Quantifying the trade drivers of planetary boundaries

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at understanding economic activity's pressure over the planetary boundaries in terms of global trade. The latest Planetary Boundaries update portrays an alarming global ecological situation in which six of the nine boundaries are transgressed[1]. Although not crossed yet, the boundaries of ocean acidification and atmospheric aerosol loading display worrying trends of increasing risks, meaning that eight of the nine boundaries face concerning prospects. By identifying the processes that are critical for maintaining the stability and resilience of the Earth system as a whole, the planetary boundaries framework equates a multi-level range of ecological dynamics[1,2,3]. However, there are mismatches between the levels of the Earth System dynamics and of the social dynamics. As planetary boundaries are defined at global level, researchers have been focused on understanding its social drivers and implications in relation to a global economy that is composed of multiple economic activities and structured around flows of trade between national units.

Global economic relations are the result of historical patterns of ecological, productive and financial exchanges[4]. Some countries are "resource suppliers" to the global economy, feeding global productive chains. On the other end of the spectrum, there are countries that are mostly consumers of these products, exerting the demand that keeps the global economy operating. When different natural resources are observed, countries switch positions along a multidimensional spectrum. One country could be, for example, an exporter of "water" and an importer of "land" at the same time. Therefore, different countries and economic sectors contribute directly and indirectly by pressuring/easing planetary boundaries through their commercial relations with other economies. The overall dynamics of cross-border global trade[5] still illustrates a dependence relationship, as the exports of resources generate income, jobs, fiscal revenues and foreign exchange that are crucial for the macroeconomic dynamics of a country[6], while imports of the same commodities are essential for sustaining certain levels of well-being[7]

The pioneer attempt to subscribe human economic needs and activities to the boundaries of the Earth System is found in Raworth's proposition of the "safe and just space for humanity"[7], in which the ceiling of environmental degradation provided by the planetary boundaries is complemented with a floor of social well-being to be achieved. Since then, multiple studies connecting the planetary boundaries framework with the economy have been centred around downscaling planetary boundaries to lower political decision-making levels, such as national, regional, sectoral and even municipal[9,10]. Although the best downscaling methodology to be employed is still the subject of ongoing debate[11,12,13,14,15], results of analysis carried out for different scales and scenarios display a worrying scenario of multiple boundaries being crossed[9,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24]. Another strand of research has focused on the study of provisioning systems[25,26] and the question of how to move towards new economic institutions and forms of organisation that would allow humanity to achieve a social floor of well-being without overshooting the planetary boundaries. Achieving a "good life for all within planetary boundaries" requires policies capable of shifting humanity towards new economic models[27] as currently no country is able to meet basic needs for its citizens without overshooting multiple planetary boundaries[28,29].

In this paper we aim at analysing environmental footprints in global trade in order to understand which countries and economic activities (economic sectors) pressure each Planetary Boundary. Although some previously published research assesses the impact of global trade on individual boundaries[17,19,30,31], they fall short on addressing the multidimensional spectrum of different countries and economic sectors impacting the different planetary boundaries in different directions. Drawing on the ecological variables employed in the original planetary boundaries' studies, we select key variables to separately estimate the pressure exerted on each one of the six exceeded planetary boundaries. Countries are treated separately and in groups, depending on the boundary under consideration. The countries are treated individually and grouped according to their income level and region following World Bank's official classifications.

Total pressure is measured through the comparison between production- and consumption-based footprint accounting[18,19,31,32,33], i.e., as the sum of direct and indirect (embodied in domestic and imported inputs) pressure that countries' final demand exerts on the multidimensional spectrum of planetary boundaries. As such, this work assumes that the pressure over the boundaries generated by global trade is driven by import consumption pressure from importing countries. The pressure on the boundaries takes place in the countries that export the products that satisfy this import pressure. These estimates allow us to identify embodied footprints on trade, and hence the pressure exerted through commercial relations across countries. In this perspective, intercountry trade of intermediary goods is considered to be endogenous[34] and the focus on the analysis relies on foreign trade of final consumption.

In addition, we also find information on the key economic sectors and activities that are leading the pressure for each planetary boundary. These results complement the major takeaways found by the literature focused on downscaling the boundaries to lower decision-making levels. The ecological transition consists of a process of economic structural change[6,35] in which economic sectors pressuring boundaries are expected to decline, or undergo fundamental transformations in their productive techniques, giving space to rising and more ecologically-friendly sectors. Therefore, identifying the major economic activities and sectors driving the pressure over each boundary is valuable for policy making as these sectors are the ones to be targeted by transition policies for the success of the ecological transition.

Variable Selection

The original planetary boundaries works[1,2,3] define limits to the impact of human activity on the Earth system in terms of stock variables as they consist of accumulated values over time for specific variables. Conversely, economic activity is commonly measured with flow variables, as GDP and total output are usually assessed in between defined accounting periods. Scenario studies[16,20] usually take the stock threshold value established by the planetary boundaries framework and distribute it across the period encompassed by the economic analysis. However, in this study we do not aim to assess whether the pressure exerted by global trade flows are above yearly defined boundary levels, instead we employ flow variables for the year 2021 in order to analyse which countries' and sectors' activities pressured the most the planetary boundaries during the selected period.

