VHDL-AMS modeling of adaptive electrostatic harvester of vibration energy with dual-output DC-DC converter

Andrii Dudka
Paris VI University, LIP6 laboratory
b.c. 167, 4, place Jussieu
75252 Paris, France
andrii.dudka@asim.lip6.fr

Dimitri Galayko
Paris VI University, LIP6 laboratory
b.c. 167, 4, place Jussieu
75252 Paris, France
dimitri.galayko@lip6.fr

Philippe Basset
Université Paris-Est,
ESYCOM, EA 2552, ESIEE
2, Boulevard B. Pascal, BP 99
93162 Noisy le Grand, France
p.basset@esiee.fr

ABSTRACT
This paper presents a functional design and modeling of smart conditioning circuit of a vibrational energy harvester based on electrostatic transducer. Two original features are added to the basic configuration previously published (whose model we presented on BMAS2007 conference). Firstly, we developed an auto-calibration block which allows the new harvester to adapt dynamically to the varying environment parameters (e.g., amplitude of external vibrations). Secondly, we propose an original schematic configuration based on a dual output DC-DC converter, which implements a smart power interface with the load, allowing the harvester to manage a possibly variable load and adapt to different situations (e.g. insufficient generated power level, load too large, etc.). The scheme of the power interface re-uses the coil existing in the basic harvester configuration. The new harvester architecture contains "software" blocks which can be programmed to implement different power-management and auto-calibration strategies. We describe one possible algorithm of the whole architecture operation, and present the corresponding modeling results. The system is implemented as a mixed VHDL-AMS/ELDO model.

Keywords
Energy harvesting, VHDL-AMS, adaptive switch, dc-dc converter, MEMS, power management

1. INTRODUCTION
Generation of electricity from available ambient energies is one of the most promising techniques of supplying low-power autonomous microsystems. Our research is focused on conversion of the energy from environment mechanical vibrations into electricity. Such supply generators can be used in microsystems embedded in moving objects (aircraft, cars, industrial tools, human body etc.), or in vibrating mechanical structures (bridges, ladders, etc.). Particularly, we are interested in harvesters using electrostatic (capacitive) transducers for electromechanical energy conversion. Harvesting the vibration energy with capacitive transducers requires complex conditioning electronics for managing the charge-discharge cycle of electromechanical energy conversion and for interfacing the transducer with the load. The conditioning electronics must take into account varying environment parameters (typically, frequency and amplitude of external vibrations): this requires a "smart" power management and adaptive control of the system operation. However, few studies have addressed these points, and the underlying theory is not mature yet [1]. Our work concerns the power management in environment-adaptive conditioning circuit for electrostatic vibration energy harvester. Here we present original architecture and algorithm of smart energy harvesting system based on capacitive transducer, and describe its mixed VHDL-AMS/ELDO model.

This study continues the work presented in [2], which concerned modeling of harvester with architecture initially proposed in [3]. This basic configuration demonstrated well the physical principle of the energy harvesting with the use of capacitive transducer, but the issues related to adaptation to environment conditions and with power management were not addressed. The new harvester architecture and its model which we present here are based on the model which was published in [2], with two new features. Firstly, we designed and modeled a calibration block which adapts "in real time" the operation parameter of the conditioning circuit to the external vibrations. Secondly, we improved the basic architecture [3] by adding a second output to the existing flyback circuit DC-DC convertor. This allows a generation of low DC voltage for the load without using an additional DC-DC convertor, which would require an additional inductor. We present the global VHDL-AMS/ELDO model of the system with the simulation results.

2. BASIC ARCHITECTURE AND MOTIVATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS
The basic architecture of the harvester is composed of a charge pump, of a flyback circuit and of a switch SW controlling the flyback circuit (fig. 1). The capacitors are initially pre-charged with some external energy sources. The role of the charge pump circuit is to transfer electrical charges from a large capacitor $C_{res}$ to a smaller capacitor $C_{store}$ making use of variation of the transducer capacitance $C_{var}$. The energy for this charge pumping comes from the mechanical domain, and during pumping, the harvested en-
energy is stored in the capacitive network composed of $C_{res}$ and $C_{store}$ connected in series. Quantitatively, the energy is represented by $C_{res}$ and $C_{store}$ voltage difference, but since $C_{res} \gg C_{store}$, during pumping $V_{res}$ remains nearly constant, and only the $V_{store}$ evolution represents the accumulation of energy.

