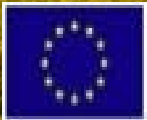




Cooperative processes for research on sustainable development

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Cooperative Research on Environmental Problems in Europe (CRÈPE)



Framework Programme 7, Science in Society programme

Co-ordinators: Les Levidow, Sue Oreszczyn, Steve Hinchliffe

**European CSO partners in France (2), Spain, Netherlands, Italy.
Academic partner in Netherlands**

Work packages:

Agrofuel production in Europe and global South

CSO participation in community supported agriculture

Water scarcity and virtual export from Spain

Local agri-food networks and environmental effects

CSOs' interventions into agri-environmental issues

European Research Area priorities for sustainable agriculture

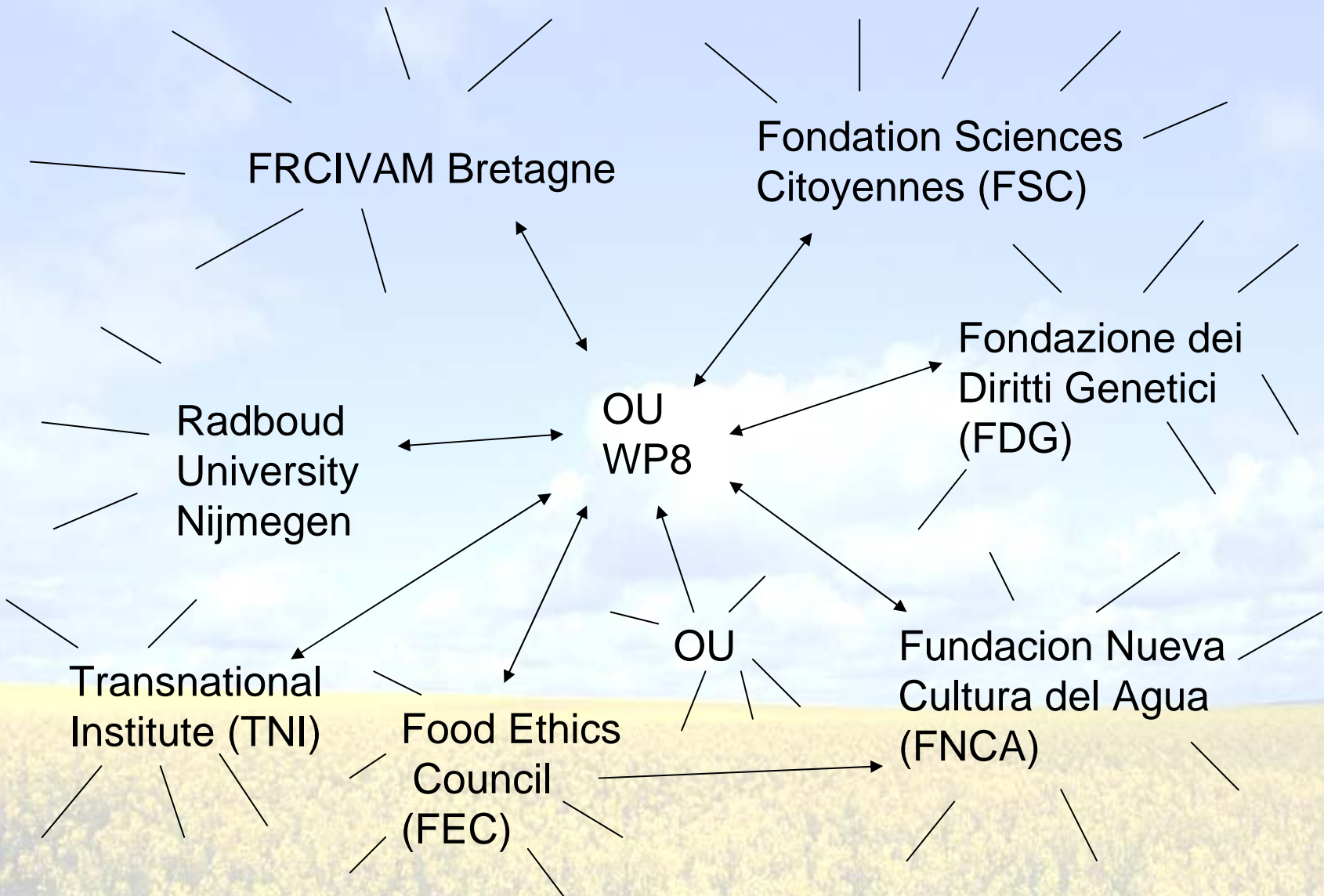
Innovation narratives in EU-funded agricultural research