Change in biosphere integrity is measured in terms of potentially disappeared fraction (PDF) of biodiversity loss. Land use is measured in terms of hectares used in production. Climate change is measured in GHG emissions in kilotonnes. The global freshwater boundary is measured both with water stress and blue water consumption calculated in million m3 H2O equivalents. Nitrogen and phosphorus loading calculations are made by estimating the amount of embodied nitrogen and phosphorus measured in tonnes in agriculture sectors' output. Following suggestions in the literature[36], the novel entities boundary is estimated through the amount of embodied non-energy materials employed in the chemicals sector. This approach aligns with extensive research on environmental footprint indicators which indicate that resource footprints are good proxies for measuring environmental damage[37,38]. A summary of the variables employed is found in Table 1 below.

Although the variables selected in this paper are not exactly the same as the ones employed by the planetary boundaries' original framework, they are all able to provide an approximated and reliable measurement of the pressure exerted by the economic activity over each one specific boundary during the selected period. Taking the boundary of "change in biosphere integrity" as an example, it is expected that elevated values of the potentially disappeared fraction variable are correlated with loss of genetic diversity and functional integrity and, consequently, will lead to increasing pressure over the earth system process towards the boundary.

Table 1: Variables employed in planetary boundaries' latest assessment vs. variables employed in this study

Earth system process	Variables employed in planetary boundaries' latest assessment[1]	Variables employed in this study
Biogeochemical flows: P and N cycles	• Phosphate global: P flow from freshwater systems into the ocean • Phosphate regional: P flow from fertilisers to erodible soils (Tg of P year−1) • Nitrogen global: industrial and intentional fixation of N (Tg of N year−1)	• Fertiliser minerals directly and indirectly embodied in agriculture production (tonnes)
Climate change	• Atmospheric CO2 concentration (ppm CO2) • Total anthropogenic radiative forcing at top-of-atmosphere (W m−2)	• Total GHG emissions provided by EDGAR (kilotonnes CO2 equivalent)
Change in biosphere integrity	• Genetic diversity: E/MSY • Functional integrity: measured as energy available to ecosystems (NPP) (% HANPP)	• Potentially Disappeared Fraction (PDF)
Freshwater change	• Blue water: human induced disturbance of blue water flow • Green water: human induced disturbance of water available to plants (% land area with deviations from preindustrial variability)	• Agriculture and non-agriculture blue water consumption (million m3 H2Oeq) • Agriculture and non-agriculture water stress (million m3 H2Oeq)

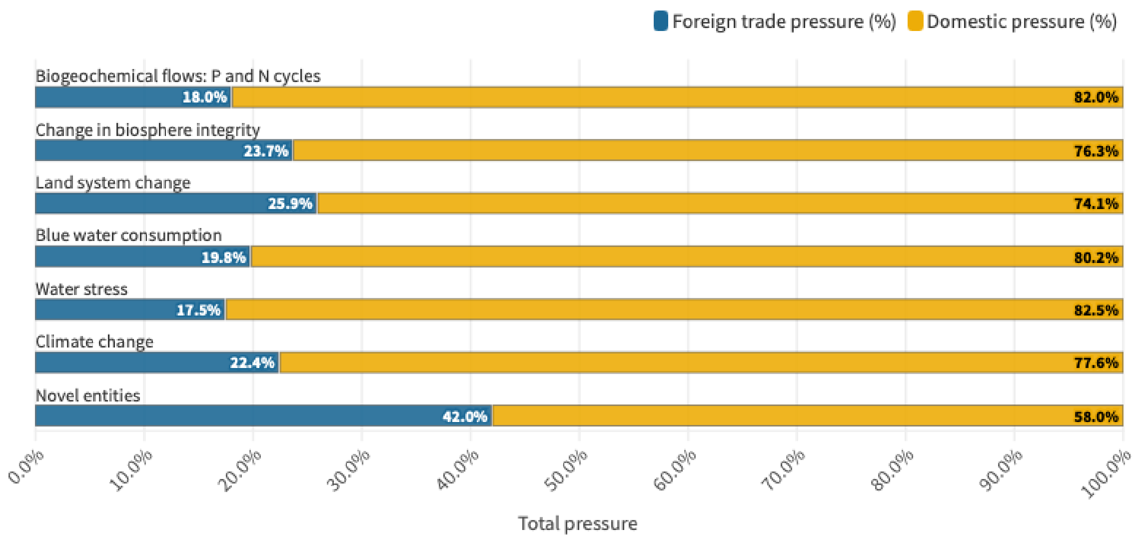
Land system change	• Global: area of forested land as the percentage of original forest cover • Biome: area of forested land as the percentage of potential forest (% area remaining)	• Total area used by the economic activity (1000 ha)
Novel entities	• Percentage of synthetic chemicals released to the environment without adequate safety testing	• Non-energy material footprint embodied in chemical production

