FP7 project, 'Co-operative Research on Environmental Problems in Europe' (CREPE), www.crepeweb.net

Workshop Report:

What Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture? What Bio-Economy for Europe?

http://crepeweb.net/?page_id=355

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Introduction

The FP7 research project, 'Co-operative Research on Environmental Problems in Europe' (CREPE), explores policy assumptions which underlie societal conflict over agri-environmental issues. The project investigates implications of current innovation trajectories, alternatives, and links with EU research priorities. Its structure is designed to facilitate cooperation between researchers and non-researchers, as well as between academics and civil society organisations (CSOs), who are full partners leading studies in the project.

Attendance and preparation

The workshop announcement was first circulated in April to approx. 80 individuals relevant to agricultural research, mainly in or near Brussels. These included: research funding agencies (especially European Commission), national research organisations, industry organisations, European Technology Platforms, farmers' organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs), members of the European Parliament, its staff members, etc. The announcement was circulated again to the same list in mid-May.

Eventually 20 individuals registered; 15 attended – mainly representatives of research organisations and CSOs, though also a couple from industry organisations. The CREPE project was represented by 8 researchers (3 academics + 5 civil society organisations) – for a total of 22 participants. A week beforehand, everyone who had registered was sent a briefing document.[1] This became the focus of the opening session and was sometimes called 'the report' by workshop participants.

This report

The workshop report mainly records the discussion points. Comments from speakers are split up or re-arranged so that they more clearly respond to a previous comment. Talks have a brief summary here. PowerPoint talks can be downloaded from the workshop webpage, http://crepeweb.net/?page_id=355

Beyond a record of the discussion, extra comments are added as footnotes and a brief final section. Some points will be further developed into a project report. This document provides material for further debate and investigation, especially for the remaining half-year of the CREPE project. Further comments on this report are welcome for that purpose. Please send comments to the project's email address, MCT-CREPE@open.ac.uk

[1] 'What Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture? What Bio-Economy for Europe?' http://www.crepeweb.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/sustagri_briefing_crepe_final.doc

Opening talks

Philippe Galiay**, 'A** Science in Society Perspective'
[see PPt file on website]

There has been unease over science and technology, even a growing organised resistance to particular technologies, such as GM crops. Is the "progress machine" jamming? There is a conflict between industry based on competition and civil society based on solidarity.

Lessons from governance case studies indicate that technological innovation has been: Partial in scientific advice, Insufficient in risk assessment. Insufficient in communication and dialogue. Lacking inclusiveness in framing issues, and lacking a sense of urgency in those respects. Overall: a failure to incorporate diverse values in a common and shared vision.

In a knowledge society, there is a need to find the right balance between competing knowledges, as well as a need to revisit the notion of 'progress'.

Les Levidow, 'What Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture?'
[see PPt file and briefing document on website]

Sustainable agriculture has divergent accounts, each inspired by narratives of societal progress for a future Europe. In the context of the Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE), they also have divergent accounts of the key terms – biological resources, economic relations and knowledge. These accounts increasingly borrow and use similar terms – but in different ways, each in their own image. These can be understood as contending paradigms.

Given the divergent accounts of sustainable agriculture, they are often seen as complementary, but they can be contradictory. As well as competing for public-sector research funds, they favour different power relations – especially between farmers, the agri-input supply industry and food markets. Highlighting the differences can open up normative choices for research priorities, narratives and European futures.

In the agri-food-bioenergy sectors, the major influence corresponds to only some parts of industry, favouring only some accounts of sustainable agriculture and relevant knowledge, especially laboratory and engineering knowledge. Stakeholder arrangements have been outsourced to a partisan vision and agenda, especially through European Technology Platforms. Prevalent research agendas marginalise farmers' knowledge and agroecological knowledge.[2] This has been promoted by Technology Platform Organics.

As a concept, Agricultural Knowledge Systems (AKS) already provide a basis for promoting and linking plural forms of knowledge. This articulates a co-research relation among all relevant knowledge-producers, including farmers. AKS may also provide a common space for interchanges between conflicting paradigms.

