

## Supercapacitors: Properties and applications

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Supercapacitor  
Energy  
Storage  
Pseudo-supercapacitor  
Hybrid-supercapacitor  
Lithium

### ABSTRACT

Energy accumulation and storage is one of the most important topics in our times. This paper presents the topic of supercapacitors (SC) as energy storage devices. Supercapacitors represent the alternative to common electrochemical batteries, mainly to widely spread lithium-ion batteries. By physical mechanism and operation principle, supercapacitors are closer to batteries than to capacitors. Their properties are somewhere between batteries and capacitors. They are able to quickly accommodate large amounts of energy (smaller than in the case of batteries – lower energy density from weight and volume point of view) and their charging response is slower than in the case of ceramic capacitors. The most common type of supercapacitors is electrical double layer capacitor (EDLC). Other types of supercapacitors are lithium-ion hybrid supercapacitors and pseudo-supercapacitors. The EDLC type is using a dielectric layer on the electrode – electrolyte interphase to storage of the energy. It uses an electrostatic mechanism of energy storage. The other two types of supercapacitors operate with electrochemical redox reactions and the energy is stored in chemical bonds of chemical materials. This paper provides a brief introduction to the supercapacitor field of knowledge.

### 1. Introduction

Limited sources of fossil fuels along with growing population and technology development put the mankind in front of an energy problem. Increasing pollution forces us to think about energy and the approach to energy management. There are two main types of energy sources, fully controllable power plants (nuclear power stations, incineration plants, fossil fuels, biomass, geothermal) and renewable energy sources, which are non-dispatchable (wind and solar energy).

The world human population cannot use only renewable energy sources, at least in the near future. The share of renewable energy among other types of energy sources in 2015 is shown in Fig. 1. In the ideal case, renewable energy should cover 100% of world energy consumption, but it is only a theoretical idea that is not possible to be achieved. We should however increase the proportion of renewable energy sources in the world energy production as fast as possible.

Energy from renewable energy sources needs to be (due to its non-dispatchability) stored and used when needed. Energy storage and accumulation is the key part of renewable energy sources utilization. Use of batteries or special hydropower plants is the only way how can we today store the energy from renewable energy sources. There are other experimental alternatives – storing energy in superconducting magnetic energy storage systems (SMES), which store it in a magnetic field created by the flow of current in a superconducting coil that has been cryogenically cooled to a temperature below its superconducting

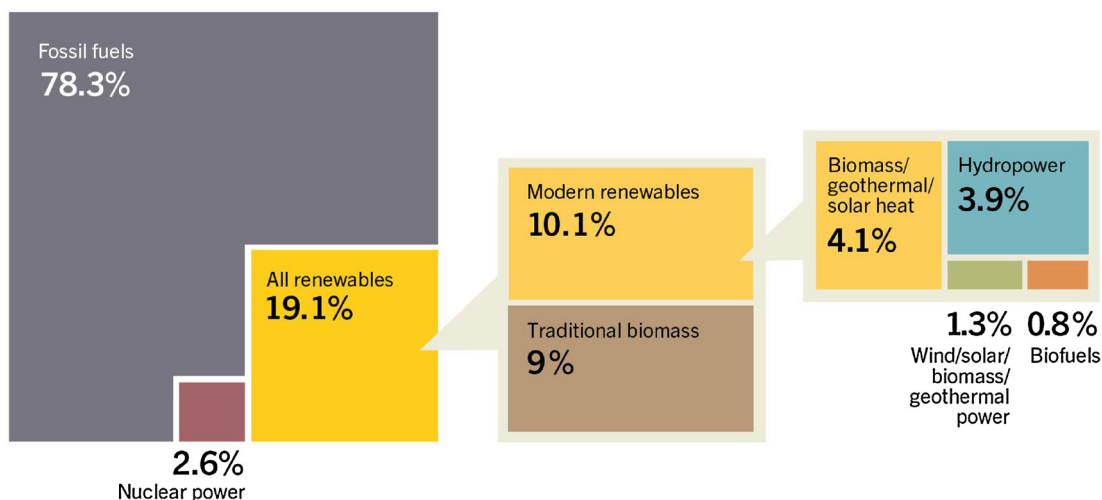
critical temperature. There are also other energy storage systems still in the phase of basic research, so they cannot be considered as regular energy storage systems. Another important step to decreasing pollution and keeping sustainable development of population is reducing emissions produced by combustion engine vehicles and replacing them with electric vehicles. Autonomy electric vehicles, which do not have connection to the electrical grid, also need to store electric energy in batteries. Using batteries, especially lithium-ion batteries, is a widely discussed and technologically developed topic.

Supercapacitors could be considered as an alternative to conventional batteries for electric vehicles. This paper is related to supercapacitors, it provides their brief description, operation principles, types and recent development.