Thin lines in fig. 2a demonstrate the evolution of $V_{store}$ and of the generated power during the charge pump operation. After some time, $V_{store}$ saturates and the harvested power decreases. To continue the energy harvesting, it is necessary to decrease the voltage difference between $C_{store}$ and $C_{res}$ without losing the harvested energy. It is performed by a flyback circuit, which operates as a Buck DC-DC converter, transferring charges from $C_{store}$ to $C_{res}$ using the inductor as an energy buffer. The flyback operation is controlled by the switch $Sw$.

From the thin curve in fig. 2b it is seen that there is some time interval where the generated power is maximal. This corresponds to some $V_1$ and $V_2$ limit values of $V_{store}$ (fig. 2a). Hence, to continuously harvest the energy, $V_{store}$ should remain in this range, varying periodically (cf. bold line plots in the fig. 2). For this, when $V_{store}$ reaches $V_2$, $Sw$ should switch on, the Buck DC-DC converter transfers the charges and the energy from $C_{store}$ to $C_{res}$. $Sw$ should turn off when $V_{store}$ is reduced to $V_1$. As we showed in [2], automatic generation of the switching events is possible if the switch control block senses the voltage $V_{store}$ and $V_{res}$ and detects the crossing of the threshold values $V_1$ and $V_2$ by $V_{store}$. Theoretical investigation provides us with following semi-empirical formula for $V_1$ and $V_2$ calculation [4]:

$$V_1 = V_{res} + 0.1 \cdot (V_{store\ max} - V_{res}),$$
$$V_2 = V_{res} + 0.6 \cdot (V_{store\ max} - V_{res}).$$

(1)

Here $V_{store\ max}$ is the saturation voltage of the charge pump (fig. 2) given by [3]:

$$V_{store\ max} = V_{res} \cdot C_{max}/C_{min},$$

(2)

where $C_{max}$ and $C_{min}$ are the maximal and minimal values of the transducer capacitance.

This architecture, whose VHDL-AMS/ELDO model is presented in [2], has two fundamental drawbacks. Firstly, from eq. (2), $V_{store\ max}$ depends on $C_{max}$ and $C_{min}$ which depends on the resonator vibration amplitude. The latter, in turn, depends on the parameter of the external vibrations, unknown a priori and which cannot be measured. Secondly, theoretical investigations presented in [4] highlight that optimal power yield requires high voltage level on $C_{res}$ (tens of volts), whereas usually, the load is supplied by few volts voltages. To generate a low voltage, a DC-DC converter is needed, which would consist in an additional energy conversion stage, and would require an additional inductor. These drawbacks are addressed by the improvements which we present in the next two sections.