Commentaries from three guest speakers

Timothy Hall, Head of Unit: Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture, DG Research

As the presentation said, sustainable agriculture has divergent accounts. Agriculture is varied, so it is difficult to define what is sustainable agriculture. Your analysis over-generalises , as you acknowledge, though it gives useful pointers for thinking about future plans. Our unit deals with sustainable primary production and houses the SCAR (Standing Committee on Agricultural Research) Secretariat, which is important for ensuring coordination between national agriculture-related research programmes.

[2] Agroecology emerged from the convergence of ecology and agronomy; ecological science is applied to the study, design and management of agroecosystems. 'Agroecological engineering' means that agricultural systems can be 'engineered' by applying agroecological principles, just as plants are 'engineered' by transgenesis (Vanloqueren and Baret, 2009).

Your briefing document comes at a useful time, near the end of FP7, when the new Commission is thinking about ways of enhancing innovation. It will soon start to think about the future Framework Programme. Innovation is reflected in the EU 2020 strategy which is about smart, sustainable, inclusive growth; and includes a reference to building a bio-economy, which includes sustainable agriculture. Resource efficiency is also addressed.

No agriculture today is really fully sustainable, not even organic agriculture, because society does not fully recycle its organic waste. We are looking for agriculture to be as sustainable as possible in producing sufficient quantities of safe food. If we want truly sustainable agriculture, then we need to deal more effectively with human waste re-use.

A new Commissioner has been appointed, with a mandate to link innovation more closely to research. The Commission is now planning a Communication in September on innovation and research, probably with a partnership initiative involving the bio-economy. Another Communication will be prepared in 2011 specifically addressing the bio-economy.

Your talk implied that the research agenda setting process is not very democratic. In FP7 many topics (though not all) contain some aspects that were suggested by European Technology Platforms (ETPs), but these call topics are also moulded by discussion with other groups of stakeholders. Calls must represent the views of more than a few organisations; bodies need to be representative and have a broad-based foundation. We consult widely and try to respond to other DGs, SCAR and the Programme Committee representing the member states and associated countries. So we have diverse sources of inputs. Different bodies will bring in the views of CSOs; although we have no direct consultation process with civil society, it will filter in through these bodies. Member States have a say and we can only proceed if they agree, so we welcome input from them. ETPs received Commission funds under FP6 in a one-off contract to get them started, but there have been no further allocations. We have no responsibility for how they are structured, though we ask them to bring in societal views as far as possible.

The Commission manages only 5% of European research funds, so we can't cover everything. We try to focus on something specific. FP6 had its focus and its omissions; some areas were left out so as not to spread resources too thinly. For example, FP6 had no specific funds for forestry research, though this has been included in FP7.

There have been many projects which have included a wide range of stakeholders, but it is in the hands of those putting together the research proposals as to whom they include. We encourage a wide participation via partnerships, where CSOs would need to be invited or to set up their own partnerships. Your briefing document suggests they have no involvement – which is not entirely the case. Nevertheless your document is welcome and is useful for our future reflection and planning.

Eduardo Cuoco, Technology Platform Organics

As the report [briefing document] argues, research priorities need a participatory approach involving more stakeholders than at present. There are still too many knowledge gaps. Europe should take the lead in producing high-quality food.

Terminology in research agendas needs closer attention to its meanings, e.g. holistic, agro-ecology, risky research, participatory research, low-input, etc. There is a large gap between farmers' and researchers' knowledge. Research should value farmers' knowledge.

Mark Cropper, DG Agriculture

I have attended many events on agricultural research, but often my knowledge has not been respected. I am looking for help in defining the role of a Commission official in Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), which is an open concept. In my circles we are getting away from the idea that knowledge is only in the hands of researchers. AKIS is open and inclusive. Everyone can have a research hat at least for one hour in the day. I encourage others to come into the AKIS process.