Electrochemical capacitors, also named supercapacitors or ultracapacitors, are electrical components that are able to store and accommodate certain amounts of energy. The development of supercapacitors started in the 50 s of the 20th century. First experiments started between 50 s and 70 s and were conducted by US companies General Electric (GE) and Standard Oil of Ohio (SOHIO). These first electrochemical supercapacitors reached the capacity around 1F. This type of supercapacitors was patented in 1971 by SOHIO. The first supercapacitor named “Gold Cap” was released to the commercial market in 1982 by Panasonic and had high equivalent series resistance (ESR). In 1982, first electric double-layer capacitor (EDLC) supercapacitor was developed for military purposes by the Pinnacle Research Institute

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REN21 *Renewables 2015 Global Status Report*



Fig. 1. Estimated renewable energy share of global final energy consumption [1].

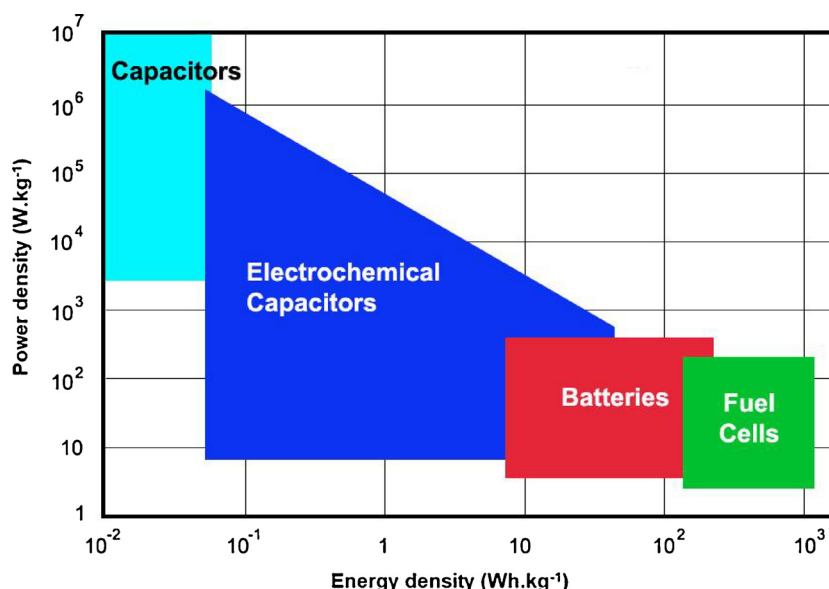


Fig. 2. Ragone chart: Power density as a function of energy density for various energy devices [2].

(PRI). This first EDLC supercapacitor already had a low ESR. After ten years, in 1992, Maxwell Laboratories introduced to the commercial market a wide range of EDLC supercapacitors with low ESR named “BoostCap” with nominal capacity of 1 kF. Since 2007, the development of novel hybrid-supercapacitors took place. This kind of supercapacitors should reach higher nominal voltage along with higher volumetric and gravimetric energy density than conventional EDLC supercapacitors. Most of today’s supercapacitors have capacity over several thousands Farads and can provide charge-discharge currents in the range from tenths to hundredths of Amperes. Their main advantage from the application point of view is extremely high current (in comparison to batteries) that they are able to operate with. Thanks to this characteristic property, supercapacitors fill the void gap among energy storage devices between batteries (accumulators) and common capacitors (see Fig. 2 below).

Supercapacitors are used in applications, where is the need to store or release huge amount of energy in a very short time. Nowadays, the supercapacitors are used primarily in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (HEV), Electric Vehicles (EV) and Fuel Cell Vehicles (FCV) like passenger cars,

trains, trolleybuses. Another area of supercapacitors’ use are electronic devices as Uninterruptible Power Supplies (UPS) and volatile memory backups in PCs. Third area of use are energy harvesting systems, solar arrays or wind turbines, where supercapacitors play a supplementary role next to conventional batteries [1–14].

Especially the application of supercapacitors in automotive industry brings many advantages. Supercapacitors can be used to increase the efficiency of hybrid electric vehicles in several ways. Today’s hybrid vehicles typically turn off the engine completely when the car stops, and then very efficiently start it again using energy stored in supercapacitors. There are over 600 thousands HEVs that use supercapacitors in their stop-start systems. Some supercapacitor manufacturers designed replacements for conventional vehicle batteries using supercapacitors connected across a smaller lead acid battery. The concept of their application is in the moments when the power demand peaks, such as starting a car, and they decrease the overall energy consumption from the batteries. Batteries last much longer when the discharge is small and steady. Supercapacitors in this “hybrid lead-acid battery” configuration essentially smooth out the energy demands on the

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