

1       **Development of bioelectrochemical systems using various biogas fermenter**  
2       **effluents as inocula and municipal waste liquor as adapting substrate**

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21

22 **Abstract**

23 The purpose of this research was to improve microbial fuel cell (MFC)  
24 performance – treating landfill-derived waste liquor – by applying effluents of  
25 various biogas fermenters as inocula. It turned out that the differences of initial  
26 microbial community profiles notably influenced the efficiency of MFCs. In fact,  
27 the adaptation time (during 3 weeks of operation) has varied significantly,  
28 depending on the source of inoculum and accordingly, the obtainable cumulative  
29 energy yields were also greatly affected (65% enhancement in case of municipal  
30 wastewater sludge inoculum compared to sugar factory waste sludge inoculum).  
31 Hence, it could be concluded that the capacity of MFCs to utilize the complex  
32 feedstock was heavily dependent on biological factors such as the origin/history  
33 of inoculum, the microbial composition as well as proper acclimation period.  
34 Therefore, these parameters should be of primary concerns for adequate  
35 process design to efficiently generate electricity with microbial fuel cells.

36

37 **Keywords:** microbial fuel cell; inoculum role; municipal waste treatment; energy  
38 recovery; microbial community analysis

39

## 40 1. Introduction

41

42 Microbial fuel cells (MFC) are emerging applications in the field of  
43 bioelectrochemical systems (BES), which is attributed to the offered potential of  
44 achieving energy recovery from the environmental-friendly remediation of organic  
45 waste materials (Dahiya et al., 2018). Nonetheless, to realize adequate  
46 efficiency, BES such as MFCs should undergo a careful design to be concerned  
47 with a number of non-biological and biological and factors affecting their  
48 performance (Kumar et al., 2017; Santoro et al., 2017). Among the former ones,  
49 the properties of materials and constructing elements i.e. electrodes, membranes  
50 and their arrangement (often referred as architecture) can be of importance  
51 (Rahimnejad et al., 2015; Sleutels et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2011). In the latter  
52 group of variables, actual MFC behavior is substantially determined by the  
53 characteristics of active biocatalysts, called exoelectrogenic, anode-respiring  
54 bacteria (Kumar et al., 2015). These microbes release electrons from substrate  
55 conversion, which, to be able to harvest electricity, have to be successfully  
56 conveyed to the anode as terminal electron acceptor under anoxic conditions.

57 From practical point of view, the MFC power output and obtainable  
58 treatment efficiency of pollutants are two important parameters and are heavily  
59 dependent on the underlying community of electroactive-microbes. Hence, an  
60 enriched and better adapted population of these bacteria can be a key to improve  
61 the process and help its cost-effective expansion to larger-scales. These  
62 electroactive-bacteria are found in a wide range of seed sources such as  
63 wastewater, soil, marine sediment, compost, etc. (Chabert et al., 2015; Miceli et  
64 al., 2012)

65 For a process taking into account practicality, mixed communities ought to  
66 be used as inoculum because of reasons such as their metabolic flexibility and  
67 better robustness to withstand fluctuations in operating circumstances (i.e.

68 process disturbances) relative to pure isolates matching more the demand of  
69 fundamental studies ([Hasany et al., 2016](#); [Jung and Regan, 2007](#)). However, in  
70 case of versatile bacterial consortia applied for MFC inoculation, considerable  
71 variations of efficiency can be expected. This may be ascribed to particular  
72 differences in the history of the inoculum (i.e. features of its origin) and its  
73 population diversity. Consequently, the proper enrichment and adaptation of  
74 microbial communities to given operating circumstances can be a requirement to  
75 establish a sufficient BES ([Kim et al., 2005](#); [Liu et al., 2011](#); [Park et al., 2017](#))  
76 and furthermore, the utilization of feedstock (based on its type and complexity)  
77 could be notably influenced by the above-said inoculum traits ([Park et al., 2017](#)).

78 To ensure appropriate start-up of BESs and promote electro-active biofilm  
79 formation on the electrode surface, several strategies can be carried out, for  
80 example the application of a given fixed anode potential or the addition of an  
81 alternative electron acceptor ([Liu et al., 2011](#)). However, more commonly, the  
82 acclimation can be properly improved by feeding various adapting substrates  
83 (among which acetate is the widely-used, or by using pre-enriched effluent of an  
84 electrochemical reactor as inocula ([Kumar et al., 2017](#)).

