

CIRCUIT FOR DIRECT ENERGY EXTRACTION FROM A CHARGED-PARTICLE BEAM

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[001] The invention relates generally to electric circuits and, more particularly, to an electric circuit that facilitates the extraction of energy from charged particles as a result of a controlled fusion reaction and sends the energy to the power grid with a unity power factor, leading power factor, or lagging power factor on demand.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[002] Controlled fusion power generation will open the door to abundant and clean energy sources. This topic has attracted significant research efforts in the United States and the world. The reported approaches are typically based on conversion of fusion energy to thermal energy then to electric energy.

[003] In an alternative approach described in US Patent No. 6,611,106 (the '106 patent), entitled "Controlled fusion in a field reversed configuration and direct energy conversion," which is incorporated herein by reference, controlled fusion energy, carried by charged particle beams in the form of momentum, can be converted directly to electricity by decelerating the charged particles using a quadropole inverse cyclotron converter (ICC). Thus, higher energy conversion is expected. A key technology is needed that extracts the energy from the ICC and injects it to the utility grid.

[004] Accordingly, it would be desirable to provide a power electronic circuit used to decelerate the plasma particles, extract the energy from the deceleration action, convert the plasma energy directly to electric energy and send the electricity to the power grid.

SUMMARY

[005] The exemplary embodiments of a fusion energy extraction circuit (FEEC) device described herein represent only a few examples of the many possible implementations of the FEEC device and are in no way intended to limit the subject matter of the present description.

[006] In one embodiment, the FEEC device preferably comprises a grid-tied bidirectional converter component and a resonant converter component. The bidirectional converter component can implement leading phase, lagging phase, or unity power factor grid-tied converters for different purposes.

[007] The resonant converter preferably comprises an inverse cyclotron converter (ICC), an inductor, and a plurality of circuit switches forming a bridge that chops the dc voltage to a pulse waveform. The ICC is preferably configured with two or more or quadropole plates that function as a capacitor together with an inductor to act as a resonant tank. The plates are

preferably elongate with an arcuate cross-section forming an elongate annular cylindrical chamber with axially extending elongate gaps formed between the plates.

[008] During start up of the FEEC device, energy flows from the utility grid via the grid-tied bidirectional converter component to the resonant converter. This establishes the resonance and excites the quadrupole electric field formed across the gaps between the plates. During power generation or energy extraction, charged particles of charge particle beams from, e.g., a fusion process are decelerated by the quadrupole electric field as the particle beams travel through the ICC. Also during power generation, lost energy will be collected by the quadrupole plates of the ICC in the form of an image current. The image current will then flow through the resonant converter and the grid-tied bidirectional converter component to the utility grid.

[009] The grid-tied converter functions as an ac/dc rectifier during start up time and as a dc/ac grid-tied inverter during power generation. In both cases, the grid-tied converter will operate with unity power factor, leading power factor, or lagging power factor to provide active power and reactive power (VAR) on demand.

[010] To realize electric field excitation and energy extraction, the resonant frequency and voltage of the resonant converter are preferably precisely controlled. The frequency in this case is fixed at slightly above the resonant frequency of the resonant tank, while the voltage control can be achieved by switching pattern modulation and feedback regulation. Two modulation methods, phase shift modulation (PSM) and pulse-width modulation (PWM), are capable of providing voltage control. Feedback regulation is achieved by comparing the sensed resonant voltage with a reference, while its error is used to modulate the phase or the pulse-width of the switches in the resonant converter. With this modulation, automatic bidirectional energy flow according to the operation mode is guaranteed.

[011] In an alternative embodiment of FEEC device, resonant conductor can implement multiple ferrite inductors connected in series to optimize the FEEC device operation. The series-connected resonant inductors have several advantages over a single resonant inductor.

[012] Feedback regulation is achieved by comparing the sensed resonant voltage with a reference, while its error is used to modulate the phase or the pulse-width of the plurality of switches in the resonant converter.

[013] In another exemplary embodiment, a feedback control loop of the resonant converter can be utilized to facilitate automatic bidirectional power flow. The feedback control loop is

composed of a resonant voltage sensing circuit, an error compensator, and a PWM or PSM pulse generator.

