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(71) Applicant: TENOVA S.P.A. [IT/IT]; Via Monte Rosa, 93, 20149 Milano (IT).

(72) Inventors: MEMOLI, Francesco; 5416 Northumberland Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217 (US). GIAVANI, Cesare; Via Bernardino Zenale 5, 20123 Milano (IT). REALLI, Silvio Maria; Via Emanuele Filiberto 4, 20149 Milano (IT). SHOOP, Kyle James; 14 Glenvue Dr, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15237 (US).

(74) Agent: MARTEGANI, Franco et al.; Via Carlo Alberto 41, 20900 MONZA (IT).

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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF CAST IRON, CAST IRON PRODUCED ACCORDING TO SAID METHOD

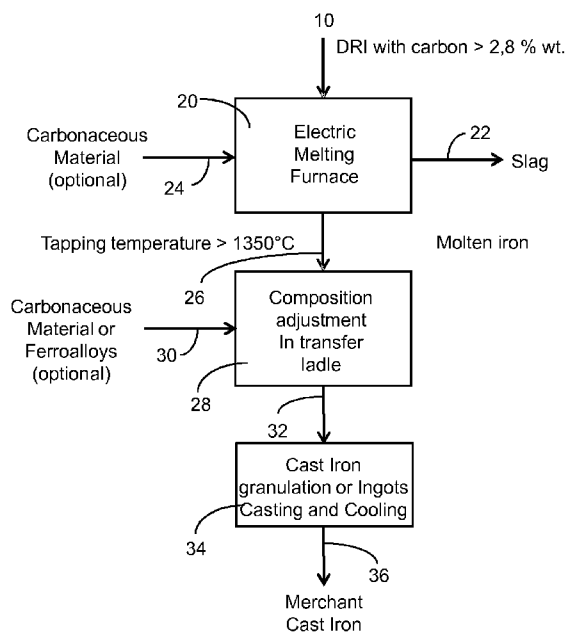


Figure 1

(57) Abstract: A method for the production of cast iron starting from pre-reduced iron ore DRI by means of an electric arc furnace EAF, comprising the following steps: a. preparing a charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI having a metallization higher than 90% and containing over 2.8% by weight of carbon, wherein at least 80% of said carbon is combined with the iron to form iron carbide Fe<sub>3</sub>C, b. charging the charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI into the electric arc furnace EAF, c. melting the DRI charge to form liquid cast iron wherein said liquid cast iron has a predetermined actual content of carbon, at least 80% by weight of said actual carbon content of the cast iron deriving from the carbon in the charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI and wherein step c. is carried out in a reducing atmosphere and in a melting chamber of the electric arc furnace EAF subjected to a positive internal pressure generated by gases produced by reduction reactions that develop in step c.

WO 2017/207472 A1

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF CAST IRON,  
CAST IRON PRODUCED ACCORDING TO SAID METHOD

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a method and an  
5 apparatus for the production of cast iron according to  
the preamble of the relative enclosed independent  
claims.

The technical field to which the invention relates  
is therefore that of the production of iron and steel,  
10 in which ferrous materials such as cast iron are widely  
used.

KNOWN ART

In the field of reference, the term "cast iron"  
indicates a variety of ferrous materials generally  
15 produced in blast furnaces, containing at least 92% (by  
weight) of Iron and 2.1% (by weight) of Carbon and  
traces of other elements; over time, cast iron has  
become a real "commodity" in the steel industry as a  
source of metallic iron for the production of high-  
20 quality steels.

Cast iron is in fact used in electric arc furnaces  
(hereinafter referred to as EAFs, for providing certain  
quantities of iron necessary for counterbalancing  
undesired elements contained in steel scraps normally  
25 introduced into EAFs: cast iron in fact helps dilute

residual elements such as copper and tin present in trace amounts in scraps; cast iron also contributes to minimizing nitrogen levels of molten iron in EAFs.

Cast iron is also used in place of other metallic iron materials such as high-grade steel scraps or pre-reduced iron ore (also known as DRI, Direct Reduced Iron).

Cast iron is a ferrous material with a high carbon content normally cast into 200mm x 100mm x 50mm ingots or other forms of ingots.