3. AUTO-CALIBRATION OF THE SYSTEM

As presented in sect. 2, the threshold voltages $V_1$ and $V_2$ are optimized for particular parameters of external vibrations. To update $V_1$ and $V_2$ when the external vibration frequency and amplitude change, the current value of the parameter $V_{store\ max}$ should be known (eq. (1)). $V_{store\ max}$ can not be measured directly, since during the energy harvesting cycle $V_{store}$ never reaches the saturation (fig. 2a). Hence, $V_{store\ max}$ can only be measured in an ad-hoc calibration cycle, which should be repeated periodically so to account for the variation of external vibration parameters. Since such measurements consume energy, a compromise should be found between the frequency (and hence, precision) of $V_1$ and $V_2$ update and the energy consumed by the calibration. The proposed technique of calibration can be summarized as follows. To measure $V_{store\ max}$, we deactivate the flyback circuit and let the charge pump run freely up to the saturation. So, the saturation value of $V_{store}$ can be measured and can be used as $V_{store\ max}$ in $V_1$ and $V_2$ calculation.
The algorithm of the calibration cycle is the following. In the beginning of each calibration cycle, \( V_{\text{store}} \) value is reset to \( V_{\text{res}} \), to place the charge pump in the initial state (fig. 2a). Then the flyback circuit is desactivated: for this \( V_2 \) voltage is temporarily set to a high unreachable value during the whole calibration cycle. To detect the \( V_{\text{store}} \) saturation, periodic measurements of \( V_{\text{store}} \) value are done during the calibration cycle. At each measurement, \( V_{\text{store}} \) is compared with the previously measured value (fig. 3). When the difference (\( dV_{\text{store}} \)) between two neighboring measured values of \( V_{\text{store}} \) becomes lower than a predefined value \( \Delta V_{\text{min}} \), it is concluded that \( C_{\text{store}} \) voltage is saturated and the last measured value is considered as \( V_{\text{store max}} \). After the \( V_{\text{store max}} \) measurement, \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \) are calculated and the calibration cycle ends. Between two calibration cycles, the system operates with updated \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \) which are likely to optimise the energy yield.

The presented algorithm of auto-calibration is integrated into the existing VHDL-AMS model of the flyback switch [2]. This new model implements the switch \( \text{SW} \) as two-terminal electrical component which can be integrated in an ELDO electrical model of the conditioning circuit. The model has two input parameters: \( V_{\text{store}} \) and \( V_{\text{res}} \), which are used by the described algorithm for \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \) calculation and for generation of the switching events. The structure of the developed VHDL-AMS model of the new flyback switch is shown in figure 4. It is composed of two functional blocks and uses five processes. The model uses two clocks generated internally: a slow clock (\( \text{clk} \)) and uses five processes. The model uses two clocks generated internally: a slow clock (\( \text{clk} \)) and a quick clock (\( \text{clk}_m \)) ordering the start of the calibration cycles, and a quick clock (\( \text{clk}_m \)) ordering the \( V_{\text{store}} \) measurements.

The calibration block includes four processes. When the signal \( \text{clk} \) arrives (process 1), \( V_{\text{store}} \) reset process is activated (process 2). It measures \( V_{\text{store}} \) and if it is far from \( V_{\text{res}} \), \( V_{\text{store}} \) voltage is reset to \( V_{\text{res}} \). After \( V_{\text{store}} \) is initialized, \( V_{\text{store max}} \) measurement starts in the process 3, and \( V_{\text{store max}} \) is detected as it was explained above. After this, process 4 calculates \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \) values: this is the end of the calibration cycle. The calculated \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \) values are the input signals of the switching block. In this model, \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \) are updated only at the end of the calibration cycle and are kept constant up to the next calibration.

The switch control is implemented in the process 5. This process is always active. It detects the \( V_{\text{store}} \) crossing with \( V_1 \), \( V_2 \) and generates “on/off” switching events which order the electrical state of the switch. The “electrical switch behavioural model” block is the same as that presented in [2].

The \( V_{\text{store max}} \) measurement (process 3) represents the most important functionality of the calibration block, for this reason we give here the listing of its VHDL-AMS code.

P3: PROCESS(new_calibration, \( \text{clk}_m \))
-- \( v_1, v_2 \) -- intermediate \( V_{\text{store}} \) values:
variable \( v_1 \): real := 5.0;
variable \( v_2 \): real := 5.1;
variable \( dv \): real := 0.0;
variable \( dv_{\text{last}} \): real := 0.0;
variable \( dv_{\text{min}} \): real := 5.0 -e- 2; -- minimal \( V_{\text{store}} \)
-- parity of the measurement cycle number:
variable \( \text{par} \): boolean := true;
-- counter of the clock event:
variable \( \text{count} \): real := 0.0;
-- internal clock period:
constant \( \text{clk} \): time := 8.0 ms;
BEGIN
if new_calibration then
  -- begin calibration: \( V_{\text{store max}} \) measurement starts
  \( \text{calibration} \) := false;
  -- \( dv \) measurement
  if \( \text{clk}_m \)’event and \( \text{clk}_m \) = '1' then
    \( dv_{\text{last}} := dv \);
    if \( \text{par} \) then
      \( v_1 := v_{\text{store}} \);
      if \( v_2 > 0.0 \) then
        \( dv := v_1 - v_2 \);
      end if;
    else
      \( v_2 := v_{\text{store}} \);
      if \( v_1 > 0.0 \) then
        \( dv := v_2 - v_1 \);
      end if;
    end if;
  end if;
end if;