85 Actually, as stated by [Ieropoulos et al. \(2010\)](#), a robust community of  
86 microorganisms is a solid requirement for MFC involved in wastewater  
87 management, which seems coincide with the findings of [Mathuriya \(2013\)](#),  
88 observing the enhancement of MFC performance by adapted (vs. non-adapted)  
89 inoculum selection for harnessing electricity from tannery wastewater. In this  
90 aspect, it should be achieved as a result of dynamic, competition mechanism  
91 between electro-active and non-electro-active bacteria that the former ones grow  
92 faster, more in numbers and dominate the consortium ([Liu et al., 2017b](#); [Xiang et  
93 al., 2017](#)). Hence, screening of seed sources and appropriate choice for a  
94 specific substrate might be a beneficial strategy and can be worthy for research.

95           So far, previous articles applying bioelectrochemical systems have dealt  
96 with the degradation of municipal waste streams, in particular a liquid fraction  
97 acquired from municipal solid waste by mechanical pressing, referred as liquid  
98 pressed waste (LPW). For instance, [Rózsenberszki et al. \(2015\)](#), [Koók et al.](#)  
99 [\(2016\)](#) and [Zhen et al. \(2016\)](#) tested this substrate in single-stage anaerobic  
100 degradation processes involving MFC and microbial electrohydrogenesis cells  
101 (MEC). Later on, cascade systems with MFCs attached have been investigated  
102 as well ([Rózsenberszki et al., 2017](#)). From these research works, it has turned  
103 out that several factors i.e. the type of system as well as the operating parameter  
104 settings could play a significant role to attain enhanced performance. However,  
105 the effect that inoculum properties can have on actual, LPW-fed MFC  
106 performance has not been systematically studied so far.

107           Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to elaborate the effect of  
108 sludge inocula (having different history/background) on the start-up and  
109 acclimation of MFCs fed with LPW as substrate. The MFCs were started-up with  
110 seed sources of two distinguishable origins:

111           - In one case, the effluent of anaerobic digester built to a municipal waste  
112 water treatment plant was used

113           - In the other case, the effluent of biogas plant processing sugar  
114 manufacturing waste was applied.

115           The systems were evaluated for more than three weeks with various loads  
116 of LPW based on cell voltages and energy yields and moreover,

117           - The development of bioelectrochemical system was assessed by  
118 undertaking microbial community analysis to follow population shifts taking place  
119 in the MFCs with time. This is useful approach to get a better understanding of  
120 the process and establish correlations between MFC power output, obtainable

121 treatment efficiency of pollutants and community structure dynamics (Liu et al.,  
122 2017a; Zhi et al., 2014).

123 These points make this work distinguishable from those we have  
124 performed in previous studies and in our opinion, the present investigation can  
125 have a novel contribution in the sequence of existing literature studies.

126

## 127 **2. Materials and Methods**

### 128 **2.1. Inoculum (seed) sources and substrate for MFCs**

129

130 In this work, two different sludges were used as seed source to inoculate  
131 MFCs. The first one, referred as MWW-S, had been collected from an anaerobic  
132 digester treating the secondary sludge of municipal waste water treatment plant  
133 located in a Hungarian countryside city and had the following initial  
134 characteristics: pH: 7.8; COD content: 13 g L<sup>-1</sup>. The second one, denoted by  
135 SFW-S, had been taken from the biogas fermenter of Hungarian sugar factory  
136 utilizing the processed, solid residue i.e. beet pulp, which is a typical by-product  
137 of this manufacturing technology. SFW-S was characterized as follows: pH: 7.8;  
138 COD content: 12 g L<sup>-1</sup>.

139 An obvious difference occurs in the history of MWW-S and SFW-S, which  
140 is the nature of feedstock. In the former case, the sludge (before collection) was  
141 continuously processing a diverse mixture of components present in the  
142 municipal wastewater. In the latter case, however, the mixed community was  
143 routinely fed with a monosubstrate-like organic matter (beet pulp) over a long  
144 time. Hence, it was presumed that MWW-S could have a faster/greater  
145 adaptation capability to complex LPW than SFW-S, which had not been applied  
146 to the treatment of such raw materials before.