Cast iron is generally produced in blast furnaces but other processes are also known for producing molten iron with a high carbon content.

There are three main categories of cast iron:

- basic cast iron, used for steelmaking,
- grey cast iron for the production of castings (also called lamellar),
- nodular (or spheroidal) cast iron used for the production of high tensile castings.

These categories of cast iron mainly differ in the silicon and phosphorous content.

A typical analysis of the cast iron categories indicated above is represented in Table 1 hereunder:

Table 1

	Basic	Grey	Nodular
Si	< 1.5%	1.5 - 3.5%	0.5 - 1.5%
C	2.1 - 4.5%	3.5 - 4.5%	3.5 - 4.5%
Mn	0.4 - 1.0%	0.4 - 1.0%	< 0.05%
P	< 0.12%	< 0.12%	< 0.04%
S	<0.05%	0.05%	< 0.02%

As already mentioned, a method for the production of cast iron is that in blast furnaces; details on this aspect are not described herein, as the manufacturing of cast iron in blast furnaces is a process well known to skilled persons in the field.

As is known, blast furnaces have certain limits however: they require coke, they have relatively lengthy production cycles, and above all generate high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which require careful control and devices specifically produced for complying with the constraints of environmental regulations which are becoming increasingly strict.

Furthermore, the production quantities of blast-furnace cast iron are extremely difficult to regulate: stopping the blast furnace in fact often, if not always, involves the complete replacement of its refractory material, with everything that ensues; the

result is that it is therefore difficult or extremely uneconomic to produce limited amounts of cast iron.

Various solutions have been developed for partially solving these drawbacks.

5 US patent 1,686,075, for example, describes a process for producing synthetic cast iron by means of a reduction process within a temperature range of 900°-1,200°C producing so-called sponge iron. The sponge iron is freed from its gangue by magnetic separation; a  
10 carbonaceous material is added and is melted in an electric furnace under acid conditions at a temperature ranging from 1,100°C to 1,300°C. Suitable quantities of silicon, manganese and other elements are added to the molten bath to obtain the desired composition. A limit  
15 of this solution is linked to the fact that a further operation for the addition of carbonaceous material is required, with a consequent increase in the energy used in the process.

A further solution is described in U.S. Patent  
20 3,165,398 which discloses a process for melting sponge iron wherein the melting temperature is gradually lowered by adding powdered carbonaceous material. The charge is slowly and continuously stirred by rotation of the melting furnace. Also in this case, therefore,  
25 there is the separate addition of carbon to the sponge

iron in the melting phase, with substantially the same limits as those previously described; furthermore the presence of continuous stirring in the furnace creates further limits deriving from the necessity of having to  
5 provide expedients specifically suitable for the purpose.

U.S. Patent 4,661,150 discloses a method and apparatus for producing liquid cast iron in an electric furnace into which pre-reduced iron ore (DRI)  
10 characterized by a metallization higher than 60% is charged, together with residual carbon coming from a reduction process. This solution however has limits due to the fact that most of the carbonaceous material added to the melting furnace is consumed to complete  
15 the reduction of the remaining iron oxides.

Other solutions of the prior art, such as those described in U.S. Patent 5,810,905 and European Patent 0871781, disclose melting the pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) in a submerged arc furnace, which is more  
20 expensive in terms of both investment and operating costs; this solution, however, has proved to be relatively advantageous as these furnaces operate with a thick layer of slag over the melt which to some degree protects the carbon from oxidation. These  
25 solutions however use pre-reduced iron ore having an

overall low metallization and/or low carbon content or use scrap as the iron source, which entails the disadvantage of having to introduce elements such as carbon, silicon and manganese during the melting step  
5 with consequent higher costs for the ferroalloys and longer duration of the casting cycles of the melting furnace.

From the above discussion, the need therefore emerges for a method (and relative equipment) for the  
10 effective production of cast iron for the manufacturing of steel or foundry products starting from iron ore.

#### OBJECTIVES AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An objective of the present invention is therefore to provide a method and an apparatus for the production  
15 of cast iron which overcomes the drawbacks of the prior art.

A further objective of the invention is to provide said method and apparatus which are relatively economical and practical.

