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An Optimal Control Strategy Separating Two Species of Microalgae in Photobioreactors ⋆

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Abstract: We investigate a minimal-time control problem in a chemostat continuous photobioreactor model that describes the dynamics of two distinct microalgae populations. More precisely, our objective is to optimize the time of selection – or separation – between two species of microalgae. We focus in this work on Droop's model which takes into account an internal quota storage for each microalgae species. Using Pontryagin's principle, we develop a dilution-based control strategy that steers the model trajectories to a suitable target in minimal time. Our study reveals that singular arcs play a key role in the optimization problem. A numerical optimal-synthesis, based on direct optimal control tools, is performed throughout the paper, thereby confirming the optimality of the provided feedback-control law, which is of type *bang-singular*.

Keywords: Optimization, feedback control, nonlinear, Droop's model, microalgae, chemostat.

1. INTRODUCTION

The principle of competitive exclusion (Hsu & *et al.* (1977)) states that one of the species wins the competition to the detriment of others. This concept has been widely used in ecology, but more rarely applied in biotechnology, with the objective of eventually improving the quality and the productivity of some products (e.g. food and fuel). In the case of microorganisms, the selection of species of interest can be achieved through a competition process taking place in continuous cultures (Liu (2016), Chap. 12).

The chemostat is a continuous reactor dedicated to growth of microorganisms. It is also an environment in which the principle of competition occurs either between different species of microorganisms initially coexisting, or within one pool of strains in the same species that becomes subsequently divided into several sub-populations. A basic modeling framework is known as the Monod's model, which is the mostly used representation of microorganisms growing inside the chemostat (Monod (1942, 1950)). Standard properties derive from analysis of the Monod's model, as the *competitive exclusion principle* (CEP) that describes the basics of competition in chemostat (see e.g. Smith & Waltman (1995)). The CEP predicts that if several species are introduced in the chemostat, the one that requires the less nutrient to sustain a growth rate equal to the dilution rate will win the competition, while the other species will vanish out asymptotically (Smith & Waltman (1995); Hsu (2008)). Not surprisingly, a great importance is given to the issue of controlling the chemostat system in order to select differently the species that wins the competition, according to more attractive and practical criteria (Masci *et al.* (2008), see also Grognard *et al.* (2015)). More recently, some approaches based on optimal control theory have been applied to Monod's model, in order to drive and accelerate the CEP, leading to species selection in *finite time* (Bayen & Mairet (2014, 2017)). Unfortunately, the application of optimal control techniques in microalgae, which are more complex systems (see e.g. Bernard (2011); Bernard *et al.* (2015)), appears to be a challenging issue. Indeed, microalgae are particular microorganisms that have the ability to store internally the substrate before using it for growth. These storage mechanisms cannot be captured by the classical Monod's model, and a more suitable framework for microalgae growth is provided by the so-called Droop's model (Droop (1973, 1968, 1983); Smith & Waltman (1995); Hsu (2008)). More precisely, Droop's model includes a new dynamics where an internal nutrient storage is introduced, so that only nutrients internal to the cell are available for cell growth. In fact, this additional state variable needs to describe the uptake of nutrients (Caperon & Meyer (1972)) in cell. Notice that Droop's model is also known as the variable yield model, as it no longer assumes a constant ratio between cell growth and nutrient consumption rate (Smith & Waltman (1995)). Finally, it is worth mentioning that, from a mathematical standpoint, the cell-quota dynamics increases the overall dimension of the model, as well as the resulting difficulty in the mathematical analysis.

This work is devoted to the analysis of a competition model with two species described with a Droop kinetics. This can be seen as a generalisation of the approach of

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Bayen & Mairet (2014), with a more complex class of systems involving two additional states (i.e. the internal quota of each species). The paper is organized as follows: Droop's model is introduced in Section 2 and the optimal control problem of interest is stated in Section 3. Pontryagin's principle is applied in Section 4, and a numerical optimal synthesis is carried out in Section 5.

2. THE MATHEMATICAL MODEL

A microalgae species concentration x_i, where $i = 1, 2$, consumes a nutrient s and transforms it into internal storage q_i. In fact, x_1 and x_2 can be seen as different species or strains coexisting in a chemostat with one limiting substrate s. The cell quota q_i increases with nutrient absorption and decreases with cell proliferation, since cell division spreads the total quantity of stored nutrient over more cells. In fact, the total amount of stored nutrient at time $t \geq 0$ is given by $\sum_{i=1}^{2} q_i(t)x_i(t)$.

