# Effect of Ag incorporation on structure and optoelectronic properties of (Ag<sub>1-x</sub>Cu<sub>x</sub>)<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> solid solutions

Galina Gurieva<sup>1\*</sup>, José A. Márquez<sup>1\*</sup>, Alexandra Franz<sup>1</sup>, Charles J. Hages<sup>1,2</sup>, Sergiu Levcenko<sup>1</sup>, Thomas Unold<sup>1</sup> and Susan Schorr<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helmholtz Zentrum Berlin für Materialien und Energie GmbH, Hahn-Meitner-Platz 1, D-14109 Berlin, Germany

<sup>2</sup> University of Florida, Department of Chemical Engineering, 1006 Center Drive, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA

<sup>3</sup> Free University Berlin, Institute of Geological Sciences, Malteserstr. 74-100, Berlin, Germany

\* Authors with equal contributions

galina.gurieva@helmholtz-berlin.de, jose.marquez\_prieto@helmholtz-berlin.de

## Abstract

The performance of  $Cu_2ZnSnSe_4$  solar cells is presently limited by low values of open-circuit voltage which are a consequence of strong band tailing and high level of non-radiative recombination. Recently, the partial substitution of Cu, Zn and Sn by other elements has shown potential to overcome this limitation. We explored the structural changes and the effect on the optoelectronic properties of the partial substitution of Cu with Ag in  $Cu_2ZnSnSe_4$ . This study clarifies the crystal structure of  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  solid solution series, deducing possible cationic point defects and paying special attention to the presence of Cu/Zn disorder with a combination of neutron and X-ray diffraction. The optoelectronic properties of the solid solution series are assessed using reflection and quantitative photoluminescence spectroscopy, which allows us to estimate the fraction of non-radiative recombination, which would contribute to the open-circuit voltage loss in devices. The results strongly suggest Ag incorporation as a promising route to eliminate Cu/Zn disorder and to reduce non-radiative recombination losses in  $Cu_2ZnSnSe_4$ .

## I. INTRODUCTION

The efficiency level of  $Cu_2ZnSn(S,Se)_4$  (CZTSSe) kesterite solar cells is presently below 13%, with the main loss in performance being attributed to low values of the open circuit voltage ( $V_{\rm OC}$ ) [1]. The  $V_{\rm OC}$ in CZTSSe devices is believed to be limited by significant non-radiative recombination [2], low minority carrier lifetime [3] and bandgap fluctuations partially caused by the exceptionally high density of antisite defects [4]. One of the recently tested strategies to overcome this limitation has been the partial replacement of Cu, Zn and Sn cations by other elements. Successful examples of this have been demonstrated with the partial replacement of Cu, Zn and Sn cations with Na, K, Li, Ag, Cd and Ge [5-12]. By replacing Cu in CZTSe with Ag, whose covalent radius is 15% larger than that of Cu and Zn, the density of I–II antisite defects (e.g Cu/Zn disorder) is predicted to drop helping to reduce the band tailing in the absorber [13]. Cu<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> solar cells with Ag alloying recently reached an efficiency of 10.2% [10]. Cu<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> and Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> are quaternary semiconductors belonging to the adamantine compound family. It was shown by neutron diffraction that CZTSe crystallizes in the kesterite type structure (space group  $\overline{I4}$ ) [15]. This structure can be derived from the cubic sphalerite type structure by doubling the unit cell in the direction of the crystallographic *c*-axis and an ordering of the cations. Very similar to the kesterite type structure is the stannite type structure (space group  $I\overline{4}2m$ ). Besides the difference in the anion position, the main difference between these two structures lays in the cation

distribution, especially with respect to  $Cu^+$  and  $Zn^{2+}$ . A differentiation between the isoelectronic cations  $Cu^+$  and  $Zn^{2+}$  and consequently between the kesterite and the stannite type structure as well as the information on Cu/Zn disorder in kesterite type structure is not possible using X-ray diffraction due to their similar scattering factors. However, neutron diffraction can solve this problem as the coherent scattering lengths are sufficiently different for these cations [15]. In the case of Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> according to density functional theory calculations the kesterite type structure is considered as the ground state structure [13]. Experimentally only X-ray diffraction was used until now to determine the crystal structure of AZTSe and the kesterite structure was found [16]. But in the case of  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  a combination of neutron and X-ray diffraction is necessary in order to determine the cation distribution in these compounds.  $Cu^+$  and  $Ag^+$  are not isoelectronic and  $Ag^+$  can be located by laboratory-based X-ray diffraction measurements, but the problem of  $Cu^+$  and  $Zn^{2+}$  being isoelectronic remains. This work presents for the first time a neutron diffraction based investigation of the crystal structure of  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$ .