Work Package 8: Co-operative research processes



Objectives of the overall project:

- **To facilitate co-operation between academic researchers and CSOs, to enhance CSOs' capacities to participate in research, to help them to network successfully, and to promote mutual learning.**
- **To design and analyse the methods used for co-operative research, as a basis to inform future efforts.**
- **To analyse how diverse accounts of sustainability arise in agri-production systems.**
- **To relate research more closely to societal needs, as a means to inform policy debate and research priorities for Europe as a 'Knowledge-Based Society'.**
- **To suggest alternative solutions related to different understandings of societal problems, agri-environmental issues and sustainable development.**



WP8:

Facilitates self-reflection and analyses the cooperative research processes within CRÊPE -- in the overall project and in the partners' own studies

Aims: to inform and benefit other efforts at collaborative research

WP8 Research questions:

- In developing co-operative research in the CRÊPE project, what are the various methods, practices, pathways and relationships?

- What obstacles and difficulties are encountered?
What efforts are taken to overcome them?





We have been drawing on ideas from the literature on participatory and partnership research, action research, transdisciplinary research and the communities and networks of practice literature

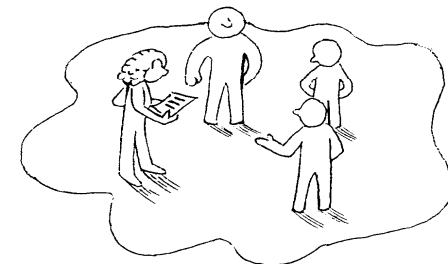
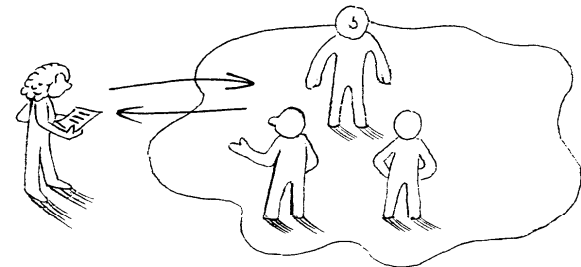
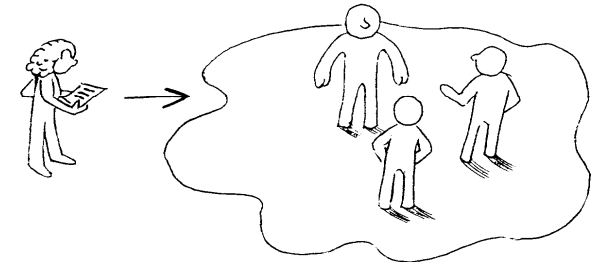
Three models for doing research



Researching on people. The researcher places themselves outside the system of interest. The researcher learns.

The researcher places themselves within the system for a short while and then leaves. The researcher learns but the participants only do so while the researcher is present.

The researcher as co-researcher (the action research model). The researcher place themselves within the system and work with the people. In this case learning is assumed to continue once the researchers leaves the system.





CREPE provided enabling spaces:

- CSOs were involved in shaping the initial design
- Partners' meetings usually had an interactive component to help foster our community of practice and always had a reflection element.

These highlighted need to clarify relations between researchers and non-researchers, especially because a CSO may play both these roles; also the need to gain a common understanding of what we mean by cooperative research and how it relates to similar concepts.
- Skype and e-mail conversations and a web site



Cooperative Research: force field analysis

This summary resulted from the Force Field Analysis conducted during the 2nd partners' meeting.

Restraining forces

- Complexity making cooperating difficult
- CSOs' multiple and ambiguous roles
- Difficulty in being perceived as neutral
- Researchers have a credibility problem
- Local CSOs can't easily see benefits of CR
- Large administrative burden
- Different stakeholders use different languages
- Conflicting interests, especially where some stakeholders may lose from the new arrangements (e.g. in the water scarcity case, some companies or farmers may lose out)
- Perceived partiality of the researcher
- Scaling up: difficult to work from CR case studies to broader issues, or from research to policy, from small to large
- Mobility of staff (across all research sectors, but may be a bigger problem in CSOs)
- Requirements of CR (social and fixed capital)
- Difference in interests
- Fear of instrumentalism
- Institutional barriers
- Unpredictable outcomes
- Previous experience (if negative)