20 Another objective of the invention is to provide said method and apparatus which allow the production of cast iron also in reduced quantities.

Yet another objective of the invention is to provide said method and apparatus for producing cast  
25 iron starting from DRI containing carbon using an arc

electric furnace.

A further objective of the present invention is to provide said method and apparatus which reduces environmental impact in terms of carbon dioxide emissions with respect to the methods and apparatuses normally adopted for this purpose.

Further objectives of the invention will appear evident to skilled persons in the field, or will become more apparent in the detailed description of the invention.

These and other objectives are achieved by means of a method and apparatus according to the invention.

The idea behind the invention is to produce cast iron through pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) with a high carbon content, preferably present in the form of iron carbide.

This is advantageous as carbon combined in this form remains in the iron bath in an energetically effective way; it should be considered that providing carbon to the melt as free carbon implies a high energy cost for its solution in the iron matrix.

More specifically, the invention provides a method and an apparatus for producing cast iron using DRI with a high carbon content as iron source and carbon in an apparatus comprising an electric arc furnace EAF for

producing cast iron having the desired carbon content,  
with numerous technical and economic advantages.

A first object of the invention therefore relates  
to a method for the production of cast iron starting  
5 from pre-reduced iron ore or DRI wherein the iron has a  
metallization higher than 90% by weight, and contains  
high carbon levels; the DRI is melted in an electric  
arc furnace or EAF to form liquid cast iron and the  
regulation of the carbon content of the cast iron  
10 mainly derives from the carbon contained in said DRI.

A second object of the patent relates to an  
apparatus which implements said method.

A further object of the patent relates to a cast  
iron produced with said method.

15 The characteristics of the method, apparatus and/or  
cast iron are described in detail hereunder and claimed  
in the following claims which should be considered as  
being an integral part of the present description.

The documents cited in this text (including the  
20 previously listed patents), and all documents cited or  
indicated in the documents cited in this text, are  
incorporated herein for reference.

Documents incorporated for reference in this text  
or any teaching therein may be used in the practice of  
25 the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

The structural and functional characteristics of the invention, and its advantages with respect to the known art, will be apparent from the following  
5 description, referring to Figure 1 enclosed, which is a schematic block diagram illustrating a non-limiting embodiment of the invention showing the main operations of the method.

With the intent of first describing the method in  
10 its general features, this is destined for the production of cast iron starting from pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) using an apparatus comprising an electric arc furnace (EAF).

The term "cast iron" refers herein and in the  
15 following claims to any type of cast iron.

The method of the invention characteristically comprises the following steps:

a. preparing a charge of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) having a metallization higher than 90% and  
20 containing over 2.8% by weight of carbon, wherein at least 80% of said carbon is combined with the iron to form iron carbide  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ ,

b. charging the charge of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) into the electric arc furnace (EAF),

25 c. melting the DRI charge to form liquid cast

iron

wherein said liquid cast iron has a predetermined target content of carbon, at least 80% by weight of said target carbon content of the cast iron deriving  
5 from the carbon in the charge of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI), wherein step c. is effected in a reducing atmosphere condition and in a melting chamber of the electric arc furnace (EAF) subjected to a positive internal pressure generated by gases produced by  
10 reduction reactions that develop in step c.

An upper limit of the carbon content by weight of the charge of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) is preferably 6.5% by weight.

A large percentage, normally higher than 90% by  
15 weight of carbon in the charge of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) is preferably combined with the iron in the form of iron carbide  $Fe_3C$ ; this avoids having carbon in the form of graphite which would be mostly lost in the slag.

20 In particular, the method is carried out in an apparatus which implements the method and comprises an electric arc furnace (EAF) equipped with a melting chamber in which the electrodes are active.

The melting chamber of the apparatus in which the  
25 DRI charge is melted, is subjected to slightly positive

pressure to prevent or in any case limit the inlet of air from the outside, avoiding the oxidation of the carbon present in the metal bath.

According to an advantageous optional feature, step  
5 a. provides the heating of said DRI charge to a temperature higher than 400°C, completely favouring energy saving in the melting process.