Figure 4: Structure of adaptive flyback switch

Electrical switch behavioral model

Flyback adaptive switch control

- Calibration block
- Process 1: Timer
- Process 2: Vstore initialization
- Process 3: Vstore max measurement
- Process 4: V1 and V2 calculation
- Process 5: Switching event generator

Figure 3: Calibration phase operation.
4. POWER MANAGEMENT OF THE HARVESTED ENERGY

4.1 Hardware architecture

As mentioned in sect. 2, the optimal energy yield requires high \( V_{res} \) voltages (tens of volts), which comes in contradiction with the low-voltage supply requirement for the load. The solution we propose is to add a large capacitor \( C_{load} \) to the basic configuration of fig. 1. This capacitor must be charged to a low voltage and is destined to store the energy immediately available for the load (fig. 5). To charge this capacitor with the energy available in the high-voltage capacitor \( C_{res} \), a DC-DC converter is needed. However, the basic architecture already contains a Buck DC-DC converter implemented by the inductor and the diode D3 and used by the flyback circuit. Its role is to transfer the energy from the high voltage \( C_{store} \) capacitor to the lower voltage \( C_{res} \) capacitor. This DC-DC converter can be directly used to charge \( C_{load} \). This is done by introducing a switch \( SW_2 \) which allows the inductor to discharge on one of two capacitors. The idea is to allow the flyback circuit to return the energy not only to \( C_{res} \) capacitor, but alternatively to \( C_{res} \) or \( C_{load} \) capacitors.

Apart the possibility of generating a low voltage suitable for the load supply, this configuration allows to control the voltage on \( C_{res} \). Indeed, as the theory shows [4], for each external vibration parameter set there is an optimal value of \( V_{res} \). If, for some reasons, \( V_{res} \) is higher than this optimal voltage, the proposed dual-output DC-DC converter can just discharge \( C_{store} \) on \( C_{load} \) during several cycles by keeping the switch \( SW_2 \) in the position "left". This will slowly reduce the charges on \( C_{res} \), since its charges consumed by the charge pump operation will not be compensated by the flyback anymore.

However, the following critical situation is possible. If the external vibration parameters change so that the optimal value of \( C_{res} \) voltage needs to be substantially reduced, the presented above dual-output dc-dc converter may not help. Indeed, since \( C_{res} \) value is too high, the charge pump may not be able to operate (this issue has been highlighted by theoretical studies [4]). In this context \( C_{res} \) voltage can’t be reduced without losses. To escape from this situation, we propose to add an additional switch \( SW_3 \) which allows to connect \( C_{res} \) to the input of the DC-DC converter, and \( C_{load} \) to the output. Thus, if the voltage \( V_{res} \) has to be quickly reduced, two switches are activated: \( SW_2 \) (position left) and \( SW_3 \) (on). The capacitor \( C_{res} \) discharges on \( C_{load} \), and the control block cut off the switch \( SW_3 \) when \( C_{res} \) come down to the wanted value.

The switch \( SW_1 \) is added to interface the load with the harvester. It is an important part of the power management infrastructure: it allows, for example, to disconnect the load from the generator if the harvested power is low, hence avoiding discharge of the capacitors \( C_{load} \) and \( C_{res} \). The switches \( SW_1-SW_3 \) are supposed to be controlled by some smart electronics which sense the voltages \( V_{cloud} \) and \( V_{res} \), and which, depending on the application and the nature of the load, implements some optimal power measurement strategy.

