и генеральной совокупности, при этом были определены затраты на производство водорода в каждом случае. Полученные значения оказались значительно ниже упомянутых в других работах, в основном в связи с низкой стоимостью используемой электроэнергии, на которую приходится около 45 % общей стоимости системы.

Ключевые слова: производство водорода; электролиз; гидроэлектростанция; Венесуэла.



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1. Introduction

Due to its exceptional properties and versatility, hydrogen is an increasingly strong option for replacing fossil fuels in the long-term [1]. A large number of feasibility studies have been carried out, based on simulation models for the introduction of hydrogen into the energy systems of Europe and Asia [2–5].

In Latin America, R&D programmes on hydrogen energy are scarce, with Brazil the leader in research on H₂ energy production from renewable sources, in particular hydroelectricity [6–8]. Venezuela itself has been, historically, a large-scale producer and exporter of fossil fuels, to the extent that its economy is determined by the behaviour of oil on the world market. In terms of

home consumption, fossil sources and hydropower are the leading suppliers, and in per capita consumption it is the first among the five largest Latin American countries [9], mainly induced by the low consumer prices. However, there is a large sector of the rural population that has no permanent energy supply whatsoever, as it is both difficult and costly to supply them from the traditional energy system. The Venezuelan State has proposed using the country's large potential for alternative energies for this purpose, but has not included hydrogen among the options [10]. In this context, it is particularly important to develop a solar-hydrogen energy system in Venezuela. The introduction of such a system would enable these isolated and underprivileged rural areas to gain autonomy in terms of energy, improving quality of life and stimulating the local



economy because it is labour-intensive, and promoting sustainable development.

Bearing all this in mind, the purpose of our study was to carry out a feasibility study based on the modeling and simulation of the production of hydrogen from hydroelectricity in Venezuela, and for the uses described above. In order to do so, mathematical structures were devised that model the behavior of hydrogen production,

the efficiency of energy conversion, the cost of electricity and the cost of electrolyser, on the basis of historical data, bibliographical references and information provided by manufacturers. The simulation was made according to various different operating conditions, and for a 20-year time horizon, as from the year 2000.

As a basis for energy comparison, we have chosen the higher heating value (HHV) of hydrogen.

Nomenclature	
boe	barrels of oil equivalent
C_{EE}	annual electricity cost, \$ year ⁻¹
C_{EL}	unit cost of electrolysis plant, \$ kW ⁻¹
C_{HE}	annual consumption of hydrogen per inhabitant, N m ³ H ₂ year ⁻¹ inhab. ⁻¹
C_I	annual cost of consumption, \$ year ⁻¹
C_{INV}	annual investment cost, \$ year ⁻¹
C_{OM}	annual cost of operation and maintenance, \$ year ⁻¹
C_T	total electricity consumption, kWh N m ³ H ₂ ⁻¹
C_{TP}	total annual cost of production of hydrogen, \$ year ⁻¹
E_A	electricity consumption: auxiliary equipment, kWh N m ³ H ₂ ⁻¹
E_C	electricity consumption: compression, kWh N m ³ H ₂ ⁻¹
E_E	electrolyser efficiency, kWh N m ³ H ₂ ⁻¹
N_H	number of inhabitants, inhab.
P	electrical power of electrolysis plant, MW
P_H	annual production of hydrogen, N m ³ H ₂ year ⁻¹
t	time, years
T_{EI}	industrial electricity tariff, \$ kWh ⁻¹
Model parameters	
d	annual discount rate (%) = 10
DI	annual availability, h year ⁻¹ = 8328
F_M	handling factor = 1.1
k_0	constant Eq. (2), kWh N m ³ H ₂ ⁻¹ = 9.0160 × 10 ³²
k_1	constant Eq. (2), kWhNm ³ H ₂ ⁻¹ = 3.5100
T	constant Eq. (2), year = 26.2417
n	lifespan, years = 20
OM	rate for O&M (%) = 5
HHV	higher heating value of hydrogen = 12.8 MJ / Nm ³
F	capital recovery factor = 0.1175

2. The Venezuelan energy system

Due to the proposed end-uses of the hydrogen produced, we shall first describe the main aspects of Venezuela's current energy system, in particular as regards residential, urban and rural consumption.