RESULTS

Global trade pressure over planetary boundaries

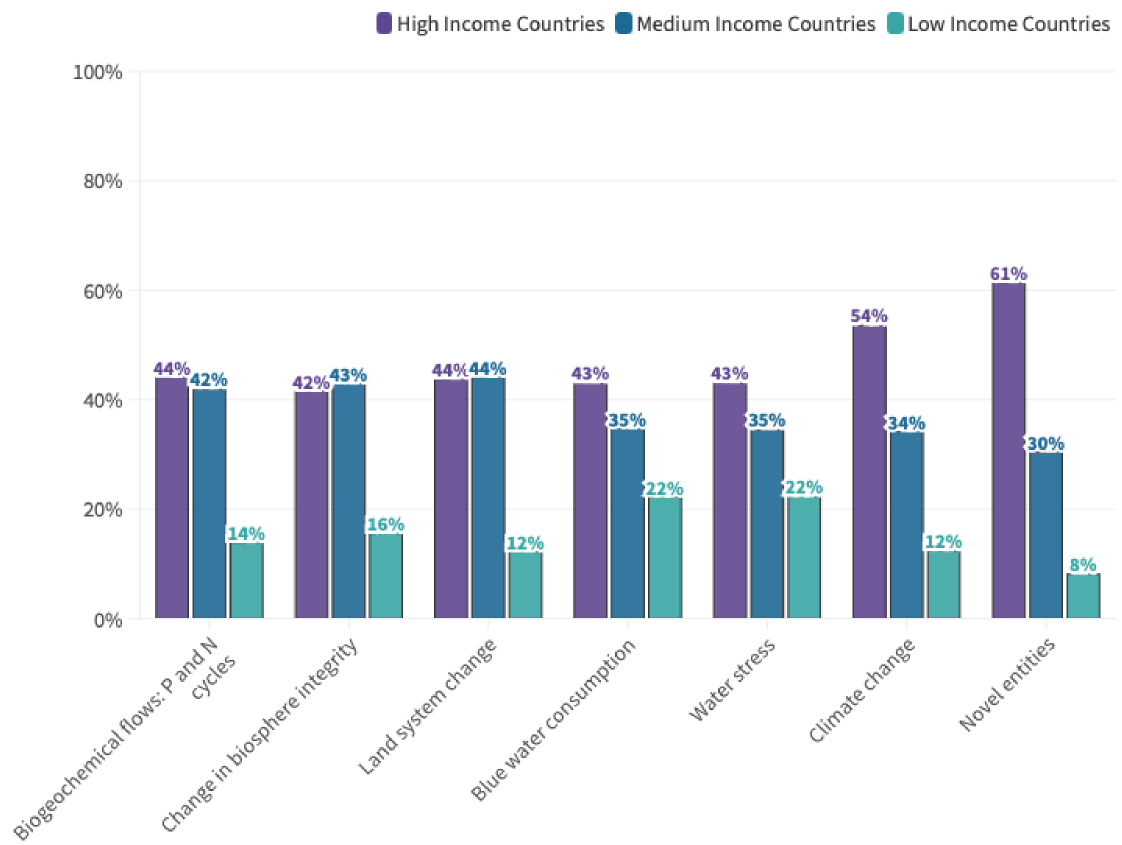
For the year of 2021, global trade was responsible for 18% of the boundary pressure on biogeochemical flows, 23.7% on biosphere integrity, 25.9% on land system change, 22.4% on climate change and 42% on novel entities. For the freshwater change boundary, global trade was responsible for 19.8% of the pressure on blue water consumption and 17.5% on water stress.

Figure 1: Share of intercountry trade pressure on the planetary boundaries



The pressure on the boundaries is mainly driven by import consumption demand in high- and middle-income countries. The group of high-income countries, for instance, is responsible for around 42% of the pressure over the change in biosphere integrity boundary and for 61% over the novel entities boundary. High- and middle-income countries are driving together at least 78% of the trade pressure over all the analysed boundaries.

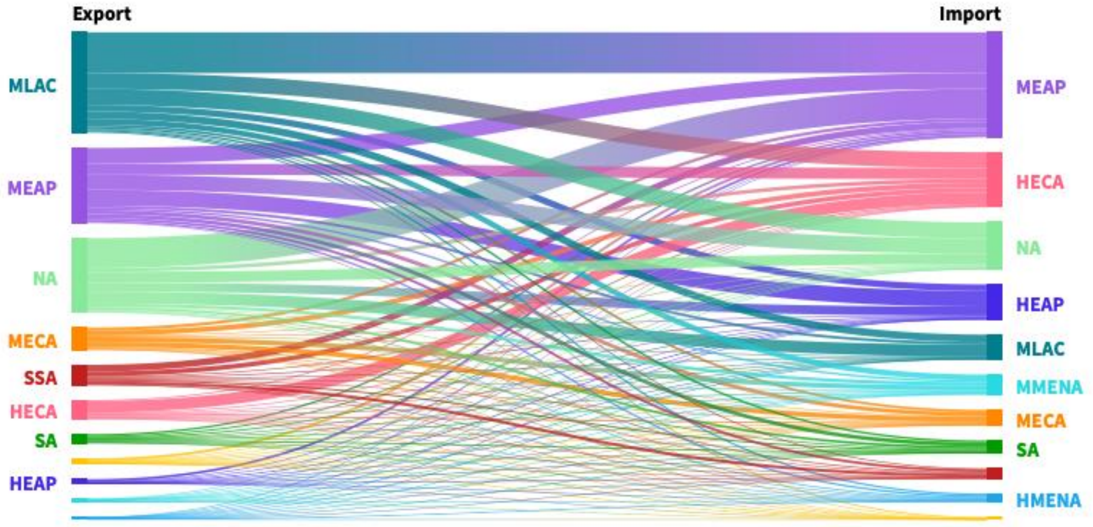
Figure 2: Pressure on the planetary boundaries from trade carried out by member countries of selected intergovernmental organisations



Biogeochemical flows: P and N cycles

More than 44% of the global trade pressure over the biogeochemical flows' boundary is driven by the import consumption pressure of high-income countries. 52.5% of all the pressure takes place in middle- and low-income East Asian, Pacific, Latin American and Caribbean countries in the form of embodied fertiliser usage in production. While high-income countries from East Asia and Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia, have an import to export ratios of embodied fertilisers in agriculture production of 8.2 and 2.9 respectively, middle- and low-income Latin American countries, on the contrary, export around 4.1 times more than import, which reveals large inequalities and geographical dependencies among different groups of countries. At the country level, China and the US are responsible for 24.4% and 11.7% of the embodied fertiliser import pressure, respectively, followed by Japan with 5.2% and Germany with 3.5%. On the export side, Brazil exports 17.3% of the total trade pressure, followed by China with 15.6%, the US with 15.1%, Peru with 7.6% and Canada with 7.2%.

