

Proposal and Energy Analysis of a New Design Integrating the SCPP into Electricity Pylon Using CFD Numerical Method: Towards Ensuring Electric Needs of Rural Dwellings

Ammar Mebarki^{1,*} and Meriem Hafidha Titi²

¹ Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Batna 1, Batna, 05000, Algeria

² Laboratory of Architecture, Urbanism, and Transport: Habitat, landscape and urban mobility (LAUTr), Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Batna 1, Batna, 05000, Algeria

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ABSTRACT

Rural electrification is critical for increasing agricultural output, thereby reducing poverty and improving food security. Electricity pylons are steel structures that transport electricity at high voltages and are often the tallest objects in the countryside. The current study proposes a novel solar chimney power plant (SCPP) model in which the chimney is contained within the pylon's vertical structure. The numerical methodology was carried out using Manzanares' SCPP 3D axisymmetric CFD model, which was simulated with ANSYS Fluent software. The RNG $k-\varepsilon$ turbulence model and a discrete ordinates non-grey radiation model were used. Following model validation, the results led to the identification of five turbine positions based on five collector radius intervals. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time this has been observed in the SCPP system as a result of air velocity variations throughout the chimney. Equations based on collector radius and solar radiation are used to calculate the generated electric energy and the number of rural houses that could be electrified at each interval. Our findings confirmed the proposed model's efficiency in generating electricity; for instance, one hour of 1000 W/m^2 solar radiation using a collector radius of 200 m produces 14.82 kW that could supply 6.877 rural houses in India or 7.411 rural houses in China for 24 h. This study proposes a plan for electricity transmission companies to invest in infrastructure (pylons) to provide rural renewable electricity.

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Nomenclatures

C_p	Specific heat capacity of the air ($\text{J kg}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$)
r	Collector radius (m)
Ri	Richardson number
g	Gravitational acceleration (m s^{-2})
H_{ch}	Chimney height (m)
G	Global radiation (W m^{-2})
k	Turbulent kinetic energy ($\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-2}$)

Δp	Pressure (Pa)
P	Electric power (KW)
Pr	Prandtl number
T	Temperature (K)
V	Air velocity (m s^{-1})
b	Thermal expansion coefficient
ε	Dissipation rate of turbulent kinetic energy ($\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-3}$)
m	Dynamic viscosity ($\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}$)
r	Air Density (kg m^{-3})

1 Introduction

With the introduction of new technologies, such as heat pumps and electric vehicles, electrical consumption has skyrocketed. Buildings account for 40% of global energy consumption and 25% of net greenhouse gas emissions [1,2]. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has resulted in a fuel energy crisis, raising the global cost of electricity generation. Indeed, despite pressure from many governments to reduce electric consumption, it increased to 2% by the end of 2022 [3], emphasizing the importance of finding efficient solutions for using renewable alternative energy.

The majority of rural residents rely on agriculture as their primary source of income. Similarly, rural electrification aims to increase agricultural output in order to reduce poverty and improve food security [4]. Many researchers investigated the issue of power supply in rural areas, taking into account the high economic costs of connecting to energy supply networks. Uski et al. (2018) conducted a sensitivity analysis of microgrid investment options to ensure power supply reliability in rural networks as an alternative to underground cabling [5]. Moreover, Gunasekaran (2020) looked into the concept of a manufacturing incubator to assist rural electric cooperatives in becoming self-sufficient in terms of electrical system needs through local manufacturing [6].

Off-grid solar photovoltaic energy offers a viable alternative to centrally distributed electricity in developing countries [7]. These off-grid energy systems operate without the extensive support networks associated with centralized power generation, allowing rural areas to overcome critical barriers in the energy transition process [8]. Urpelainen et al. (2016) demonstrated that microgrids are becoming more widely recognized as a viable alternative to traditional grid infrastructure for connecting underserved populations and ensuring a sustainable energy supply [9,10].

Several studies in the literature have emphasized the ability of stand-alone renewable off-grid systems in developing countries to promote economic development while also ensuring environmental sustainability [11,12]. For example, previous research in India has shown that providing solar power locally in villages can overcome the political challenges that Indian energy sector reforms typically face [13].

The solar chimney power plant (SCPP) is a renewable-energy system that generates electricity. It has recently gained popularity due to its ability to generate green energy. This system consists of three main components: a long cylindrical structure typically located in the center of a greenhouse collector made of transparent plastic films or glass, and a turbine placed at the base or inside the chimney [14]. The SCPP operates by converting solar energy into thermal energy within a collector. This thermal energy is then transformed into kinetic energy as heated air rises through a chimney, ultimately generating electricity via a wind turbine coupled with a generator. This system is clean, simple, durable, and capable of producing large-scale renewable electricity with very low operating costs and extended daily generation [14].

Although the concept of the solar chimney was introduced in 1903, its first successful implementation occurred in the 1980s in Manzanares, Spain, through the efforts of Caicedo et al. and Schlaich et al. The SCPP analyzed in the study features a chimney measuring 194.6 m in height and 5.08 m in radius, while the collector is positioned 1.85 m above the ground with a radius of 122 m [15–18].

The collector enables solar radiation to penetrate the air volume between it and a 6000 m² soil surface. The greenhouse effect driven by the soil's absorptivity results in the absorption of solar radiation, which heats the soil and consequently the overlying air. As the air temperature increases, its density decreases, causing it to rise and accelerate due to the pressure differential created by the tall chimney. Although the primary energy source for the system is daily solar radiation, the pressure gradient between the chimney's inlet and outlet allows the system to continue operating during nighttime or low-sunlight conditions.