147 Prior to use in MFCs, the anaerobic sludges were sieved by 1 mm mesh to  
148 get rid of larger particles. To characterize and compare these inocula sources

149 from a microbiological point of view, initial population structures of both were  
150 examined as detailed later on in the Results and Discussion section.

151 As for the substrate, high organic-strength municipal liquid pressed waste  
152 (abbreviated as LPW) was applied to feed and adapt the mixed culture MFCs.  
153 The technology to produce raw LPW was detailed in our previous publication  
154 ([Rózsenszki et al., 2015](#)) and in brief, it includes consecutive shredding, metal  
155 separation and trommeling, leading to a so-called biofraction of municipal solid  
156 waste, from which LPW is obtained by mechanical pressing. Prior to use, in this  
157 study, LPW was pre-filtered through 0.22  $\mu\text{m}$  pore size membrane discs  
158 (Sartorius Stedim Biotech GmbH, Germany) in order to remove its natural  
159 microflora and hence, avoid possible cross-effects and interactions with microbial  
160 communities in the inoculum.

161

## 162 **2.2. Microbial fuel cell set-up**

163

164 In this study, batch experiments (at 35 °C) were carried out in cylindrical  
165 two-chambered MFCs applying Nafion N115 proton exchange membrane  
166 (Sigma-Aldrich, USA) with diameter of 4.5 cm to separate the (anaerobic) anode  
167 and (continuously aerated) cathode chambers (each having 60 mL total volume).  
168 Before use, the membrane underwent an activation treatment as referenced in  
169 our previous papers ([Koók et al., 2017ab](#)). Carbon fibers with 36  $\text{cm}^2$  surface  
170 area (serving as anodes to be colonized by exoelectrogenic strains during biofilm  
171 formation) were fixed on a central Ti wire (current collector; Sigma – Aldrich,  
172 USA). As for the cathode material, Pt-coated carbon cloth (with 12.5  $\text{cm}^2$   
173 apparent surface area) (Cloth GDE - 0.3  $\text{mg cm}^{-2}$  Pt/C 40 %, FuelCellsEtc) was  
174 employed and connected to the external electric circuit by Ti wire. For inoculation  
175 of anode, 10 mL of either SFW-S or MWW-S was added to 45 mL phosphate  
176 buffer (pH = 7; 50 mM). At the same time, 55 mL of KCl solution (pH = 7; 0.1 M)  
177 was loaded to the cathode compartment. To feed the MFCs, LPW as substrate

178 was injected in various quantities for successive cycles (**Fig. 1A**). Before LPW  
179 additions, equal volumes of spent anolyte (1, 2 or 4 mL) were drawn. Control  
180 MFCs without LPW supplementation were run to be able to take into account the  
181 electricity generation that originates from the degradation of residual organic  
182 matter contained in the sludge inocula.

183

### 184 **2.3. Electrochemical assessment**

185

186 To follow electricity generation of MFCs in operation, cell voltage (the  
187 actual potential between the anode and cathode electrodes) (**Fig. 1A**) was  
188 measured via a 150  $\Omega$  external resistor. The reactors were running in duplicate  
189 and results presented thoroughly are derived as arithmetic averages of those.  
190 According to Ohm's law and based on the (closed-circuit) voltage profiles  
191 recorded (**Fig. 1A**), current data and consequently, electrical power ( $P$ ) were  
192 computed. Thereafter, by integrating the time ( $t$ ) dependent power curve,  
193 cumulative energy yield ( $E$ ) was calculated (Eq. 1) and is presented in **Fig. 1B**.

194

$$195 \quad E = \int_0^{\tau} P(t)dt \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

196

197 where  $\tau$  is the operation time (h) for a given batch feeding cycle.

198

### 199 **2.4. Microbial structure assessment – DNA extraction, PCR** 200 **amplification, sequencing and bioinformatics analysis**

201

202 Bacterial DNA was extracted from 15 mg matrix per sample using the  
203 AquaGenomic Kit (MoBiTec) and further purified using KAPA PureBeads  
204 (Roche) according to the manufacturer's protocols. The concentration of genomic  
205 DNA was measured using a Qubit 3.0 Fluorometer with Qubit dsDNA HS Assay



