



DYNAVERSITY

Circuitos de Sementes (Portugal)

Case study analysis

DYNAmic seed networks for managing European diversity:
conserving diversity *in situ* in agriculture and in the food chain



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PART 1: DESCRIPTION

1.1 Contextualising the case

In October 2012, following Vandana Shiva's call for seed freedom, the Portuguese association Wakeseed organised a national event on seed saving, thanks to the initiative of two volunteers (Fredereica Teixeira and Pepa Bernardes).

Various people, NGOs and associations present at this event decided to continue their commitment to seeds. They created the "Ofinicas de Recolha e Conservação de Sementes" (Seed rescue and conservation groups), organized at the local level around multiplication and sharing of seeds. The idea of organising local "Circuitos de Sementes" (Seed Circles) was born. Fredereica Teixeira and Pepa Bernardes of the Wakeseed association proposed setting up a national coordination for the "Circuitos de Sementes". This is how the association "Circuitos de Sementes" emerged.

The number of "Circuitos de Sementes" varies from year to year. In 2019, five "Circuitos de Sementes" are active.

It should be noted that the economic situation in Portugal does not facilitate voluntary involvement. In addition, some people involved in the "Circuitos de sementes" emigrate and leave the group.



The founders with Vandana Schiva

1.2 « Doing »

1.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

Seeds are multiplied locally by members. Everyone is responsible for at least one variety. During meetings, members exchange seeds and share the related knowledge with each other. The type of seeds multiplied is described by the association as "traditional and rustic", rooted in local traditions. This implies that they have been cultivated in the territory for at least 10 years. Considered as a precious heritage, their preservation is part of the ensuring food sovereignty.

Each local group is invited to form an "Arca comunitária de sementes", that is a space for the collective storage of seeds.

The idea is to "help maintain as much seed diversity as possible in a decentralized and local way"¹. The use of the term "arca" serves to distinguish it from the term "bank", "gene bank", which is part of a more productivism paradigm.

1.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

Seeds do not move beyond local circles with the exception of national meetings, during which the people exchange seeds in a broader manner.

1.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

Seed dissemination is organized within local groups, where members are considered to be "seed keepers". For members to be a seed keeper is to respect life. For them, seeds are a gift of life. For them, the living cannot be manipulated. Seeds, as a living entity, must be loved, sown and shared. The poem below is at the forefront of the association's website.



"As Sementes são uma Dádiva da Natureza,
Não são invenções nem são coisas,
Devem ser Respeitadas e Honradas,
Não devem ser manipuladas nem patenteadas
Devem ser Semeadas, Amadas e Partilhadas
Tal como a Natureza o faz
As Sementes são Vida."

"Seeds are a Gift from Nature,
They're not inventions, they're not things,
Should be Respected and Honoured,
Should not be manipulated or patented
Must be Sown, Beloved and Shared
Just like Nature does
Seeds are Life"

¹ <https://circulosdesementes.blogspot.com/p/projecto.html>

1.3 « Organizing »

1.3.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

The website states that "a "Círculos de semillas" functions as a meeting of friends, where everyone registers to multiply and save seeds of one or more varieties". Within each group, three rules must be respected:

- All seeds are pooled;
- No seed may be sold; and
- No genetically modified seeds are allowed.

In order to form a local group, it is advisable to be at least a dozen people and to appoint a "dynamizer" (facilitator). This person is responsible for facilitating the organisation of local meetings. He is also asked to share a report with the national network and present photos of the local meetings.

The network has a support team of two volunteers (Frederica Teixeira and Pepa Bernardes), who act as a link between local groups.

1.3.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

The national team responds to external requests, mainly from schools (primary, secondary and university). At the primary school level, through practical (often sensory) activities, children explore the seeds. The animation consists in opening them to the power of life contained in seeds, to their diversity, and to the need to save, transmit and honour them.

On a different level, the coordinators were invited for a workshop at the Art-Based Sustainability Institute in Barcelona for a workshop on the relationship between sustainability sciences and art. During this workshop one of the artists (Ana Castilhos) made a Mandala with seeds. All the people in the workshop shared a moment of gratitude to celebrate the seeds and their lives (see picture below).



Seed mandala by Ana Castilhos

1.3.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

Responsibility is decentralized. Each "Círculos de Sementes" is responsible for the rescue, production and sharing of old and traditional varieties.

Enão se Esqueçam...



Círculos de Sementes circulosdesementes@gmail.com ou 962658017

CUIDAR DAS PESSOAS, CUIDAR DA NATUREZA e PARTILHA JUSTA

"And don't forget...the best banks to invest in are seed banks"

PART 2: ANALYSIS

2.1 Knowing

2.1.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

Knowledge is organized on two scales. First, within local circles, exchanges are mainly oral. Secondly, at the national level, two volunteers (Fredereica Teixeira and Pepa Bernardes) disseminate knowledge about seed production. They are available to members of the network for practical training sessions within their local "Círculos de sementes". The local group just has to cover the travel costs. The role of these two people also consists in spreading an interest in seeds in schools.

2.1.2 Transformative effects beyond initiative

The underlying principle behind all activities is food sovereignty. The association embodies it through tis daily activities rather than theorising or politicising it.

2.2 Framing

2.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

The initiative acts mainly on a local level. The national level exists as a support but does not interfere with local management.

The network is focused on doing, hence on seed production and dissemination. This automatically, even if somewhat

implicitly, gets people involved in policy dimensions. The network doesn't have any advocacy activities, but at the international level, it is linked with other associations such as Seed Freedom, Arche Noah.

2.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

In order to enable anyone to regain autonomy in their seed practices, national coordinators travels at the request of local groups. Practical workshops are also an opportunity for the coordinators to invite people to respect life and nature.

Since its foundation in 2012, the association has carried out about a hundred activities, the main focus of which is seed saving and conservation.

During the national meetings, a larger place is given to the celebration of life in general, and particularly of seeds, through songs and dances.

2.3 Networking

Two elements allow people to network:

- 1) The "Arcas Comunitária de sementes"
- 2) National meetings. At present, however, the lack of funding does not allow the organisation of annual meetings. The coordination is currently looking for financial and material assistance to organize a meeting, but Portugal's economic situation does not offer many opportunities.

PART 3: SUMMARY

Let us note two learnings. First, the association is only composed of volunteers and doesn't have any operating resources, which reduces the impact it can achieve. At the same time, this situation facilitates decentralized autonomous management: the role of the two persons in the national coordination is to support members based on their requests rather than to follow up on them closely.

Secondly, autonomous management makes it possible to develop free management of seeds without any intellectual property rights. Thus, the dissemination of varieties is up to the free choice of each local group.