Recent studies have employed numerical simulations to enhance SCPP performance, particularly examining the influence of ground thermal inertia [19]. Additional research has focused on the effects of chimney geometry (including divergence angle), ambient temperature, solar flux and turbine efficiency [20], and chimney height [21]. Solar chimneys have been evaluated across diverse climatic conditions, as reported by Schlaich and Titi et al. [22,23]. While most investigations treat the SCPP as a standalone system, some have explored its integration with existing structures. For instance, Wang et al. [24], proposed the coupling of solar chimneys with buildings and telecommunications towers, highlighting their potential as multifunctional infrastructure elements.

Electricity pylons, also known as transmission towers, are tall steel structures used to transport high-voltage electricity. The word pylon is derived from the Greek word 'pyle', meaning 'gateway'. During the 1920s, the first steel pylons were built, becoming the gateways to electricity for everyone [25]. These pylons are usually the tallest structures in the countryside [26]. The height of pylons varies depending on factors such as the ground height from which they rise and the distance between them [27]. Tall pylons allow the wires to cross rivers, railways, and roads. For example, the National Grid pylons in the United Kingdom are at least 36 m tall [25]. Given that these large structures are indispensable and widely distributed around the world, it appears critical to find an environmental use for them, such as producing renewable energy, as proposed by Perales et al. (2019). The researchers of the previously mentioned study concentrated on the arrangement of cross-flow turbine blades and the development of an electric generation system intended for rural homes [28].

This study is based on selecting and implementing a model from one of the most well-known and widely distributed electricity pylons for the production of clean electricity via the solar chimney power plant (SCPP) system. The integration of an SCPP with existing transmission pylons aims to reuse land and structures already available in power corridors, avoiding the need to build a separate tall chimney. This approach reduces environmental and structural costs while enabling small, distributed renewable generation directly on the grid.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 The Novel SCPP Proposed Model

The tower model announced in the Central Electricity Board's annual report for 1927 in the United Kingdom was chosen as the basis for the proposed shape and dimensions of the solar chimney power plant, which is considered one of the most widely used types of pylons worldwide [25]. This paper proposes a new design for solar chimneys that corresponds to the shape of the chosen pylon, tests the effect of collector diameters on system outputs, and investigates the best height for placing the

2.2 The Numerical Model

While some research on SCPP focuses on numerical model optimization [30,31], the majority of SCPP studies use CFD techniques. Elwekeel et al. (2018) used the ANSYS Fluent solver to analyze the effect of numerical model parameters on the accuracy of computational outcomes. They discovered that the $ek-\varepsilon$ model is the most effective model to predict the SCPP characteristics, based on their investigation of the effect of the turbulence model on air flow within SCPP [32]. The governing equations for continuity, momentum, and energy transport describe the interior flow of a solar chimney [33,34]:

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial(\rho ur)}{\partial r} + \frac{\partial(vr)}{\partial z} = 0 \quad (1)$$

$$\frac{\partial(\rho u)}{\partial t} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} (\rho r u u) + \frac{\partial(\rho u v)}{\partial z} = -\frac{\partial p}{\partial r} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(\mu r \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right) + \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \left(\mu \frac{\partial u}{\partial z} \right) - 2\mu \frac{u}{r^2} \quad (2)$$

$$\frac{\partial(\rho v)}{\partial t} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} (\rho r u v) + \frac{\partial(\rho v^2)}{\partial z} = -\frac{\partial p}{\partial z} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(\mu r \frac{\partial v}{\partial r} \right) + \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \left(\mu \frac{\partial v}{\partial z} \right) - (\rho_0 - \rho) g \quad (3)$$

Energy equation:

$$\frac{\partial(\rho C_p T)}{\partial t} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} (\rho r C_p u T) + \frac{\partial(\rho C_p v T)}{\partial z} = \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(r \lambda \frac{\partial T}{\partial r} \right) + \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \left(\lambda \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} \right) - \nabla \cdot q_r \quad (4)$$

The Rayleigh number (Ra) quantifies the strength of buoyancy-induced flow in natural convection:

$$Ra = \frac{g \beta \Delta T L^3}{\nu \alpha} \quad (5)$$

where, ΔT represents the maximum temperature difference within the system, β denotes the thermal expansion coefficient, L signifies the mean height of the collector, and α indicates the thermal diffusivity.

Overall, the analysis of the collector and chimney shows that the Ra value is greater than 1010; thus, fluid flow in the regions may be turbulent [35,36]. The turbulent flow was simulated with the RNG k-model [37]. The turbulence kinetic energy (K) and rate of dissipation can be calculated from the two transport equations as follows [38]:

$$\frac{\partial(\rho k)}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial}{\partial X_j} (\rho k u_j) = \frac{\partial}{\partial X_j} \left(\alpha_k \mu_{eff} \frac{\partial k}{\partial X_j} \right) + G_k + G_b - \rho \varepsilon - Y_M \quad (6)$$

$$\frac{\partial(\rho \varepsilon)}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial}{\partial X_j} (\rho \varepsilon u_j) = \frac{\partial}{\partial X_j} \left(\alpha_\varepsilon \mu_{eff} \frac{\partial \varepsilon}{\partial X_j} \right) + G_{1\varepsilon} \frac{\varepsilon}{k} (G_k + G_{3\varepsilon} G_b) - G_{2\varepsilon} \rho \frac{\varepsilon^2}{k} - R_\varepsilon \quad (7)$$

In this context, G_k represents the generation of turbulent kinetic energy due to mean velocity gradients, while G_b denotes the generation of turbulent kinetic energy attributed to buoyancy. The turbulent Prandtl numbers are defined as $\partial_T = 0.9$, $\partial_k = 1.0$, and $\partial_\varepsilon = 1.3$ for T , k , and ε , respectively. Additionally, the constants for the turbulent model are $C_{1\varepsilon} = 1.44$, $C_{2\varepsilon} = 1.92$, and $C_\mu = 0.09$.

