



Social assessment of technologies: the innovative approach of PROSUITE

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Abstract:

While the demand for transparency regarding the sustainability impacts of new and existing technologies increase, different stakeholders including policy makers, industries, SMEs and NGOs need a methodology and a tool to assess these impacts. Such methodology should enable these stakeholders to make decisions that take into account potential economic, social and environmental impacts of technologies, not only considering present impacts but also those based on future scenarios.

A well-accepted and robust methodology is still lacking. PROSUITE (PROspective SUstainability Assessment of TEchnologies) aims to address this issue. This FP7 European project brings together leading-edge European researchers with expertise in each of the three sustainability areas - economy, environment and society - and industry partners to develop a well grounded methodology, as well as a freeware open source tool to allow prospective sustainability life cycle assessment of technologies.

This paper will elaborate on the work dedicated to the social assessment within PROSUITE. Firstly, social aspects to be included in the assessment were selected based on literature review and expert consultations. The main challenge was to go beyond the identification of relevant social aspects to put them in the context of technology life cycle assessment. Following this, a series of methodological issues have been addressed, including: i) how to relate a technology with the scenario assessment ii) how to carry out prospective social assessment, iii) how to measure and benchmark social indicators, iv) how to model, assess and aggregate social indicators along the life cycle, v) what normalization factors should be used, and vi) which data sources are available and to which extent they can be used as proxies.

The results of this work and their integration in a social life cycle impact assessment framework will be presented, in addition to the application of this framework by four PROSUITE case studies. Once integrated in the PROSUITE decision support system, this module will help assessing the potential impact of a technology regarding ethical aspects, the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.