206 Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific). Bacterial DNA was amplified with tagged primers  
207 (5'-TCGTCGGCAGCGTCAGATGTGTATAAGAGACAGCCTACGGGNGGCWGCAG and 5'-  
208 GTCTCGTGGGCTCGGAGATGTGTATAAGAGACAGGACTACHVGGGTATCTAATCC)  
209 covering V3–V4 region of the bacterial 16S rRNA gene (Klindworth et al., 2013).  
210 Polymerase chain reactions (PCR) and DNA purifications were performed  
211 according to Illumina's demonstrated protocol (Part #15044223 Rev. B, to be  
212 accessed at: [https://support.illumina.com/content/dam/illumina-](https://support.illumina.com/content/dam/illumina-support/documents/documentation/chemistry_documentation/16s/16s-metagenomic-library-prep-guide-15044223-b.pdf)  
213 [support/documents/documentation/chemistry\\_documentation/16s/16s-metagenomic-](https://support.illumina.com/content/dam/illumina-support/documents/documentation/chemistry_documentation/16s/16s-metagenomic-library-prep-guide-15044223-b.pdf)  
214 [library-prep-guide-15044223-b.pdf](https://support.illumina.com/content/dam/illumina-support/documents/documentation/chemistry_documentation/16s/16s-metagenomic-library-prep-guide-15044223-b.pdf)).

215 The PCR product libraries were quantified and qualified by using High  
216 Sensitivity D1000 ScreenTape on TapeStation 2200 instrument (Agilent).  
217 Equimolar concentrations of libraries were pooled and sequenced on an Illumina  
218 MiSeq platform using MiSeq Reagent Kit v3 (600 cycles PE).

219 In average ca. 755.000 raw sequencing reads per sample were generated,  
220 which were demultiplexed and adapter-trimmed by using MiSeq Control Software  
221 (Illumina). The high-quality sequences were aligned, and OTUs were generated  
222 by using Kraken software (Wood and Salzberg, 2014).

223

## 224 **2.5. Statistical analysis**

225

226 The statistical analysis is an important element of process evaluation. In  
227 this work, the comparison of SFW-S and MWW-S inoculated MFCS was carried  
228 out based on the widely-applied mathematical statistical tool, t-test (**Table 1**). For  
229 the analysis, the measured (closed-circuit) voltage values (**Fig. 1A**) were used as  
230 independent variables after being grouped in accordance with the LPW doses,  
231 representing the actual stage of operation.

232

### 233 3. Results and Discussion

#### 234 3.1. Evaluation of initial period with different sludges (SFW-S and 235 MWW-S) applied in MFCs

236  
237 After some (2-3) days of starvation aiming the reduction of organic matter  
238 inherently contained in both sludge inocula (SFW-S and MWW-S), MFCs were  
239 supplemented with 2 mL LPW substrate, as to be noted in **Fig. 1A**. At that point,  
240 one particular difference in the behavior of the two MFC systems was observed.  
241 In case of MWW-S inoculated bioelectrochemical cells, a clearly detectable  
242 voltage signal (between approx. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> days of operation) could be registered  
243 unlike for SFW-S with quasi negligible response (**Fig. 1A**). This may be related  
244 with the different characteristics and history of the two inocula.

245 First of all, the SFW-S is delivered from an anaerobic digester that has  
246 been mainly processing mono-substrate (sugar beet solid residue) and was  
247 therefore inefficient to deal with the LPW, representing a substrate of higher  
248 complexity and remarkably different origin. Nevertheless, LPW would appear to  
249 be a more feasible feedstock in MFCs started-up with MWW-S since this seed  
250 source has been used to assist municipal waste water treatment plant  
251 continuously fed with influents of versatile composition. Thus, faster adaptation to  
252 this substrate could have taken place in this system. This step, the acclimation is  
253 an essential feature of the initial, start-up phase and can take an effect on the  
254 process performance ([Boghani et al., 2013](#); [Borjas et al., 2015](#); [Kim et al., 2005](#);  
255 [Kumar et al., 2017](#); [Sato et al., 2009](#); [Wang et al., 2010](#)).