2.2.1 Modeling the Performance of SCPP

The Collector

The heat gain of air is given by the following equation:

$$Q = \eta_{col} A_{col} G \quad (8)$$

where, η_{col} , A_{col} and Q are the solar collector efficiency, the solar collector and the generated heat due to the effect of the greenhouse.

Q is given by:

$$Q = CN \cdot m \Delta T \quad (9)$$

with,

$$m = \rho_{air} V_{ch} A_{ch} \quad (10)$$

and,

$$\eta_{col} = \rho_{air} \cdot V_{ch} A_{ch} CN \Delta T / A_{col} G \quad (11)$$

where, A_{ch} , V_{ch} and m are the surface, the velocity and the mass flow at the entrance to the chimney, respectively.

The Chimney

The chimney efficiency is expressed as:

$$\eta_{ch} = g H_{ch} / CN T_a \quad (12)$$

where, T_a and H_{ch} are the ambient air temperature and the height of the chimney, respectively.

The total Power is given by:

$$N_{tot} = \eta_{ch} Q = g (A_{ch} / T_a) \rho_{col} V_{ch} \Delta T A_{ch} \quad (13)$$

The pressure difference between the chimney base and the outlet is calculated as follows:

$$\Delta N_{tot} = \rho_{col} g H_{ch} (\Delta T / T_a) \quad (14)$$

2.2.2 The Turbine Model

Located at the bottom, the wind turbine converts the kinetic energy of the airflow into mechanical rotational energy [22]. The mechanical power drawn in by the turbine is calculated as follows [21]:

$$P_m = \frac{2}{3} \eta_{col} \eta_{ch} A_{col} G \quad (15)$$

The equation above can be further detailed as:

$$P_m = \frac{2}{3} \eta_{col} \eta_{ch} \pi r^2 G \quad (16)$$

η_t in the present paper is taken to be 0.8 [21,39].

2.3 Modeling and Meshing

The numerical methodology for this study was implemented using Manzanares' SCPP 3D axisymmetric CFD model, which was simulated with ANSYS Fluent software. Because of symmetries along

the YZ and XZ planes, the modeling required only 15° of the pilot plant to accelerate convergence [40]. Because of the irregular shape, triangular meshing is recommended for CFD calculations, as depicted in Fig. 2.