The aim of this study is to clarify the crystal structure as well as to deduce possible cationic point defects, paying a special attention to the presence of Cu/Zn disorder in these compounds. Additionally, the optoelectronic properties of the synthesized powder materials are characterized by means of hyperspectral imaging techniques, allowing us to evaluate the bandgap and the quasi-Fermi level splitting as a function of Ag substitution.

## II. EXPERIMENTAL

#### A. Synthesis

The silver containing compounds were synthesized via solid state reaction starting with the stoichiometric amounts of pure elements Ag (6N), Cu (6N), Zn (6N), Sn (6N) and Se (5N) in evacuated silica tubes, similar to the synthesis of CZTSe, CZGSe and CZTS compounds [15, 17, 20-22]. Due to the comparably low decomposition temperature of the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> end member of the (Ag<sub>1-x</sub>Cu<sub>x</sub>)<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> solid solution [16], the maximum synthesis temperature had to be adjusted significantly, and accordingly the holding times had to be increased. As the result the samples were synthesized using the temperature regime: 10K/h to 200 °C hold for 24h, 10K/h to 400 °C hold 24h, 10K/h to 550 °C hold for 20 days followed by natural cooling. The homogenization procedure – grinding in agate mortar, pressing in a pellet and annealing at 550 °C for 20 more days, was repeated twice.

#### **B.** Compositional characterization

To determine the chemical composition and phase content of the samples, wavelength dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (WDX) has been performed using an electron microprobe analysis system (JEOL-JXA 8200) equipped with a wavelength dispersive X-ray spectroscopy unit (WDX) where the phase content and chemical composition have been determined. In order to obtain reliable results from the WDX measurements, the system was calibrated using elemental standards. High accuracy of the compositional parameters was achieved by averaging over 20 local measurement points within one grain and averaging over 30 grains of the ACZTSe. Averaging over all grains of the main phase is possible due to the fact that deviations of the values for each of the measurements within each grain as well as among all of the grains did not exceed a 1% error, originated by the instrumental error.

## C. Structural characterization

For structural characterization of these mixed crystals both neutron and X-ray diffraction were used. A PANalytical X'Pert PRO MRD diffractometer with Bragg-Brentano geometry and a sample spinner stage was used for the XRD measurements. The collected XRD patterns were further processed by a Rietveld refinement using the FullProf Suite software package [22]. The Thompson-Cox-Hastings pseudo-Voigt function was applied to describe the XRD peak shape profile [25]. In order to distinguish between Cu<sup>+</sup> and Zn<sup>2+</sup> neutron diffraction experiments have been performed at the Berlin Research Reactor BER II at the Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin für Materialien und Energie using the fine resolution powder diffractometer FIREPOD (E9) ( $\lambda = 1.7982$  Å; ambient temperature) [26]. The data treatment was performed by a full pattern Rietveld refinement [24] using the FullProf Suite software package [23].