The variable yield model – Droop's model – involving two species is described by:

$$\begin{cases} \dot{s} = (s_{in} - s)D - \displaystyle\sum_{i=1}^{2} \rho_i(s)x_i, \\ \dot{q}_i = \rho_i(s) - \mu_i(q_i)q_i, \\ \dot{x}_i = [\mu_i(q_i) - D]\, x_i, \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

where $i = 1, 2$, the total substrate concentration s is a scalar variable, and s_{in} is the constant input concentration of the substrate. As previously mentioned, x_i is the i-th species-biomass concentration, and q_i is the internal substrate storage for the i-th species. The dilution rate is denoted D. In experiment, it is usual to play on D, which is indeed a bounded nonnegative control in system (1). Next, ρ_i is a real-valued function quantifying the rate of substrate absorption, i.e. the uptake rate of free nutrient s; while μ_i is a real-valued function quantifying the growth rate of the i-th species. The functions ρ_i and μ_i are nonnegative and increasing bounded functions, s.t.,

$$0 \leq \rho_i(s) \leq \rho_{mi}, \quad 0 \leq \mu_i(q_i) \leq \mu_{mi}, \tag{2}$$

where ρ_{mi} and μ_{mi} are strictly positive constants. In fact, typically in Droop's model, the uptake rate $\rho_i(s)$ is expressed in terms of Michaelis-Menten kinetics:

$$\rho_i(s) = \frac{\rho_{mi}s}{K_{si} + s}, \tag{3}$$

where K_{si} is a strictly positive constant of the i-th species.

We consider that there exists a minimum threshold $k_{qi} > 0$, for each species, under which cell division cannot occur, and we consider the growth rates in the Droop's form:

$$\mu_i(q_i) = \mu_{i\infty}\left(1 - \frac{k_{qi}}{q_i}\right), \quad q_i \geq k_{qi}. \tag{4}$$

In fact, we can see that for all $t \geq 0$, $k_{qi} \leq q_i(t) \leq q_{mi}$, where q_{mi} is the maximum internal storage rate, and $\mu_{mi} = \mu_i(q_{mi})$, thus $\mu_{i\infty} = \frac{q_{mi}}{q_{mi} - k_{qi}}\mu_{mi}$.

For each fixed $s = s_*$, i.e. under a constant substrate concentration s_*, we notice that q_i converges towards $q_i(s_*)$, which is the unique and attractive solution of the equation $\mu_i(q_i(s_*))q_i(s_*) = \rho_i(s_*)$, for $i = 1, 2$. In addition, to be consistent with inequalities (2), we have:

$$\rho_{mi} = \mu_i(q_{mi})q_{mi}, \tag{5}$$

where q_{mi} is the maximum internal storage rate previously defined, and $\mu_i(q_{mi})$ corresponds to the maximum growth rate for the i-th species, i.e. $\mu_i(q_{mi}) = \frac{\rho_{mi}}{q_{mi}} = \mu_{mi}$.

Clearly, the system (1) is positive, i.e. for strictly positive initial conditions the trajectories remain positive. The total mass in the chemostat system is given by: $z = s + q_1x_1 + x_2q_2$. The following statement allows us to reduce the dimension of the studied system:

Proposition 1. The set,

$$\mathcal{F} = \{(s, q_1, q_2, x_1, x_2) \in \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* | \\ k_{qi} \leq q_i \leq q_{mi},\ q_1x_1 + q_2x_2 + s = s_{in}\},$$

is positively invariant and attractive for system (1).

Indeed, standard arguments show that the total mass remains constant, $z = s_{in}$, when the initial conditions are within $\mathcal{F}$. More precisely, to see why Proposition 1 holds, it is sufficient to notice that z satisfies, along the trajectories of system (1), the dynamics:

$$\dot{z} = (s_{in} - z)D.$$

As a consequence, considering that the initial conditions associated to system (1) belong to the set $\mathcal{F}$ allows us to reduce the dimension of system (1), since $s = s_{in} - q_1x_1 - q_2x_2$ for all future time, as formulated in the next section.

Now, before stating the optimal control problem, let us define some useful functions and constants. Using the forms of the functions ρ_i and μ_i, given respectively in (3) and (4), we readily get $\rho_i^{-1}(a) = \frac{K_{si}a}{\rho_{mi} - a}$, $\rho_i^{-1} : [0, \rho_{mi}) \to [0, +\infty)$, and we define the function:

$$\delta_i(a) = \rho_i^{-1}(\tilde{\mu}_i(a)) = K_{si}\frac{a - k_{qi}}{\kappa_i - a}, \quad a \in [0, \kappa_i),$$

where, $\tilde{\mu}_i(a) = \mu_i(a)a$, and, $\kappa_i = \frac{\rho_{mi}}{\mu_{i\infty}} + k_{qi}$. In fact, we notice that if we regulate the substrate s to a fixed value $s_* \in [0, s_{in}]$, then the quota q_i is regulated to the unique value, $q_i(s_*)$, satisfying $\rho_i(s_*) = \tilde{\mu}_i(q_i(s_*))$, or, equivalently, $s_* = \delta_i(q_i(s_*))$, for $i = 1, 2$, since all the functions are bijective (we recall that $q_i \geq k_{qi}$). This means that the elemental cell quota, and which are directly available for cell growth of each species, are approaching the values: $q_i(s_*) = \delta_i^{-1}(s_*)$, for $i = 1, 2$, where,

