



# Charge-sensitive modelling of organic Rankine cycle power systems for off-design performance simulation

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- True off-design models must be charge-sensitive to be fully deterministic.
- To account for the charge helps to identify the heat exchangers coefficients.
- Hugmark's void fraction model shows the best results to simulate two-phase flows.
- The presence of a liquid receiver arises numerical issues to model ORC systems.
- The charge-sensitive model is validated with experimental data.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Organic Rankine cycle  
Modelling  
Off-design  
Charge-sensitive  
Void fraction

## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a charge-sensitive model to characterize the off-design performance of low-capacity organic Rankine cycle (ORC) power systems. The goal is to develop a reliable steady-state model that only uses the system boundary conditions (i.e. the supply heat source/heat sink conditions, the mechanical components rotational speeds, the ambient temperature and the total charge of working fluid) in order to predict the ORC performance. To this end, sub-models are developed to simulate each component and they are assembled to model the entire closed-loop system. A dedicated solver architecture is proposed to ensure high-robustness for charge-sensitive simulations.

This work emphasizes the complexity of the heat exchangers modelling. It demonstrates how state-of-the-art correlations may be used to identify the convective heat transfer coefficients and how the modelling of the charge helps to assess their reliability. In order to compute the fluid density in two-phase conditions, five different void fraction models are investigated. A 2 kWe unit is used as case study and the charge-sensitive ORC model is validated by comparison to experimental measurements. Using this ORC model, the mean percent errors related to the thermal power predictions in the heat exchangers are lower than 2%. Regarding the mechanical powers in the pump/expander and the net thermal efficiency of the system, these errors are lower than 11.5% and 11.6%, respectively.

## 1. Introduction

Among the fields of research and development in the energy sector, power generation from low-grade heat sources is gaining interest because of its enormous worldwide potential [1]. For low-temperature (i.e. below 200 °C) or low-capacity applications (typically lower than 2 MWe), the use of conventional steam power plants is neither technically nor economically beneficial [2]. However, by substituting water with an organic compound as working fluid (WF), it is possible to efficiently convert low-grade heat into mechanical power by means of a closed-loop Rankine cycle. In such a case, the terminology *organic*

*Rankine cycle* (ORC) is used to name the system [3]. A common aspect of most ORC power systems is the versatile nature of their operating conditions. Either for combined heat and power, waste heat recovery, geothermal or solar thermal applications, the heat source and the heat sink conditions often vary in time, which forces the ORC system to adapt its working regime for performance or safety reasons. Consequently, once sized and built, an ORC system often operates in conditions differing from its nominal design point.

The study of ORC systems in off-design conditions is not a new topic and numerous papers can be found in the scientific literature. Over the past years, both steady-state and dynamic models have been developed

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2018.01.004>

Received 26 September 2017; Received in revised form 22 December 2017; Accepted 2 January 2018  
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Nomenclature		Variables	
<i>Acronyms</i>		$\alpha$	void fraction (–)
BPHEX	Brazed Plate Heat Exchanger	$\beta$	weighing factor (–)
CD	Condenser	$\Delta$	difference (–)
EV	Evaporator	$\dot{m}$	mass flow (kg/s)
EXP	Expander	$\dot{Q}$	heat power (W)
FCHEX	Fin Coil Heat Exchanger	$\dot{V}$	volume flow (m <sup>3</sup> /s)
HEX	Heat Exchanger	$\dot{W}$	power (W)
HP	High Pressure	$\eta$	efficiency (%)
HTF	Heat Transfer Fluid	$\mu$	viscosity (kg/(s·m))
LP	Low Pressure	$\omega$	spatial fraction of a zone (–)
LR	Liquid Receiver	$\rho$	density (kg/m <sup>3</sup> )
MAPE	Mean Absolute Percent Error	$\theta$	chevron angle (rad)
NRMSE	Normalized Root Mean Square Error	$A$	surface (m <sup>2</sup> )
PP	Pump	$B$	parameter (–)
REC	Recuperator	$Bd$	bond number (–)
WF	Working Fluid	$Bo$	boiling number (–)
<i>Subscripts</i>			correction factor (–)
amb	ambient	$D_h$	hydraulic diameter (m)
c	cold	$G$	mass flux (kg/(s·m <sup>2</sup> ))
cs	cross-section	$H$	convective heat transfer coefficient (W/(m <sup>2</sup> ·K))
ex	exhaust	$h$	enthalpy (J/kg)
exp	experimental	$it$	iteration variable (–)
h	hot	$j$	colburn factor (–)
i, j, k	index	$K$	parameter (–)
l	saturated liquid	$k$	conductivity (W/(m·K))
lam	laminar	$L/l$	length (m)
lk	leakage	$M$	mass (kg)
log	logarithmic	$m$	Reynolds exponent (–)
max	maximum	$MM$	molecular weight (–)
mec	mechanical	$Nu$	Nusselt number (–)
min	minimum	$P$	pressure (Pa, bar)
sc	subcooling	$Pr$	Prandtl number (–)
sim	simulation	$Re$	Reynolds number (–)
sp	single-phase	$res$	residuals (–)
su	supply	$rv$	volume-ratio (–)
tot	total	$S$	slip ratio (–)
tp	two-phase	$T$	temperature (K/°C)
turb	turbulent	$U$	global heat transfer coefficient (W/(m <sup>2</sup> ·K))
v	saturated vapour	$u$	fluid velocity (m/s)
		$V$	volume (m <sup>3</sup> )
		$We$	Weber number (–)
		$x$	quality (–)

to simulate ORC units under various operations. To illustrate the current state-of-the-art, a non-exhaustive list of thirteen works is presented in Table 1. As highlighted in the last column, almost all the existing models rely on user-defined assumptions in the ORC state, e.g. an imposed fluid subcooling, superheating or condensing pressure. Such hypotheses make the off-design models not fully deterministic and can mislead the performance predictions. For instance, to assume a constant fluid subcooling in the ORC makes the simulations blind to important phenomena susceptible to occur in off-design operations, like the cavitation of the pump or the complete flooding of the liquid receiver. In practice, the state in an ORC system is unequivocally defined by its boundary conditions. All the pressures, temperatures and energy transfers *inside* the ORC unit are dictated by (i) the heat sink and the heat source supply conditions, (ii) the pump/expander rotational speeds, (iii) the ambient temperature, (iv) the components geometry and, finally, (v) the total mass of working fluid enclosed in the system. A true off-design model should account for this univocal relationship. In order to make the simulations free of such assumptions, the ORC model must implement both the energy *and* the mass balances in the system.

Besides the energy transfers, the model must account for the total charge of fluid in the system and simulate its repartition through the components in function of the operating conditions. Such a model is known as *charge-sensitive*.

Charge-sensitive models are well known for refrigeration systems for which they have been extensively used for both design and performance analyses (e.g. see [18–21]). However, their use for ORC power systems is much less common. For steady-state simulations, a thorough search of the literature yielded only two articles dedicated to ORC charge-sensitive modelling. A first paper was proposed by Ziviani et al. [16] which described an ORC model developed in Python. The model could either use a specified subcooling or account for the total charge of working fluid. A simplified method to simulate the liquid receiver was introduced. Heat transfer coefficients in the various components were calculated with state-of-the-art correlations and Zivi's void fraction model characterized the two-phase flows. The overall cycle model was validated against two experimental setups featuring different cycle architectures. When the charge of fluid was specified as input, the overall cycle efficiency was estimated within a maximum

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