256 Second of all, it might be that the two sludges inherently contained different  
257 amounts of exoelectrogenic strains taking part in LPW decomposition in the  
258 anode chamber. For further elaboration and to be able to draw supportive  
259 conclusions, the initial microbial community structures were checked. As it can  
260 be inferred from **Fig. 2**, initial SFW-S contained nearly 20 % of representative  
261 exoelectrogenic phylum, namely *Firmicutes* (15 %), *Proteobacteria* (3 %) and

262 *Actinobacteria* (1 %) (Kiely et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2010; Sharma and Kundu,  
263 2010; Sun et al., 2010). In contrast, at the beginning (**Fig. 3**), the proportion of  
264 same groups in the whole MWW-S population was 58 %, to be distributed in the  
265 following order according to their relative abundance as *Proteobacteria* (38 %),  
266 *Firmicutes* (14 %) and *Actinobacteria* (6 %).

267 Therefore, it can be deduced that because of reason such as (i) the higher  
268 portion of potential electroactive bacteria and (ii) probably more effective initial  
269 metabolic acclimation of the mixed community to LPW led together to better  
270 initial bioelectrochemical performance for MWW-S inoculated MFC, as reflected  
271 by cell voltage (**Fig. 1A**) as well as cumulative energy yield patterns (**Fig. 1B**).

272

### 273 **3.2. Assessment of post-initial phase with different sludges (SFW-S** 274 **and MWW-S) employed in MFCs**

275

276 After the first operating phase (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> days), 4 mL LPWs were injected (**Fig.**  
277 **1A**). As a result, both MFCs produced clear voltage responses without significant  
278 lag time. This, for SFW-S, was a considerable improvement especially in  
279 comparison with the case of 2 mL LPW lacking any meaningful electricity  
280 generation. This could be taken as a positive feedback regarding the stepwise  
281 adaptation of the system, which, however, still performed less efficiently than its  
282 counterpart working with MWW-S seed source. This is well-expressed by  
283 cumulative energy yields (**Fig. 1B**), illustrating a more or less 3-fold difference for  
284 the two BES at that point of experiments (30-32 vs. 10-12 Joules). By delivering  
285 cumulative energy yield, the kinetics of the energy production can be also  
286 visualized as the increasing (steep) phases show the current generation (voltage  
287 peaks on **Fig. 1A**), while the stationary phases imply the depletion of substrate  
288 according to which no further increase can be observed. Additionally, it should be  
289 noticed for MWW-S-MFC that the higher substrate dose (4 mL) induced a  
290 markedly bigger cell voltage peak and corresponding area than the lower one (2

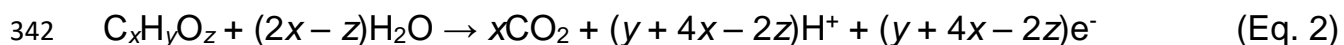
291 mL). This is a good indication that the exoelectrogenic strains had sufficient  
292 capacities to manage even larger organic matter loadings.

293 On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> days, 1 mL and 2 mL LPW was added to the microbial  
294 electrochemical cells, respectively (**Fig. 1A**). Overall, it can be drawn that over  
295 the time elapsed, differences in electrical performance became less notable  
296 between the MFCs using either SFW-S or MWW-S as inoculum. This assumes  
297 that though the adaption of MWW-S could be likely accomplished in faster way,  
298 in the end, by ensuring suitable time, the microbial consortia of SFW-S could also  
299 get used to the LPW feedstock and produce electricity with comparable  
300 performance. This is reflected by the similar increments of cumulative energy  
301 yields upon the 4<sup>th</sup> feedings in both MFCs (**Fig. 1B**). Moreover, by comparing the  
302 voltage profiles of the 2 mL (1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) LPW feedings and the related cumulative  
303 energy yields, it can be clearly seen that both MFCs were able to produce  
304 significantly higher amount of electricity from the equal amount of substrate. This  
305 observation matches well with the expectations regarding the adaptation process  
306 and hence, supports the statements above. The results of statistical analysis  
307 (**Table 1**) are also supportive regarding the system behaviors using SFWS and  
308 MWW-S as inocula. In conclusion, generated voltages in MFCs were found  
309 statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) during the first three stages of operation (2 mL, 4  
310 mL and 1 mL LPW additions), while because of the adaptation of SWF-S over  
311 time, the values were not significantly distinguishable ( $p > 0.05$ ) in the fourth cycle  
312 when 2 mL LPW was added. In order to compare the results with literature data,  
313 current density values can be delivered. In this work with LPW, 65-306 mA m<sup>-2</sup>  
314 was possible to achieve, depending on the experimental conditions i.e. the  
315 substrate loading and the source of inoculum. Taken into account MFCs operated  
316 using complex, landfill-derived feedstock that show similarities with LPW, works  
317 such as [Cercado-Quezada et al. \(2010\)](#), [Ganesh and Jambeck \(2013\)](#), [Tugtas et al. \(2013\)](#)  
318 and previous work by [Koók et al. \(2016\)](#) can be referenced, reporting  
319 current densities of 209, 114, 418-548 and 152-218 mA m<sup>-2</sup>, respectively. This

320 indicates that throughout studies the values fall to the same order of magnitude  
321 and the results of the present investigation match well with the literature trends.

