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UNDERSTANDING & IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FARMING SYSTEMS IN THE EU

Addressing barriers of agro-ecological transitions in European farming systems: Lessons and experiences from multi-actor engagement in 15 case studies

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(For a list of contributors, please see slide 14)

AAG Annual Meeting 2021
Agroecological transitions in different geographic contexts 2: Governance and sustainability
Online, 10/04/2021

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 773901.

Background

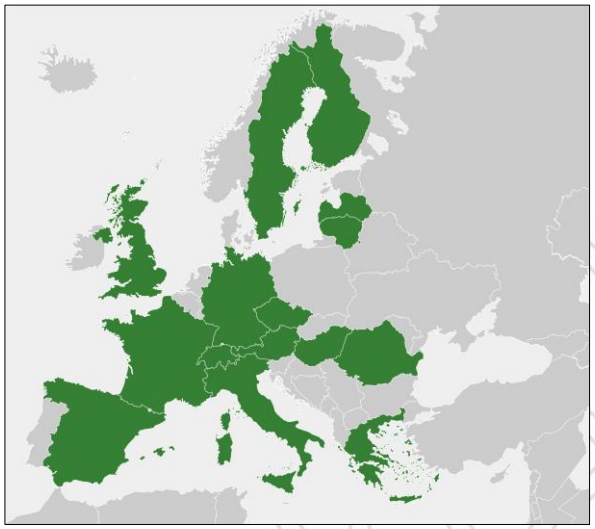
- **UNISECO project**
  - To strengthen the sustainability of European farming systems, through co-constructing improved strategies and incentives for agro-ecological approaches.
  - To improve the knowledge base of agro-ecological transitions in the EU to inform future policies at European, national and regional levels
- **WP3**
  - Analyse barriers and drivers of agro-ecological transitions and co-construct strategies with local actors to address these
- **Transition**
  - Continuum from conventional to agro-ecological (food) systems

Main research focus

How to produce environmentally sustainable and be profitable at the same time?

→ UNISECO project approached this key dilemma with a focus on *agro-ecological approaches* in the 15 case studies

- Improving the understanding of barriers and drivers of implementation – **focus on socio-economic and policy factors**
- Perspective of **various farm production types and different socio-economic and policy contexts** across Europe

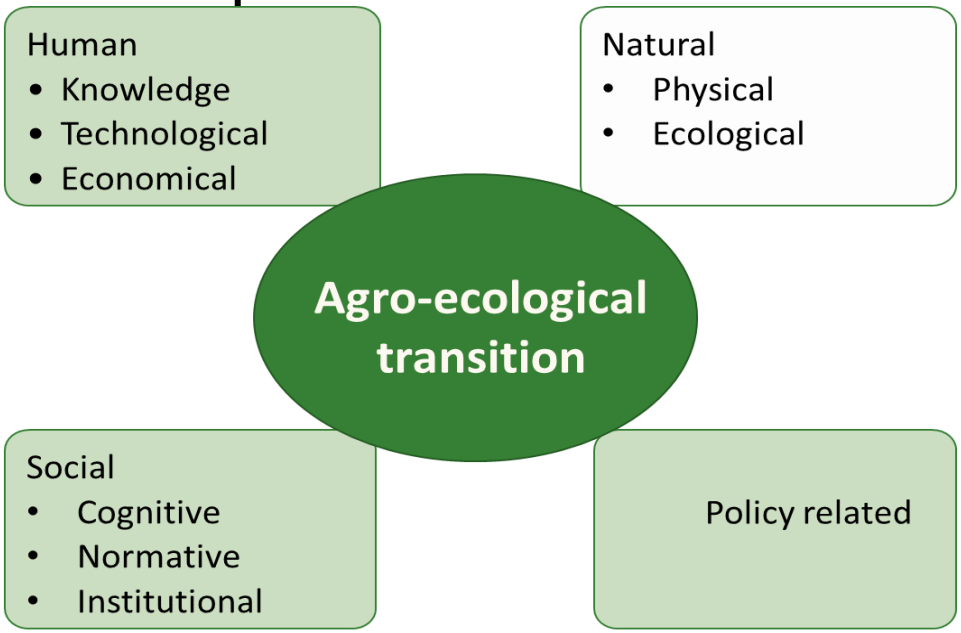


Research questions

- What are key barriers and drivers hindering or facilitating agro-ecological transitions that need to be addressed?
- What governance changes are needed considering a multi-actor perspective?
  - Which actions to address the barriers can be done by whom, with whom and for whom?
  - How can these actors cooperate to facilitate the implementation of agro-ecological practices?
  - Which changes in market institutions and external policy related rules address the barriers and drivers?