ETPs are a good place to meet others interested in research. When asked, I have replied that I am satisfied by my role in them but not by others' involvement, e.g. farmers and consumers. I am told they are often not made welcome. MNCs have a big stake in them. Maybe we should too, as shareholders or stakeholders, whichever term is more appropriate. ETPs need to evolve and seem to be showing signs of wanting to (e.g. at the 12 May ETPs conference).

EU agricultural committees in the CAP do not systematically discuss research. Would such committees have a governance structure that was more appropriate for discussing ag research in a civil society setting? If neither ETPs nor the CAP committees are suitable or adaptable, it's always possible to start from scratch. But few in the EC system start from blank sheet of paper. In any case, if you start a new structure, then don't make it too scientific.

The CAP consultation process is framed as from now until 2020. The current debate is motivated by a need to know where European agriculture should be going. This means we need to know now what to do, whereas research looks to a longer time scale. Issues include: income of farmers, public goods and restructuring. Farmers still need direct payments. CAP is framed as a triangular relationship among three aspects: the Single Farm Payments, which are directed more at public goods, e.g. compliance with environmental criteria; Rural Development Programme, which is more about social aspects; and market or economic competition.

Do not leave agriculture out of the KBBE. And reflect: some of the wording can be alienating. In the KBBE vision, saying that "farms are oil wells of the future " is a striking statement. I find it hard to relate to the idea of farms being the factories of tomorrow. Under the new CAP regime, all industrial sectors of the bio-economy are open to farmers, who have the final say over whether or not to grow biofuels. But let's not forget food.

General discussion 1

Willem Halffman (chair): Looking at the two divergent paradigms, there are procedural issues about participation and influence, as well as substantive issues about agenda-setting, e.g. different accounts of sustainability. Are alternatives being excluded from research agendas? What are the urgent research needs?

Hans-Jörg Lutzeyer (DG Research): We tried to include NGOs in the FP7 advisory committee. But the challenge is to get people to workshops; they found it difficult even to attend because they have so many activities. Research projects promote this interaction, bridging farmers' and scientists' knowledge. We fund a project which develops participatory approaches in Africa linking farmers' and scientists' knowledge. The 2008 regulation allows a market for new varieties, so research studies whether this is developing.

Daniele Tissot (DG Research): European Animal Welfare Platform includes CSOs in evaluating acceptable production methods.

Fabrizio Fabbri (FDG): Our experience with EC consultation is that it is difficult to understand how (or how much) each contribution is taken into account. Part of the research budget could be for participatory projects with CSOs and share to increase year on year.

Peter Keet (NL Ministry of Agriculture): Research agendas reflect dominant paradigms. This is not surprising because research is about money, reflecting power relations in society. ETPs were originally intended to mobilise private investment for research, but they have been campaigning and lobbying for research priorities; they didn´t mobilize much of their own funds. Research agendas can try to accommodate different paradigms, for which we need CSOs. This is not always easy, as CSOs are small organisations with few resources. The Netherlands funds networks bringing together farmers and researchers, within the constraints of dominant agri paradigms and power relations. Farmers are highly educated and can communicate with researchers. Now there are networks for them to construct research agendas together, but within the constraints of agricultural policy.

M Cropper (DG Agriculture): Participation is like a party, which may (or may not) invite people – or may leave them in a corner. Some countries have a participatory attitude to research, among other things. But Europe doesn't: why not?

Nina Holland (Corporate Europe Observatory/CEO): ETPs are not interested in CSOs and environmental issues. We have regarded the Biofuels Technology Platform as corporate-dominated; CSOs are hardly involved and can't be involved. You cannot expect CSOs (with limited resources) to participate in all the platforms, and there is no civil society platform. ETPs have their own EU website and influence research agendas; they are independent of the Commission, yet the Platform's predecessor was established and funded by the Commission. We filed a complaint to the EC Ombudsman and are still waiting for a response. Technology Platform Organics is a good development but does not solve the problem of the 36 other ETPs in which CSOs are little (or not) involved. There need to be alternatives to ETPs.