2.1. Primary energy production and reserves

The Venezuelan energy system has been, and remains, governed by fossil fuels. The high rate of production of oil and its derivatives has placed Venezuela among the top ten oilproducing countries in the world. This position is the result of the high volume of proven oil reserves, the duration of which, at the 2002 production rate, has conferred upon Venezuela a privileged world status (Table 1).

Primary energy production and reserves in Venezuela

Table 1

Добыча и запасы источников первичной энергии в Венесуэле

Таблица 1

Source	Production (Mboe)	%	Reserves	Ratio R/P (years)
Oil	1106	72.3	78 Bboe	75
Natural gas	247	16.2	4.19 Tm ³	111
Hydropower	134	8.7	—	—
Coal	43	2.8	1309 Mtm	188

Source: Ref. [11]. Year 2002.

2.2. Potential for alternative energies

Official studies indicate there is great potential (Table 2), equivalent to around three times Venezuela’s average oil production rate for the year 2002, which shows the great possibilities of this kind of energy.

Table 2

Potential for alternative energies in Venezuela

Таблица 2

Потенциал альтернативных источников энергии в Венесуэле

Type of energy	Potential (Mboe)
Mini-hydro	47.5
Bioenergy	124.1
Solar (15% conversion)	1664.4
Eolic (3% conversion)	514.7
Geothermic	54.8
Other alternative energies	193.5
Partial potential	2598.8
Large-scale hydropower	678.9
Total potential	3277.9

Source: Ref. [12]. Year 2002.

2.3. Final residential consumption

Final residential consumption saw an average tendency to rise in the period between 1970–2002 (Fig. 1, continuous line), and in the latter year it represented 11% of total consumption [11]. In terms of the pattern for residential consumption, electricity supply, liquified petroleum gas (LPG) and natural gas made up over 95% of the whole. Gas was mainly used for cooking, as almost 93% of homes use LPG for this purpose [13]. As for electricity, the population supplied by the electrical power system for the year 2004 was 96% of the national total [14].

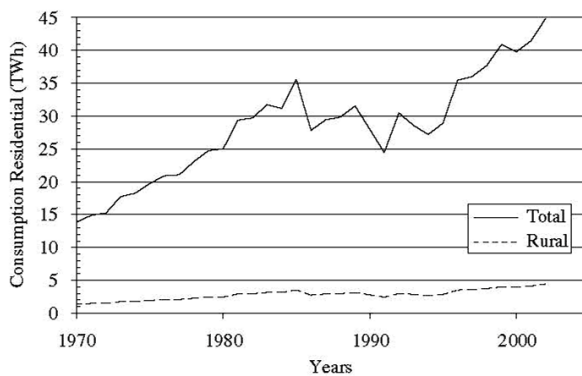


Fig. 1 – Consumption of residential energy. Period 1970–2002
 Рис. 1 – Потребление энергии жилищным сектором (1970–2002 гг.)

If we look at the rural population, its contribution to residential consumption averaged 10% during the same period (Fig. 1, discontinuous line), and the energy consumption per rural inhabitant has been estimated at 191 kWh/year, which is equivalent to 11% of the urban sector. Also, the percentage of the rural population with no kind of permanent energy supply is 27%—828,000 inhabitants—and there is no plan to satisfy this need using the traditional energy system [10].

3. Energy model

This consists of formulating equations on the variation of hydrogen production and the associated consumption of electricity, including the hydrogen purification and compression stages. The hydrogen that is produced will go to satisfy the energy requirements in sectors of the rural population.

3.1. Annual hydrogen production

The annual production of H₂ will be considered directly proportional to the residential energy consumption per rural inhabitant, expressed as equivalent hydrogen (C_{HE}), and to the number of inhabitants to be supplied with energy (N_H), according to a handling factor (F_M)

$$P_H = F_M C_{HE} N_H \quad (1)$$

The heightened level of migration from rural to urban areas in the period between 1950–2001 and the deterioration of socio-economic conditions of the rural population over the last 20 years, have caused their per capita energy consumption to remain almost unchanged [13]. In this context, a constant value for C_{HE} was assumed for time horizon of the simulation.