4.2 Model of harvester with power management

The model of the improved architecture of harvester with power management block (fig. 5) is implemented in the same way as the basic model (fig. 1) [2]: the Eldo netlist of the schematic of fig. 5 includes electric components (diodes, ca-

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```
par:=not par;
--de minimal value detection:
--active only after 3 measurements of Vstore
if dv<dv_min and count>3 then
  v_store_max<=v_store;
  end_calibration:=true;
  count:=0.0;
end if;
count:=count+1.0;
end if;
clk_m<=not clk_m after clkp/2;
END PROCESS P3;
```

Figure 5: Conditioning circuit of energy harvester with power management control
The development of the algorithm of the "power management control" block operation is the subject of ongoing work. However, to test our model, we implemented a very simple algorithm consisting in following. The goal is to maintain $V_{res}$ and $V_{cloud}$ in fixed limits ($V_{r1}$, $V_{r2}$) and ($V_{l1}$, $V_{l2}$) respectively. When $V_{res}$ reaches the upper limit $V_{r2}$, SW3 becomes on and SW2 connects $L$ to $C_{load}$ (position left). Thus, $C_{res}$ discharges quickly on $C_{load}$ through $L$. The switch SW3 becomes off when $V_{res}$ reduces to $V_{r1}$. The switch SW2 goes to position "right" after $L$ discharges completely on $C_{load}$. After that, the conditioning circuit operates in the normal way until $V_{res}$ becomes over $V_{r2}$ again. Independently of this, the level of $V_{cloud}$ is controlled. When $V_{load}$ reaches $V_{l2}$, the switch SW1 connects the load resistance to $C_{load}$ and $C_{load}$ discharges on the load, loosing its energy and hence reducing its voltage. When $V_{cloud}$ reduces to $V_{l1}$, the switch SW1 becomes off. This algorithm is appropriate in the case, when the load consumes more power than the harvester is able to produce. Hence, the load can only be supplied by time bursts during which the energy is injected in the load. For example, this operation can be used to recharge an accumulator. However, more complex algorithms can be developed, depending on the specific application.

5. MODELING RESULTS

To validate our study, two modeling experiments were done. The goal of the first one is the comparison of operation of the harvester, which uses the flyback calibration with the basic configuration in which $V_{store,max}$ is pre-calculated under hypothesis of constant and known parameters of external vibration [2]. Both configurations are identical apart the flyback switch models (with and without calibration), and are modeled in the same context of variable acceleration of external vibrations. Both configurations don’t include nor output voltage control, neither load resistor (fig. 1). The calibration is done after each 1 s ($clk$ period) and $clk_{mn}$ clock has a period of 8 ms. The goal of the second experiment is to test the output voltage control block described in sec. 4. This experiment was modeled with constant parameters of external vibrations. For the simulation we used a load resistor of 2 MΩ. The goal of the output voltage control block is to maintain $V_{res}$ within the range (19.5V, 20.5V) and $V_{cloud}$ in the range (3.2V, 3.6V). Both experiments were performed with external vibrations frequency of 298 Hz and used a transducer model with $C_{var}$ variation between 100 pF and 200 pF. The initial value for $C_{res}$ and $C_{store}$ capacitors was 13 V.

Figure 6 presents the simulation results for the first experiment. The upper plot shows the acceleration of the external vibrations, with amplitude changing over time from 4.5 to 10 $ms^{-2}$. In the same figure, we present the evolution of characteristic quantities in the two tested models. The plots (b), (c), (d) demonstrate $V_{store}$, $V_{res}$ and generated power evolution curves respectively for the auto-calibrated system. The plots (e), (f), (g) represent the evolution of the same parameters for the system with the non-adaptive switch. Comparing results of these two simulations, some interesting observations can be done. When the acceleration amplitude of the external vibrations decreases, the system with the non-adaptive switch doesn’t harvest energy. It occurs because due to the lower mechanical force, the amplitude of resonator vibration reduces, and $C_{var}$ variation amplitude reduces as well, mod-
