

## Toward sustainability: benchmarks, certification and LCA

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LCA and related LC approaches are inevitable to recognize environmental issues in the development of strategies, the definition of policies and decision support. They are based on the quantification of potential environmental impacts as one aspect of a broader consideration of sustainability. The measurement of potential environmental impacts can be interpreted only in comparison. Benchmarks for single potential environmental impacts in product categories, based on average values from LCA results, may serve as baseline to provide additional meaning to the measurements. An LCA benchmark doesn't give thresholds to say what is sustainable, but give a start point to environmental improvement. The definition of benchmarks (reference values, thresholds) and goals (minimum criteria) is in particular important and necessary for the development of policies and strategies (as in the case of the Action Plan on Sustainable Production and Consumption and Green Public Procurement). A benchmark ideally is also useful to understand when a product, a service, a strategies can be more sustainable, or better for the environment, than others. The same holds true for certificates and labels. In some cases the label scheme defines benchmarks to access to the certification (like the EU Ecolabel), in some cases the certification has no benchmarks (like the EPD), but also in this case it would be useful to have LCA benchmarks related to typical values of the current practice, giving sense to the LCA results. Towards sustainability the quantitative measurement may not be enough. In LCA physical flows cannot cover essential qualitative aspects of sustainability. This may be disadvantageous in either case: Having no qualification in place may end up in overlooking essential sustainability aspects in benchmark systems, having no quantified references may end in contradicting messages. For example, a sustainable resource management does not necessarily lead to fewer emissions or other measurable improvements in LCA terms. In consequence a certified product might not have a "better" LCA or – in extreme cases LCAs could serve to explore weakness of such schemes. Examples for such rather qualitative certification schemes are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) which guide consumers to the preferable alternative based on a set of principles. The proposed session invites for contributions which deal with LCA in context of the development of benchmarks as reference for comparisons or as support for instruments which integrate qualitative aspects of sustainability.

Keywords: Benchmark, Certification, quantitative measures, qualitative criteria

**SESSION TYPE:** Platform, Poster Spotlight and Poster