Figure 3: Sankey diagram of global trade's pressure over the biogeochemical flows boundary

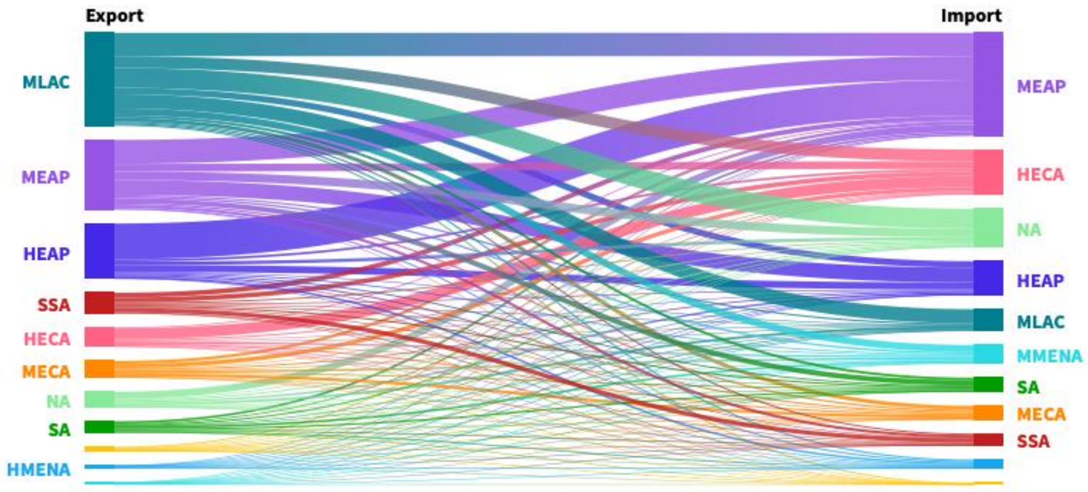


Note: HEAP: High-income East Asia and Pacific, MEAP: Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific, HECA: High-income Europe and Central Asia, MECA: Middle- and low-income Europe and Central Asia, HLAC: High-income Latin America and the Caribbean (yellow colour), MLAC: Middle- and low-income Latin America and the Caribbean, HMENA: High-income Middle East and North Africa, MMENA: Middle- and low-income Middle East and North Africa, NA: North America, SA: South Asia, SSA: Sub-Saharian Africa.

Change in biosphere integrity

The results for the biosphere integrity boundary follow similar patterns of the biogeochemical flows one as pressure over the biosphere integrity mostly flows from middle- and low-income East Asian, Pacific, Latin American and Caribbean countries countries towards high-income regions and middle and middle- and low-income East Asian and Pacific countries themselves. Together, Latin American and East Asian and Pacific middle- and low-income countries provide 52.4% of all the products that satisfy the import demand pressure over the boundary. Middle-income and low-income Latin American countries display an import to export ratio of only 0.23, meaning that the region exports 4.3 times more pressure than it imports. The global potential loss of species caused by global trade is geographically concentrated in Australia (15.2%), Brazil (11.9%) and Indonesia (5.9%), and driven mostly by import consumption pressure from China (25.2%), the US (11.2%) and Japan (5.4%).

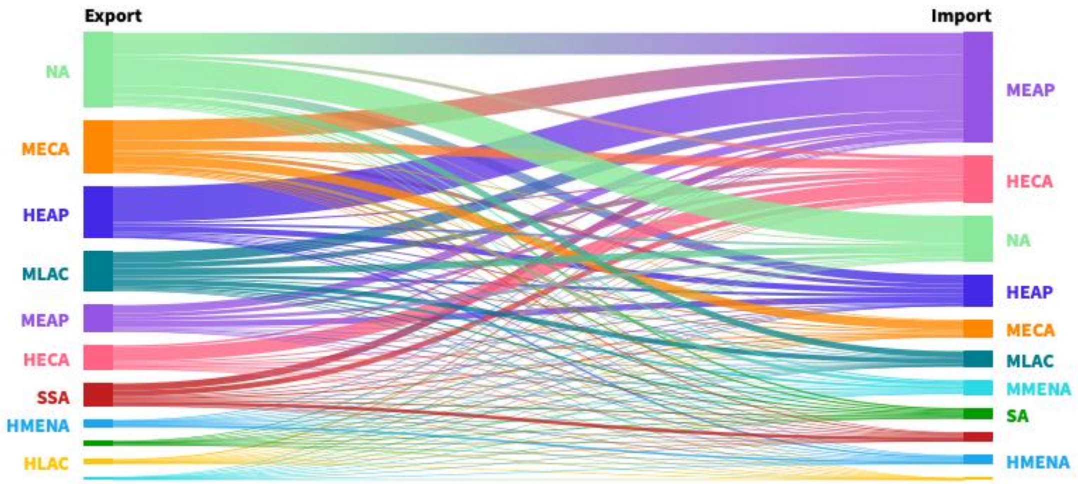
Figure 4: Sankey diagram of global trade's pressure over the change in biosphere integrity boundary



Land system change

High-income countries together with middle- and low-income East Asian and Pacific countries account for 78.7% of all import demand pressure over the land system change boundary. Although spread throughout the different groups of countries in a more evenly way in comparison to other boundary pressures, the land system change pressure takes place mostly in spatially large countries. The group of Australia (16%), Canada (13.5%), the US (10.3%), Russia (10%) and Brazil (5.5%) concentrates more than half of global land use and change driven by global trade. This land use is embodied in products that are mostly consumed in China (28.9%), the US (13.4%), Japan (5.2%) and Korea (2.7%).