[014] Other systems, methods, features and advantages of the invention will be or will become apparent to one with skill in the art upon examination of the following figures and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional systems, methods, features and advantages be included within this description, be within the scope of the invention, and be protected by the accompanying claims. As mentioned above, it is also intended that the invention not be limited to the details of the example embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[015] The details of the invention, including fabrication, structure and operation, may be gleaned in part by study of the accompanying figures, in which like reference numerals refer to like parts. The components in the figures are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention. Moreover, all illustrations are intended to convey concepts, where relative sizes, shapes and other detailed attributes may be illustrated schematically rather than literally or precisely.

[016] Figure 1 is a schematic of a fusion energy extraction circuit (FEEC).

[017] Figure 2 is a schematic of a resonant converter circuit with equivalent image current source.

[018] Figure 3 is a graph showing a Bode plot of the parallel resonant tank.

[019] Figure 4 is a graph showing Pulse Width Modulation method illustration.

[020] Figure 5 is a graph showing a mechanism of Pulse Width Modulation generation.

[021] Figure 6 is a graph providing a Phase Shift Modulation illustration.

[022] Figure 7 is a schematic of a Phase Shift Modulation generation circuit.

[023] Figure 8 is a schematic of a feedback loop of the fusion energy extraction circuit.

[024] Figure 9 is a schematic of a resonant voltage sensing circuit.

[025] Figure 10 is a graph depicting a simulation result for the dynamic waveform of the power flow responding to the particle beam injection.

[026] Figure 11 is a graph depicting experimental results of the resonant voltage at the capacitor (emulating the quadrupole plates).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[027] The systems and methods described herein are directed to a direct fusion energy extraction.

[028] FIG. 1 is a block diagram depicting a preferred embodiment of the fusion energy extraction circuit (FEEC) device 100. FEEC device 100 is composed of a grid-tied bidirectional converter component 110 and a resonant converter 120. In a preferred embodiment of the FEEC device 100 in FIG. 1, the bidirectional converter component 110 implements a three-phase grid-tied converter 112. However, it is appreciated that the bidirectional converter component 110 can implement different factor phase grid-tied converters for different purposes. For example, a single-phase grid-tied converter (not shown) can be implemented for lower power applications.

[029] In a preferred embodiment of the FEEC device 100, the resonant converter 120 comprises an inverse cyclotron converter (ICC) 122 and a plurality of switches S1-S4. ICC 122, which is described in greater detail in the '106 patent (which is incorporated herein by reference), is preferably configured with a plurality of plates 124 shown in this instance in a quadrupole configuration. The quadrupole plates 124 of the ICC 122 function as a capacitor and together with an inductor L form a resonant tank 130, which will be described in greater detail below. The plates 124 are preferably elongate with an arcuate cross-section forming an elongate annular cylindrical chamber with axially extending elongate gaps formed between the plates. When current is applied to the plate a multi-pole electric field is formed across the gaps between the plates.

[030] During device start up, energy flows from the utility grid 114 via the grid-tied bidirectional converter component 110 to the resonant converter 120 to establish the resonance and excite the quadrupole electric field of the resonant converter 120. During power generation/energy extraction, charged particles beams from, such as, e.g., a fusion process, travel through the ICC 122 and decelerated by the quadrupole electric field formed across the gaps between the plates 124 of the ICC 122. Also during generation/extraction, lost energy will be collected by the quadrupole plates 122 in the form of image current i_s . The image current i_s will then flow through the resonant converter 120 and the grid-tied bidirectional converter component 110 to the grid 114. The grid-tied converter 110 functions as an ac/dc rectifier during start up time and as a dc/ac grid-tied inverter during generation time. In both cases, the grid-tied converter 110 will operate with unity power factor, leading power factor, or lagging power factor to provide active power and reactive power (VAR) on demand.

[031] In order for the resonant converter 120 to realize electric field excitation and energy extraction, it is preferably that the resonant frequency and voltage be precisely controlled. The frequency in this case is fixed at slightly above the resonant frequency of the resonant tank 130 to ensure zero voltage soft-switching, while the voltage control can be achieved by switching

pattern modulation and feedback regulation. Two modulation methods, phase shift modulation (PSM) and pulse-width modulation (PWM) are examined below. Both are capable of the task of voltage control; however, the PSM method yields a wider operation range for dynamic maneuver. Feedback regulation is achieved by comparing the sensed resonant voltage with a reference, while its error is used to modulate the phase or the pulse-width of the switches S1-S4 in the resonant converter 120. With this modulation, automatic bidirectional energy flow according to the operation mode is guaranteed.