## D. Characterization of the optoelectronic properties

The characterization of the optoelectronic properties was performed with a home-built hyperspectral imaging setup. The photoluminescence (PL) image detection was performed with a CCD camera for the AZTSe sample and with an InGaAs camera for the  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  with x = 0, 0.17, 0.26 and 0.46. Both cameras are coupled to liquid crystal tunable filters. The excitation for the CCD camera system was performed with two 455 nm LEDs equipped with diffuser lenses with an intensity of 1.2 x  $10^{21}$  photons m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>. The excitation for the InGaAs camera system was performed with two 660 nm fibre coupled lasers attached to homogenizers units with an intensity of 4.8 x 10<sup>21</sup> photons m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>. Both systems were calibrated to absolute photon numbers. The external PL quantum efficiency values are calculated from the ratio of total photons emitted to total photons absorbed. We assume that the absorptivity A equals 1 for the excitation wavelength used in this study. The Shockley-Queisser quasi-Fermi level splitting ( $\Delta \mu^{SQ}$ ) values have been calculated by detailed balanced using "AM 1.5 GT" solar spectrum which corresponds to the theoretical limit. The calculations assume a step-like absorptivity function where all the photons above the bandgap value are absorbed. The calculated  $\Delta \mu^{SQ}$  vs bandgap  $(E_g)$  is shown in the supplementary material. For the calculation of the quasi-Fermi level splitting values  $(\Delta \mu)$  we assumed step like absorptivity where A=1 for photon energies above the bandgap and A=0 below the bandgap.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The presence of small amounts of two secondary phases (ZnSe and Ag<sub>8</sub>SnSe<sub>6</sub>) were detected in all of the Ag-containing samples. Additionally, SnSe<sub>2</sub> was found in the AZTSe sample. The presence of secondary phases was the reason for the resulting off- stoichiometric compositions of the ACZTSe phase in contrast to the aimed stoichiometric compositions. **Figure 1a** presents a back scatter electron (BSE) micrograph showing the homogeneity of the main phase alongside with the presence of the two secondary phases which were as well detected with Raman spectroscopy (see Supplementary material part A). In addition, the Raman characterization part provides results concerning the effect of the Cu substitution by Ag on the Raman active phonon modes in ACZTSSe samples. One of the samples (Ag-26) showed a few grains of a quaternary phase with slightly different Ag/(Ag+Cu) ratio in addition to the quaternary main phase, which made it unsuitable for detailed structural characterization via neutron diffraction. In the case of the other ACZTSe powder samples (further referred as Ag-17, Ag-46 and Ag-100), their main quaternary phases were homogeneous, but with slightly off-stoichiometric composition (see **Figure 1b**). All of the ACZTSe phases were slightly Zn rich and Sn poor, while the (Ag+Cu)/(Zn+Sn) ratio is changing from 0.96 for CZTSe and AZTSe to 0.99 for the rest of the samples but remained very close to 1. The (Ag+Cu)/(Zn+Sn), Ag/(Ag+Cu) and Zn/Sn ratios of the mixed crystals as well as the offstoichiometry type information and final formulae of the quaternary compounds, calculated according to the method described in [15,17,19], are presented in Table I.

TABLE I. Overview of synthesized samples: cation ratios (Ag+Cu)/(Zn+Sn), Ag/(Ag+Cu) and Zn/Sn of the main phase obtained from the WDX analysis, chemical formula, off-stoichiometry type and presence of secondary phases.

Name	(Ag+Cu)/	Zn/Sn	Ag/	Secondary	Final formula	Туре
	(Zn+Sn)		(Ag+Cu)	phases		
Ag-100	0.96 (1)	1.06 (1)	1.00	Ag <sub>8</sub> SnSe <sub>6</sub>	$Ag_{1.95}Zn_{1.05}Sn_{0.99}Se_4$	A-B
				ZnSe		
				SnSe <sub>2</sub>		
Ag-46	0.99(1)	1.05 (1)	0.46(1)	Ag <sub>8</sub> SnSe <sub>6</sub>	$Ag_{0.91}Cu_{1.08}Zn_{1.03}Sn_{0.99}Se_4$	B-G
-				ZnSe	-	
Ag-26	0.99(1)	1.09 (1)	0.26(1)	Ag <sub>8</sub> SnSe <sub>6</sub>	$Ag_{0.52}Cu_{1.48}Zn_{1.03}Sn_{0.99}Se_4$	G-F
C				ZnSe	C	
Ag-17	0.99(1)	1.05 (1)	0.17(1)	Ag <sub>8</sub> SnSe <sub>6</sub>	$Ag_{0.35}Cu_{1.66}Zn_{1.06}Sn_{0.97}Se_{4}$	G
0				ZnSe		
Ag-0	0.96(1)	1.08 (1)	0.00	-	$Cu_{1.95}Zn_{1.05}Sn_{0.98}Se_{4}$	A-B
1.5 0	5.25 (1)	1.00(1)	0.00		001.99211.000110.98004	

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**FIG. 1.** (a) BSE micrograph of the  $Ag_{0.91}Cu_{1.08}Zn_{1.03}Sn_{0.99}Se_4$  (Ag-46) sample, with exemplarily grains belonging to secondary phases indicated: ZnSe darker grain I, Ag<sub>6</sub>SnSe<sub>8</sub> lighter grain II; (b) Cation ratio plot (Ag+Cu)/(Zn+Sn) vs. Zn/Sn showing the different off-stoichiometry types A, B, G and F relevant for this study [17 - 20]. The positions of the synthesized ACZTSe phases, obtained from the analysis of the WDX data are indicated.

