

Listening to the stakeholders:

A plea for a participatory approach - and
some grounded theories - of impacts in
social LCA

Alain Falque



How must we proceed in sLCA?

There are many differences between eLCA and sLCA.
But one is critical

- eLCA start with a finite inventory of outputs
- sLCA cannot
the range of possible consequences that may be relevant is virtually infinite

So that we are led to proceed otherwise

- eLCA proceed down the stream
- sLCA need to proceed backwards
 - from adverse states of social aspects of concern
 - backward to social outputs supposed to be involved
 - through assumptions on possible causal relations



Therefore, how can we identify the key issues?

This may be the most critical problem to resolve

Social issues are endlessly questionable

All the concepts involved in social phenomena are "essentially contested", within the meaning of Gallie (1956)

UNEP-SETAC guidelines took the option to refer to

- existing and widely distributed standards
- in CSR framework and literature
- assumed to be consensual



But... is CSR framework and literature free from any bias of perspective?

Designers and proponents of CSR standards take part of a (very) "small world"

they are a particular “epistemic community”, in sense of Haas (1992)

similar profiles and careers, from Transnational Corporations to NGOs, from NGOs to public institutions, and return

They can't claim having an universal point of view on CSR issues

they may have a particular perspective on CSR issues
Just as specific as those of any other specific community



Which stakeholders are to be taken in account?

According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are:

Those groups and individuals that can affect, *or* are affected by, the accomplishment of organizational purpose

Five “major” stakeholders are listed by UNEP-SETAC: workers; consumers; value chain actors; local community; society

But CSR literature paid material attention only to the first three:

- the “primary” - “voluntary” – stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995)
- or “legitimate”- “contracting” – ones (Hill and Jones, 1992)
- i.e., those groups and individuals *that can affect*



Which stakeholders are to be taken in account? (2)

However, sLCA practioners should logically paid more attention to “secondary” stakeholders:

Those groups and individuals *that are affected by* the accomplishment of organizational purpose

In accordance with the original concept underlying the stakeholder approach:

Freeman’s plea for a stakeholder approach was based on the observation that potential stakeholders don’t do anything *unless they have to, because they discovered themselves affected*

What point of view is legitimate?

About the nature and the extend of the impact:

to be as local as any other's one ...

... stakeholder's point of view is nevertheless the only legitimate one...

... as a direct consequence of Kant's categorical imperative

"no one should be used as a means to some other purposes whatsoever without the benefit of full rights to participate in any relative decisions"

Whereby Evan et Freeman (1993) stated:

- "stakeholders have inalienable rights to participate in decisions that substantially affect their welfare"
- "management have the duty to recognize the legitimacy of claims made to the company"



For a participatory definition of impacts

Let's adopt the AA1000 AccountAbility Principles:

- **Inclusiveness:** people should have their say in the decisions that have an impact on them
- **Materiality:** policymakers must identify the real problems and have a clear position about them
- **Reactivity:** organizations must respond seamlessly for their actions

For a participatory development of “grounded theories” of impacts:

- theories we are looking for are “idiosyncratic” theories of impacts
- i.e., that kind of “bottom-up” “mid-range” theories which are falling straight within the framework of “grounded theories” developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967)

Listening to the stakeholders: a plea for a participatory approach of impacts

Thank you for your attention