ifying $C_{\text{max}}$ and $C_{\text{min}}$ capacitances so that new $V_{\text{store maz}}$ value (eq. (2)) is less than the $V_2$ limit value, and flyback cannot be activated. In this way, the charge pump is saturated, no energy is harvested and $V_{\text{res}}$ voltage remains constant.

However, with the use of the auto-calibrated flyback switch (sec. 3), one can observe that the conditioning circuit adapts to the variable amplitude of acceleration and continues the energy harvesting. For example, when the vibration amplitude becomes low, $V_1$ and $V_2$ values decrease so to ensure the energy harvesting under those conditions. And inversely, when the acceleration amplitude increases, $V_1$ and $V_2$ values become also greater so to provide the system with the maximum possible power of harvested energy. The average power generated by the system with auto-calibration is nearly twice larger than in the case of the basic architecture.

The plots in fig. 7 demonstrate the modeling results of the conditioning circuit presented in fig. 5. On this plot, one can observe the establishing of the mode of sustainable energy harvesting. The system starts from the state corresponding to zero energy of $C_{\text{load}}$ and to 13 V of $C_{\text{res}}$ pre-charge. The plots highlight three phase of operation. The first phase continues up to 45 seconds, and corresponds to the accumulation of internal energy of the harvester. Indeed, initially $V_{\text{res}}$ is below the wanted range (19.5,20.5 V), hence, during the first phase, all harvested energy is accumulated by $C_{\text{res}}$ so to increase its voltage. When $V_{\text{res}}$ reaches $V_{\text{res max}}$, the extra energy of $V_{\text{res}}$ begins to be transferred toward $C_{\text{load}}$. This transfer is very quick comparing to the average rate of $V_{\text{res}}$ evolution, and immediately after this, $V_{\text{res}}$ equals to $V_{\text{L2}}$. Looking at the $V_{\text{load}}$ evolution, one can observe that between 45 and 85 seconds, the $C_{\text{load}}$ accumulates the charges from $C_{\text{res}}$, but doesn’t transfer them to the load. This is the second phase: pre-charge of the energy buffer for the load supply. Indeed, the load can’t be supplied with the voltage under $V_{\text{L1}}$, hence, the switch $S_1$ is kept off during all the phase 2. Actually, when $V_{\text{load}}$ reaches $V_{\text{L2}}$, the switch $S_1$ is on and the load is supplied by $C_{\text{load}}$. This is the start of the phase 3 corresponding to sustainable energy generation. Since $R_{\text{load}}$ consumes more power that the harvester generates, $V_{\text{load}}$ reduces slowly, and when it reaches $V_{\text{L1}}$, $S_1$ disconnects $R_{\text{load}}$ from $C_{\text{load}}$, and $C_{\text{load}}$ increases its voltage and energy again until $V_{\text{load}} = V_{\text{L2}}$.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides the basic architecture of vibration energy harvester with two new features: the possibility to adapt to the environmental conditions and with smart power interface with the load. To our knowledge, these issues concerning the integration of the harvester into the real environment have never been addressed for the studied basic architecture [3]. The global improved architecture is implemented as VHDL-AMS/ELDO mixed model. The proposed model includes hardware blocks such as switches, resonator and conditioning electronics, and the control blocks which can operate following different algorithms. Hence, this model can be used as the basis for research of the optimal strategy of power management inside the harvester and on the interface between the harvester and the load. Several improvements can be made to the proposed model. Firstly, the switches should be implemented by high-voltage transistors, to adequately model losses and transient phenomena. Secondly, the algorithm of the calibration should take into account the possible measurement losses when detecting the minimal $dV_{\text{store}}$ value, and probably, it should yet be simplified to be more appropriate for low-power hardware implementation. At last, more investigation should be made on dual-output DC-DC converter, its performances and operation algorithm.

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8. REFERENCES