$$\delta_i^{-1}(s_*) = \frac{\kappa_i s_* + K_{si}k_{qi}}{s_* + K_{si}}.$$

Thus, we can define the effective growth rate of each species with respect to $q_i(s_*)$:

$$\mu_i(q_i(s_*)) = \mu_i(\delta_i^{-1}(s_*)) = \frac{\rho_{mi}s_*}{\kappa_i s_* + K_{si}k_{qi}}. \tag{6}$$

We note that the function $\mu_i(q_i(s))$ is increasing. In light of the above arguments about the effective growth rate of each species, we expect at a first sight that the maximization – or minimization – of the function:

$$\Delta(s) = \mu_1(\delta_1^{-1}(s)) - \mu_2(\delta_2^{-1}(s)), \tag{7}$$

along a feasible trajectory $s(t)$, for all $t \geq 0$, solution of system (1), plays a role in the optimal strategy separating between the involved species. To see why, observe that the optima of the function $\Delta(s)$ represent the operating modes with the largest gap between potential growth of the species. Hence, for later use, we denote $s_c \in [0, s_{in}]$ the constant that maximizes the function $\Delta(s)$. The functions discussed above are illustrated in Figure 1.

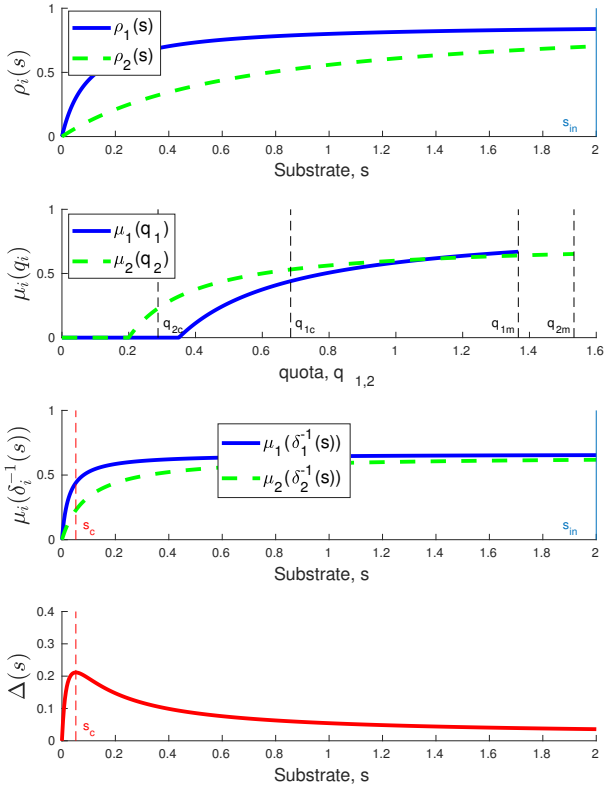

Fig. 1. Illustrations of the functions $\rho_i(\cdot)$, $\mu_i(\cdot)$ and $\mu_i(\delta_i^{-1}(\cdot))$. The constant $s_c = 0.0520$ maximizes the function $\Delta(s)$, $\forall s \in [0, s_{in}]$, with $s_{in} = 2$; $q_{ic} = q_i(s_c)$. The numerical values of the biological parameters are provided in Section 5 (Table 1).

3. STATEMENT OF THE OPTIMAL CONTROL PROBLEM

Now, we want to formulate the optimal control problem (OCP) of interest in this paper. Firstly, we recall from the previous section that we limit ourselves to the trajectories of system (1) that are confined in the invariant set $\mathcal{F}$. Thus, we leave aside the s-dynamics and we introduce for system (1) the – biologically relevant – set:

$$\mathcal{S} = \{X_r := (q_1, q_2, x_1, x_2) \in \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R}_+^* \mid k_{qi} \leq q_i \leq q_{mi},\ \ q_1 x_1 + q_2 x_2 < s_{in}\}.$$

Then, next, we define the target $\mathcal{T}$ of interest as follows:

$$\mathcal{T} = \{X_r := (q_1, q_2, x_1, x_2) \in \mathcal{S} \ \mid \ x_2 < \epsilon x_1\},$$

where X satisfies system (1) and $X(0) \in \mathcal{F}$, X_r is the reduced state, and ϵ is a small enough strictly positive constant. In fact, we are assuming that the species x_1 is the one of interest from a biological standpoint. Thus, the target $\mathcal{T}$ expresses a situation where the concentration of the first species is significantly larger than the second one, with a small ϵ that represents the final contamination rate of the selected population x_1.

