Claims:

1. A process for the preparation of lactic acid and 2-hydroxy-3-butenoic acid or esters thereof from a sugar in the presence of a metallo-silicate material, a metal ion and a solvent, said process comprising contacting the sugar with a metallo-silicate material, wherein the metal ion is selected from one or more of the group consisting of potassium ions, sodium ions, lithium ions, rubidium ions and caesium ions.

2. A process according to claim 1, wherein the metal ion is obtainable by the addition to the process of one or more compounds selected from the group consisting of K_2CO_3, KNO_3, KCl, potassium acetate (CH_3CO_2K), potassium lactate ($CH_3CH(OH)CO_2K$), Na_2CO_3, Li_2CO_3 and Rb_2CO_3.

3. A process according to claims 1 or 2, wherein the metallo-silicate material has a framework structure selected from the group consisting of BEA, MFI, FAU, MOR, FER, MCM and SBA.

4. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the metallo-silicate material comprises an active metal selected from one or more of the group consisting of Sn, Ti, Pb, Zr, Ge and Hf.

5. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the metallo-silicate material is selected from the group consisting of Sn-BEA, Sn-MFI, Sn-FAU, Sn-MCM-41 and Sn-SBA-15.

6. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the sugar is selected from one or more of the group consisting of glucose, fructose, mannose, sucrose, xylose, erythrose, erythrulose, threose and glycolaldehyde.

7. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the solvent is selected from one or more of the group consisting of methanol, ethanol, 1-propanol, 1-butanol and water.

8. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the ester of lactic acid is methyl lactate or ethyl lactate.

9. A process according to claim 8, wherein the yield of methyl lactate is equal to or greater than 69%.

10. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the metallo-silicate material is prepared using a post synthesis process.

11. The process according to any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the process is run as a continuous process.

12. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the metallo-silicate material is prepared by impregnating a de-aluminated or de-boronated zeotype material or mesoporous amorphous silicate material with an active metal.

13. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the metallo-silicate material is prepared by impregnating a de-aluminated or de-boronated zeotype material or mesoporous amorphous silicate material with an active metal and a metal ion.

14. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 13, wherein the metallo-silicate material comprises a metal ion selected from the group consisting of alkaline earth metal ions and alkali metal ions.

15. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 14, wherein the metallo-silicate material comprises a silicon oxide structure and an active metal and wherein the silicon oxide structure comprises M-O-Si bonds.

16. A process according to claim 15, wherein the atomic ratio of silicon to active metal is between 0.008 and 200.

17. A process according to any one of claims 4 to 16, wherein the active metal to metal ion ratio is between 1 and 20.