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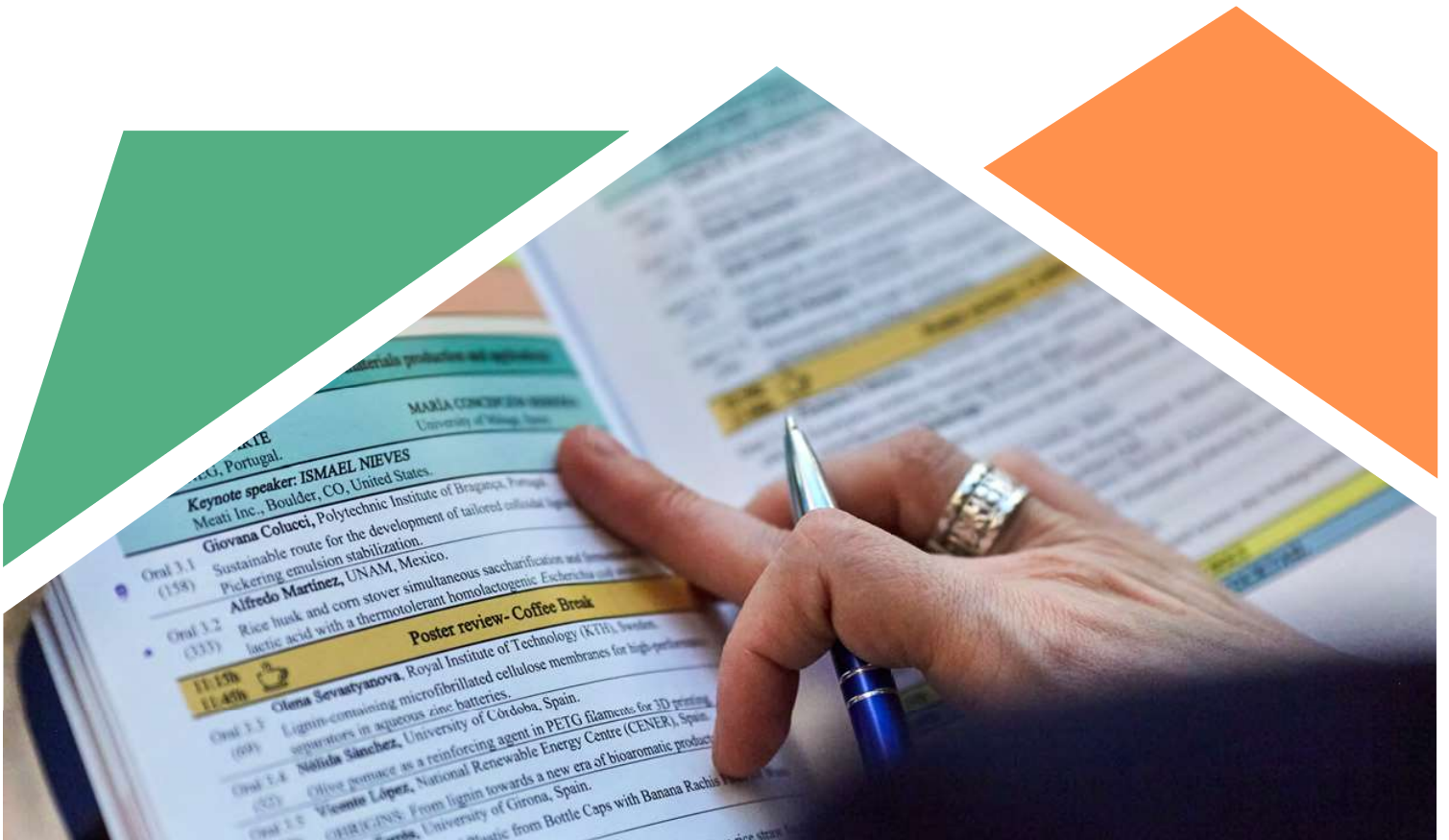
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# INDEX



**Keynote speaker: ISMAEL NIEVES**  
Meati Inc., Boulder, CO, United States

**Giovana Colucci**, Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal

Oral 3.1 Sustainable route for the development of tailored cellulose fibers  
(158)

Pickering emulsion stabilization.  
**Alfredo Martínez**, UNAM, Mexico.

Oral 3.2 Rice husk and corn stover simultaneous saccharification and fermentation  
(337)

lactic acid with a thermotolerant homo-lactogenic *Escherichia coli* strain

### Poster review- Coffee Break

11:15h **Olena Sevastyanova**, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Sweden

Oral 3.3 Lignin-containing microfibrillated cellulose membranes for high-performance  
(69)

separators in aqueous zinc batteries.  
**Nérida Sánchez**, University of Córdoba, Spain

Oral 3.4 Olive pomace as a reinforcing agent in PETG filaments for 3D printing  
(97)

**Vicente López**, National Renewable Energy Centre (CENER), Spain

Oral 3.5 From lignin towards a new era of biomimetic products  
**CHRISTIAN**, University of Girona, Spain

# Index

PLENARY TALKS (INDEX) .....	12
ADVANCEMENTS IN BIOREFINERY TECHNOLOGIES AND FRACTIONATION OF BIOMASS (INDEX) .....	18
SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION OF BIOFUELS AND BIOENERGY (INDEX) .....	136
LIGNIN AND BIOMATERIALS PRODUCTION AND APPLICATIONS (INDEX) .....	292
EXTRACTIVES, BIOACTIVE COMPOUNDS AND BIOCHEMICAL PROCESSES (INDEX) .....	358
TECHNO-ECONOMIC EVALUATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND LCA ANALYSIS (INDEX) .....	440
CATALYSIS (INDEX) .....	488
AUTHORS INDEX .....	548