322 Generally, in case of complex organic matter with municipal origin,  
323 carbohydrates, proteins and lipids/oils as main constituents should be  
324 considered. In our previous papers, LPW was found as a feedstock characterized  
325 by high COD content and relatively lower quantities of proteins, polysaccharides  
326 and reducing sugars (Rózsensberszki et al., 2017; Zhen et al., 2016). As it has  
327 been demonstrated, the degradation of biopolymeric components by  
328 exoelectrogenic microorganisms can face challenges. Hence, solubilization and  
329 hydrolysis are essential, resulting in the release of amino acids, glucose,  
330 glycerol, fatty acids. These components, by the cooperative metabolism of  
331 fermentative strains, can be converted to acetic, butyric and propionic acid (Chen  
332 et al., 2013), which are among the primary carbon sources for electro-active  
333 microbes. Thus, the decomposition of organic matter in bioelectrochemical  
334 systems seems to be hierarchical, demanding the simultaneous involvement of  
335 various groups of microorganisms. To make an attempt for the description of  
336 such a process and follow the fate of feedstock, a generalized equation  
337 presented by Harnisch et al. (2009) can be referenced (Eq. 2), where, however,  
338 the exact composition of particular organic matter is a requirement (in this  
339 aspect, typical formulation of biomass was described by Ortiz-Martínez et al.  
340 (2015)).

341



343

344 where  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$  are stoichiometric factors. It can be said that even the simplest  
345 molecules can be oxidized through different pathways and intermediates. For  
346 example, glucose can be converted to acetate, pyruvate, lactate, propionate,  
347 succinate as well as ethanol in BES, in addition to its direct oxidation to  $\text{CO}_2$ ,

348 protons and electrons (Das, 2017). The other (mainly diverse and unknown)  
349 components and the microbiome present in the anode chamber of MFCs make  
350 the stoichiometric description difficult. In other words, a component-wise analysis  
351 can be quite laborious and rely on sophisticated analytical techniques. For  
352 instance, in the study by Wang et al. (2012) where the degradation of pretreated,  
353 algal organic matter in MFCs was investigated, 18 different amino acids had to  
354 be subjected to HPLC. Therefore, following the removal of proteins, lipids and  
355 carbohydrates can be proposed via the COD consumption of underlying  
356 microbial community. In the literature, COD conversion factors for above  
357 substances are available (Chen et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2012). Moreover,  
358 establishing COD balance to monitor the biotransformation can be a way forward  
359 (Mahmoud et al., 2014; Rózsenszki et al., 2017; Su et al., 2013; Zhen et al.,  
360 2016), which, in an implicit manner, expresses the fate of compounds having  
361 contribution to measurable COD.

362 Overall, tracking the decomposition of LPW via a COD-based method in  
363 MFC can be an interesting aspect to continue this work in the future and more  
364 deeply elaborate the performance of the bioelectrochemical system.

365

### 366 **3.3. Microbial community dynamics**

367

368 To elucidate the progress observed based on population shifts taken place  
369 during the 3 weeks of operation, community structures were analyzed. The  
370 results are depicted in **Figs. 4 and 5** for MFCs driven by SFW-S and MWW-S,  
371 respectively. On one hand, according to **Fig. 4**, it can be concluded that in the  
372 former system, the portion of bacteria comprising likely of exoelectrogens  
373 increased to 27 % (14 % *Firmicutes*, 10 % *Proteobacteria* and 3 %  
374 *Actinobacteria*) from the initial 19-20 % (**Fig. 2**). On the other hand, as shown in  
375 **Fig. 5**, a similar enrichment process of predominant species seemed to occur in

376 the latter MFCs as demonstrated by the overall 75 % of potentially  
377 exoelectrogenic phylum (38 % *Proteobacteria*, 25 % *Firmicutes* and 12 %  
378 *Actinobacteria*), which was 58 % initially in accordance with **Fig. 3**.