Due to the similarity between the neutron scattering length of Ag and Zn (b<sub>Zn</sub>=5.680 fm and b<sub>Ag</sub>=5.922 fm [27]) it is hard to distinguish them using only neutron scattering. In order to obtain reliable site occupancy parameters (SOF) for all 4 crystallographic sites of kesterite type structure, and locate all four cations within the crystal structure, a simultaneous Rietveld refinement of X-ray and neutron diffraction data was performed. As the starting crystal structure model for the ACZTSe main phase the kesterite type structure (space group  $I\overline{4}$ ) with Cu/Ag on 2a:(0,0,0), Cu on 2c:(0,1/2,1/4), Zn on 2d:(0,  $\frac{1}{2},\frac{3}{4}$ , Sn on  $2b:(\frac{1}{2},\frac{1}{2},0)$  and Se on 8g:(x,y,z) Wyckoff positions [15, 16] was selected. Both secondary

phases deduced from chemical analysis (WDX) have been included in the refinement files (see **Figure 2a**). The obtained phase contents are presented in Supplimentary Information in Table S1 [40]. The refinements have been performed without any chemical constraints. The resulting lattice constants are in a good agreement with Vergard's law (see **Figure 2b**, **Table S1**).



**FIG. 2.** (a) Rietveld refinement of the neutron diffraction data for  $Ag_{0.35}Cu_{1.66}Zn_{1.06}Sn_{0.97}Se_4$ , where the red dots are experimental data, the black line is the obtained fit, the blue ticks are the Bragg peak positions of the stannite type structure, red ticks for ZnSe and green ticks for  $Ag_8SnSe_6$  secondary phases, and the blue line is the difference between the experimental and calculated data; (b) lattice parameters *a* and *c*/2 in dependence of the Ag/(Ag+Cu) ratio.

The Ag-46 sample is being discussed here in detail, as an example, while the same type of analysis was performed for all of the samples, and the results are presented in Supplementary Information (Figure S7) [40]. In order to determine the distribution of the cations  $Cu^+$ ,  $Ag^+$ ,  $Zn^{2+}$  and  $Sn^{4+}$  on the four cation sites of the kesterite type structure the method of the average neutron scattering length analysis [28] was applied. The experimental average neutron scattering lengths of the four cation sites 2a, 2b, 2c and 2dwere calculated as described earlier [20, 22, 28]. As the result of the comparison of the experimentally obtained values with the neutron scattering lengths of copper, silver, zinc and tin (Figure 3a), it is already obvious that the average neutron scattering length of the copper site 2a is extremely decreased in comparison to the copper neutron scattering length, and is equal to the zinc neutron scattering length which means that the 2*a* position is completely occupied by  $Zn^{2+}$ (Figure 3b). The 2*c* and 2*d* positions, where Cu/Zn disorder is usually present in compounds with kesterite type structure, are occupied by Ag<sup>+</sup> and Cu<sup>+</sup> in proportions suggested by the chemical compositions (see Figure 3b) instead. Only  $Sn^{4+}$ is located on 2b position as expected. All of findings mentioned above are very strong indications of stannite type structure (space group  $I\overline{4}2m$ ). An additional refinement of the powder pattern using the stannite type structure with Zn on 2a:(0,0,0), Cu/Ag on 4d:( $0,\frac{1}{2},\frac{1}{4}$ ), Sn on 2b:( $\frac{1}{2},\frac{1}{2},0$ ) and Se on 8i:(x,x,z) Wyckoff positions as starting model was performed. A lower value for both  $R_{Bragg}$  and  $\chi^2$  (e.g.  $R_{Bragg} = 3.33$  instead of 4.14 and  $\chi^2 = 2.48$  instead of 2.69 in case of Ag-46) were obtained. A slight presence of off-stoichiometry type related defects was detected as well. The resulting comparison of the experimentally obtained values with the neutron scattering lengths of copper, silver, zinc and tin (Figure 3c) and cation distribution (Figure 3d) are presented as well. The kesterite type structure of AZTSe reported earlier was confirmed by anomalous X-ray diffraction[38]. The paper concerning these results is in preparation and will be published separately [39].