Our objective is to determine a dilution-based optimal control strategy D that allows the trajectories of system (1), starting from arbitrary initial conditions $X(0)$ within $\mathcal{F}$, in order that X_r reaches the target $\mathcal{T}$ in minimal time. For that, we define firstly the set of admissible controls:

$$\mathcal{D} = \{D : [0, +\infty] \to [0, D_{\max}] \ \mid \ D(\cdot) \in \mathcal{L}^\infty_{loc}(\mathbb{R}^+)\},$$

where $D_{\max}$ is a sufficiently large strictly positive constant. Thus, $\mathcal{D}$ is a subset of $\mathcal{L}^\infty_{loc}(\mathbb{R}^+)$, the space of locally integrable functions on every compact set on $\mathbb{R}^+$.

The optimal control problem (OCP) of interest is stated as follows. For all initial conditions [1] belonging to $\mathcal{F}$, we are seeking for an admissible control strategy $D \in \mathcal{D}$, steering the solution $X_r = (q_1, q_2, x_1, x_2)$ of the reduced system,

$$\begin{cases} \dot{q}_i = \rho_i(s) - \mu_i(q_i) q_i, \\ \dot{x}_i = [\mu_i(q_i) - D]\, x_i, \end{cases} \tag{8}$$

where $i = 1, 2$, and $s = s_{in} - q_1 x_1 - q_2 x_2$, to the target set $\mathcal{T}$ in minimal time, i.e., for a fixed $D_{\max}$ and a given contamination rate ϵ, the OCP reads,

$$\begin{aligned} &\inf_{D \in \mathcal{D}} t_f, \quad \text{s.t.} \quad X_r(t_f) \in \mathcal{T}, \\ &X_r(\cdot) \text{ is solution of (8)}, \quad \text{and} \quad X(0) \in \mathcal{F}. \end{aligned} \tag{9}$$

Now, we are in position to apply Pontryagin's principle (Pontryagin *et al.* (1964)) in order to provide necessary conditions for the optimality of the control D that we want to determine.

4. APPLICATION OF THE PONTRYAGIN MAXIMUM PRINCIPLE

Let $H = H(q_1, q_2, x_1, x_2, \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3, \lambda_4, \lambda_0, D)$ be the Hamiltonian of the reduced system (8) associated with the OCP given in (9), that is:

$$\begin{aligned} H =& (\rho_1(s) - \mu_1(q_1) q_1)\lambda_1 + (\rho_2(s) - \mu_2(q_2) q_2)\lambda_2 \\ &+ \mu_1(q_1) x_1 \lambda_3 + \mu_2(q_2) x_2 \lambda_4 + \lambda_0 + D\Phi, \end{aligned} \tag{10}$$

where,

$$\Phi = -\lambda_3 x_1 - \lambda_4 x_2, \tag{11}$$

the λ_is are the co-states of q_1, q_2, x_1 and x_2, governed by:

$$\dot{\lambda}_1 = -\frac{\partial H}{\partial q_1}, \quad \dot{\lambda}_2 = -\frac{\partial H}{\partial q_2}, \quad \dot{\lambda}_3 = -\frac{\partial H}{\partial x_1}, \quad \dot{\lambda}_4 = -\frac{\partial H}{\partial x_2}, \tag{12}$$

and the states of the reduced system (8) satisfy:

$$\dot{q}_1 = \frac{\partial H}{\partial \lambda_1}, \quad \dot{q}_2 = \frac{\partial H}{\partial \lambda_2}, \quad \dot{x}_1 = \frac{\partial H}{\partial \lambda_3}, \quad \dot{x}_2 = \frac{\partial H}{\partial \lambda_4}, \tag{13}$$

with $X(0) \in \mathcal{F}$. It is classical to set $\lambda_0 = -1$ in minimization problems. Next, in Pontryagin's approach, the control D satisfies the maximization condition:

$$D(t) \in \underset{D \in [0, D_{\max}]}{\operatorname{argmax}} \ H(q_1, q_2, x_1, x_2, \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3, \lambda_4, \lambda_0, D),$$

for almost all $t \geq [0, t_f]$, where t_f is the first time the trajectories reach the target. Since the Hamiltonian H is linear with respect to the control, we deduce that the control law is given by the sign of the switching function Φ, that is:

- $D = D_{\max}$ iff $\Phi > 0$.
- $D = 0$ iff $\Phi < 0$.
- $D = D_c$, when $\Phi = 0$ (D_c is called the singular control, and it will be determined in the rest).