Mark Cropper (DG Agriculture): Nina Holland raised the issue of ETPs' legitimacy. In another EC project, FAAN, the report suggested that some laws were against the people.[3] In this way, we use research to identify barriers. We need to breathe new life into laws and do more research projects. ETPs are able to evolve because they do not now have EC influence. I regret that ETPs did not open up participation.

Eduardo Cuoco (TP Organics): To develop TP Organics we started by asking farmers to describe their problems and how they see possible solutions. We had a long consultation and translated this into research topics. All topics were sourced from farmers and consumers. The process made it possible to translate their ideas into a Strategic Research Agenda (SRA).

Claudia Neubauer (Fondation Sciences Citoyennes/FSC): From our study in an FP6 project, we concluded that ETPs are not the place for CSOs to participate.[4] They are mainly dominated by industry. They develop SRAs for industry, in ways that conflict with civil society. Exceptions include wind energy and organics, but the latter is not officially recognised by the Commission. It would be interesting to set up a civil society platform on research agendas. Agroecology has several roles – a scientific approach, field techniques and social movement. What role does agroecology play in EC research agendas?

Eric Gall (EP staff member): CAP discussions are taking up legitimacy problems about the public-good character of agriculture. Science should serve society. So, what are plans to do this through Joint Programming?

Timothy Hall (DG Research): In setting our research priorities, DG research gives no preference to the fact that a Technology Platform has been approved by the Commission. There are links with TP Organics. We have consulted with the organics sector on research priorities. Many topics (e.g. low-input breeds, ecological intensification) are relevant to organic farming. We are taking a longer-term view because research does not deliver results in a 10-year timescale. We face a population growth to 8bn people, so we need measures to avoid a catastrophe, plus problems of climate change, e.g. ways to conserve resources. Research aims to provide options which may or may not be taken on board in agriculture. But within the limits of low funding, we have to focus on some priorities. As regards ETPs, I don't know the Biofuels TP, which relates to another section of DG Research.[5] We take up ideas from ETPs but often in a different form; they often complain that we haven't taken up their ideas. We set up a Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) on agriculture, food security and climate change; but we don't dictate the approach. Member states decide where to take it; we have a wide consultation.

Mark Cropper: We have thought about committees in CAP as a place to discuss and input into research agendas. But legitimacy questions also apply to CAP committees, because they don't involve all stakeholders. We don't know how people's visions will be interpreted, but it will be a different CAP.

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[3] For example, hygiene and trading laws have been impeding local food networks, www.faanweb.eu

[4] Gall, E., Neubauer, C., Millot, G. and Piasecki, F. (2009) *Understanding the European Research System: A Handbook for Civil Society Organisations*. Based on the Science, Technology and Civil Society (STACS) project from FP6. Paris: Fondation Sciences Citoyennes.

[5] Nevertheless the FAFB unit co-funded a joint call by several parts of DG Research for research on bio-refineries, taking up proposals from the Biofuels Technology Platform.

Three specific studies

These presentations drew upon specific studies in the CREPE project, corresponding to Annexes of the briefing document, as noted below. Here are just a few points from those talks.

Claudia Neubauer, Agri-environmental research priorities [see also PPt file and Annex 3]
Fondation Sciences Citoyennes, Paris

Sustainable agriculture is a central concept in agricultural and research policy. It is used by different actors – policy makers, scientists, industry, NGOs and social movements – in different ways. These meanings can be understood by analysing discourses, budgets and journal publications. Our study surveyed several documents on agricultural research.

From the perspective of civil society organisations, sustainable agriculture is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just and inclusive, culturally appropriate and based on a holistic and participatory scientific approach. Such perspectives overlap with some research documents (SCAR, IAASTD, IFOAM). By contrast, other documents (ETPs, FP7 KBBE) link sustainable agriculture with agbiotech.