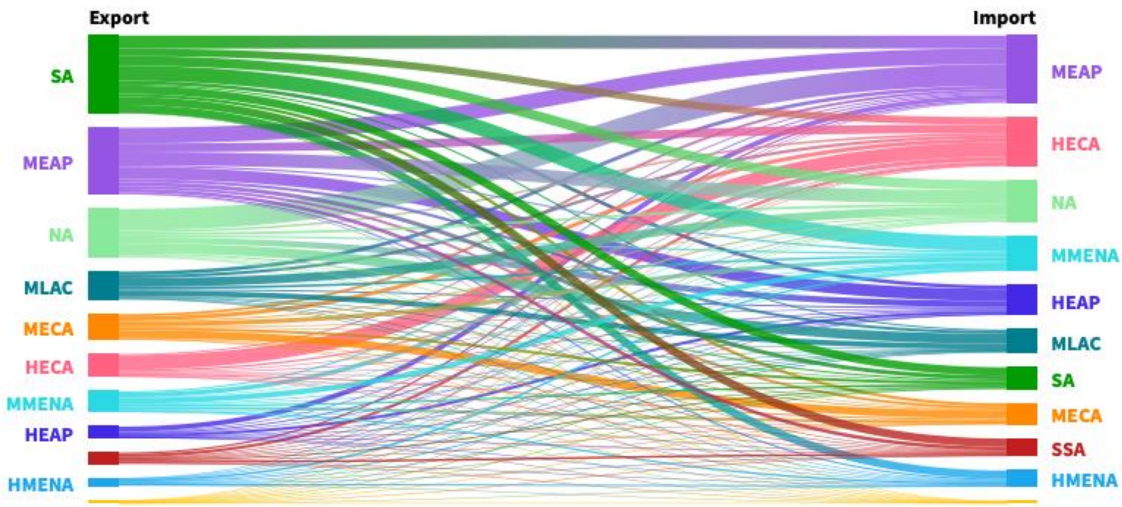
Figure 5: Sankey diagram of global trade's pressure over the land system change boundary



Freshwater change

51.3% of blue water consumption and 57.7% of water stress driven by global trade take place in middle- and low-income East and South Asian, Pacific, Middle Eastern and North African countries. High-income countries together are responsible for 42.7% of total import consumption pressure over blue water consumption, and for 42.8% over water stress. In terms of individual countries, China, the US and Iran are the ones that exert most pressure over the freshwater change boundary, both in terms of blue water consumption and water stress. On the exporting side, India is isolated as the largest exporter of products that embody blue water (21.3%) and water stress (21%), followed by China and the US.

Figure 6: Sankey diagram of global trade's pressure over the freshwater change boundary in terms of blue water consumption

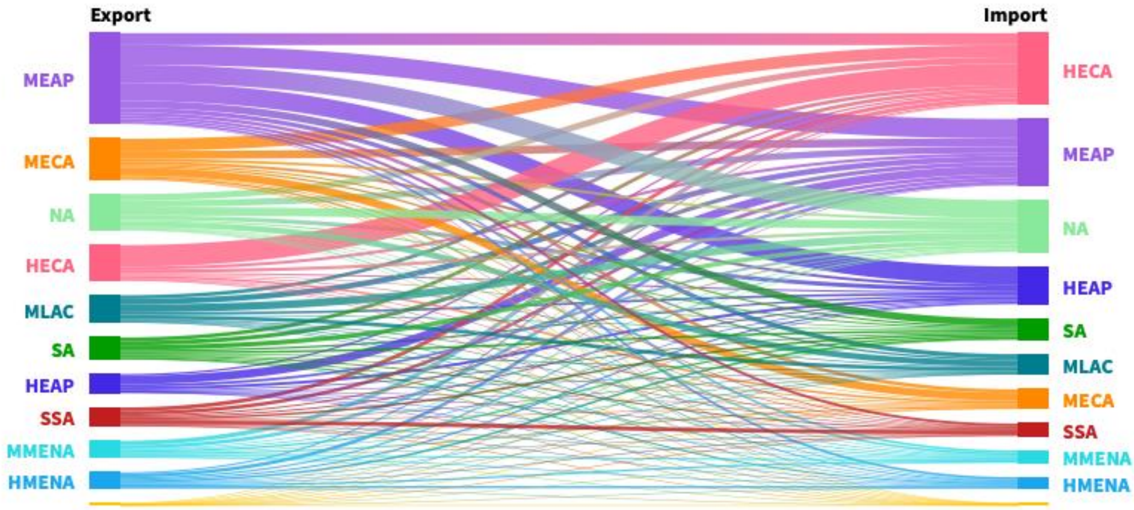


Climate change

The import consumption pressure over the climate change boundary is led by high-income European and Central Asian countries (21.9%), followed by Middle and low-income East Asian and Pacific countries (20.5%), North American countries (15.9%) and high-income East Asian and Pacific countries (11.5%). Country groups of Sub-Saharian Africa and of middle- and low-income Latin American and the Caribbean, and Middle East and North Africa account for only 13.7% of the global import pressure over this boundary. This inequality is expressed in the import to export ratios of the different regions, as high-income European and Central Asian, and East Asian and Pacific countries have import to export ratios of 2.0, while the same values for the groups of Sub-

Saharian Africa and of middle- and low-income Latin American and the Caribbean, and Middle East and North Africa are 0.6, 0.7 and 0.7, respectively. China (18.9%), the US (13.6%) and Russia (6.9%) are the largest exporters of GHG emissions. These emissions are driven by import consumption pressure stemming mainly from China (14%), the US (13.6%), Japan (4.9%), India (4.7%) and Germany (4%).