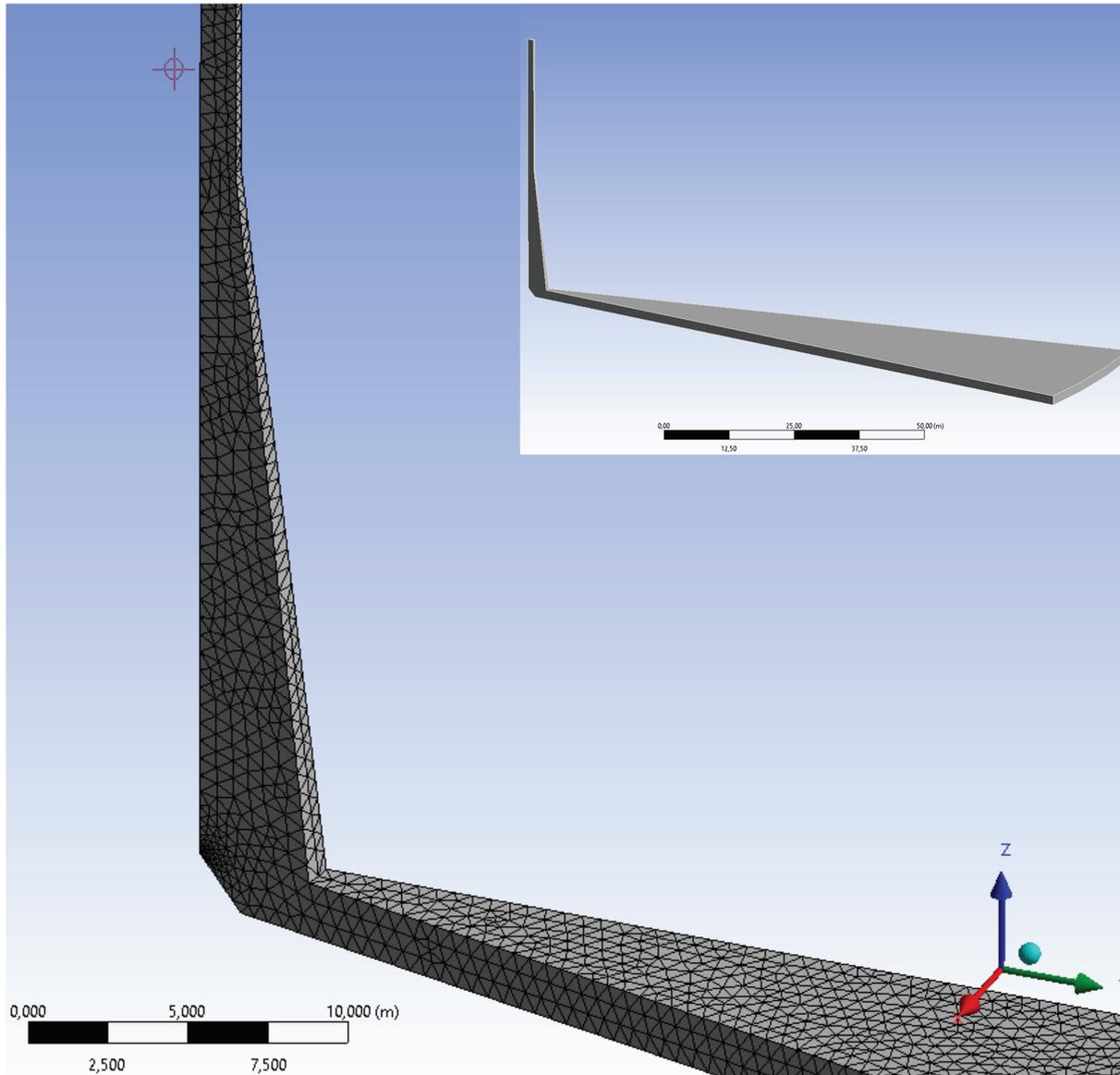


Figure 2: Modeling and meshing adopted in CFD analyses

To obtain a mesh-independent answer, various cell count-based computations were performed. Table 1 shows the three mesh configurations used for air temperature (T_m) and air velocity (V_m) at the proposed turbine levels. When the number of cells was 299,682, corresponding to 0.4 element dimension, the perceived percentage variation in air velocity (V_m) was 0.84%.

This element dimension was used for the entire CFD parametric investigation because it was deemed adequate in comparison to similar efforts in the literature [21].

Table 1: Mesh-independent solution results for the CFD analyses

Elements dimension (m)	Cell counts	Temperature (Tm) K	Change in (Tm) %	Air velocity (Vm)	Change in (Vm) %	Difference from experimental data in (Vm) %
0.6	110,435	318.00	–	14.69	–	1.69
0.5	175,683	317.20	0.25	15.47	5.3	0.47
0.4	299,682	317.00	0.06	15.60	0.84	0.60

2.4 Boundary Conditions

The appropriate material ties for the ground, chimney, and collector glass as shown in [Table 2](#). The choice of an appropriate turbulence model for describing the physics of the flow field is critical to CFD prediction [41]. The air temperature (T°) is set at 293.15 K. The inlet condition for pressure is designated at the entrance of the domain, whereas a pressure outlet condition is implemented at the exit.

Table 2: Material properties

Physical characteristics	Chimney	Glass	Ground
Thickness (m)	0.0125	0.004	0.5
Density (kg/m³)	2719	2500	2160
Thermal conductivity (W/mK)	202.4	1.15	1.83
Specific heat (J/kg K)	871	750	710
Absorption coefficient	0	0.03	0.9
Transmissivity	–	0.9	–

