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Title: Lost in calculation? Externalities assessments & challenges for a food system transition

Abstract:

The assessment of externalities plays a pivotal role in the transition of agri-food systems. However, it is essential that these assessments are integrated into comprehensive strategies, aimed to both reduce the negative impact of externalities and to redistribute these externalities among the various actors in the system, particularly within value chains. To implement this approach, a three-step sequence is recommended: defining possible strategies, identifying the relevant actors, and then proceeding with the assessment. Yet, we argue that the prevailing methodological approach tackling externalities are focus firstly on the robustness and completeness of the assessment, and only after target the relevance to stakeholders and the strategies to reduce related impacts. These often results in either market-based or command and control solutions (Alliot et al., 2022), that do not always lead to fair and adequate strategies. The underlying assumption of such approach is that better assessment will lead to better strategies, which has been highly contested (Patel, 2021). Our proposed method places strategy at the forefront to guide the calculations, thus reversing the usual process.

Bibliographic references

- Alliot, C., Mc Adams-Marin, D., Borniotto, D., & Baret, P. V. (2022). The social costs of pesticide use in France. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 6, 1027583. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.1027583>
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