Methodological approach

- Social-ecological systems (SES) framework
- Semi-structured interviews and 4 sets of workshops in each case study to co-construct strategies in local contexts
- Types of actors: Farmers, AKIS, value chain, authority and administration, rural community, NGOs
- Classification and scope of barriers and drivers:



Adapted based Jones and Boyd (2011) and Gruere and Wreford (2017)

Results

- Identified more than 100 key barriers across seven main types of barriers
- Focus on socio-economic and policy factors, which local actors can address
- Three main themes of barriers and drivers and proposed actions emerged:

1) Knowledge and social capital

2) Value added, processing and markets

3) Policy design

Knowledge and social capital

Barriers

- Lack of specific knowledge on agro-ecological practices and market opportunities
- Attitudes towards agro-ecological farming and strong tradition in conventional practices
- Limited willingness to cooperate
- Farmers fatigue (especially small farmers)

Drivers

- Sharing of experience and information between farmers in some cases.

Governance changes proposed in strategies

Internal to social-ecological system studied – initiated by SES actors
Creation of formal and informal networks for knowledge transfer and sharing
Farmers agree on hiring advisors, attracting research/education actors (e.g. for open days and strategic discussions)
Cooperation of actors to create digital hub for knowledge exchange.
Piloting new technologies on demonstration farms.
Cooperation of advanced farmers with educational institutions

External to social-ecological system studied
Local authorities coordinating education and raising awareness of landowners.
Policy support for creation of networks and capacity building in cooperation
Support for better targeted advisory service (e.g. to facilitating cooperation, lacking knowledge transfer, using demonstration farms, platforms).
Support to farmers for better access to advisory services to address knowledge gaps.
Pilot testing instruments to foster farmer and non-farmer actors cooperation.

Value added, processing and markets

Barriers

- Cost-price squeeze, market saturation and sales uncertainty
- Investments needs – difficult to afford technology.
- Access to land
- Low awareness of consumers
- Markets not mature
- Lack of storing and processing facilities

Drivers

- Similar initiatives to learn from, slow demand growth

Value added, processing and market

Governance changes proposed in strategies

Internal to social-ecological system studied – initiated by SES actors
Collective processing, marketing, storage, machinery use and similar activities.
Initiate cooperation with all key value chain actors outside SES (e.g. processors)
Develop regional fairs as platforms and markets for niche products.
Create procurement platform for organic matter exchange and composting centre.
Creation of rural land associations to match supply and demand for land.

External to social-ecological system studied
Support for collective initiatives (e.g. marketing, processing)
Creation of cooperation platforms for different value chain actors including short value chains and supermarkets with secure and stable growing contracts
Green public procurement implementation – for agro-ecologically produced goods.
Support promotional campaigns and advertisements, regional labels/certification.
Support farm investment related to transition to agro-ecological farming.

Policy design

Barriers

- Bureaucracy of policy support and unclear definitions and requirements of support
- Low differentiation of Pillar II support
- Milk cooperatives not allowed to sell to traders
- Low promotion of agro-ecological practices in protected areas

Drivers

- Increasing knowledge and experience with innovative contract design (e.g. cooperative, result-based, rental agreements).

Governance changes proposed in strategies

Internal to social-ecological system studied – initiated by SES actors
Buttom up initiatives to better understand the needs of government staff.
Get involved as trusted peers (farmers) in monitoring and controlling policy measures.
Actively participate on consultation on the CAP strategic plans design.

External to social-ecological system studied
Implement measures allowing trusted farmers to participate on monitoring and controlling policy measures (e.g. result-based AEMs).
Implement new AECM promoting agro-ecological practices (e.g. mating disruption in orchards, biodiversity support).
Removal of administrative barriers behind policy instruments.
Inviting all stakeholders to the CAP debates.
Promotion of diversification, innovation, consumers awareness, benefits of AEFS products and added value.

Key lessons

- Improving farmer **knowledge** on the benefits of agro-ecological practices and economic opportunities is a key aspect for successful transition strategies
- Important role of education - focus on **young generation and school programmes**
- Horizontal and vertical **collaboration in the value chain** are of crucial importance to address key barriers
- Tailored policy support to increase the capacity of local actors to create **agro-ecological networks**
- Transformational change requires several interlinked strategic pathways addressing the **whole food system**

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 773901.

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