**FIG. 3.** (a) Average neutron scattering length  $\overline{b}$  of the cation sites 2*a*, 2*c*, 2*d* and 2*b*, assuming kesterite type structure exemplarily shown for Ag<sub>0.91</sub>Cu<sub>1.08</sub>Zn<sub>1.03</sub>Sn<sub>0.99</sub>Se<sub>4</sub> (full symbols – experimental values; star – calculated values according to a cation distribution model); (b) Resulting cation distribution in Ag<sub>0.91</sub>Cu<sub>1.08</sub>Zn<sub>1.03</sub>Sn<sub>0.99</sub>Se<sub>4</sub> (Ag-46); (c) Average neutron scattering length  $\overline{b}$  of the cation sites 2*a*, 4*d* and 2*b*, assuming stannite type structure (full symbols – experimental values; star – calculated values according to a cation distribution in Ag<sub>0.91</sub>Cu<sub>1.08</sub>Zn<sub>1.03</sub>Sn<sub>0.99</sub>Se<sub>4</sub> (Ag-46); (d) Resulting cation distribution in Ag<sub>0.91</sub>Cu<sub>1.08</sub>Zn<sub>1.03</sub>Sn<sub>0.99</sub>Se<sub>4</sub> (Ag-46).

The optoelectronic properties of the powders synthesized were measured by means of hyperspectral imaging, thus allowing good statistics and providing representative data of the large volume of crystallite powder samples. From the diffuse reflectance data, the bandgap of the  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  series has been calculated with Tauc plots using the Kubelka-Munk function [29] as shown in (**Figure 4a**). The bandgap dependence on the composition is shown in **Figure 4b**. An initial decrease of the bandgap energy is observed for the Ag-17 sample compared to CZTSe. Then, an increase of the  $E_g$  values with increasing the Ag/(Ag+Cu) ratio is found for *x* larger than ~0.2. The values are in agreement with the bandgaps and bowing reported in the study reported by Gong et al. [16] showing that for Ag contents above 50% the optical bandgap of the material approaches the optimal region for photovoltaic energy conversion.



**FIG. 4.** a) Tauc plots for the bandgap determination of the powders. c) bandgap values  $E_g$  as a function of the Ag/(Cu+Ag) ratio of the powders. The gray line is a guide for the eye.

To evaluate the potential of the synthesized compounds as absorbers for thin film solar cells, absolute photoluminescence (PL) hyperspectral imaging has been performed on the (Ag<sub>1-x</sub>Cu<sub>x</sub>)<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> series. The advantage of imaging techniques for the optoelectronic characterization of the powders can be understood when looking at the maps shown in Figures 5 a and b. The distribution of the external PL quantum yield ( $Q_e^{PL}$ ) measured over a 3x3 mm<sup>2</sup> of the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> powder can be seen in figure Figure **5a**. The map shows local grain to grain variations in the  $Q_e^{PL}$  values. A statistical analysis based on a Gaussian distribution indicates a standard deviation of the  $Q_e^{PL}$  map around 30% (see Supplementary material [40]). As the luminescence yield depends on both minority carrier lifetime and (doping) charge carrier density, the local changes in the  $Q_e^{PL}$  can arise from variations in either of these two quantities. Similarly, a map of the center of the emission band attributed to the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> phase is shown in Figure 5b. This map exhibits local differences of the energy of the PL maximum of up to 80 meV with an average value of 1.258 eV and a standard deviation of 11 meV (see histograms in the supplementary material [40]).