[032] FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the resonant converter 120, where the dc voltage v_{dc} is provided by the grid-tied bidirectional converter 110 (v_{dc} is also illustrated in FIG. 1). Here, the resonant converter 120 includes a plurality of switches S1, S2, S3, and S4. The switches S1, S2, S3, and S4 form a bridge that chops the dc voltage v_{dc} to a pulse waveform v_{AB} across AB at a switching frequency f_s , which is much higher than the frequency of the power grid 114. A capacitor C represents the quadrupole plates 124 of the ICC 122. As indicated above, the capacitor C and the inductor L form the resonant tank 130. Only the fundamental of v_{AB} will pass the resonant tank 130, where it gains $H(s)$, and will appear across the quadrupole plates 122 as a sinusoidal waveform v_s . The current source i_s represents the corrected image current when the charged particles are decelerated, and the resistor R_c represents the heat and radiation losses from the charged particles.

[033] The gain $H(s)$ of the resonant tank is:

$$H(s) = \frac{\frac{1}{sC} // R_c}{sL + \frac{1}{sC} // R_c} = \frac{1}{s^2 LC + s \frac{L}{R_c} + 1} \quad (1)$$

[034] Therefore, the magnitude (voltage gain) is:

$$|H(j\omega)| = \frac{1}{\sqrt{(1 - \omega^2 LC)^2 + (\frac{\omega L}{R_c})^2}} \quad (2)$$

[035] The maximum amplitude frequency is ω_m at which frequency the output voltage has the maximum value:

$$\omega_m = \sqrt{\frac{1}{LC} - \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{1}{CR_C} \right)^2} \quad (3)$$

[036] For the FEEC device 100, R_C is typically very large, thus:

$$\omega_m \approx \omega_r = \frac{1}{\sqrt{LC}} \quad (4)$$

[037] FIG. 3 illustrates a bode plot of the parallel resonant tank 130. The maximum gain appears approximately at the resonant frequency ω_r . Another important parameter for the resonant circuit is Quality Factor Q :

$$Q = \frac{R_C}{R_0} \quad (5)$$

[038] where R_0 is the characteristic impedance of the resonant tank 130:

$$R_0 = \sqrt{\frac{L}{C}} \quad (6)$$

[039] Therefore:

$$Q = \frac{R_C}{\sqrt{\frac{L}{C}}} \quad (7)$$

[040] From equation (7), it is noted that a larger R_C results in a higher Q and a steeper slope of change in voltage gain off the resonance.

[041] As mentioned above, the resonant converter 120 output voltage control can be achieved by switching pattern modulation and feedback regulation. Both phase shift modulation (PSM) and pulse-width modulation (PWM) are capable of the task of voltage control.

[042] Pulse Width Modulation (PWM): With PWM, the pulse widths of the switches S_1 , S_2 , S_3 , and S_4 in the two legs are adjusted. The resulted voltage difference is in a staircase shape whose fundamental component is adjustable by the pulse width.

[043] FIG. 4 shows the trigger pulse waveform for all the switches S_1 , S_2 , S_3 , and S_4 illustrated in FIG. 2. The on time of the switches S_1 and S_2 is adjusted between 0-50%. The switches S_4 and S_3 are complementary to the switches S_1 and S_2 respectively. FIG. 4 also

illustrates the voltage pulse waveform at nodes A (v_A) and B (v_B) of the circuit embodiment illustrated in FIG. 2.

[044] The fundamental of the bridge voltage v_{AB} (as illustrated in FIG. 4) is expressed as follows:

$$v_{AB1} = \frac{600}{\pi} \sin(\pi D) \cos\left(\frac{2\pi}{T_s} t - \pi D\right) \quad D < 0.5$$

[045] The appropriate trigger signals for all switches can be realized by a simple and frequently used circuit.

