

The CSA Research group project: Overview of Community Supported Agriculture (and other emerging distribution systems) for food sovereignty and agro-ecology in Europe

10.5.2015

Among many leading scientists, there is widespread agreement that our globalized food system with its high negative social, ecological and regional-economic externalities is not sustainable (IAASTD 2009). Local, short supply chain solutions are urgently needed. A good starting point for this is the concept of Agro-ecology as outlined in the recent International Forum for Agroecology declaration (<http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/sustainable-peasants-agriculture-mainmenu-42/1749-declaration-of-the-international-forum-for-agroecology>, Nyéléni 2015):

Some key points of the Nyéléni declaration on Agro-ecology

-The production practices of agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles.

-Territories are a fundamental pillar of agroecology. Peoples and communities have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships to their lands. They are entitled to secure, develop, control, and reconstruct their customary social structures and to administer their lands and territories, including fishing grounds, both politically and socially. This implies the full recognition of their laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions, and constitutes the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of peoples.

-Collective rights and access to the commons are a fundamental pillar of agroecology.

-The diverse knowledge and ways of knowing of our peoples are fundamental to agroecology. The learning processes are horizontal and peer-to-peer, based on popular education. They take place in our own training centres and territories (farmers teach farmers, fishers teach fishers, etc.), and are also intergenerational, with exchange of knowledge between youth and elders. Agroecology is developed through own innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding.

-The core of the cosmo-vision is the necessary equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. As humans we are but a part of nature and the cosmos. There is a spiritual connection with our lands and with the web of life. We reject the commodification of all forms of life.

-Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what make it possible to scale-up agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our food system. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.

-The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. It means we minimize the use of purchased inputs that come from outside. It requires the re-shaping of markets so that they are based on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption. It promotes direct and fair short distribution chains. It implies a transparent relationship between producers and consumers, and is based on the solidarity of shared risks and benefits.

-Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world.

-Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical for moving forward.

-Youth, together with women, provide one of the two principle social bases for the evolution of agroecology. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation that is underway in many of our societies. Youth bear the responsibility to carry forward the collective knowledge learned from their parents, elders and ancestors into the future. They are the stewards of agroecology for future generations. Agroecology must create a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership.

One of the promising approaches in this direction is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA is not only an agricultural approach but an example of an economic concept based on short cycles, personal trust, transparency and solidarity which offers an alternative to dominant economic paradigms.

CSA is a partnership between farmers and the local community, in which the costs, responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. CSA has been coined and implemented autonomously by active citizens making a commitment to local farms in many countries, in the North and the South. CSA models provide an alternative to markets for family farmers, and have already proved effective in creating adequate conditions for new jobs. Moreover, they are closely interconnected with local communities and usually environmentally conscious. Yet, they have implications that reach far beyond agricultural issues: CSA is powerful on many levels. It is a proactive response to concerns around resilience and transparency in the food system and provides a logical step for consumers towards reclaiming sovereignty over the way their food is grown, processed and traded.

The high demand for such schemes is illustrated by the extremely dynamic development of CSA in many European countries. In France, where the first CSA was founded in 2001, an estimated 2000-3000 CSAs are operating at present. In Germany, their number has doubled in the last 3 years to 70 and is expected to double again in the coming year. Similar growth rates can be observed in various other European countries.

According to estimations of the International Network of Community Supported Agriculture, Urgenci, which are based on data collected in 16 different European countries, there were at least 4,000 CSA groups in 2014, involving nearly 465,000 consumers and 6,300 farms. Urgenci and its partners promote CSA as a cross-border and context-sensitive concept rather than a unique model.

Many experience-sharing projects have been carried out since 2011 through several EU funded lifelong learning programmes, creating trust and mutual exchange within the European CSA community. Two big European CSA meetings have taken place. Out of these exchanges the “European CSA research group” has emerged. The seeds for the CSA research group were sown at the First European CSA Meeting in Milan in 2012. The idea was to create a platform for participatory research on CSA from within the community. The group met again at the Second European CSA Meeting in Paris in early 2014 and more members joined the group. A webspace was set up (<http://urgenci.net/the-csa-research-group/>). This project brings the CSA Research group new means to carry on with its work as mandated.