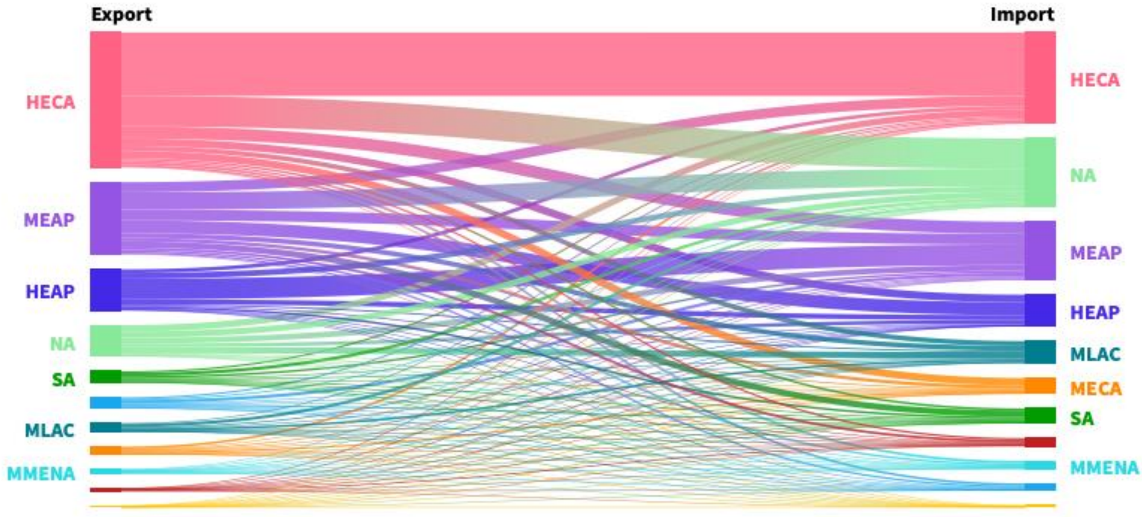
Figure 7: Sankey diagram of global trade's pressure over the climate change boundary



Novel entities

Pressure results for the novel entities boundary are relatively different when compared to other boundaries. 28% of the import consumption driving the pressure over the boundary is generated in high-income European and Central Asian countries, 21% in North American countries, and 17.8% in middle- and low-income East Asian and Pacific countries. More than 40% of this pressure (41.4%) takes place in high-income European and Central Asian countries. Import to export ratios are somewhat reversed for this boundary, as Sub-Saharian, middle- and low-income Latin American and Caribbean countries have ratios of 3.0 and 2.6, respectively. The group of North American countries also has a high import to export ratio of 2.2. This value is led mainly by the US position as the largest importing country of material footprint embodied in chemical products, accounting for 18.4% of global trade's pressure over the novel entities boundary, and followed by China (12.8%), Germany (5.8%), Japan (4.4%) and France (3.4%). On the exporting side, China leads with 18.2%, followed by the US (8.3%), Germany (6.8%), Ireland (6.3%) and Switzerland (5.7%).

Figure 8: Sankey diagram of global trade's pressure over the novel entities boundary



Similarities among boundary pressures and sectoral results

Combined with a correlation analysis, the results above reveal some similarities among the different boundaries in terms of the sources of pressure. For instance, the boundary of change in biosphere integrity and land system change present quite similar results in terms of the geoeconomic sources of the import pressure. The boundaries of biogeochemical flows and freshwater change also display moderate correlation with the boundaries of change in biosphere integrity and land system change. Conversely, the results for the boundaries of climate change and novel entities unveil little correlation with the other boundaries and a moderate correlation between both.

The main reason for these similarities lies in the economic sectoral compositions of the countries. Countries and geographical regions with analogous import and export sectoral structures generate similar pressures over the planetary boundaries. Despite geographical differences in productivity that may lead to the same sector being responsible for a distinct level of pressure per unit of output when located in a different country, the analysis shows that the pressure exerted by global trade over the different boundaries is sector specific and, hence, associated with the foreign trade of particular economic activities.

A cluster analysis indicates some relevant outlier sectors and different groups of countries according to their level of pressure over the different planetary boundaries. The agricultural sector of “growing leguminous crops and oil seeds” is the major supplier to the global import consumption pressure on the boundaries of biogeochemical flows and change in biosphere integrity. The same sector is also exporting relevant shares of the pressure over land system change and of all the blue water consumed by global trade.

A group of economic activities related to forestry, logging, sawmill products and raising of animals is also related to the global import consumption pressure on land system change and biosphere integrity. Concerning the freshwater change boundary, the economic activities of cereal products and spices, aromatic and drug crops exports are driving the pressure over blue water consumption and water stress. Another group consisting of the sectors of growing fruits, nuts, maize, wheat and textile activities also plays a large role in pressuring multiple boundaries of biogeochemical flows, change in biosphere integrity and freshwater change. All in all, the results indicate that import consumption pressure over agricultural sectors plays a key role in pressuring multiple planetary boundaries.

The pressure on the novel entities and the climate change boundaries has different profiles. Economic sectors of basic organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, medicinal products, dyes, paints, glues, detergents and other chemical products lead the pressure over the novel entities boundary. On a different note, the results for the climate change boundary reveal that multiple carbon intensive manufacturing sectors provide to the import pressure on the boundary, ranging from hard coal, petroleum extraction and refining products to computers and electronic products, and machinery and equipment in general. The industry of ceramics is also largely related with the pressure on the boundary, together with other basic industries such as iron, steel and basic organic chemicals.

