

Meta-analysis of SLCA: where are we and where are we headed?

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Social Life Cycle Assessment (SLCA) has first been developed to complement Environmental Life Cycle Assessment (ELCA) with social aspects (UNEP/SETAC, 2009). However, whether it has allowed for the integration of social aspects into the ELCA methodology, or for the consideration of social aspect into decisions and applications where ELCA is traditionally used is a question still in search for an answer (Parent et al., 2013). What makes SLCA a part of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) is still not clear despite many years of theoretical reflection and practical application. In order to feed into this reflection, a broad selection of theoretical texts pertaining to or relying upon SLCA have been selected and reviewed. Our goal has been to capture explicit or implicit methodological features that closely fit into the ELCA framework or other types of methodological features, and whether or not they strive to answer questions which ELCA usually addresses. In other words, this review offers a portrait of today's SLCA which – we hope – will provide insight into the question of “what are its potential trajectories?”. In order to do so, each theoretical text or case study was assessed with regards to its intended application; the unit used to described the product system (what would be, in ELCA, the unit process); the elements that vary inside a system or between systems (the elementary flux); the method used to assess if the observed variation potentially intensifies a social impact or, on the contrary, if it reduces that potential or creates benefits (the characterization factors); the areas of protection which – sometimes implicitly – is suggested; and, finally, the boundaries of the system assessed. The evolution of emphasis upon these last characteristics through time was also analyzed in order to offer an appreciation of what might the future orientation of SLCA be. This work is completed in the context of a working group involving consultants from Groupe AGÉCO and researchers from the inter-university research centre the CIRAIG.

Reference

Parent, J., Cucuzzella, C., & Revéret, J. P. (2013). Revisiting the role of LCA and SLCA in the transition towards sustainable production and consumption. *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 18(9), 1642-1652.