The momentum equation was addressed utilizing the RNG $k-\varepsilon$ turbulence model. The correlation between air velocity and pressure was established through a straightforward method. The PRESTO technique was used for the interpolation of pressure. The major equations were approximated with a second-order upwind approach. To solve the radiation equation, we used the discrete ordinates (DO) non-grey radiation approach combined with the solar ray tracing method. The Boussinesq approximation was used to suggest a link between temperature and variations in air density. Using convergence criteria of 10^{-6} resulted in optimal simulation accuracy.

2.5 Model Validation

Validation of numerical model results is critical to ensuring their applicability. For this purpose, we applied the numerical model used in this study to the Manzanares pilot plant while maintaining the same material properties ([Table 2](#)).

The numerical and experimental data found in the literature [14,21] were compared with the numerical air velocity and air temperature results derived from solar radiations (600, 800, and 1000 W/m²) to verify the accuracy of the current CFD model. [Fig. 3](#) shows air velocity and total temperature contours that are consistent with previous studies, as well as experimental results from the Manzanares Plant. In the following section of the study, the model will be used to investigate the system's performance.

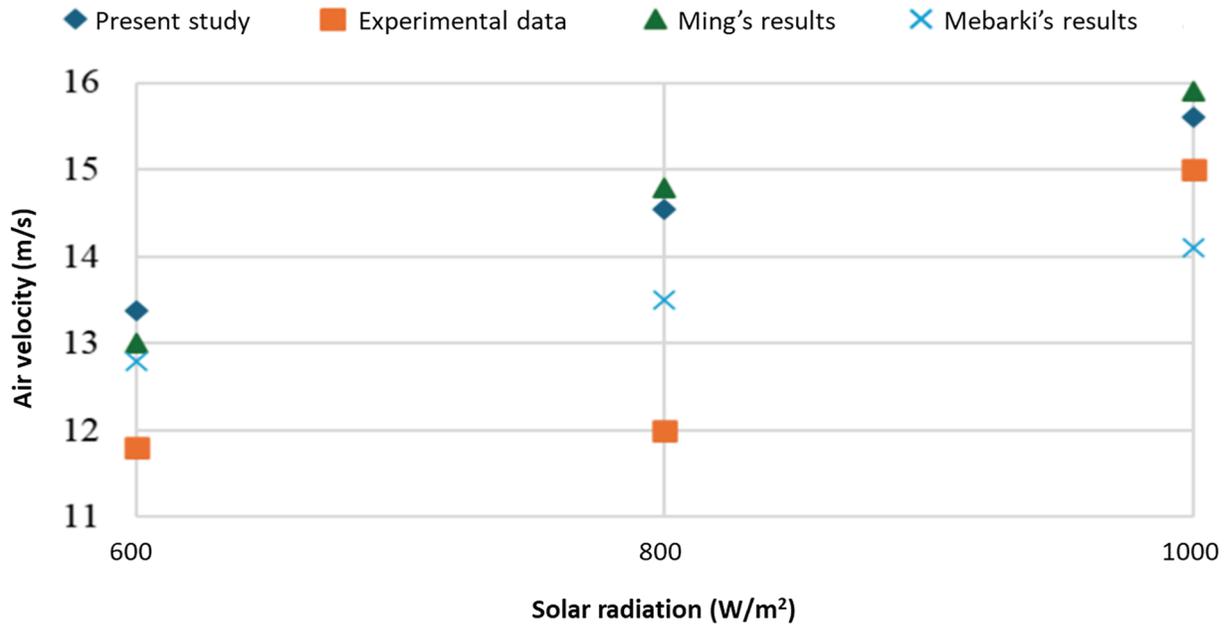


Figure 3: Verification of the accuracy of the CFD model by comparing it with certain numerical and experimental data from the literature

3 Results and Discussion

Following the application of the CFD model to parametric studies, the following results were obtained.

