# bw_timex: A Python Package for Time-Explicit Life Cycle Assessment

Timo Diepers [1], **Amelie Müller** [2,3], **and Arthur Jakobs** [4]

1 Institute of Technical Thermodynamics, RWTH Aachen University, Germany **2** Institute of Environmental Sciences (CML), Leiden University, The Netherlands **3** Flemish Institute for Technology Research (VITO), EnergyVille, Belgium **4** Technology Assessment Group, Laboratory for Energy Analysis, Center for Nuclear Engineering and Sciences & Center for Energy and Environmental Sciences, Paul Scherrer Institut (PSI), Villigen PSI, Switzerland

Summary

bw_timex is a Python package for time-explicit Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). Unlike conventional LCA, time-explicit LCA allows the quantification of environmental impacts of products and processes *over time*, considering their temporal distribution and evolution. As such, bw_timex allows to account simultaneously for:

- the timing of processes throughout the supply chain (e.g., end-of-life treatment occurs 20 years after production),
- variable and/or evolving supply chains and technologies (e.g., increasing shares of renewable electricity in the future), and
- the timing of emissions (enabling dynamic characterization).

To achieve this, bw_timex uses graph traversal to convolve process-relative temporal distributions through the supply chain. From the resulting timeline of technosphere exchanges, Life Cycle Inventories (LCIs) are automatically linked across time-specific background databases. The resulting time-explicit LCI reflects the current technology status within the product system at the actual time of each process. Moreover, bw_timex preserves the timing of emissions, enabling both dynamic and static Life Cycle Impact Assessment.

Statement of need

LCA traditionally assumes a static system, where all processes occur simultaneously and do not change over time (Heijungs & Suh, 2002). To add a temporal dimension in LCA, the fields of dynamic LCA (dLCA) and prospective LCA (pLCA) have emerged. While dLCA focuses on when processes and emissions occur and how impacts are distributed over time (*temporal distribution*), it typically assumes that the underlying product system remains the same (Beloin-Saint-Pierre et al., 2020). Conversely, while pLCA tracks how processes evolve (*temporal evolution*) using future scenarios, it generally only assesses a single (future) point in time, ignoring that processes occur at different times across a product's life cycle (Arvidsson et al., 2024). Both fields have seen open-source tool development in recent years, including Temporalis (Cardellini et al., 2018) for dLCA and premise (Sacchi et al., 2022), Futura (Joyce & Björklund, 2022) and pathways (Sacchi & Hahn-Menacho, 2024) for pLCA. However, a comprehensive open-source package that supports consideration of both temporal distribution and evolution is currently lacking.

bw_timex addresses this gap by providing a framework for time-explicit LCA calculations within the Brightway ecosystem (Mutel, 2017). It combines considerations of temporal distribution and evolution by accounting for both the timing of processes and emissions as well as the

⁴² state of the product system at the respective points in time. This makes `bw_timex` particularly
⁴³ useful for studies involving variable or strongly evolving product systems, long-lived products,
⁴⁴ biogenic carbon and scenario analyses.

Workflow

⁴⁶ A time-explicit LCA with `bw_timex` follows four main steps, as illustrated in Figure 1. First,
⁴⁷ a conventional product system model is temporalized by adding process-relative temporal
⁴⁸ distributions (rTDs) to the exchanges (c.f. Cardellini et al. (2018)). These rTDs describe how
⁴⁹ the amount of a technosphere or biosphere exchange is distributed over time relative to the
⁵⁰ consuming or emitting process. In Step 2, a timeline of technosphere exchanges is constructed
⁵¹ by convolving rTDs along the supply chain, starting from the absolute reference time for the
⁵² demand, which is defined by the user. In Step 3, the exchanges in the timeline are re-linked to
⁵³ time-specific background databases that reflect the technology landscape at specific points
⁵⁴ in time. Based on the temporally re-linked product system, a time-explicit LCI is calculated,
⁵⁵ preserving the timing of processes and emissions. The inventory is calculated following the
⁵⁶ conventional matrix-based LCA formulation (Heijungs & Suh, 2002), with the time dimension
⁵⁷ embedded in the matrices through additional row/column pairs. In Step 4, these emissions
⁵⁸ can be characterized, either using standard characterization factors or by applying dynamic
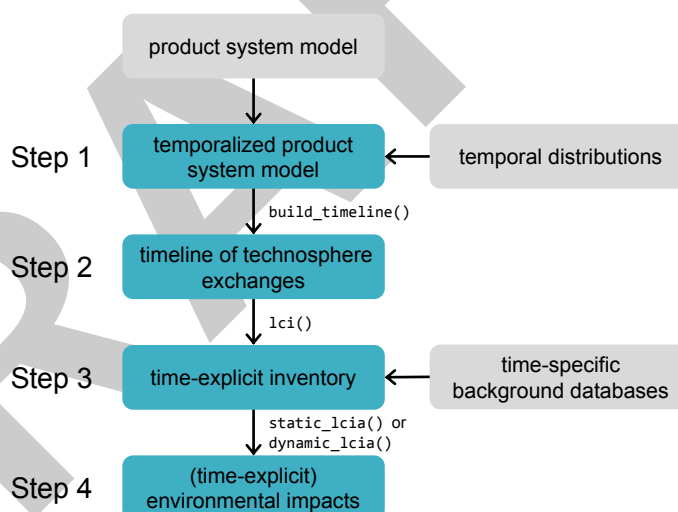⁵⁹ characterization functions that take the emissions' timing into account.

Figure 1: Workflow of a time-explicit LCA with `bw_timex`.

Further reading

⁶¹ The documentation of the `bw_timex` package, including installation instructions, extensive
⁶² example notebooks and detailed API reference, can be found at https://docs.brightway.dev/
⁶³ projects/bw-timex. For a detailed explanation of the framework of time-explicit LCA, please
⁶⁴ refer to our accompanying publication (Müller et al., 2025).

Acknowledgements

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