**FIG. 5.** a) Map of the external PL quantum yield  $Q_e^{PL}$  and b) of the energy of the center of the PL emission band of the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> powder. The pixel resolution in both maps is approximately 10 µm in diameter and an average grain area of about ~160 µm<sup>2</sup> is estimated from the BSE micrograph shown in Figure 1a (see also Supplementary material [40]). A Gaussian fit was performed to construct the maps in every pixel to extract the  $Q_e^{PL}$  (form the area) and the PL maximum (from the center). For computational simplicity the data with energies above 1.35eV was masked to omit the contribution of the high energy band and avoid multiple peak fits. c) Absolute intensity PL spectrum of the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> powder. d) External PL quantum yield  $Q_e^{PL}$  as a function of composition. The black symbols represent the upper limit for the values of the  $Q_e^{PL}$  which have been calculated integrating the full PL spectrum (area of the cumulative fit in *figure 5c*). The blue symbols correspond to the lower bound estimated for the  $Q_e^{PL}$ which has been calculated with the area of the Gaussian peak of the (Ag<sub>1-x</sub>Cu<sub>x</sub>)<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> band (red peaks in *figure 5c and figure S3*). The black line is a guide for the eye.

The average PL spectrum of the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> sample is presented in **Figure 5c.** The spectrum shows a PL band close to the bandgap (1.31 eV determined by diffuse reflectance) accompanied by a higher energy secondary peak. We attribute the dominant PL band of the ACZTSe samples to band to band (BB) or band to tail (BT) transition based on the comparison of the PL maximum and the bandgap ( $E_g$ ) of the kesterites determined by diffuse reflectance (Table II). Based on this criterion the PL emission of the lower Ag containing samples is attributed to the BB transition [30]. The samples with higher Ag content exhibit a dominant PL band located 30-50 meV below the estimated bandgap and most likely originates from a BT type transition (See Supplementary material figure S3 [40]). The high energy band observed in the spectrum of the AZTSe sample is likely to be secondary phases related and it appears for all the Ag containing powders studied (see Supplementary material [40]). This has been evaluated by synthesizing and measuring powders of Ag<sub>8</sub>SnSe<sub>6</sub> and ZnSe. We can discard that the high energy contribution comes from the emission of the Ag<sub>8</sub>SnSe<sub>6</sub> which shows a photoluminescence emission at 0.83 eV (see Supplementary material [40]). On the other hand, the origin of the high energy band could

come from ZnSe in which we detect a PL signal centered at 1.27 eV from a transition possibly related to a defect level of this phase. It is important to highlight that the Ag<sub>8</sub>SnSe<sub>6</sub> and ZnSe phases which may segregate during the growth of the (Ag,Cu)<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> powder are likely to lead to different defect properties compared to the reference powders and therefore contribute differently to the overall PL emission spectra. It is also worth commenting that the presence of Ag<sub>8</sub>SnSe<sub>6</sub> (found in all the Ag containing samples of this study) might be problematic in a solar cell due to its narrow bandgap, particularly if this phase is located close to the pn-junction. However, this problem could potentially be overcome by a KCN chemical etching of the absorber layer [10].

**Table II** Summary of parameters obtained from the optoelectronic characterization performed in the powders. The  $Q_e^{PL}$  values shown in the table are the average of the upper and lower bounds shown in figure 5d.

	O PL (0/.)	$E_{\rm g}\left({ m eV} ight)$	max. of PL	$\Delta\mu_{\rm SQ}({ m eV})$	$\Delta \mu (\mathrm{eV})$	$\Delta \mu / \Delta \mu_{SQ}$
Ag/(Ag+Cu)	$Q_e$ (70)		( <b>eV</b> )			(%)
1	1.2 x 10 <sup>-2</sup>	1.31	1.25	1.054	0.819	78
0.46	1.8 x 10 <sup>-2</sup>	1.08	1.05	0.840	0.615	73
0.26	6.4 x 10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.96	0.95	0.728	0.477	66
0.17	3.6 x 10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.92	0.92	0.690	0.424	61
0	2.7 x 10 <sup>-4</sup>	0.94	0.94	0.79	0.376	53

