

Future SETAC-Europe LCA Activities

A Personal View

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It has been approximately 25 years since LCA was developed in the United States and during that time there has been a tremendous change in the environmental scene which I believe has been reflected in the changes seen in LCA. From the recognition of problems at both local and global levels through the legislation and the present development to environmental management systems, LCA has played a fundamental role in shaping the agenda at each stage. This has only been possible because of the seminal work of SETAC in Europe and North America in the early 1990's culminating in the publication of the now famous "Code of Practice" in 1993: For some people, this is the highlight of SETAC's achievements and, considering how widely that framework was accepted and that it has even formed the basis of the ISO work, they wonder what, if any, role SETAC might have in the future.

Without any doubt in my mind, I can assure them that the journey has just begun!

The strength of SETAC has always been its tripartite organization made up of the Government, Industry, and Academia and especially the enthusiasm of its members willing to devote a lot of time and effort to the subject. This has been very evident during the last three years by the number of people involved in the Working Groups and the quality of the reports published.

These Working Groups described "The Practice of the Code" or the main issues that are encountered during the application of LCA in many ways whether it is in Inventory Analysis, Impact Assessment, Streamlining LCA, relating LCA to other tools or benchmarking the case studies. What the Working Groups clarified is not only the areas where agreement exists, but also a number of areas where there will perhaps never be a consensus and where uncertainties will always exist.

All the work in the past has been focused on obtaining a consensus and eliminating uncertainty – especially when LCA is used as a tool

for decision making. The recently held Case Studies Symposium showed that we should perhaps instead be concentrating on accepting different stakeholder requirements and finding a way of dealing with them.

LCA is an evolving tool. It is also a unique and valuable tool and, I believe, a critical tool to be used as part of an environmental management system. Nevertheless, it will never be a panacea for all environmental problems. On the contrary, I believe that its survival will depend on its ability to interact with other tools, especially risk assessment and material balance models. What in my opinion LCA can bring to these tools is its main achievement so far that is reflected in the acceptance of the life-cycle concept and the recognition that environmental impact cannot be shifted from one stage to another of the life cycle. This is the driving force now toward clean technology and away from end-of-life solutions.

If the last three years were about "The Practice of the Code", the next three years will then be about "The Practice of LCA" and, with that in mind, I think that there are three main areas SETAC should be concentrating on:

- ◆ methodological development
 - aspects of LCA, e.g. impact assessment
 - use of LCA in a sector
- ◆ interaction with other tools.

Personally, I think that this work should be carried out under the auspices of SETAC in the foreseeable future. One day, this whole area will perhaps become large enough to split into different parts, although this point has not yet been reached. This does not in any way preclude practitioners from today forming a society to deal with their requirements which are quite separate.

All of us who wish to see LCA survive into the future will have to work together to ensure that it happens.

New SETAC-Europe LCA Working Groups

According to the March issue of SETAC-Europe News, LCA section (the LCA News Letter ceased to appear as a separate publication), there are seven new working groups "in statu nascendi" (convenors in parenthesis):

- 1 Scenario Development (Günter Fleischer, TU Berlin)
- 2 Data Availability, Quality, Uncertainty (Rolf Bretz, CIBA)
- 3 LCA in Building Industry (Agnes Schuurmans, INTRON)
- 4 Standardisation of Impact Categories (Udo de Haes, CML Leiden)
- 5 Work Environment (Allan Astrup Jensen, dk-Teknik)
- 6 Life-Cycle Management (LCM) (Allan Astrup Jensen)
- 7 LCA and Decision Making (Roland Clift, University of Surrey)

We are proud that five from the six convenors belong to the board of editors of our Journal and hope that our readers will be well informed about the progress in the science of LCA. The working groups are supposed to continue the work performed by the previous groups and within LCA-NET (see "LCA-Documents" Vol. 1, 1997).

Founding Meeting of the Wgs: Wednesday, April 15, 1998, 1.30 pm - 3.30 pm, during the SETAC-Europe 8th Annual Meeting in Bordeaux, April 14 - 18, 1998.