According to other variants, an additional step is optionally provided

10 b1- for the addition, to the pre-reduced iron ore charge (DRI), of a carbonaceous material in the electric arc furnace (EAF) in order to regulate the carbon content,

said step b1 being effected between steps b. and c.  
15 either contemporaneously with step b. or contemporaneously with or downstream of step c.

According to other variants, an additional step d. is optionally provided, for discharging the contents of the EAF furnace - downstream of (after) step c. -  
20 into a transfer ladle or container.

The additional step is also optionally provided

d1. of adding a carbonaceous material to said transfer ladle.

Said carbonaceous material, of step b1 or d1, is  
25 generally selected from the group of coal, coke,

graphite, or mixtures thereof.

The liquid cast iron is then solidified from the ladle according to one of the following alternative steps:

- 5 e. granulation of the liquid cast iron
- f. casting the liquid cast iron into ingots.

The cast iron thus obtained is basic cast iron, and comprises, in addition to iron, the following weight percentages of elements:

- 10 Carbon 2.1-4.5%
- Silicon <1.5%
- Manganese 0.5-1.0%
- Sulfur <0.05%
- Phosphorous <0.12%

- 15 In other preferred embodiments, the cast iron obtained is grey cast iron or nodular cast iron.

The grey cast iron thus produced even more preferably comprises, in addition to iron, the following weight percentages of elements:

- 20 Carbon 3.5-4.5%
- Silicon 1.5-3.5%
- Manganese 0.5-1.0%
- Sulfur <0.05%
- Phosphorous <0.12%

- 25 The nodular cast iron thus produced even more

preferably comprises, in addition to iron, the following weight percentages of elements:

Carbon 3.5-4.5%

Manganese <0.5%

5 Sulfur <0.02%

Phosphorous <0.04%

Referring now to figure 1, which illustrates a simplified block scheme of a preferred embodiment of a method for the production of cast iron according to the invention, 10 indicates as a whole a supply of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI).

The latter contains a carbon percentage higher than 2.8% by weight, preferably ranging from 3% to 6% by weight, and more preferably from 4% to 5%.

15 The metallization of the charge of pre-reduced iron ore (DRI) is at least 90% by weight, preferably at least 94% by weight.

The DRI charge is fed to an apparatus 20 according to the invention comprising an electric arc furnace, to 20 be melted.

The DRI containing carbon can be charged into the melting chamber of the apparatus 20 at a temperature ranging from room temperature to 500°C or higher (preferably up to 700°C), the energy consumption of the 25 melting process will obviously be lower with an

increase in the charging temperature of the DRI.

The charging is effected using means known per sé in the state of the art, for example by gravity, by means of a pneumatic transport system, by a mechanical  
5 conveyor provided with means for maintaining an inert atmosphere in contact with the hot DRI, or in thermally insulated containers (not shown as they are known in the art).

The DRI charge is then melted in the EAF at a  
10 temperature at least higher than 1,350°C, preferably ranging from 1,400°C to 1,550°C.

Once the process has been completed, the contents of the furnace are discharged (tapped) (see 26) from the EAF.

15 It should be noted that the carbon content in the charge material (DRI) is already close to the target content of the cast iron to be produced.

The carbon content can optionally be adjusted by the addition of a further carbonaceous material.

20 In a first embodiment, this carbonaceous material 24 is mixed with the DRI directly in the melting chamber of the apparatus.

The carbonaceous material 24 that can be used is, for example but not exclusively, carbon, coke, graphite  
25 or mixtures thereof.

In a second embodiment, alternatively to or combined with the first embodiment, the carbonaceous material 30 is subsequently mixed with the molten DRI, for example in a transfer ladle 28.

5 The carbonaceous material 30 that can be used is, for example but not exclusively, carbon, coke, graphite or mixtures thereof.

These additions are optional and are only necessary when the target carbon content of the cast iron to be produced exceeds the carbon content of the DRI.

10 The carbon content of the DRI is preferably equal to the target carbon content of the cast iron to be produced, so that the method expressly excludes the addition of carbon both in the melting chamber and subsequently.