379 Moreover, literature surveys and studies – such as the work of [Oh et al.](#)  
380 [\(2010\)](#) and [Ki et al. \(2008\)](#) – suggest the possible involvement of *Bacteroidetes*  
381 in the electricity generation. Species from this phylum were found in remarkable  
382 percentages (7-39 %) depending on the samples, as depicted in **Figs. 3-6**.  
383 Besides, these strains can be usually found in anaerobic sludge and reportedly  
384 participate in hydrolytic and acidogenic steps of anaerobic digestion ([Delbes et](#)  
385 [al., 2000](#)).

386 Overall, based on the research outcomes detailed so far, it can be pointed  
387 out that (i) the source of inoculum and its history, (ii) the adaptation time provided  
388 as well as (iii) the microbial community dynamics are key-factors that will highly  
389 affect the utilization efficiency of a feedstock, in particular LPW in this study. In  
390 the concern of adaptation, it is noteworthy that [Park et al. \(2017\)](#) have also  
391 emphasized the beneficial effect of pre-acclimation in MFCs treating waste water,  
392 which coincides well with core of our conclusions in this subject. Therefore, it  
393 seems to be that inoculum selection and its subsequent adaptation are critical for  
394 adequate bioelectrochemical applications, however, both should be done  
395 according to the conditions of the particular case. In other words, an inoculum  
396 may fit better in one case and underperform in another, depending on the  
397 environmental factors i.e. feedstock (substrate) properties. In future studies,  
398 several questions have to be addressed. For example, the relationship between  
399 the composition of the inocula and the type of adapting substrate should be  
400 explored in order to suggest further implications for proper acclimation of  
401 bioelectrochemical systems.

402

#### 403        **4. Conclusions**

404            In this paper, the role of inoculum (using anaerobic sludge taken either  
405 from sugar factory or municipal wastewater treatment plant) on the electricity  
406 generation efficiency from municipal liquid waste feedstock using microbial fuel  
407 cells was addressed. It was found that the characteristics of seed source were  
408 able to demonstrate substantial effect on the process (>65% higher energy yield  
409 obtained for reactors inoculated with municipal waste sludge). Nonetheless, by  
410 ensuring proper adaptation time (during 3 weeks of operation) for adequate  
411 development of MFCs, initial differences in performances (due to various inocula)  
412 could be alleviated resulting in *Firmicutes*-, *Proteobacteria*- and *Actinobacteria*-  
413 dominant systems.

414

#### 415        **Appendix A. Supplementary data**

416            Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online  
417 version.

418

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420

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599

## Figure Legends

600

601 **Fig. 1 – (A) Cell voltage and (B) Cumulative energy yield progress curves**  
602 **for MFCs.** Red squares: using MWW-S as inoculum; Blue diamonds: using  
603 SFW-S as inoculum.

604 **Fig. 2 – Initial microbial community profile of SFW-S used as MFC seed**  
605 **source (bacteria level)**

606 **Fig. 3 – Initial microbial community profile of MWW-S used as MFC seed**  
607 **source (bacteria level)**

608 **Fig. 4 – Microbial community structure in the end of experiments for MFC**  
609 **inoculated with SFW-S (bacteria level)**

610 **Fig. 5 – Microbial community structure in the end of experiments for MFC**  
611 **inoculated with MWW-S (bacteria level)**

612

**Table 1 – Statistical analysis of MFC voltage outputs.**

Independent variable: Closed-circuit voltage	Mean (SFW-S)	Mean (MWW-S)	t-value	df	p-value	Valid N (SFW-S)	Valid N (MWW-S)	Std. Dev. (SFW-S)	Std. Dev. (MWW-S)
1 mL LPW	0.015892	0.020243	-6.10166	768	<0.000001	385	385	0.004245	0.013332
4 mL LPW	0.048828	0.071256	-7.81914	574	<0.000001	288	288	0.030588	0.037867
1 mL LPW	0.041049	0.050628	-3.02478	382	0.002656	192	192	0.028731	0.033165
2 mL LPW	0.082869	0.089376	-1.19790	296	0.231915	149	149	0.040917	0.052181

p<0.05 represent statistical significance.