3.2. Electrical power required for the production and compression of the hydrogen

The electrical power for obtaining and subsequently treating the hydrogen can be supplied by various primary sources. In this case we used hydropower, in order to make good use of Venezuela’s competitive advantages in terms of its great hydropower potential and low electricity costs. As regards the first point, it should be mentioned that hydroelectric power comprises 22% of the total power supplied by alternative energy in Venezuela, and only 19% of this amount is used (Tables 1 and 2). Even if, hypothetically, the hydrogen was used to satisfy the energy requirements of the rural population



who currently have no energy supply, the electricity required would be less than 1% of usable power. These figures confirm that hydroelectricity is viable as a primary source for hydrogen production in Venezuela. As for cost, because no official data is available on the real cost of producing hydroelectricity in Venezuela, for our financial study we used the prices paid by consumers for electricity in that country, which are among the lowest in South America [15].

3.2.1. Electrolyser

The electrical consumption of the electrolyser is considered to be the factor most likely to require technological improvement and, at this time, active research it being made into improving the design parameters related to the voltage and size of the electrolytic cell, the current density and the temperature of the process, amongst others. The consumption of electricity per volume unit of hydrogen produced, has been called energy efficiency, or E_E . The information used for constructing a mathematical model to represent its present and future behaviour, came from references in literature and information from manufacturers [16–18]. On the basis of this information, and bearing in mind the theoretical value of the energy conversion of hydrogen, HHV, a structure has been proposed (2), that has provided a fairly satisfactory result (Fig. 2)

$$E_E = k_0 e^{-t/T} + k_1. \tag{2}$$

3.2.2. Auxiliary equipment, treatment and compression of the gases

The electricity consumption for this equipment varies depending on the size of the electrolysis system. On average, each one represents 12% of the electrolyser consumption [18, 19]

$$E_A + E_C = 0.24E_E \tag{3}$$

and the total consumption of electricity is

$$C_T = E_E + E_A + E_C = 1.24E_E. \tag{4}$$

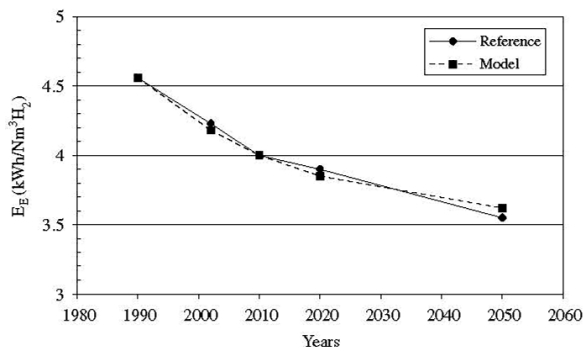


Fig. 2 – Energy efficiency
Рис. 2 – Энергоэффективность

4. Total cost model

The preparation of a total cost model for the production and use of hydrogen for energy purposes in Venezuela, involves preparing and then interconnecting the partial models for each of the stages examined: production, storage and transport, distribution and end-uses. This procedure, as well as following the logical sequence for the physical process, provides an analysis of the results. In this case, the cost model for the production stage will be developed.

5. Production cost model

In general, the cost models for the production of hydrogen follow the same structure, which consists of dividing costs into energy and non-energy, only differing in the details. For this purpose, several models have been proposed in [6,20,21] that share various equations, each of which deal with a specific aspect of the cost structure. On the basis of this, in our model, three cost modules were established: (1) Consumption, (2) Investment and (3) Operation and maintenance. Fitting these modules together provided us with the production cost model.