The overall organisation of research systems, the existing agricultural system, the dominant perception of progress and innovation are broadly more in favour of biotechnological agriculture than of agroecology. Innovation policies must take into account the true value of agroecological innovations.

Lucia Goldfarb, Global agrofuels [see also PPt file and Annex 5]
Transnational Institute, Amsterdam

'Agrofuels' express criticism of industrial ways in which biofuels are produced, especially as large-scale monocultures in the global South. Sustainability problems there include: competition for land use (fuel versus food or feed), land grabs, GHG emissions from changes in land use (especially indirect changes), environmental pollution from intensive monoculture, etc. EU policy documents explain these problems along two lines, each with a remedy.

(i) Inadequate management**:** to be addressed by EC development policy and self-governance in global South, e.g. voluntary schemes (corporate social responsibility model). Yet EC development agencies lack resources and powers to limit damage from unsustainable agrofuel production. And self-governance readily accommodates agrofuels, e.g. Brazil softening its law on environmental crimes.

(ii) Inefficient use of resources**:** to be addressed through eco-efficient technological innovation. Assumes that the higher the productivity, the less biofuels will compete for land with food, until 2nd-generation biofuels are commercially available. As our study shows, sustainability problems have causes in political-economic drivers. More efficient methods per se would not counteract monoculture expansion or subordination of local land use to global markets, which are the main drivers of harm. 'Smart-green' techno-fixes provide a false solution, aimed at the wrong problems – e.g. how to sustain Europe's growing consumption of transport fuel, and how to maximise value-added from global commodities.

Pascal Aubrée, Local agri-food networks [see also PPt file and Annex 7]
Federation Régionale des Centres d'Initiatives pour Valoriser l'Agriculture et le Milieu rural (FRCIVAM)

In the last decade, local agri-food networks have been quickly developing in Brittany. These networks feature traditional forms of short chains, such as open air markets, micro farm-shops and collective shops of farmers. Often through cooperative organisations, farmers take responsibility for their own marketing scheme through short supply chains, including direct sales.

The environment becomes an internal resource that can provide the whole farm system with free inputs and services. In this way, the route is to adapt the whole agricultural system to the productive potential of the farm territory. The environment also becomes a benefit – for the needs and enjoyment of farm families, as well as the whole society. Short food-supply chains have diverse field practices, with a broad range of results regarding greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

In wider discussions over reducing GHG emissions from agriculture, this aim has become a rationale to invest in scientific research towards technological innovation which could use resources more efficiently. Such efforts ignore farmers' organisational innovations which significantly reduce GHG emissions. Already available, such solutions could be implemented rapidly and at low cost. The main obstacles are farmers' and institutions' mindsets, as well as farmers' dependence on conventional food chains – which therefore warrant research towards overcoming them.

General discussion 2

Comments are split up or re-arranged so that they more clearly respond to a previous comment.

Willem Halffman (chair): We have heard three talks which concretise the abstract story in the main presentation. For agri-research priorities, we saw two divergent paradigms. For agrofuels, we saw that practices and effects are different than as optimistically assumed by EC policy. For local agri-food networks, we saw that farmers' innovation is being ignored by research agendas.

Biofuels

Fabrizio Fabbri: In the Renewable Energy Directive, the 10% target has a top-down approach from President Barroso, who was unwilling to negotiate, despite criticism from the Parliament's rapporteur, Claude Turmes. Economic forces search for techno-solutions.

Lucia Goldfarb: Germany reached the limit of rapeseed production in 2007, so this indicates a potential future of Europe in attempting to fulfil the EU biofuel targets, which will need more land in the global South. To answer the earlier question about second generation biofuels, generating cheap biofuels for global markets will worsen the problem in the global South.
Les Levidow: Yes, more efficient production methods do not address the source of sustainability problems and could worsen them.

Mark Cropper: Our knowledge of biofuels was not good in 2005. Without carbon trading, GHG emissions could be even worse.

