

Workshop 4: Research aspects - Bringing it all together

How can we guide an agroecological transition?

The workshop was organized by an international and inter-disciplinary team: Michael Löbmann, Maaike Happel, Claudia Fernandez Gonzalez, Valentina Vaglia, Anastasia Pantera, Rosa Mosquera Losada, George Vlahos, Gerald Schwarz, Katalin Balazs, and Alexandra Smyrniotopoulou. The aim of the workshop was to discuss practical real-life problems when performing, or planning interdisciplinary, or participatory agroecological research. Together with the participants, we collected and exchanged insights in experiences of people, problem situations and solving strategies. We explicitly tried to involve non-researchers, since research efforts and results help shaping policies and practice and thus are an integrated element of a democratic process towards a sustainable development.

In order to get people tuned with the topic, the workshop started with a short presentation session, where the speakers introduced agroecological research projects and demonstrated their experiences:

1. Valentina Vaglia (PhD Student University of Milan)
Framing Agroecological farming in organic rice agroecosystems
2. George Vlahos (Agricultural University of Athens)
Transdisciplinary research to advance agroecological transitions: Experiences from the UNISECO project
3. Anastasia Pantera (TEI Stereas Elladas)
Innovation in agroforestry: the HYDROUSA project
4. Claudia Fernández González (INRA / Wageningen University):
Transdisciplinary approaches of agroecological research in Europe

World Café

After the presentations, the participants discussed three questions in a World Café. The key outcomes were (Figure 1):

1. What are the problems and bottlenecks in agroecological research?
 - Administrative boundaries and the problematic situation for establishing long-term experiments restrict the practice of proper agroecological research projects. A paradigm shift is necessary within the academic research system.
 - Both farmers and researchers have limited time available for valuable knowledge exchange.
 - Often, it is difficult for researchers to access farms regularly, due to long distances (see time limitations above). The same applies to farmers.
 - Building a trust relationship between researchers and farmers takes time and consistency.
 - Different generations may have different perception of problem situation.

2. What tools, solutions, and experience do you have to solve these problems?
 - We can promote step-by-step changes of the academic research system. Involving more and more people increases the pressure on decision makers to make these changes.
 - Involving people emotionally makes it more likely that people spend time with agroecological research. Further, farmers should benefit directly from the research activities.
 - Farmers' contributions and time need to be valued more and the people involved need to be respected. Both parties need to benefit from the collaboration.
 - Researchers need to account for more time to interact with farmers in order to build a trust relationship and to exchange valuable knowledge and experience.
3. What is the role of the researcher to improve agroecology?
 - Perceive agroecological research as a social process: Connect researchers, practitioners and policy makers in order to create an agroecological social reality
 - Promote inter- and transdisciplinary research collaborations
 - Provide direct benefits to the farmers and create a persistent environment of trust
 - Include and harmonize the perspectives and experience of stakeholders
 - Appreciate and reward farmers' time
 - Be actively involved in policy making → take responsibility
 - Participatory learning
 - Communicate outside the 'research world' and provide reliable evidence for the benefits of agroecological farming

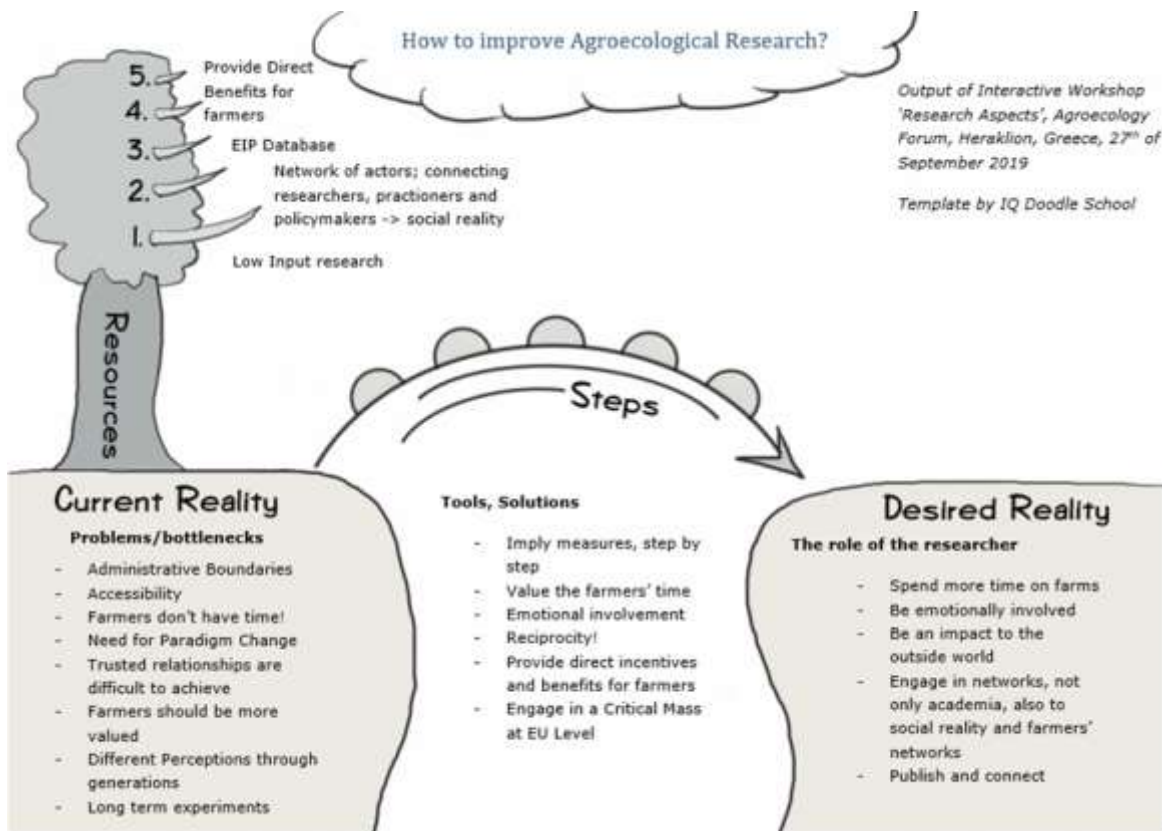


Figure 1: Overview of the outcome of the group discussion.