The evolution of the external photoluminescence quantum efficiency  $Q_e^{PL}$  with increasing Ag/(Ag+Cu) ratio is shown in **Figure 5d** and indicates an increase by two orders of magnitude from the Cu<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> to the Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub>. As pointed out above, the photoluminescence yield (and thus also the  $Q_e^{PL}$ ) in low injection conditions depends on both the minority carrier lifetime and the doping density of the material. Therefore the increase of the  $Q_e^{PL}$  observed for increasing silver content in the samples could in principle be due to an increase in the Shockley-Read-Hall (RSH) lifetime or to an increase in the intrinsic carrier density. Although we were not able to measure the carrier density in these powder samples we note that there have been several reports in the literature that clearly indicate a strong decrease in the intrinsic carrier density with increasing silver content, with up to 4 orders of magnitude lower values observed for Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> than for Cu<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> [10]. This would indicate that the significant increase in the  $Q_e^{PL}$  observed for the higher silver contents is due to a strongly increased SRH lifetime caused by a reduction in non-radiative recombination via deep defects. Indeed, such increased lifetimes have been recently predicted for Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> in a first-principles study of non-radiative recombination [14], which indicate that carrier capture and recombination induced by Sn<sub>Zn</sub> antisite defects are significantly suppressed in this compound.

The  $Q_e^{PL}$  can be used to calculate the quasi-Fermi level splitting and thus allows an estimation of maximum achievable  $V_{OC}$  in a solar cell following the approach from Ross [31]. The higher the  $Q_e^{PL}$  the lower the  $V_{OC}$  deficit with respect to the ideal one at the Shockley-Queisser limit [31, 32]. The estimated values of  $\Delta \mu$  from the  $Q_e^{PL}$  are shown in **Table II** along with the ideal  $\Delta \mu^{SQ}$  (Shockley-Queisser limit). [29] The low Ag containing samples (Ag-17 and Ag-26) show above 60% of the  $\Delta \mu^{SQ}$ , which is a ~10% improvement with respect to the CZTSe powder. These values are comparable to the ones reported for the best kesterite solar cells [9,33,34]. Remarkably, the percentage of gain in maximum achievable  $V_{OC}$  with respect to the ideal  $V_{OC}$  increases by more than 20% for the mixed crystals with x=0.46 and x=1 compared to the Cu<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> end member. Such an increase in the measured quasi-Fermi level splitting demonstrates that Ag incorporation in CZTSe can be a promising strategy to reduce the  $V_{OC}$  deficit of

kesterite solar cells. A maximum achievable  $\Delta \mu$  of ~820 meV is calculated for the pure Ag compound. This value of the quasi-Fermi level splitting is more than 300 meV larger than the  $V_{\rm OC}$  achieved in the best solar cell reported using Ag<sub>2</sub>ZnSnSe<sub>4</sub> as an absorber layer [35]. Since the quasi-Fermi level splitting gives the achievable upper limit for the  $V_{OC}$ , additional losses must occur when functional layers and contacts are added in the devices, as has been recently shown and discussed in detail for halideperovskite solar cells. [36, 37]. One possible reason for the limited  $V_{\rm OC}$  observed in silver containing  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  solar cells is the fact that in addition to low intrinsic charge carrier densities, a type conversion from *p*-type to *n*-type doping has been found for x < 0.1. Thus conventional *pn*-junction device architectures commonly employed for chalcopyrite or kesterite-type solar cells, which include an *n*-type window (zinc oxide or indium tin oxide) and an n-type buffer layer (CdS), are not expected to lead to good photoconversion properties. If n-type absorber layers are to be used, either an *np*-junction configuration with a *p*-type buffer/window layer, or a *p*-i-*n* type configuration with highly selective n and *p*-type contact layers would have to be employed. At present this poses a considerable challenge as there is a lack of suitable *p*-type conducting materials, but indicates a promising direction for future research. The greatly improved radiative efficiencies in the  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  investigated in this study indicate the possibility of increased photoconversion efficiencies in thin film solar cells derived from kesterite/stannite-type materials than the current state of the art.

### I. CONCLUSION

Detailed structural analysis of a  $(Ag_{1-x}Cu_x)_2ZnSnSe_4$  solid solution series was performed by means of neutron and X-ray diffraction. In contrast to previous assignments of the kesterite structure to  $Ag_2ZnSnSe_4$  and  $Cu_2ZnSnSe_4$ , we find that mixed crystals with x=0.17 and 0.46 adopt the stannite type structure, in this way the possibility of Cu/Zn disorder formation is completely blocked.

The  $Q_e^{PL}$  was found to increase with Ag content by up to two orders of magnitude compared to CZTSe. The high  $Q_e^{PL}$  measured in the AZTSe sample suggests that solar cells based on this compound with a  $V_{OC}$  larger than 0.8V with a bandgap of 1.31 eV could be in principle achieved.

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