3.1 Air Behavior inside the Chimney

To better understand the behavior of air movement inside the chimney, and because the results are similar depending on solar radiation, we used the case of 1000 W/m² solar radiation for each collector radius. Figs. 4 and 5 show the results of the air velocity and pressure simulations within the chimney, respectively. The air velocity increases with variable acceleration along the height of the inverted cone, influenced by the change in pressure difference, reaching its maximum value at the beginning of the cylindrical part at a height of 34 m. As shown in Fig. 6, the air velocity reaches its maximum of 6.89, 10.05, 11.79, 13.23, and 13.75 m/s with collector radius 40, 80, 120, 160, and 200 m, respectively, with pressure differences 22.3, 46.0, 65.0, 79.55, and 90.2 Pa (Fig. 7). The Venturi effect has the shape of the change in velocity explained by the Bernoulli theory and equation of fluid motion (Eq. (17)) [42]:

$$e_i = P + \frac{1}{2}\rho V^2 + \rho gZ = const \tag{17}$$

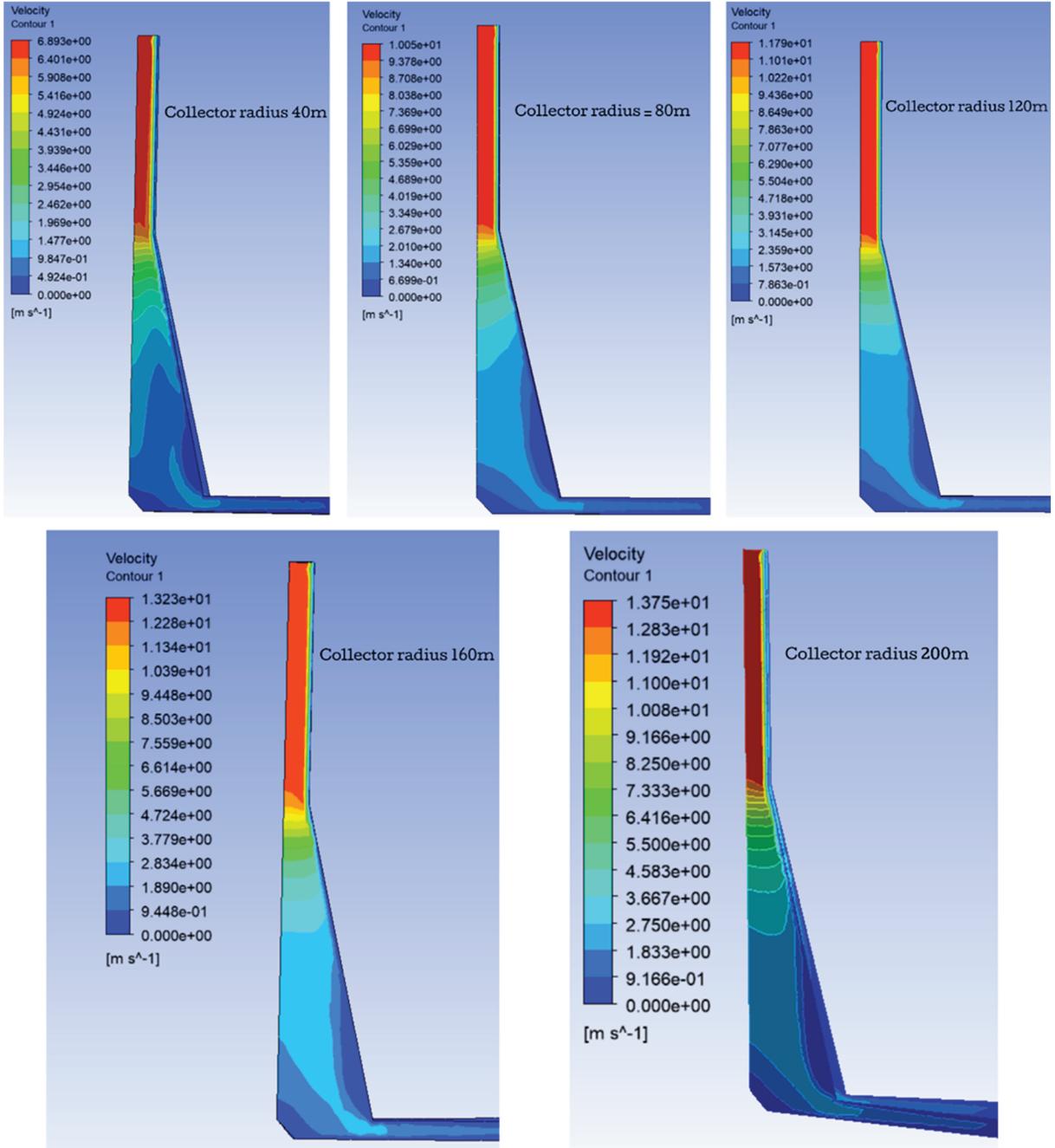


Figure 4: The results of the air velocity simulation for five collector radii

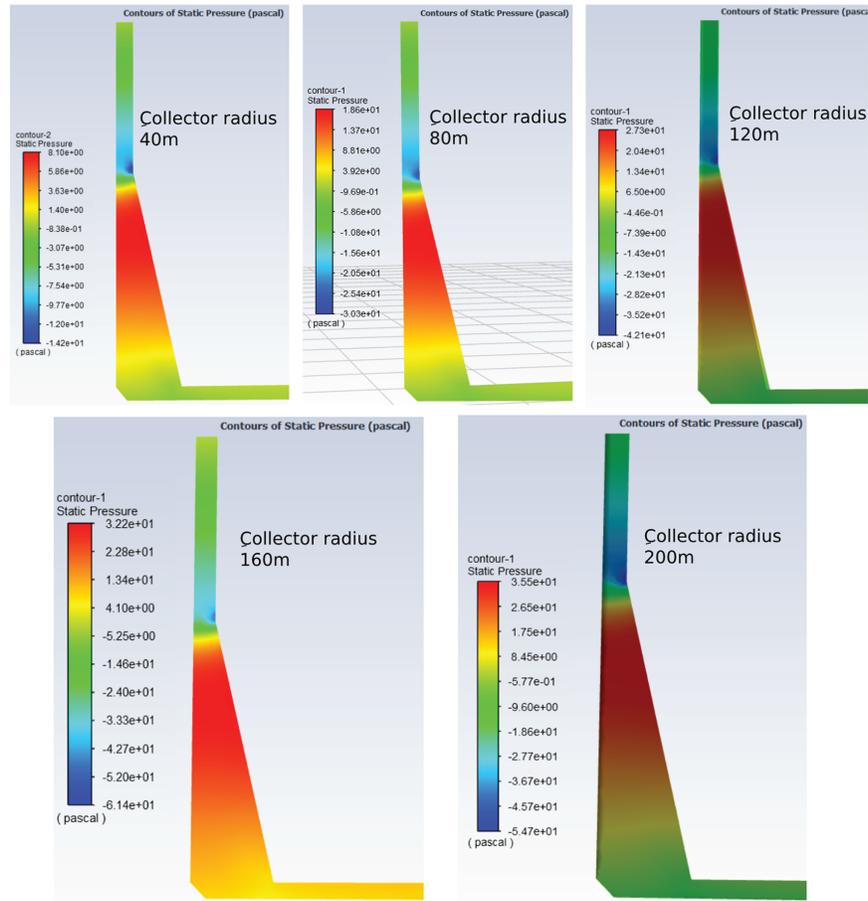


Figure 5: The results of the air pressure simulation for five collector radii

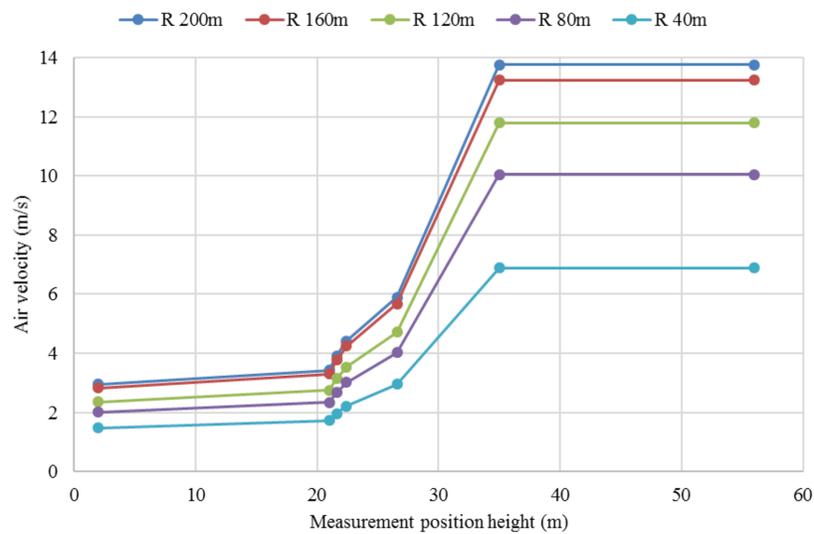


Figure 6: Air velocity as a function of measurement location in the chimney for five collector radii