According to the invention, the carbon content in the DRI charge is combined therein with iron, preferably mostly in the form of carbon carbide  $Fe_3C$ . The combined carbon provides a number of advantages in the electric arc furnace (EAF) with respect to the use of "free" carbon which can be added in the form of soot, coal, coke, graphite: soot is in fact easily entrained by the hot gases during the melting phase of the DRI, coal brings numerous impurities, among which sulfur which must be controlled and eliminated in the

final composition of cast iron, coke has a high cost and graphite, as high-purity carbon, is even more expensive.

It is therefore evident that the use of the carbon content in DRI as carbon carbide  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$  is economically convenient for the production of a commodity such as cast iron.

The tapping step 26 of the liquid cast iron thus obtained is set at a temperature which is such as to have a certain degree of overheating, preferably ranging from  $1,400^\circ\text{C}$  to  $1,550^\circ\text{C}$ , also in relation to the melting point of the slag that is expected to be produced.

In this way, there can be sufficient time in the transfer ladle 28 for adjusting the desired final composition to meet the pre-determined chemical analysis of the cast iron in view of its final use.

Ferroalloys or scorifiers 30 can also be optionally introduced into the transfer ladle 28 containing liquid cast iron.

Said ferroalloys or scorifiers are known per sé in the state of the art and consequently no further reference will be made herein to the same.

The liquid cast iron 32 is then discharged from the transfer ladle 28 and cast into forming containers 34

in the form of ingots 36, or it can be granulated through processes known in the art, thus forming the final cast iron.

The objectives of the present invention have  
5 therefore been achieved.

## CLAIMS

1. A method for the production of cast iron starting from pre-reduced iron ore DRI by means of an electric arc furnace EAF, comprising the following steps:
- 5 a. preparing a charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI having a metallization higher than 90% and containing over 2.8% by weight of carbon, wherein at least 80% of said carbon is combined with the iron to form iron carbide  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ ,
- 10 b. charging the charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI into the electric arc furnace EAF,
- c. melting the DRI charge to form liquid cast iron
- wherein said liquid cast iron has a predetermined
- 15 actual content of carbon, at least 80% by weight of said actual carbon content of the cast iron deriving from the carbon in the charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI and
- wherein step c. is carried out in a reducing atmosphere
- 20 and in a melting chamber of the electric arc furnace EAF subjected to a positive internal pressure generated by gases produced by reduction reactions that develop in step c.
2. The method according to claim 1, wherein said charge
- 25 of pre-reduced iron ore DRI contains up to 6.5% by weight of carbon.
3. The method according to one or more of the previous claims, wherein substantially 100% of said carbon in

the charge of pre-reduced iron ore DRI is combined with iron in the form of iron carbide  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ .

4. The method according to one or more of the previous claims, wherein step a. provides that said DRI charge  
5 be charged into the furnace at a temperature higher than  $400^\circ\text{C}$ .

5. The method according to one or more of the previous claims, wherein an additional step is provided:

b1. addition, to the charge of pre-reduced iron ore  
10 DRI, of a carbonaceous material in the electric arc furnace EAF to regulate the carbon content,

said step b1 being effected between steps b. and c. or contemporaneously with step b. or contemporaneously or downstream of step c.

15 6. The method according to one or more of the previous claims, wherein an additional step is provided

d. discharging the contents of the EAF furnace downstream of step c. into a transfer ladle or container.

20 7. The method according to claim 3, wherein an additional step is provided

d1. adding a carbonaceous material to said transfer ladle.

8. The method according to one or more of claims 5-7,  
25 wherein the carbonaceous material is selected from the group of coal, coke, graphite, or mixtures thereof.

9. The method according to one or more of the previous claims, wherein the following step is provided

e. granulation of the liquid cast iron  
or a step

f. casting the liquid cast iron in ingots.

10. The method according to one or more of the previous  
5 claims, wherein the cast iron is grey cast iron or  
nodular cast iron.

11. Cast iron produced according to the method of one  
or more of the previous claims.

12. An apparatus for the production of cast iron  
10 characterized in that it implements the method  
according to one or more of claims 1 to 10.