5.1. Consumption cost module

5.1.1. Cost of electricity

The equation used to estimate this cost includes: (a) the total consumption of electricity (Eq. (4)); (b) the production of hydrogen (Eq. (1)); and (c) the industrial electrical tariff, whose variation is satisfactorily modelled in a line graph (Fig. 3, Eq. (5))

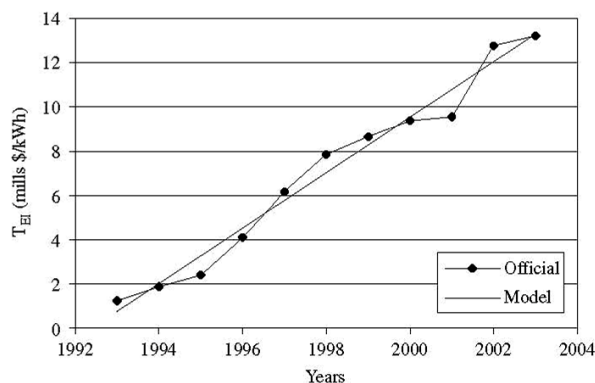


Fig. 3 – Industrial electricity tariff
Рис. 3 – Промышленный тариф на электроэнергию

$$T_{EI} = 1.2535t - 0.4985, R_2 = 0.9761. \tag{5}$$

The cost of electricity for the production of electrolytic hydrogen is

$$C_{EE} = P_H C_T T_{EI}. \tag{6}$$

5.1.2. Cost of water

The water consumption for hydrogen production, including cooling, averages $1/1/N \text{ m}^3 \text{ H}_2$ [17]. The low tariff for this consumption in Venezuela—around



10–4 \$/l—and the estimated volume of H₂ to be produced, enable the effect of this cost to be ignored, so that

$$C_I = C_{EE}. \tag{7}$$

5.2. Investment cost module

This is represented by the cost of the electrolyser, which varies considerably according to the size of the plant and vice versa, due to economy of scale. The mathematical model for this variation was prepared on the basis of the data supplied by [8, 21–23]. The mathematical expression of this is

$$C_{EL} = 1499.74P^{-0.2167}, R^2 = 0.987. \tag{8}$$

In which the power of the plant is obtained from

$$P = P_H C_T / DI. \tag{9}$$

The cost of installing the electrolyser

$$C_{IE} = C_{EL} P \tag{10}$$

with the capital recovery factor

$$F = \frac{d(1+d)^n}{1+d^n-1} \tag{11}$$

and the investment cost

$$C_{INV} = FC_{IE}. \tag{12}$$

5.3. Operating and maintenance costs module

This is simply assumed as a percentage of investment costs. In this case, we also use the average of the values reported in the references we consulted [6,8,17,23,24]

$$C_{OM} = OMC_{INV}. \tag{13}$$

5.4. General equation for the production cost model

The total cost of production would therefore be shown by

$$C_{TP} = \frac{C_I + C_{INV} + C_{OM}}{P_H}. \tag{14}$$

6. Applying the model in Venezuela

The above model will be applied in Venezuela in the following cases:

1. A rural village: Quebrada Seca (866 inhabitants).
2. The parish in which the village of Quebrada Seca is located: Parroquia San Félix. (1254 inhabitants).
3. The municipal district in which Parroquia San Félix is located: Municipio Cedeño (4851 inhabitants).

Geographically, all the above are located in Monagas state, Cedeco Municipal District, in the east of the country. Case 1 is an entire rural village with no energy supply whatsoever, whereas in cases 2 and 3, the rural population with no energy supply is found by applying the percentage calculated by [10]. The simulation will be in place for a time horizon of up to 20 years as from 2000.

7. Results and analysis

Table 1 shows the costs per module and the total cost of production for all the study cases, for the year 2005. It can be seen that the value of C_{TP} diminishes as the population supplied with it increases, as a result of economy of scale (Table 3).

If we compare the values of C_{TP} with those given in references for similar values of hydrogen production, it can be seen that the values found in the Venezuelan case are much smaller, even for cases in which far larger production is involved, and therefore with a greater impact of economy of scale, Table 4. These results are strongly influenced by the low electricity tariffs in Venezuela.

The evolution of C_{TP} in the period studied shows a sustained increase in all cases (Fig. 4).