Driving forces

- Complexity requiring cooperation
- Funding for CR (resource and legitimacy)
- Combining activist and researcher role brings creative possibilities
- Global issues require cooperation
- Reflection makes for better practice
- Interactions are energising
- CSOs have good outreach, making knowledge more robust
- All parties can gain credibility and work to set new agenda
- Cooperative publications may have wider benefits
- Different perspectives can add value
- Shared interests – where all parties can see the benefit in solving a problem together
- Perceived neutrality (for example FEC)
- Discourses around a topic like sustainability generates enough shared ground to cooperate
- Fear of being exposed (e.g. companies would rather cooperate than be exposed as unethical etc)
- CR provides iterations and helps to generate an adaptive research process that is never far from its 'ground'
- Mobility of staff (presents new opportunities)
- Social relevance
- Socially constructed questioning
- Shared responsibility
- Double identities
- Gaps in scientific knowledge
- Previous experience (if positive)



Reflecting on experience



In addition to reflections in the partners' meetings:

All partners agreed to keep a cooperative research diary on their thoughts, activities and conversations.

These were guided by a set of questions which developed during the project

Critical Moments Exercise: was carried out towards the end of the project.



Workshops

Workshops were a common element across the studies.

Each CSO held a workshop, involving CSOs in particular.

Two project-level workshops

- **Brussels: Policy issues**

‘What Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture?’

‘What Bio-Economy for Europe?’

- **London: CR processes**

Policy relevance: sustainable agriculture



Partners were encouraged to identify policy assumptions and to question them.

Project meetings developed a transversal perspective on sustainable agriculture, especially its divergent accounts – within and across the topics.

These accounts became more explicit in the various WP studies, as a basis to criticise dominant policies.

This transversal perspective linked the studies within the project.

Techno-fixes: critical perspectives



- In some topics (e.g. biofuels, water scarcity), policy agendas propose technological solutions which would more efficiently use natural resources to enhance environmental sustainability.
- In our studies, these solutions were critically analysed as techno-fixes
- This critique linked the studies in our transversal analysis.
- This was presented at the Brussels workshop.



More equal stakes and joint responsibilities

Joint funding and joint responsibilities for management decisions put partners on a more equal footing.

This strengthened CSOs' capacity to participate in research activities, e.g. by enabling more staff time or new posts to be funded for research activities.



Multiple identities, culture, synergies

Partners reflected on their roles as academic researchers and CSO researchers and the multiple roles they played

The different cultures did not tend to lead to disagreements.



Strengthening and developing networks

For CSOs cooperative research is a way of extending and strengthening their networks.

Relationships formed through the workshops were particularly important.

By working with academics, the CSOs were able to link with the wider academic community and relevant concepts.

Partners have been playing a knowledge-mediator role in their studies

Highlighted the importance of boundary spanners able to cross the boundaries between different communities of practice

Mutual learning



Partners started with a diversity of experience in this type of research.

We discussed methods and experiences with each other. We were learning by doing – learning at the overall project level, within their studies at an individual level and group

**Partners were learning from us and from their networks
Eg. WP2 (FDG): Learning how to work in a team; how to relate to non-specialists; how to develop small scale independent projects; how to deal with the practical difficulties of engaging grounded local community practice-based research**

We initially were learning what we were attempting to do



Good practice

Our experience in CREPE highlights the diversity of research practices and how varied roles and studies can be.

It enables us to say something about good practice, but not best practice

It enables us to make more explicit practices already being carried out and so to focus on how they may be improved in that particular context

It highlighted the need for greater flexibility than would normally be the case to accommodate the particular difficulties that CSOs and researcher face – e.g. to take account of:

- **the heavy demands on peoples time and resources**
- **events beyond partners control;**
- **staff changes, resulting in changes in expertise**

Studies may require a major re-design after they have begun.

Partners valued the experience



“The experience has been very enriching so far and I must say that I was very positively surprised by the good results of the cooperation among partners at different levels and intensities.” (WP 1)

WP4, FRCIVAM, Gilles: “The opportunity to work with formal research helped us achieve a social and thus political recognition that could not have been reached without this support.”

There was a desire among partners and those within their networks to continue relationships built within CREPE



There needs to be some continuity of the partnership. There are still many loose ends, new research questions or questions requiring research in more depth. CSOs have limited capacity to capitalise on the knowledge produced by the overall project in their own work. More time is needed (WP1, TNI).

Thank you for your attention



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