The project

Being a new movement that is characterized by strong dynamics and a great diversity, a systematic overview of the CSA movement in Europe is much needed. This comprises the need for general information and dynamics, an analysis of the agro-ecology concepts as well as organizational and legal forms of the movement throughout Europe. This regards quantitative aspects as well as qualitative ones.

The European CSA research group would like to provide a new, updated and extended comprehensive report about the various CSA activities in all European countries. The international network for CSA and other emerging systems for food sovereignty, Urgenci, and the European working group for CSA research can be seen as ideal carriers of this research project that is going to be conducted by members of the CSA community from all respective countries. Also with regard to the method used, this project is covering new ground for the democratization of agricultural and social research implementing a participatory action-research process to gain deeper insight into the social

and economic impacts of CSA on European society. The Europe-wide research group will be composed of researchers and practitioners from potentially all European countries, developing a common methodology for this report.

The aims for the “Overview of Community Supported Agriculture (and other emerging distribution systems) for food sovereignty and agro-ecology in Europe” are:

- 1) Mapping the history, diffusion, legal status, characteristics and dynamics of CSAs in the respective countries.
- 2) Assess whether agro-ecological principles are in use in CSAs and what can be done to move them forward (These recommendations can also provide useful for a follow-up project).
- 3) Scrutinize the national umbrella organisations, their chartas and internal organization/communication as well as European and international exchange between them.

The results are:

- Better scientific knowledge of CSA strengths and weaknesses and its dissemination.
- Thorough evaluation of innovative democratic procedures among CSA groups.
- Analysis of the role of agro-ecology in the CSA movement.
- Documentation of the CSA impacts/benefits on local communities and on the European societies.
- Documentation of the CSA impacts/benefits for food sovereignty.
- In the course of the research, CSAs across Europe will be linked.

Citizens, policy makers and activists alike can benefit from insights in this powerful emerging movement.

Such an overview can build on information of a previous study on CSA in 4 European countries which was carried out in 2011 by German non-profit research association “Die Agronauten” and the French consultancy “ACTeon”. The outcome was a report: “Community Supported Agriculture: An overview of characteristics, diffusion and political interaction in France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland” (available: <http://www.agronauten.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Community-Supported-Agriculture-An-overview-of-characteristics-diffusion-and-political-interaction-in-France-Germany-Belgium-and-Switzerland.pdf>).

Finance plan

Action	Cost in €
1 Meeting (2 working days) CSA Research group with up to 30 participants (Travel/Accommodation)	10.000
Writing of report (CSA Research group, payment per author varies depending on the scope)	12.000
Printing of report	2000
Coordination (Agronauten)	1000
TOTAL	25.000

Envisaged time frame: 10 months (April 2015 - January 2016)

Envisaged costs: 25.000€

Funds available through "Agroecology for food Sovereignty" Project" (via Agronauten): 15.000€

Contribution by Urgenci (Concord Project): 10.000€

Timeline:

Meeting August 2015: Development of common methodology

Researching and Writing: August to December 2015

Edit December 2015/January 2016

Release January 2016

Requirements for Authors:

- Attending the meeting, developing common methodology
- Collection of information, writing of country report on CSA (see topics below)
- React to editing comments
- Perhaps arrange translation of (shortened) report in native language (still searching financing)

Topics for report (overlapping)

General	Agroecology Dimension	Organisational Dimension
Diffusion	Actions or principles regarding Biodiversity, Seeds, Ecology	Umbrella Organisation
Dynamics, History	Principles regarding Cosmvision	Charta
Interaction with public bodies	Actions or principles regarding Autonomy, Circlular Economy	Communication and Learning
Definition and Characteristics (e.g. legal)	Knowledge Transfer	...
...	e.g. Gender issues	...

Contact

Forschungsgesellschaft Die Agronauten, Peter Volz, Geyer zu Lauf Str 5, 79312 Emmendingen, Germany

www.agronauten.net peter.volz@agronauten.net

Urgenci, the international CSA network,

Maison de la Vie associative, allée Robert Govi, 13 400 Aubagne, France

www.urgenci.net jocelyn.parot@urgenci.net; morgane.iserte@urgenci.net