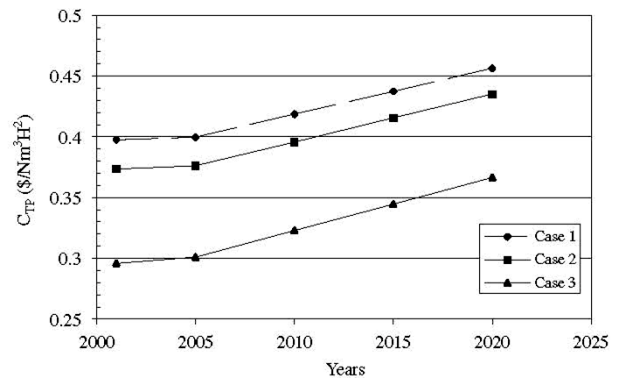


Fig. 4 – Evolution of production costs
Рис. 4 – Динамика производственных затрат

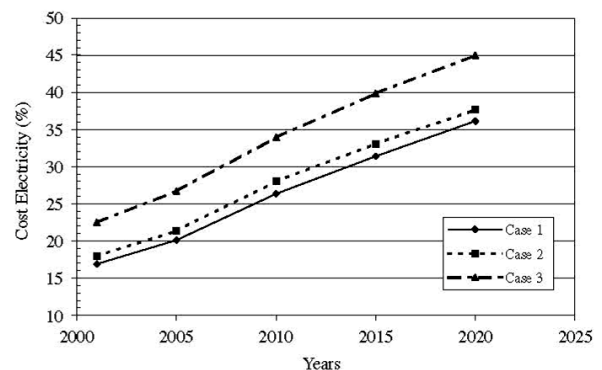


Fig. 5 – Contribution of electrical power to the production costs. Period 2002–2020
Рис. 5 – Вклад электроэнергии в себестоимость (2002–2020 гг.)



The increase in costs, in particular in C_{EE} , predominates over the increase in PH, particularly after 2010, as shown by the change in the slope of the curve. This behaviour can be explained because, as from that year, the improvement in efficiency (Fig. 2), is not as acute and, therefore, nor is its effect on costs. It should also be noted that the degree of progress of C_{TP} is less as the population increases, due to the effect of economy of scale.

As for electrical power, its contribution in percentage to the total cost increases throughout the study period (Fig. 5), at the expense of investment costs and due mainly to the nonlinear nature of the electrical energy cost model (Eq. (6)).

It should also be noted that, for the same year, the contribution in percentage increases with the increase in population.

Costs of production of hydrogen

Table 3

Стоимость производства водорода

Таблица 3

Considered case	C_{EE}	C_{INV}	C_{OM}	$P_H (Nm^3 H_2/y)$	C_{TP}
Case 1	4486	12,504	5321	55,814	0.3997
Case 2	6365	16,435	6993	79,194	0.3762
Case 3	24,168	47,421	20,179	306,285	0.3011

Year 2005.

Comparison of costs with bibliographic results

Table 4

Сравнение стоимости с литературными данными

Таблица 4

	$P_H (N m^3 H_2/y)$	$C_{TP} (\$/N m^3 H_2)$
Model proposed (Case 2, 2005)	79,000	0.3762
[17]	78,000	1.7010
[25]	11,580	0.6385
[23]	34,000,000	0.3674
[8]	59,000,000	0.9200

8. Conclusions

References

A non-linear mathematical model has been prepared to show the costs of the production of hydrogen via electrolysis, using hydroelectricity in Venezuela. The model is comprised of several modules which each deal with one of the components of the total production cost: consumption, investment, and operation and maintenance. The mathematical equations used for each of these modules were obtained from historical data, manufacturers' information and references. The production cost model was applied to different rural Venezuelan villages that had no permanent energy supply. For the cases analysed, the total cost of the production of hydrogen was much lower than those reported in the references we consulted for similar production levels and even for others with more favourable conditions in terms of economy of scale. The percentage of cost for electricity was between 17% and 45%, depending on the year and the population involved. Finally, it may be concluded that the production of electrolytic hydrogen from hydroelectricity is, in comparative terms, highly advantageous in the case of Venezuela.

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