Before determining the singular control D_c, let us express the transversality conditions of the optimization problem. By definition, the co-state vector satisfies [2] at $t = t_f$,

$$[\lambda_1(t_f)\ \lambda_2(t_f)\ \lambda_3(t_f)\ \lambda_4(t_f)]^{tr} \in \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{T}}(X_r(t_f)), \tag{14}$$

[1] We note that any initial condition $X(0) = \left(s^0, q_1^0, q_2^0, x_1^0, x_2^0\right)$ within $\mathcal{F}$ also satisfies that $X_r(0) = \left(q_1^0, q_2^0, x_1^0, x_2^0\right)$ belongs to $\mathcal{S}$.

[2] The overscript tr means the transpose of the vector/matrix.

where X_r is solution of (8) and $\mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{T}}$ is the normal cone to the target $\mathcal{T}$ at the point $X_r(t_f)$. In particular, from the definition of the target $\mathcal{T}$, (14) expresses that $[\lambda_3(t_f)\ \lambda_4(t_f)]^{tr}$ is parallel to the vector $\boldsymbol{v} = [\epsilon\ -1]^{tr}$. In other words, there exists α, s.t., $[\lambda_3(t_f)\ \lambda_4(t_f)]^{tr} = \alpha v$. Therefore, it follows that $\Phi(t_f) = 0$. We conclude that the target $\mathcal{T}$ is reached with the singular control D_c.

Now, we want to determine the explicit form of the singular control D_c. Thanks to the numerical optimal synthesis that we perform on Droop's model (through direct methods, as developed in the next section), we note that the singular control D_c is activated on a time-interval that is not reduced to a point. So, let us consider that the function Φ, defined in (11), is vanishing on a time interval $I = [t_1, t_2]$. During the time interval I, we say that the trajectory is singular, i.e. in closed loop with the singular control D_c to be determined. Firstly, from (12), and using $s_{in} = s + x_1 q_1 + x_2 q_2$, and also the notations: $\rho_i'(s) = \frac{\partial \rho_i(s)}{\partial s}$, and, $\tilde{\mu}_i'(q_i) = \frac{\partial \mu_i(q_i) q_i}{\partial q_i}$, (in the case where μ_i given by (4), we get, $\tilde{\mu}_i'(q_i) = \mu_{i\infty}$), then we deduce that:

$$\begin{aligned}
\dot{\lambda}_1 &= \rho_1'(s)\lambda_1 x_1 + \mu_{1\infty}\lambda_1 + \rho_2'(s)\lambda_2 x_1 - \mu_1'(q_1)\lambda_3 x_1,\\
\dot{\lambda}_2 &= \rho_1'(s)\lambda_1 x_2 + \mu_{2\infty}\lambda_2 + \rho_2'(s)\lambda_2 x_2 - \mu_2'(q_2)\lambda_4 x_2,\\
\dot{\lambda}_3 &= \rho_1'(s)\lambda_1 q_1 + \rho_2'(s)\lambda_2 q_1 - \mu_1(q_1)\lambda_3 + \lambda_3 D,\\
\dot{\lambda}_4 &= \rho_1'(s)\lambda_1 q_2 + \rho_2'(s)\lambda_2 q_2 - \mu_2(q_2)\lambda_4 + \lambda_4 D.
\end{aligned} \tag{15}$$

Now, for all $t \in I$, belonging to $[0, t_f]$, we consider that: $\Phi(t) = -\lambda_3(t)x_1(t) - \lambda_4(t)x_2(t) = 0$. It follows that $\dot{\Phi}(t) \equiv 0$, for all $t \in I$. Let us notice that for all $t \geq 0$:

$$\dot{\Phi} = -\left(q_1 x_1 + q_2 x_2\right)\underbrace{\left(\rho_1'(s)\lambda_1 + \rho_2'(s)\lambda_2\right)}_{\Psi}.$$

Since the system (1) is positive, we deduce that $q_1 x_1 + q_2 x_2 > 0$, and consequently $\dot{\Phi}(t) \equiv 0$, for all $t \in I$, gives:

$$\Psi(t) = \rho_1'(s(t))\lambda_1(t) + \rho_2'(s(t))\lambda_2(t) = 0, \quad \forall t \in I. \tag{16}$$

Similarly, since $\Psi(t) \equiv 0$ for all $t \in I$, it follows that $\dot{\Psi}(t) \equiv 0$ on the same time interval. We readily check that:

$$\dot{\Psi} = \left(\rho_1''(s)\lambda_1 + \rho_2''(s)\lambda_2\right)\dot{s} + \underbrace{\rho_1'(s)\dot{\lambda}_1 + \rho_2'(s)\dot{\lambda}_2}_{\xi}, \tag{17}$$

for all $t \geq 0$. Using $\dot{\lambda}_1$ and $\dot{\lambda}_2$, given in (15), and since, on the singular arc, we have $\lambda_3 x_1 = -\lambda_4 x_2$, and, $\rho_1'(s)\lambda_1 = -\rho_2'(s)\lambda_2$, then ξ reads:

$$\begin{aligned}
\xi =& \rho_1'(s)\left[\tilde{\mu}_1'(q_1) - \tilde{\mu}_2'(q_2)\right]\lambda_1\\
&- x_1\left[\rho_1'(s)\mu_1'(q_1) - \rho_2'(s)\mu_2'(q_2)\right]\lambda_3,
\end{aligned} \tag{18}$$

where $\rho_i'(s) = \frac{\rho_{mi} K_{si}}{(K_{si}+s)^2}$ and $\rho_i''(s) = -\frac{2\rho_{mi} K_{si}}{(K_{si}+s)^3}$.