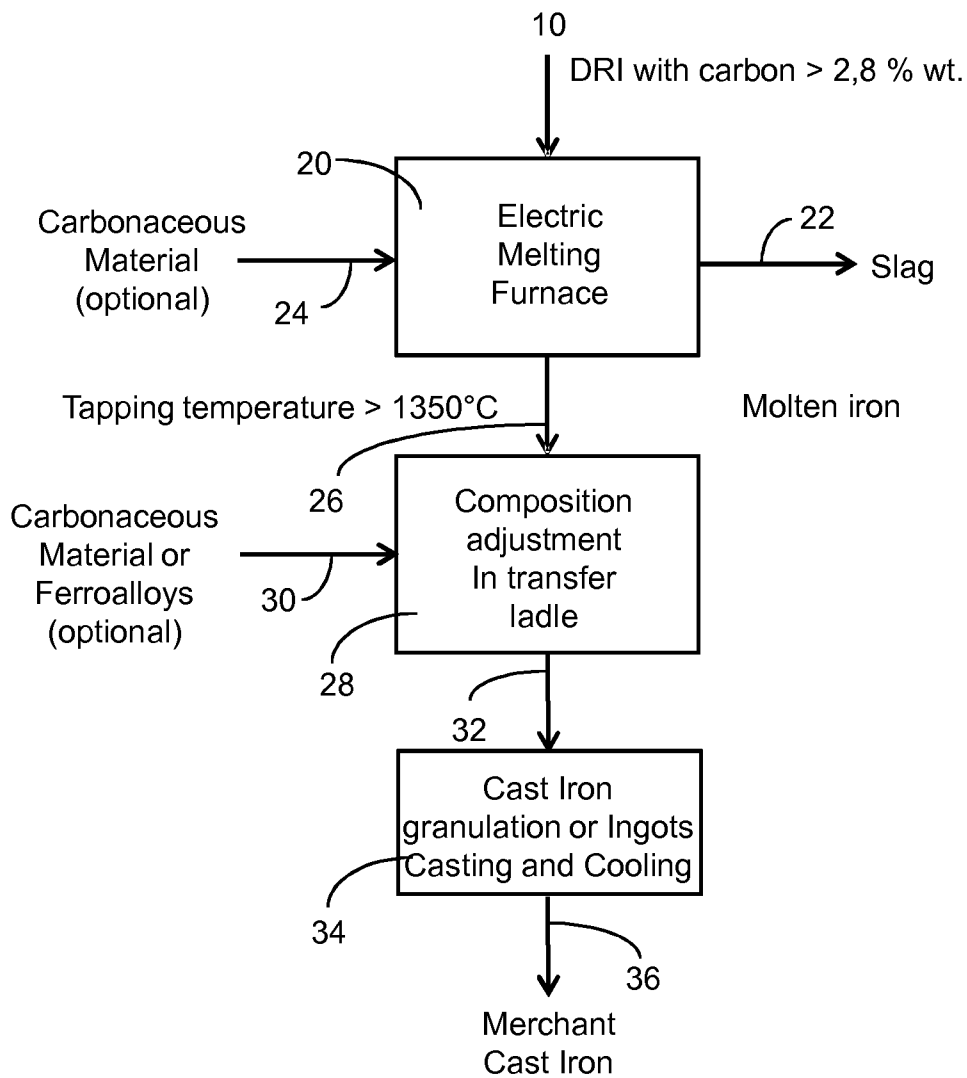


Figure 1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No  
PCT/EP2017/062860

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER  
 INV. C21B11/10 C21B13/12 C21C5/52 C21B13/14 C21C1/08  
 C21B13/00  
 ADD.  
 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED  
 Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)  
 C21B C21C  
 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)  
 EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	Francesco Memoli: "Behaviour and Benefits of High Fe <sub>3</sub> C-DRI in the EAF", RESEARCH GATE 31 May 2015 (2015-05-31), XP002767548, Retrieved from the Internet: URL:https://www.researchgate.net/profile/..DRI.../568d541408ae78cc0514198 [retrieved on 2017-02-23] the whole document ----- -/--	1-12

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

\* Special categories of cited documents :

<p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p>	<p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"&amp;" document member of the same patent family</p>
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Date of the actual completion of the international search  31 July 2017	Date of mailing of the international search report  04/08/2017
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Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer  Gimeno-Fabra, Lluís
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## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No  
PCT/EP2017/062860

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/EP2017/062860

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