Table 2: Summary of results

Earth system processes	Major pressure exporting regions and countries	Major pressure importing regions and countries	Main economic sectors pressuring the boundary
Biogeochemical flows: P and N cycles	• Middle- and low-income Latin American and the Caribbean • Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific • North America	• Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific • High-income Europe and Central Asia • North America	• Growing leguminous crops and oil seeds • Growing fruits, nuts, maize and wheat • Textiles and clothing
Change in biosphere integrity	• Middle- and low-income Latin	• Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific	• Growing leguminous crops and oil seeds • Forestry, logging and sawmill products

	American and the Caribbean • High-, Middle- and low- income East Asia and Pacific	• High-income Europe and Central Asia • North America	• Raising of animals and services to agriculture
Land system change	• Spatially large countries such as Australia, the US, Russia, China, Canada and Brazil	• Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific • High-income Europe and Central Asia • North America	• Forestry, logging and sawmill products • Raising of animals and services to agriculture • Growing leguminous crops and oil seeds
Freshwater change	• South Asia led by India • Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific • North America	• Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific led by China • High-income Europe and Central Asia • North America • Middle East and North Africa led by Iran	• Cereal products • Growing leguminous crops and oil seeds • Growing spices, aromatic, drug and pharma ceutical crops • Growing fruits and nuts • Textiles and clothing
Climate change	• Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific led by China • North America led by the US • Middle- and low-Europe and Central Asia	• High-income countries led by the US • Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific led by China	• Ceramics and other ceramics • Basic iron, steel and organic chemicals • Petroleum extraction, refined products and hard coal • Raising of animals • Computers, electronic products, optical and precision instruments; machinery and equipment
Novel entities	• High-income group of countries led by EU countries • Middle- and low-income East Asia and Pacific led by China	• High-income Europe and Central Asia led by EU countries • North America countries led by the US	• Pharmaceuticals and medicinal products • Dyes, paints, glues, detergents and other chemical products • Basic organic chemicals and petrochemical products • Plastic products

DISCUSSION

Our results provide a broad overview of the ecological footprint exerted by global trade over the planetary boundaries. They are in alignment with the results found in previous studies focused on specific boundaries, countries or sectors. Most notably, the pressure generated by global trade over the different planetary boundaries is unevenly distributed around the world in geographical terms and, in alignment with past studies[30,39], we found a great divide among high-income and middle- and low-income countries as import demand for final consumption goods from the former leads to deterioration of Earth system processes taking place in the latter. Middle and low-income East Asia and Pacific countries, led by China, stand in between the groups, being a major importer and exporter of pressure for multiple analysed boundaries.

Each boundary pressure is driven by a different set of economic sectors. While some are relatively similar such as the boundaries of change in biosphere integrity and land system change, others such as novel entities and climate change are affected by very different economic activities. Consequently, the geographical distribution of the ecological pressure caused by global trade follows countries' sectoral import and export profiles. Import and export profiles are also well known to be great proxies for measuring countries' development levels, as exporting more complex manufacturing products is associated with higher levels of economic development whereas developing countries are usually more specialized in exporting primary and less complex products, particularly agricultural ones[40,41,42].

The group of Sub-Saharian African countries occupies a completely marginal position in the analysis, not importing or exporting relevant shares of the global pressure on the boundaries. Moreover, few countries such as Brazil and India lead exporting pressure numbers for other marginal groups of countries such as of middle- and low-income Latin America and the Caribbean, and of South Asia. In the end, import consumption pressure stems from high-income countries and particular developing Asian countries demanding manufacturing and agricultural products from other regions, generating geographically localized pressure over the Earth system's processes. In summary, the pressure over the different planetary boundaries is sectoral specific and geographically specific, reflecting the international division of labour and matching the distribution of roles in international trade between developed and developing countries.

By casting a light on the geographical and sectoral particularities of the pressure generated by global trade affecting each planetary boundary, this study provides valuable information for devising and tailoring more precise policies for the ecological transition. On the productive side, effective transition policies should target precise sectors in specific places. On the consumption side, policies should incentivize more sober patterns of consumption that would reduce the import consumption pressure that drives the pressure on the boundaries.

As export production and import consumption are only different sides of the same global trade coin, it is important for these policies to be part of a global coordinated effort in which development, global trade and ecological issues are addressed together[47]. It is important put the ecological transition at the core of international trade arrangements and move ahead of the current World Trade Organization's deadlock. Given the regionalization of trade, the ecological agenda should also become part of economic blocs and regional trade agreements.

METHODOLOGY

Estimating the pressure over each boundary

The pressure over each boundary is estimated with a Multi-Regional Input-Output model (MRIO). This kind of model is suited for footprint analysis as it measures international trade through consumption-based accounting while incorporates the insights of unequal ecological exchange theories[43].

The matrix of total footprints embodied in final demand by country ($\mathbf{e^F}$) is given by

$$\mathbf{e^F} = \hat{\mathbf{e}}(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-1}\mathbf{F} \qquad \textbf{(1)}$$

where $\mathbf{e}$ is the vector of emissions per output by country and product, the hat indicates a diagonal vector, **A** is the matrix of technical coefficients and is **F** the matrix of final demand (lines are products and countries, and columns, countries and final demand components.