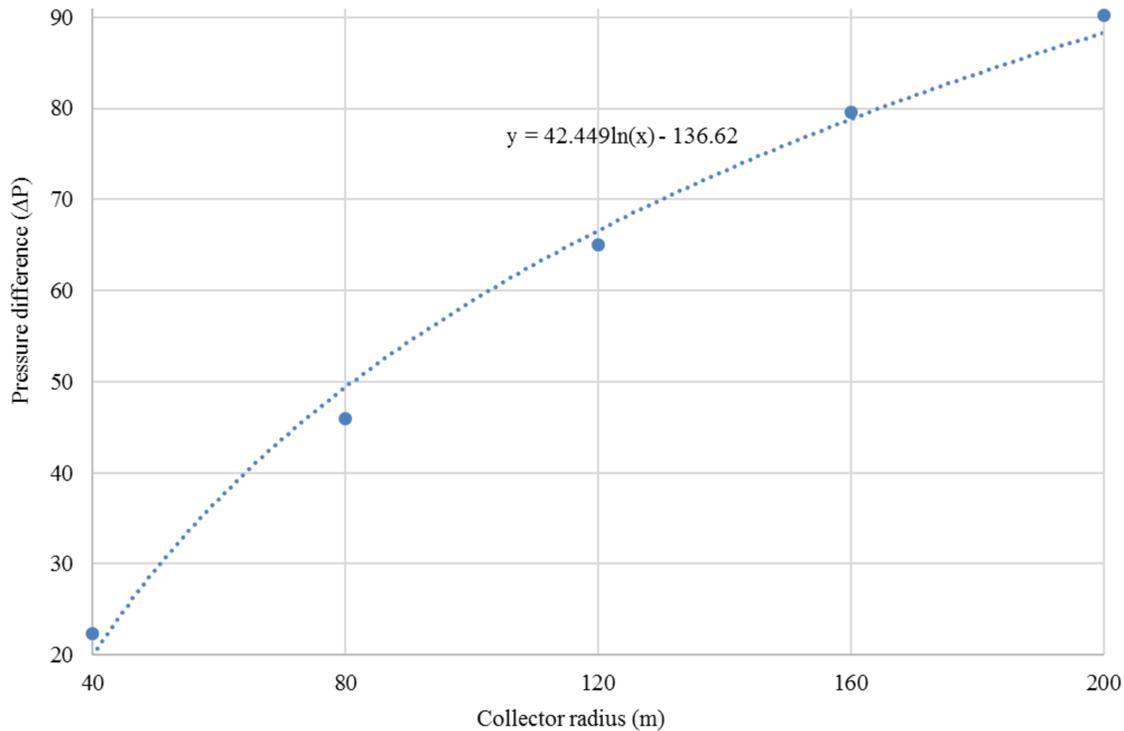


Figure 7: The pressure difference for five collector radii

3.2 Choosing Turbine Location

Choosing the best location for the turbine to ensure the system's best energy performance is determined by a number of factors, including the air velocity value and the chimney's cross-sectional area, which are determined by the equation that converts kinetic energy into electrical energy within the chimney. Fig. 8 illustrates how the product of air velocity and the chimney's cross-sectional area varies with changes in measurement height for different collector radii. Fig. 8 shows three intervals, with the best being ≤ 20 m, followed by 22.4–24.4 and finally ≥ 34 m. It is worth noting that for the first two intervals, the lowest possible position should be chosen.

Several studies have looked at the minimum air velocity required for a vertical axis turbine to operate efficiently [43,44]. Indeed, the startup wind speed required for power production in vertical axis wind turbines (VAWTs) can be as low as 1 m/s, with some models operating efficiently at 2 m/s [45]. As a result, using the minimum solar radiation proposed in this study as a reference, 400 W/m², Fig. 9 depicts the proposed model's air velocity curves as a function of collector radius change for five turbine locations. The turbine locations were chosen based on the height intervals mentioned above, which are 2, 20, 22.4, 24.4, and 34 m, respectively. The minimum air velocity threshold line was set at 2 m/s.

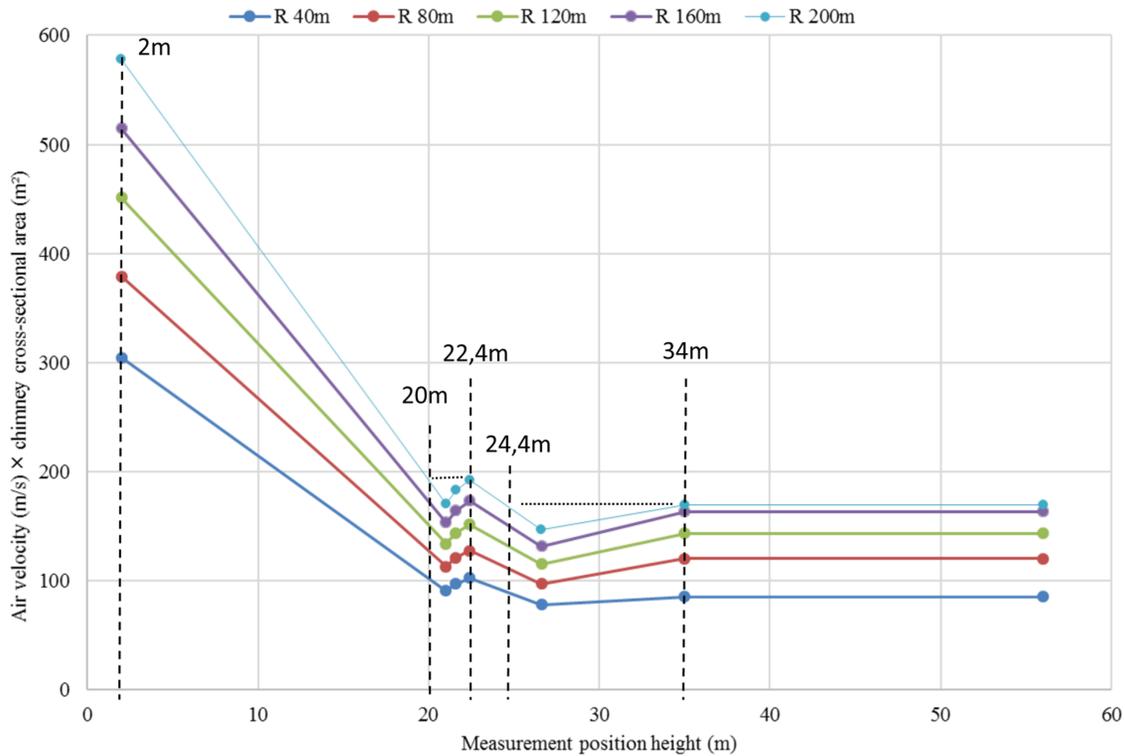


Figure 8: The multiplication product of air velocity and chimney cross-section as a function of the change in measuring height for different collector radii