[046] As depicted in FIG. 5, two saw tooth waves 151 and 152, whose phase shift equals $T_s/2$, are compared with the same control signal V_C . The duty ratio D equals the portion of time when V_C is greater than the magnitude of the saw tooth. The resulted two pulses are used to trigger the MOSFET switches S_1 and S_2 respectively. As mentioned above, the switches S_4 and S_3 are driven by the complementary signals of the switches S_1 and S_2 respectively. It is noted that the duty ratio D can only be varied between 0-50%. In a preferred embodiment, resonant converter 120 is configured with MOSFET switches S_1 - S_4 . It is appreciated that resonant converter 120 can be configured with a variety of circuit switches that would achieve the same result.

[047] Phase Shift Modulation (PSM): In PSM method, the output voltage of the resonant converter 120 is regulated by adjusting the phase difference between the trigger pulses to the switches of the two legs. FIG. 6 illustrates the typical PSM waveforms of the switch network, where α is the phase shift between leg A and B. Note that the pulse width of the switches does not change. As α changes, the pulse width of the bridge voltage v_{AB} changes. Consequently, the fundamental component changes and the resonate voltage v_s is regulated. The fundamental of the bridge voltage v_{AB} is a function of α :

$$v_{AB} = \frac{600}{\pi} \cos\left(\frac{\alpha}{2}\right) \sin\left(\frac{2\pi}{T_s} t\right) \quad 0 \leq \alpha \leq \pi$$

It is clear that the phase shift α can control the amplitude of v_{AB} .

[048] FIG. 7 illustrates one exemplary embodiment of a circuit capable of implementing an adjustable phase shift between v_A and v_B . It is appreciated that many other circuit embodiments can achieve the same goal. For example, various digital circuits can be used for the purpose of implementing an adjustable phase shift. As illustrated in FIG. 7, a saw tooth wave 170 is used as a carrier to compare with two DC voltages—control signal v_C and fixed DC signal v_{fix} . When the saw tooth wave 170 is compared with the control signal v_C , the comparison results in

a phase shift value. When the saw tooth wave 170 is compared with the fixed DC signal v_{fix} , the comparison results in a clock signal for all the digital components in the control circuit. The frequency of the saw tooth is twice of the switching frequency which is divided by 2 after passing the D flip-flop.

[049] Resonant Inductor Implementation: In an alternative embodiment of the FEEC device 100, resonant conductor 120 can implement multiple ferrite inductors connected in series to optimize the FEEC device 100 operation. The series-connected resonant inductors have several advantages over a single resonant inductor. First, the power loss can be reduced because each series-connected inductor can be realized by a small-size, high frequency ferrite core with low core loss and small flux swing. Second, it is possible to make each resonant inductor with a single layer structure, eliminating the need for high voltage isolation between layers. Furthermore, the parasitic capacitance and coupling inductance between layers is also eliminated. These parasitic capacitances and coupling inductances can have a serious effect on the resonant circuit 120 of the FEEC device 100. Third, the single layer structure can provide an effective cooling solution for the resonant inductors without overheating the inner layers. Finally, the series-connected resonant inductors can be implemented by small-size ferrite cores, which are commercially available for high frequency power applications.

[050] Feedback Control Loop: As mentioned above, the output voltage control of resonant converter 120 can be achieved by switching pattern modulation and feedback regulation. The two modulation methods were described in detail above. Feedback regulation is achieved by comparing the sensed resonant voltage with a reference, while its error is used to modulate the phase or the pulse-width of the switches S1-S4 in the resonant converter 120.

[051] FIG. 8 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a feedback control loop 180 of the resonant converter 120. The feedback control loop 180 of the resonant converter 120 is a crucial element of the FEEC device 100 because it facilitates automatic bidirectional power flow. Feedback control loop 180 is composed of a resonant voltage sensing circuit 182, an error compensator 184, and a PWM or PSM pulse generator 186. During the start up mode, the resonant voltage v_s is initially zero. This zero value of the resonant voltage v_s results in a large error and high output from the compensator 184 and the PWM or PSM pulse generator 186 will then produce a high duty ratio or small phase shift, respectively, to ramp up the resonant voltage v_s .