To obtain the footprints embodied in trade, we have to calculate the footprints embodied in imported final demand ($\mathbf{e^{FM}}$) and the footprints of imported inputs embodied in domestic final demand ($\mathbf{e^{ML}}$). However, to do this, we first have to calculate the domestic footprints embodied in imported final demand ($\mathbf{e^{DM}}$):

$$\mathbf{e^{DM}} = \hat{\mathbf{e}}[(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-1} \emptyset \ \mathbf{ID}](\mathbf{F} \emptyset \ \mathbf{IF}) \qquad \textbf{(2)}$$

where **IF** is a matrix with the same dimension of **F** with zero for domestic relations and one for trade across countries, **ID** is a matrix with the same dimension of **A** with zero for domestic relations and one for trade across countries, and $\emptyset$ is the element-wise multiplication.

We then can obtain emissions embodied in trade first excluding the domestic final demand from equation (1), which gives footprints embodied in imported final demand

($\mathbf{e^{FM}}$), and then excluding the domestic inputs from the same equation, which gives footprints embodied in inputs ($\mathbf{e^{ML}}$):

$$\mathbf{e^{MF}} = \hat{\mathbf{e}}(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-\mathbf{1}}(\mathbf{F} \oslash \mathbf{IF}) - \mathbf{e^{DM}} \quad \textbf{(3)}$$

and

$$\mathbf{e^{ML}} = \hat{\mathbf{e}}[(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-\mathbf{1}} \oslash \mathbf{ID}]\mathbf{F} - \mathbf{e^{DM}} \quad \textbf{(4)}$$

Note that in both resulting matrices, the domestic interrelations have the same value and they account for domestic inputs embodied in imported final demand. This is why one need to exclude $\mathbf{e^{DM}}$ from them.

We can therefore obtain footprints related to trade as

$$\mathbf{e^{tr}} = \mathbf{e^{MF}} + \mathbf{e^{ML}} + \mathbf{e^{DM}} \quad \textbf{(5)}$$

and imported footprints embodied in countries' final demand as

$$\mathbf{e^{M}} = \mathbf{e^{MF}} + \mathbf{e^{ML}} \quad \textbf{(6)}$$

This gives us a matrix of country by product in the rows and country by component of final demand in columns. The countries (and products) in rows are the origin of the footprint, and the countries (and final demand component) in columns are the consumer of these footprints.

One can also calculate a similar matrix but with rather than countries in columns, products, which gives us the embodied footprints by country and product of origin in rows and consumed product in columns:

$$\mathbf{e^{Mi}} = \hat{\mathbf{e}}(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-\mathbf{1}}\widehat{\mathbf{f^{M}}} + \hat{\mathbf{e}}[(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-\mathbf{1}} \oslash \mathbf{ID}]\hat{\mathbf{f}} - \mathbf{2}\hat{\mathbf{e}}[(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-\mathbf{1}} \oslash \mathbf{ID}]\widehat{\mathbf{f^{M}}} \quad \textbf{(7)}$$

where $\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{F}\boldsymbol{\iota}$ is a vector of total final demand, $\mathbf{f^{M}} = (\mathbf{F} \oslash \mathbf{IF})\boldsymbol{\iota}$ is a vector of imported final demand, and $\boldsymbol{\iota}$ is a vector of ones to sum-up the columns of final demand.

We apply this method to each of pre-calculated variable related to boundaries replacing $\mathbf{e}$ for the specific footprint intensity. In the case of GHG emissions, it is provided directly by GLORIA environmental MRIO, and we need only to obtain the intensity diving by output. In the case of land use, biodiversity loss, water stress, blue water consumption, material use and energy, one need to first aggregate the different sources, and then divide by output to obtain the intensity.

In the case of fertilizers embodied in agriculture production, we calculate the total fertilizers embodied in production ($\mathbf{q^{f,t}}$),

$$\mathbf{q^{f,t}} = \widehat{\mathbf{q^f}}(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-1} \qquad \textbf{(8)}$$

where $\mathbf{q^f}$ is the sum of fertilizers divided by output, and then we exclude the non-agriculture sectors, setting their values to zero.

Finally, in the case of chemicals, we calculate the total material embodied in chemical production, excluding the material transformed into energy ($\mathbf{q^{m,t}}$), as follows:

$$\mathbf{q^{m,t}} = \widehat{\mathbf{q^m}}[(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-1} \emptyset \, (\mathbf{1} - \mathbf{IE})] \qquad \textbf{(9)}$$

where $\mathbf{q^m}$ is the sum of materials divided by output and $\mathbf{IE}$ is a matrix with energy rows set to one and others set to zero, and then we exclude the non-chemical sectors, setting their values to zero.

Data Sources

The ecological footprints embodied in trade relations were calculated using data from the GLORIA environmental extended multi-regional input-output (MRIO) database[44] constructed in the Global MRIO Lab[45], which accounts for 164 countries and 120 sectors.

Limitations

One of the main caveats of input-output analysis consists of the linear assumption of the model which assumes that all inputs are employed in fixed proportions, hiding scale effects[42]. This is an important issue to be addressed in further studies looking at particular sectors pressuring the boundaries, as pressure might scale differently for each sector. Nevertheless, the linear proportionality assumption is usually assumed in the literature to be the best method available for estimating environmental footprints[43,46].

Another limitation is the low spatial resolution of the model which reduces the accuracy of the variables' values, particularly in large countries. This might be extremely relevant for some boundaries such as change in biosphere integrity, given that multiple biomes and natural characteristics integrate may exist inside the same country. Moreover, this study is not able to assess important synergies among the boundaries. For instance, the effects of the increasing pressure on the climate change boundary may lead to rising pressure over the freshwater change boundary due to regional climate modifications affecting the water cycle.

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