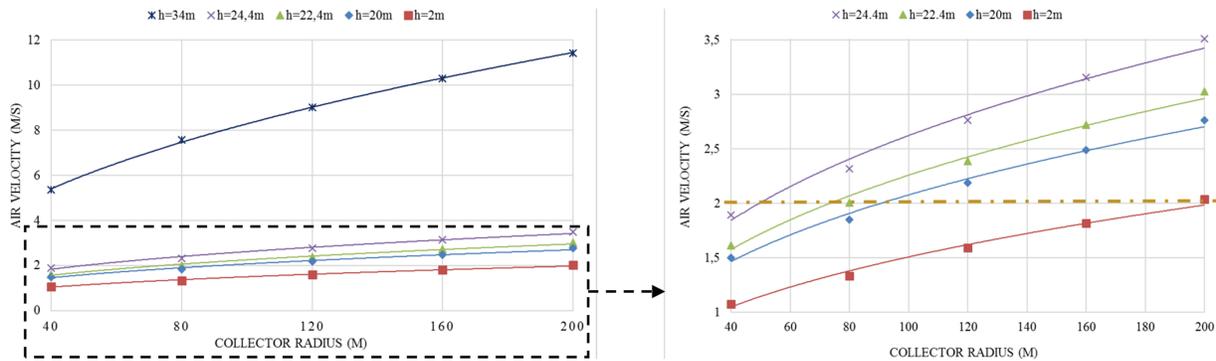


Figure 9: The air velocity of the proposed model considering the change in the collector radius, $G = 400 \text{ W/m}^2$

Based on these findings, it can be noted that the turbine position is determined by five collector radius intervals: 40–50, which corresponds to the turbine position of 34 m; 50–75, which corresponds to the turbine positions of 24.4 and 34 m. Despite the fact that both positions result in the same expected energy, the turbine position 34 m is preferred to reduce turbine costs. The third collector radius interval is 75–90, which corresponds to the turbine position (22.4 m). The next interval is 90–200, which corresponds to a turbine position of 20 m, followed by ≥ 200 , which corresponds to a turbine location of 2 m.

3.3 The Produced Electric Energy

The generated electric energy is calculated using power equations, with the collector radius (r) as the variable. Table 3 provides a guide for using this novel solar chimney model. It displays the generated energy as equations that change depending on the collector radius and solar radiation.

Table 3: Equations to calculate the generated energy

Collector radius ranges (m)	Turbine position (m)	Turbine Radius (m)	Solar radiation W/m ²			
			400	600	800	1000
[40–50]	34.0	2.25	$p = 0.0493r^{1.1301}$	$p = 0.0295r^{1.344}$	$p = 0.0743r^{1.2094}$	$p = 0.1504r^{1.1147}$
[50–75]	24.4	4.11				
[75–90]	22.4	4.5	$p = 0.0194r^{1.0898}$	$p = 0.0099r^{1.344}$	$p = 0.0251r^{1.2089}$	$p = 0.0507r^{1.1144}$
[90–200]	20.0	4.96				
≥200	2	9.5	$p = 0.0154r^{1.1176}$	$p = 0.009r^{1.3399}$	$p = 0.0218r^{1.2022}$	$p = 0.0416r^{1.109}$

It also accurately represents the turbine locations and radii for each collector radius interval. In the following section, we will present a practical example of how our model could cover daily electricity needs. Based on the most recent scientific articles that provide a database of electricity consumption in rural dwellings and a large number of rural populations, we chose China, with a rural population of 509,787,562 [46] and India, with a rural population of 893,660,000 (Women and Men in India 2022, 24th Issue) as examples.

According to the literature, the average daily consumption of rural households in India is around 2.150 kW [11], while in China is about 2 kW [47]. Table 4 lists the equations used to calculate the number of electrified houses based on collector radius, solar radiation, and country. As a numerical example, the number of electrified rural houses was calculated using a collector radius of 200 m and solar radiation of 1000 W/m². The obtained results confirmed that 1 h of solar radiation resulted in the electrification for 24 h of 6.877 rural houses in India or 7.411 rural houses in China.

Table 4: Equations to calculate the number of electrified rural houses

Collector radius ranges (m)	Covered houses (N)							
	China				India			
	400 W/m ²	600 W/m ²	800 W/m ²	1000 W/m ²	400 W/m ²	600 W/m ²	800 W/m ²	1000 W/m ²
[40–75]	$0.02465r^{1.1301}$	$0.0147r^{1.344}$	$0.0371r^{1.2094}$	$0.0752r^{1.1147}$	$0.0229r^{1.1301}$	$0.0137r^{1.344}$	$0.0345r^{1.2094}$	$0.0699r^{1.1147}$
[75–200]	$0.0097r^{1.0898}$	$0.0049r^{1.344}$	$0.0125r^{1.2089}$	$0.0253r^{1.1144}$	$0.009r^{1.0898}$	$0.0046r^{1.344}$	$0.0116r^{1.2089}$	$0.0235r^{1.1144}$
≥200	$0.0077r^{1.1176}$	$0.0045r^{1.3399}$	$0.0109r^{1.2022}$	$0.0208r^{1.109}$	$0.0071r^{1.1176}$	$0.0041r^{1.3399}$	$0.0101r^{1.2022}$	$0.0193r^{1.109}$

4 Conclusion

This study proposed integrating the solar chimney power plant system with one of the most common types of electricity pylons. The numerical methodology was carried out using Manzanares' SCPP 3D axisymmetric CFD model, which was simulated with ANSYS Fluent software. The RNG $k-\epsilon$ turbulence model and a discrete ordinates non-grey radiation model were used. The behavior of air inside the chimney was investigated in the first stage. This study determined the optimal turbine positions based on collector radius intervals of 40–50, 50–75, 75–90, 90–200, and ≥200.

Finally, the energy outputs for solar radiation 400, 600, 800, and 1000 W/m² are presented in the form of equations, with the collector radius as the variable, highlighting the number of rural houses that could be supplied with energy. Our findings confirmed the proposed model's efficiency in generating electricity; for instance, one hour of solar radiation could power 6.877 rural houses in India and 7.411 rural houses in China for 24 h. This study proposes an initiative for electricity transmission companies to invest in infrastructure to supply rural electricity.

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