Catalysis and life-cycle-analysis of current and future industrial routes to CO$_2$ utilization

Thomas E Müller
RWTH Aachen University, Germany

The utilization of carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) as an inexpensive and renewable C1 feedstock is of strategic importance for decreasing our dependence on fossil based raw materials (Ref. 1). In this context, the direct build-up of fuels, chemicals and polymers, at least partially, from CO$_2$ is of particular interest. Various technologies are being discussed for implementation in the industry (Figure 1). The lecture will compare the current status of these technologies, the changes effected upon introducing CO$_2$ as feedstock and evaluate the CO$_2$ reduction potential based on the currently available life-cycle-analyses. One recently commercialized process that involves the direct use of carbon dioxide as a feedstock is the production of organic carbonates by reaction of CO$_2$ with epoxides (Ref. 2-4). Indirect routes for CO$_2$ utilization are of equal relevance. Formaldehyde, commercially attained by partial combustion of methanol that, in a future economy, may be obtained from CO$_2$, is a promising feedstock. Thus, oligomeric poly (acetalester) is generated readily from formaldehyde. Such poly (acetalester) has intriguing properties rendering them inspiring compounds for fuel and polymer applications. Motivated by the goal of expanding the CO$_2$ technologies to further application fields, it seems essential to unravel highly effective strategies for activating the carbon dioxide molecule. The energy needed to overcome the thermodynamically low energy level of CO$_2$ is thereby a crucial factor. Only when the energy level of the resulting intermediates is appropriate, the subsequent reaction of the activated CO$_2$ molecule with the co-reagents will take place. The right choice of the catalyst is thus the key to CO$_2$ conversion and directs the reaction pathway to the desired target products. The lecture concludes with discussing some of the most intriguing approaches for activating CO$_2$.

Biography

Thomas E Müller is working as a Lecturer at RWTH Aachen University, Germany. He has received a PhD in Chemistry (1995) from Imperial College London. After positions at University of Sussex and TU Munich and Visiting Professor position at NUS Singapore (2005) and University of Tokyo (2005), he accepted a position at Covestro in 2007. Since 2015, he has been concentrating on taking innovation to the chemical industry. He is Associate Editor of JCOU. His achievements include 80 papers and 75 patent applications, mainly in the fields of CO$_2$ chemistry, catalyst development, and materials. His vision is to bridge the gap between fundamental research and industrial application.

thomas.ernst.mueller@itmc.rwth-aachen.de