Piet Schenkelaars: Agricultural waste is being redefined as inputs for a bio-factory, but much 'waste' (residue) is needed for agricultural purposes. Dutch industry is already based on large-scale imports of biomass: will this be expanded further? Are conventional long chains sustainable? What GHG emissions will result? Carbon trading schemes are creating a financial bubble.

Peter Keet: It is inefficient to transform energy from the sun via plants into liquid fuel, but an industry lobby promotes this agenda through policy-based evidence. Netherlands is planning a study on reducing GHG emissions from livestock.

Nina Holland: Political parties in Netherlands seek higher targets for biofuels. EU biofuel sustainability criteria are limited to GHG emissions, with no social criteria. Industry dominates the European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production Round Table, which is co-financed by Commission.

Research priorities

Tim Hall: We fund many projects which involve agroecology, even if this is not mentioned in the call or project summary. Your survey counted the frequency of key words in agri-research priorities: but documents may use other significant words than those specifically looked for. You need to look at a wider range of words that mean the same thing. If biotech is mentioned negatively, then would it be counted in your search? And the organic research budget should be compared to the agricultural research budget, not the entire Framework Programme.

Claudia Neubauer: I agree that counting words is not enough for analysing the meaning of text. Some words are more thought through than others in the documents, but we are looking at how they link to the master narratives and so how they shape where we are going. We put together different indicators (including word counts) into overall master narratives defining progress. The IAASTD report critically reflects on biotech, so it is counted in our search.

Discrepancy in funding between the two paradigms resulted from a policy decision. We should reflect on which paradigm is being promoted and why. As one of many reasons, journal publications on biotech are seen as scientific excellence, more prestigious and advantageous for careers.[6]
The dominant agricultural paradigm imagines that it can totally redesign and control nature. There has been a long history of agricultural changes along those lines; food crops have been reduced to a few varieties.
We need to reflect on which paradigms are being used, why certain priorities are funded and not others. We looked not only at terms but also how they linked to wider thinking.
Why not make agro-ecology more explicitly visible?

Fabrizio Fabbri: Perhaps agroecology could benefit from some technology, e.g. marker-assisted breeding.

Claudia Neubauer: Marker-assisted breeding could be integrated into agroecology, though the latter does not advocate this.

Hans-Jörg Lutzeyer (DG Research): In our research programme, the next call will try to integrate specialised local farming systems – new institutional arrangements which transfer resources, e.g. nutrient transfers across farms. Such experiences could be included in a Leader project under DG Agri.

Mark Cropper: Will food and agroecology be forgotten in the bioeconomy? Let's consider 'waste' from agroecology perspectives; look for organic and agroecology where they are not explicit. We can learn a lot about organic methods from projects that are not organic. Let's anticipate another potential food crisis from biomass extraction for industrial purposes. Let me ask Pascal: What do you mean by a rupture? Where did it come from? How did the change happen? And how do you measure environmental improvements?

Pascal Aubrée: In Brittany producers shifted from mass consumption in conventional chains to more specialised forms of consumption. Consumers' positive response to some initiatives has reinforced producers' perception of a different model. We can measure environmental impacts of specific practices. But we have no environmental data on overall conventional chains. More than 60% of GHG emissions come from the production aspect, while only 17% from transport (of inputs and products), so we should focus on production systems to reduce GHG emissions. Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) are meant to reduce environmental impacts, so European farmers should not use inputs from the global South.

Les Levidow: In designing the study of local food networks, we did not know any baseline data on conventional chains, so instead the study compares different practices among farmers developing short chains.

Peter Keet: Although SCAR sponsors foresight reports, they are not a SCAR position, thus giving us room for manoeuvre.[7] Member states are making decisions and giving approval to FP7 priorities, so we should look at discussions there.

Hans-Jörg Lutzeyer (DG Research): Europe is strong in innovation but not in introducing products to the market. Germany's renewable energy policy built up solar capacity. But the EU's biofuel targets were based on faulty assumptions, which should be debated. Europe needs a debate on research priorities, so that research can lead to more sustainable production.