[052] During the generation or extraction mode, charged particle beams will travel through the ICC 122 and are decelerated as they rotate through the quadrupole electric field formed across the gaps between the quadrupole plates 124. The lost energy collected at the quadrupole

plates 124 will be forced to flow into the resonant converter 120 by the feedback loop 180. Similarly, the feedback loop 180 of the grid-tied bidirectional converter 110 will force the energy collected at the dc bus 181 to flow back to the power grid.

[053] FIG. 9 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of resonant voltage sensing circuit 182. The input v_0 of resonant voltage sensing current is coupled to the resonant output terminal v_s , whose resonant voltage modulates the photo diode current. The output of the resonant voltage sensing current (" v_0 feedback") is coupled to the error compensator of the PWM or PSM controller with high voltage optic isolation. Therefore, variations in the resonant voltage can be optically transferred as the feedback signal for the control loop 180.

[054] Benefits of this method include low cost, high voltage isolation, and simple implementation. Specifically, the AC input photocoupler with high voltage (HV) divider resistors imposes little effect on the resonant operation since the HV divider resistors have very high resistance.

[055] Simulation and Experiments: FIG. 10 illustrates simulation results for various particle strengths. With the FEEC converter device 100, illustrated in FIG. 1, direct fusion energy extraction is demonstrated by the simulation result shown in FIG. 10. The average DC link current I_{DC} values during the start up time and the generation time are illustrated corresponding to the intensity of particle beam injection, which is modeled by the image current source I_s . In FIG. 10, charged particles were injected into the ICC 122 at 300 μ s. When the charged particles are decelerated by the ICC 122, the fusion energy is approximately proportional to the image current. In this simulation, the heat and radiation losses are modeled by the resistor R_C , which is 1 M Ω . During the start up time, the average DC link current I_{DC} value is 117.5 mA that represents the circuit losses. After the image current is injected, I_{DC} value decreases due to the fusion energy input. For example, the DC link current I_{DC} value is reduced to 87.5 mA when a 3 mA image current is injected into the resonant converter 120, which is a 5W injection case. From FIG. 10, it is expected that when the fusion energy is between 15W and 20W, the average DC link current I_{DC} reaches zero (break even) and then is reduced to the negative value (power generation).

[056] The presented FEEC device 100 is capable of providing energy to the quadrupole plates 124 of the ICC 122 to start the deceleration process. When the image current is collected at the quadrupole plates 124, the energy will be sent back to the power grid via the bidirectional grid-tied converter 110.

[057] FIG. 11 illustrates an experimental waveform measured across the resonant capacitor C (illustrated in FIG. 2). In this experiment, the resonant inductor L value is about 370 μ H and the emulated capacitor value C of the quadrupole plates is 70 pF. The estimated resistor R_C of the heat and radiation losses is 2M Ω and the frequency of the image current is 1 MHz which is the same as the switching frequency of the resonant converter. With the closed loop control 180, 126V DC link voltage V_{DC} of the resonant converter can generate 3 kV, 1 MHz resonant voltage during the start up time shown in FIG. 11.

[058] The systems and methods provided herein are described for exemplary purposes only with regard to direct fusion energy extraction. However, one skilled in the art would readily appreciate that the systems and methods provided herein for extracting the kinetic energy of charged particles could be used for the recovery of energy in high current ion accelerators. As one of ordinary skill in the art is well aware, high power ion beams from high current ion accelerators are used in various commercial and academic research settings in science and engineering. All these applications are energy intensive. Today most of the energy is simply wasted. The energy extraction process described herein provides a means to recover such energy and reduce the energy consumption of such installations. To achieve this, the extraction design would simply be added at the end of the beam line past the target area.

[059] One skilled in the art would also readily appreciate that the systems and methods provided herein could be used in combination with other systems for the recovery and extraction of energy. PCT Application No. PCT/US2006/008251, entitled "Plasma Electric Generation System," which is incorporated herein by reference, refers to an energy generator system used to provide direct space plasma propulsion. One skilled in the art would readily recognize that the energy extraction process described herein could facilitate energy recovery and extraction from the fusion energy stream when propulsion is not desired.