Now, we use (16), (17) and (18) to get the expression of the control D_c, depending on whether ξ and the term multiplying $\dot{s}$ in (17) are zero or not. Indeed, without giving more details in this version, we state that the singular control is given for almost all $t \in I = [t_1, t_2]$ by:

$$D_c = \frac{\left(\rho_1(s)x_1 + \rho_2(s)x_2\right)\left(\rho_1''(s)\lambda_1 + \rho_2''(s)\lambda_2\right) - \xi}{\left(s_{in} - s\right)\left(\rho_1''(s)\lambda_1 + \rho_2''(s)\lambda_2\right)}. \tag{19}$$

To summarize, we applied in this section the Pontryagin's principle in order to get some insights on the form of the optimal control in our specific optimization problem, which could combine bang-type controls (0 and/or $D_{\max}$), as well as singular arcs D_c (given by (19)). We further know that the target is reached with $\Phi(t_f) = 0$, thanks to the transversality conditions. Now, we are going to determine the structure of the optimal control using a direct method, i.e. by discretizing the optimal control problem and solving a nonlinear programming problem (Betts (2010), Biegler (2010)).

5. A NUMERICAL OPTIMAL SYNTHESIS

In this section, a numerical optimal synthesis is carried out on the Droop's model (1), with the biological parameters and functions given in Table 1. The direct method that we apply is implemented in the `Bocop` software[3] (see, e.g., Bonnans *et al.* (2017)), which solves nonlinear optimization problems using some interior point approaches. More precisely, we use a discontinuous collocation method of Lobatto's type (a sixth order time-discretization Labatto IIIC formula), with a time-discretization of 100 steps. In the settings of the optimization problem, we consider a free final-time t_f and we choose a target $\mathcal{T}$ with a contamination coefficient $\epsilon = 0.2$.

Table 1. Parameters of the numerical example.

i	$k_{qi}(\mu mol^3/L)$	$\mu_{i\infty}(day^{-1})$	$K_{si}\ (\mu mol/L)$
1	0.35	0.9	0.1
2	0.2	0.75	0.7

i	$\rho_{mi}(\mu mol/\mu m^3/day)$	$s_{in} = 2\ (\mu mol/L)$
1	0.88	
2	0.95	

At a first glance, the numerical results that we obtain suggest that the optimal strategy aims, in a first step, to drive the system from the initial condition s^0 of the substrate s around the value $s = s_c$ (but not exactly to s_c, as illustrated in the sequel). We can interpret this behavior by saying that the control aims to put the system in an operating mode that ensures an ability to separate the species as quickly as possible, since s_c maximizes the function $\Delta(s) = \mu_1(\delta^{-1}(s)) - \mu_2(\delta^{-1}(s))$. Then, in a second phase, the singular arc – or singular control D_c – steers the states x_i to the target $\mathcal{T}$ in minimal time. It is worth mentioning that this *bang-singular* type control is similar to the one observed in Monod's model (Bayen & Mairet (2014)), with the notable exception that the substrate s is no longer constant along the singular arc in our case. More importantly, the switching instant, that we denote t_s throughout this section, does not correspond to $s(t_s) = s_c$, as it was the case in the simpler Monod's model (Bayen & Mairet (2014)). The characterization of the switching instant t_s proves to be a challenging issue in our optimization problem and it deserves a separated study. However, we highlight in this work the link between the switching instant t_s and the dynamics of the co-state of the substrate s. More precisely, t_s corresponds to the time at which the co-state of s becomes zero, and it remains zero for all $t \in [t_s, t_f]$. Admittedly, it is not always possible to interpret the dynamics of the co-states; however, in this case, the co-state of s is zero on $[t_s, t_f]$, meaning that $s(t) \equiv s^\star(t)$, for all $t \in [t_s, t_f]$, where there is no gain in changing the dynamics $s \equiv s^\star$ on that interval.