Mark Cropper: There are economic arguments about return on investment from research.

Willem Halffman: At a previous workshop that I chaired, on environmental research priorities, we saw a need for links between research institutions and CSOs, which can bring legitimacy and ideas for research agendas. The same applies to agricultural research.

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[6] Vanloqueren, G. and Baret, P.V. (2009) How aricultural research systems shape a technological regime that develops genetic engineering but locks out agroecological innovations, *Research Policy* 38(6): 971-83.
[7] http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/index_en

Follow-up issues to explore

Previous sections have simply reported (and re-arranged) comments from workshop participants. This final section sketches some issues that warrant further exploration, especially regarding agenda-setting in Europe-wide research priorities for the agri-food-forestry-biofuel sectors.

Divergent research agendas

In the name of sustainable agriculture, research agendas promote specific visions of future agriculture, societal progress and a bio-economy (see again the briefing document). Different agendas have some distinctive language. The dominant agenda promotes agbiotech, novel crops to supply biomass, agriculture as a factory, etc. Other agendas promote agro-ecological methods, farmers' knowledge, closer relations between producers and consumers, etc. At the same time, different agendas increasingly use similar key terms – e.g., intensification, holistic, low-input, biodiversity, knowledge, bio-economy, innovation, etc. – while framing these terms in their own distinctive way. These differences are analysed by the CREPE project overview and specific studies.

Questions: How to identify these divergent agendas, e.g. through different key terms? or different meanings of the same terms? Within the wider policy framework of multifunctional agriculture, how are these research agendas complementary? or contradictory?

Role of Framework Programmes

Although Framework Programmes comprise only a small part of Europe-wide research, they play special roles in embedding future visions, defining progress and signalling research priorities accordingly. They also mobilise Europe-wide resources along those lines through cross-national cooperative efforts such as ERA-Nets.

Questions: How do Framework Programmes play a leadership role in Europe-wide research agendas? What are their roles and responsibilities in shaping the future in specific ways? How do different agendas contend for influence through strategic language and stakeholder networks? Within the Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE) as a central policy concept, which research priorities prevail?

Priority-setting

Limited funds mean difficult choices about research priorities, but why do Framework Programmes favour some priorities in particular? Agenda-setting expresses power relations over resource allocation and policy processes. Current EU-level research agendas largely favour the dominant paradigm, responding to some stakeholders, especially those in European Technology Platforms which are officially recognised. Farmers' knowledge and agroecological methods seem marginal, though perhaps they are present in less obvious forms.

Questions: What is the relative responsibility of the European Commission and member states in the overall decision process on research priorities? What shapes these priorities? What have been the recent changes, e.g. in broadening these priorities? What has been the direct or indirect role of civil society organisations (CSOs)?

Wider participation

Largely favouring the dominant paradigm, current EU-level research agendas may have a legitimacy problem. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have criticised the dominant priorities, while also proposing alternatives, but they have difficulties in maintaining attention to research issues. With limited resources and staff members, CSOs have competing demands on their time, cannot regularly attend meetings beyond their campaign issues and see conflicts with official fora such as Technology Platforms. Some CSOs doubt that participation in such fora would make a difference – except perhaps that powerful actors could then claim that CSOs have been consulted. These problems contribute to a circular logic of their non-involvement in research issues.

Ways are needed to overcome this impasse. Links and ideas from CSOs could help to generate more plural research agendas, especially via links with industry actors who share common perspectives, as in the case of TP Organics. Farmers' knowledge already contributes to research, mainly in implicit ways, and could be more explicitly incorporated into research agendas. Broader participation could enhance their legitimacy.

Questions:
Given that some proposals and knowledges have considerable support but remain under-represented, how to represent them better in official research agendas? e.g. through broader participation
How to facilitate stakeholder networks that could elaborate these priorities?
As a concept, Agricultural Knowledge Systems encompass all relevant knowledges, so how could this help to stimulate broader networks for shaping research agendas?