[060] One skilled in the art would also readily appreciate that the process for extracting the kinetic energy of charged particles could be used for efficiency enhancements in neutral beam accelerators. High power neutral atom beams from positive and/or negative ion sources are used for diagnostics or as energetic atom sources in different commercial and academic settings. In all these applications, the beam sources are characterized by efficiency constraints that arise from the fairly small charge-exchange cross-sections. To achieve pure neutral atom beams, all residual ions past the neutralizing cell are deflected and dumped. This waste energy is usually half of the plug power. Extraction systems of the type described herein can help to recover most of the energy of these "filtered" ions.

[061] In the foregoing specification, the invention has been described with reference to specific embodiments thereof. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made thereto without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the invention. For example, the reader is to understand that the specific ordering and combination of process actions shown in the process flow diagrams described herein is merely illustrative, unless otherwise stated, and the invention can be performed using different or additional process actions, or a different combination or ordering of process actions. As another example, each feature of one embodiment can be mixed and matched with other features shown in other embodiments. Features and processes known to those of ordinary skill may similarly be incorporated as desired. Additionally and obviously, features may be added or subtracted as desired. Accordingly, the invention is not to be restricted except in light of the attached claims and their equivalents.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An energy extraction circuit comprising:
a grid-tied bidirectional converter; and
a resonant converter comprising a multi-pole inverse cyclotron converter, an inductor, and a plurality of circuit switches, the multi-pole inverse cyclotron converter includes two or more elongate plates with arcuate cross-sections forming an elongate annular cylindrical chamber with axially extending elongate gaps formed between the two or more plates, wherein the two or more plates function as a capacitor which resonates with the inductor, wherein the plurality of circuit switches are configured to form a bridge that chops direct current voltage to a pulse waveform.
2. The circuit of claim 1 wherein the grid-tied bidirectional converter is configured to interface a grid ac voltage.
3. The circuit of claim 2 wherein the grid-tied bidirectional converter is controlled to achieve bidirectional power and reactive power flow.
4. The circuit of claim 3 wherein the resonant converter is configured by an H-bridge or Half-bridge resonant converter.
5. The circuit of claim 3 wherein the resonant converter is regulated by a feedback control loop having a resonant voltage sensing circuit, a compensator, a modulation generator, and an interface to the resonant converter.
6. The circuit of claim 5 wherein the modulation generator is a pulse width modulation generator.
7. The circuit of claim 5 wherein the modulation generator is a phase shift modulation generator.
8. The circuit of claim 5 wherein the modulation generator adjusts the resonant converter's resonant voltage.
9. An energy extraction circuit comprising a grid-tied bidirectional converter and resonant converter.
10. The circuit of claim 9 wherein the resonant converter comprises a quadrupole inverse cyclotron converter wherein the quadrupole plates are configured to function as a capacitor which resonates with an inductor.

11. The circuit of claim 10 wherein the grid-tied converter is configured to function as an ac/dc rectifier during start up mode of operation and as a dc/ac grid-tied inverter during generation mode of operation.

12. The circuit of claim 11 wherein the grid-tied converter is configured to operate with at least one of unity power factor, leading phase, or lagging phase.

13. A method for extracting energy from charged particles in a system comprising a resonant converter and a grid-tied bidirectional converter, comprising the steps of:

receiving energy from a utility grid to the system comprising a resonant converter and a grid-tied bidirectional converter, wherein the resonant converter comprises a multi-pole inverse cyclotron converter, an inductor, and a plurality of circuit switches, the multi-pole inverse cyclotron converter includes two or more elongate plates with arcuate cross-sections forming an elongate annular cylindrical chamber with axially extending elongate gaps formed between the two or more plates, wherein the two or more plates function as a capacitor which resonates with the inductor, wherein the plurality of circuit switches are configured to form a bridge that chops direct current voltage to a pulse waveform;

establishing the resonance of the multi-pole inverse cyclotron converter; and

exciting a multi-pole electric field across the gaps of the two or more plates.

14. The method of claim 13 further comprising the steps of:

receiving charged particles in the resonant converter;

decelerating the charged particles to extract electric energy from the kinetic energy of the charged particles; and

collecting lost energy from decelerating the charged particles in the form of image current by the two or more elongate plates.

15. The method of claim 14 further comprising the steps of:

flowing image current through the resonant converter; and

flowing image current back to the utility grid through the grid-tied converter.

16. The method of claim 14 further comprising the steps of sending the extracted electric energy back to the utility grid.