[3] `Bocop` is an optimal control solver, `https://www.bocop.org/`

Furthermore, in the simple case of Monod's model, it appears that the optimal trajectory $s^\star(t)$ for $t \in [t_s, t_f]$ coincides with the constant that is equivalent to s_c in Droop's model. The previous observation (from Bayen & Mairet (2014)) seems quite natural in Monod's model. However, Droop's model is less trivial to interpret since the variables q_i introduce a latency (i.e. they act as time-delays) between the absorption of s and the growth of the species x_i, in a nontrivial way. Thus, the model achieves better performance through $s^\star$ (that we characterize via the co-state of s), than s_c. This being so, we focus in the sequel on the following two cases that summarize the numerical optimal synthesis:

❶ If $s^0 > s_c$, where s^0 is the initial condition of the substrate s, then the control steers s to the vicinity of s_c and it is initially set to its minimal value, i.e. $D = 0$, during this first phase. When $D = 0$, we get from the model equations: $\dot{s} < 0$ and the s variable decreases. It is possible that the trajectories reach the target $\mathcal{T}$ (this depends for instance on x_i^0); however, in the general case, the phase *bang(0)* is followed by a singular phase (the control $D = 0$ switches to the singular control D_c given in (19)), which steers the trajectories to the target $\mathcal{T}$ later on.

❷ If $s^0 < s_c$, the control steers s to the vicinity of s_c and it is maximum, i.e. $D = D_{\max}$, during the first phase. Similarly to the previous case, it is possible that the system reaches the target after some time. However, in the general case, we notice that there exists a switching instant t_s at which the control becomes singular. This singular arc steers the trajectories to the target $\mathcal{T}$ in minimal time. Let us observe that the dynamics of x_i in closed loop with $D = D_{\max}$ are governed by: $\dot{x}_i = [\mu_i(q_i) - D_{\max}]\, x_i$. We deduce that the biomass species concentrations x_i converge exponentially to zero when $D_{\max}$ is sufficiently large (e.g. $D_{\max} = 1 > \mu_{mi}$ in the numerical example). It follows that s converges to s_{in} when $t \to \infty$. Thus, s increases and approaches $s_c \in [0, s_{in}]$ in finite time.

The behaviors outlined in ❶ and ❷ are highlighted in the rest, starting from numerical simulations performed when the initial conditions are given by: $s^0 = 1$, $x_1^0 = x_2^0 = 1$, $q_1^0 = q_2^0 = 0.5$, within the invariant set $\mathcal{F}$.

The optimal control provided by Bocop in this case is given in Figure 2. The structure *bang(0)-singular* of the control is validated by checking that the functions Φ and $\dot{\Phi}$ are zero in this case. The corresponding model trajectories are given in Figure 3. The switching time instant t_s is characterized by the co-state of the s variable, as illustrated in Figure 4.

In Figure 3, we notice that the substrate s is not constant on the singular arc, but it remains in the vicinity of s_c.

In a similar way, we can check that if $s^0 < s_c$ (i.e. as in situation ❷), then the optimal control is *bang-singular*, where this time the bang corresponds to $D = D_{\max}$. So now, we consider the initial conditions: $s^0 = 0.02$, $x_1^0 = x_2^0 = 1.1$, $q_1^0 = q_2^0 = 0.9$, within the invariant set $\mathcal{F}$. We also set the upper bound on the control at $D_{\max} = 1$. The optimal control in this case is given in Figure 5. The trajectories of the system are illustrated in Figure 6. As previously mentioned, the switching instant t_s is identified

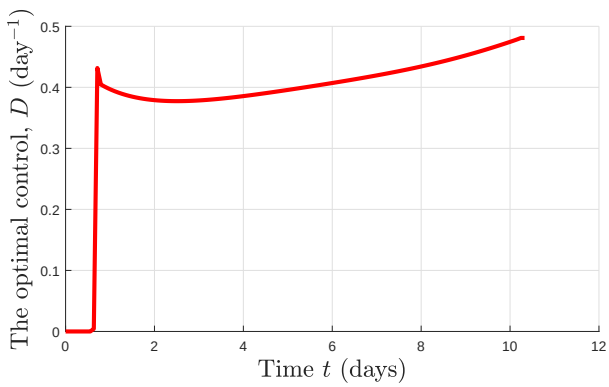

Fig. 2. The optimal control provided by Bocop when $s^0 = 1 > s_c$ is a *bang(0)-singular* control law.

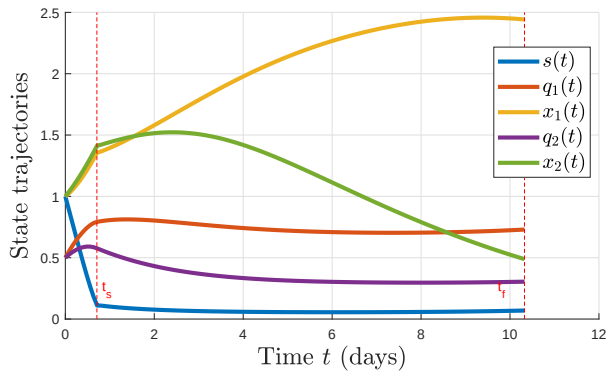

Fig. 3. Trajectories associated to the initial conditions $s^0 = 1$, $x_1^0 = x_2^0 = 1$, $q_1^0 = q_2^0 = 0.5$, in closed loop with the *bang(0)-singular* control law in Figure 2.