# ADVANCEMENTS IN BIOREFINERY TECHNOLOGIES AND FRACTIONATION OF BIOMASS (Index)

ADVANCEMENTS IN BIOREFINERY TECHNOLOGIES AND FRACTIONATION OF BIOMASS (INDEX) .....	18
Innovative biomass fractionation and valorization processes using benign solvents: ionic liquids, eutetic solvents and biobased solvents in biorefinery processes .....	22
Enhancing Fractionation and Pretreatment of Lignocellulosic Biomass by Steam Explosion in a Biorefinery Context .....	23
Biorefinery electrification and recycling of post-consumer bio-based packaging for sustainable production of platform chemicals and biopolymers .....	24
Acidogenic fermentation of process water from hydrothermal carbonization of sewage sludge: volatile fatty acids production .....	25
An expedite methodology for identification of inorganic contaminants in biomass origin feedstock: wavelength dispersive x-ray fluorescence (WD-XRF) spectrometry ....	26
<i>Aspergillus ibericus</i> biomass production from <i>Codium tomentosum</i> hydrolysate.....	27
Assessing the Impact of Different Chemical Pretreatments on TEMPO-Mediated Oxidation and Crystallinity of Eucalyptus Pulp .....	28
Autohydrolysis processing for sugarcane bagasse pretreatment.....	29
Avocado waste a sustainable raw material for green fuel .....	30
Bioconversion of lignocellulose inhibitors in wastewater into microbial oil .....	31
Biological pretreatment of <i>Rugulopteryx okamurae</i> to improve the saccharification process .....	32
Biomass adaptation and microbial community assessment when targeting at carboxylates production in anaerobic fermenters.....	33
Biorefinery processes for the valorisation of residual green seaweeds in Galicia.....	34
Biorefining of shrub species biomass for fermentable sugar production .....	35
Biphasic fractionation of <i>Pinus pinaster</i> using 1-pentanol and water catalyzed by sulphuric acid on a single step.....	36
Biphasic fractionation systems: a comparative study on the behaviour of various biomass resources.....	37
Cascade valorization of olive leaf biomass in CENER BIO2C .....	38
Cellulose Fibers from <i>Agave durangensis</i> Leaves .....	39
Cellulose obtention from <i>Agave durangensis</i> agroindustrial waste using Natural Deep Eutectic Solvents (NADES) .....	40
Characterisation of Ionosolv lignins selectively precipitated by organic solvents.....	41
Characterization of <i>Pinus pinaster</i> lignins obtained by one-pot 1-butanol/water biphasic fractionation .....	46

# An expedite methodology for identification of inorganic contaminants in biomass origin feedstock: wavelength dispersive x-ray fluorescence (WD-XRF) spectrometry

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**Keywords:** Biomass feedstocks; WD-XRF; inorganic contaminants; characterization

## Abstract

The use of biomass feedstock for bioenergy production has increased in recent years. In the context of a circular economy, wastes such as municipal solid wastes and industrial wastes (namely by-products from agro-food wastes, agro-livestock wastes and sewage sludge) have been tested as new feedstocks of biomass origin. However, the presence of some inorganic contaminants in these new feedstocks might be problematic for thermochemical and biochemical conversion processes.

Wavelength Dispersive X-Ray Fluorescence (WD-XRF) spectrometry is an easy and fast technique that uses only a small amount of sample, presenting a low contamination risk and is a non-destructive methodology. Thus, if potential contaminants are identified, then samples remain available for subsequent analysis.

In the aim of the Horizon 2020 project "BRISK2 - Biomass Research Infrastructure" (<https://brisk2.eu/>) an expedite methodology was developed in order to better evaluate the use of endogenous biomasses for energy production by biochemical or thermochemical processes. In this study five samples received from project partners were used: beech wood chips, *Ulva Lactuca*, palm kernel, brewers grains and *Miscanthus* pellets.

In a first step, qualitative analysis, *i.e.* examination to identify the presence of elements in each sample, was performed following a procedure based on the ISO/TS 16996:2015 but using directly the milled biomass dried at  $(105 \pm 2)$  °C. All measurements were carried out by WD-XRF spectrometry using an AXIOS sequential wavelength dispersive spectrometer, fitted with a 4 kW generator and a rhodium anode X-ray super sharp tube and using five crystals (LiF220, LiF200, Ge, PE and PX1) and controlled by PANalytical SuperQ through the IQ+ analytical software, by referring to a database for elemental identification.

Afterwards, the values given by the equipment software, were normalized taking into account each ash mass fraction at  $(550 \pm 10)$  °C. This step was the basis of the semiquantative analysis. The mass fraction level of each element were then classified on the in-house classification ranges: major elements [ $\omega > 4$  %(m/m)], minor elements [ $1$  %(m/m)  $< \omega < 4$  %(m/m)] and trace elements [ $\omega < 1$  %(m/m)], where  $\omega$  represents the mass fraction (m/m) in dry basis at 105 °C.

The validation of this procedure was performed by comparison among certified values of biomass materials and the results obtained by both the expedite methodology and the classification ranges proposed. Five biomass certified reference materials from the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Community Bureau of Reference and seven solid biofuels from DCC and BIMEP Proficiency Testing were considered in order to enlarge the elemental mass fraction ranges.

In conclusion, WD-XRF spectrometry proved to be an expedite methodology for mass fraction range prediction of inorganic contaminants in biomass origin feedstock and could be used as an approach to new feedstock, that are few or still to be explored. Furthermore, in the cases of inorganic contaminant identification, the same sample may go to subsequent analysis.

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