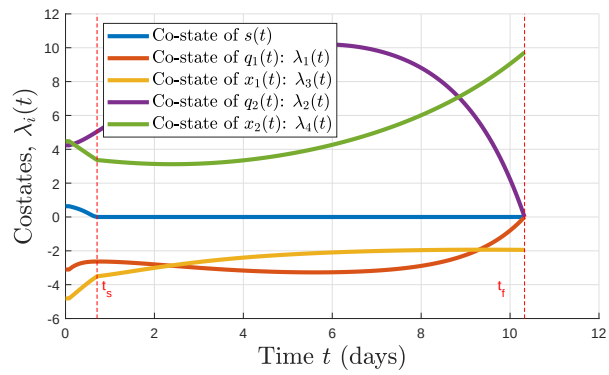

Fig. 4. Co-states trajectories for all $t \in [0, t_f]$. We notice that the switching time corresponds to the instant at which the co-state of s becomes zero. The co-state of the s-dynamics remains zero until reaching t_f, i.e. until the trajectories reach the target $\mathcal{T}$.

from the co-state of the substrate s, as indicated in Figure 7.

6. CONCLUSION

In this work, we have investigated the issue of minimal-time selection of microalgae species. From the insights given by Pontryagin's principle, and using a direct method for the optimization problem, we highlighted the fact that the optimal feedback law is of type *bang-singular*, where the bangs are of two types (0 and $D_{\max}$) depending on the substrate initial state. In future work, we will focus on the

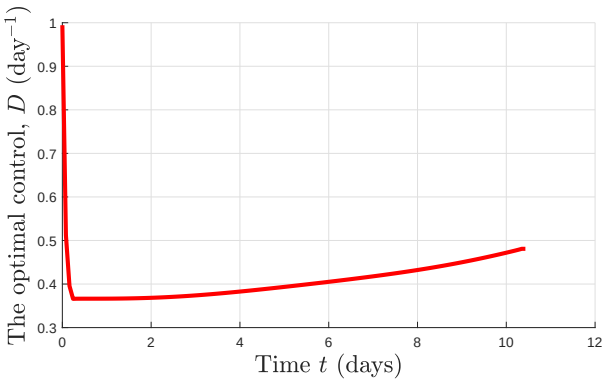

Fig. 5. The optimal control in the case where $s^0 < s_c$ is of type *bang(1)-singular*.

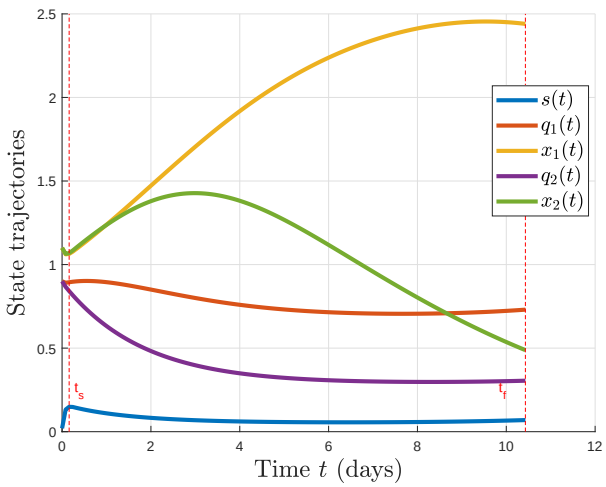

Fig. 6. Trajectories associated to: $s^0 = 0.02$, $x_1^0 = x_2^0 = 1.1$, $q_1^0 = q_2^0 = 0.9$, in closed loop with the *bang(1)-singular* control law in Figure 5.

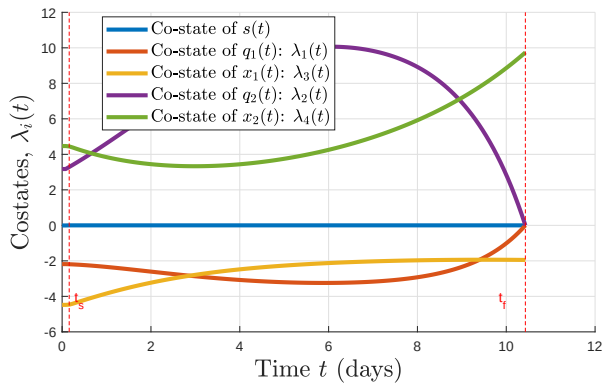

Fig. 7. Trajectories of the co-states for all $t \in [0, t_f]$.

deepening of the optimal synthesis, which is proving hardly tractable for a chemostat system involving five states.

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