

DYNIVERSITY

European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity

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

Since 2005, national stakeholders working on cultivated biodiversity (from Spain, France, Italy) have been meeting at the annual European meetings of the Let's Liberate Diversity forum. The first edition of this meeting dates back to 2005 (Poitiers - France). In 2006 it took place in Spain, followed by subsequent editions in Germany (2007), Italy (2008), Austria (2010), Hungary (2011), Scotland (2012) and Switzerland (2013).

In 2012, the organisations involved in this forum decided to set up a European coordination. They called it European Coordination for Let's Liberate Diversity! (EC-LLD, and its general objective is to strengthen the dynamic management of cultivated biodiversity across Europe. The more specific objectives of EC-LLD are:

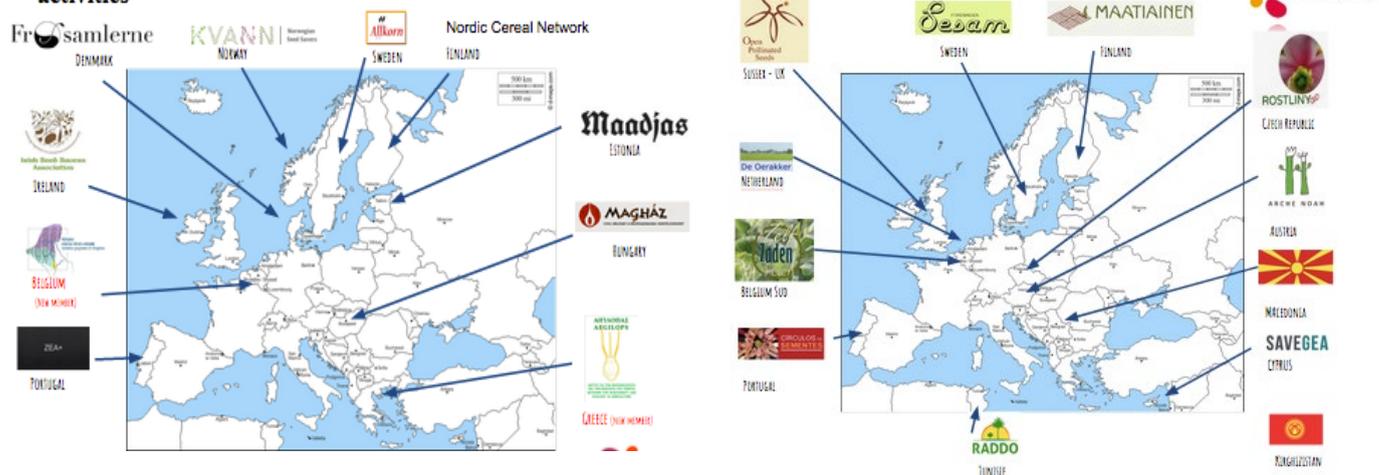
- The promotion and development of farmers' seeds on farms and gardens;
- The exchange and dissemination of knowledge and expertise associated with farmers' seeds, their use, and promotion;
- The collection, translation, and dissemination of existing information;
- Training and stock-taking;
- Experimentation and research; and
- Advocacy for legislative frameworks favourable to farmers' rights as well as gardeners' and small seed companies' rights over agricultural biodiversity

Currently, EC-LLD has 11 members from the following national networks:

- Pro Specie Rara (Switzerland),
- Farmers' Seeds Network (France),
- BEDE (France),
- Red de Semillas "Resembrando e Intercambiando" (Spain),
- Centro Internazionale Crocevia - CIC (Italy),
- Rete Semi Rurali (Italy),
- Dachverband Kulturpflanzen- und Nutztiervielfalt e. V. Dachverband (Germany),
- SEED (Luxemburg),
- Aegilops (Greece); and
- RMRM - Meuse-Rhin-Moselle network (Belgium/Luxembourg/Northern France cross-border network).

For the past 1 or 2 years, other European organisations have become interested in interacting with the ECLLD. The two images below are from the EC-LLD presentation at the annual meeting of the DYNAVERSITY project in December 2018.

LLD 2018 Networks and association interested in EC-LLD activities



This offers potential for ECLLD's further development and outreach; at the same time, it represents a management and inclusion challenge in view of the diversity of its possible new members.

1.2 « Doing »

1.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

Although seed exchanges are organised at LLD / LCD meetings, the European EC-LLD network does not directly deal with seed distribution, but rather ensures circulation of knowledge, know-how, policy developments and financial resources. Within EC-LLD, only GMOs and hybrids are not covered.

1.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

Each national network is free to act in its own way, but issues concerning some partners vs. others are discussed. For example, an issue came up when the Kaol Kozh association (see relevant case study) accepted to be part of Carrefour's "Forbidden Market" campaign, by certifying that the vegetables under that label are made from so-called farmer seeds.

1.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

To share knowledge and mobilize financial resources, EC-LLD strives to create a relationship of trust between partners. This trust implies that there must be an ability of each member to understand how other partners deal with their national issues. Building trust requires an investment in time. One member pointed out that "it takes time to create it. It takes time to maintain it. It is not something that has been won once and for all". To this end, the exchange of knowledge and practices across members remains critical.

1.3 « Organizing »

1.3.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

The network is intended to be a place of mutual sharing of knowledge, a place where members can share the diversity of their positions and experiences. Such a perspective, however, must be lived, not just declared. This investment requires members to take the necessary time to participate in this. EC-LLD has noted through experience that the imposition of a common advocacy in relation to European policies such as those contained in the "Better Regulation" leads to divisions between members as their local roots are not part of the same stories, values, and practices. We return to this point in the next section. Currently, in case of disagreement, EC-LLD either postpones the decision or does not take a common decision on behalf of EC-LLD. This does not prevent some members from pursuing a different path. The main difference concerns collaboration with research institutions and private companies. For example, the case of EC-LLD's involvement in a pre-breeding program with genetic banks does not find a consensus among all members. Referring to the way EC-

LLD operates, one of the members indicated that it is a kind of "gentleman agreement".

In terms of concrete operating mode, the network has an office of 5 people. Annually, the members meet at a general meeting. This multi-day meeting provides an opportunity to discuss in person and do some community-building with one another by spending time together. Usually this meeting takes place before or after a European or national event.

Since 2018, EC-LLD has been supported by an employed coordinator. The network decided that this person should work within a national network, while spending several months within each of the other members. This system has a triple objective:

- 1) Avoid isolating the coordinator;
- 2) Give the coordinator the opportunity to immerse himself in the diversity of the members; and
- 3) Avoid that the coordinator exclusively adopts the vision of the member who hosts him/her.

The coordinator is located in Italy. The financial resources to hire this person come from a European project. EC-LLD has opted for the coordinator to be someone with an agronomist profile and technical and scientific experience as a basis. Technical competence is desired to establish the coordinator's legitimacy towards farmers who are members of national networks. A second criteria considers the age of the person. The European coordination has chosen a young person. This choice, as one member pointed out, is intended to "bring fresh air into the system", that is, to find a person who does not come from the same political struggles as the older members and thereby can provide new insights and perspectives.

1.3.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

To go beyond the interest of those already involved, to strengthen and develop knowledge on cultivated biodiversity, EC-LLD organises national events with a European and international scope. In the genesis of European movements working on cultivated biodiversity, two events bring them together: the "Let's Liberate Diversity" (LLD) and the "Let's Cultivate Diversity" (LCD) meetings. The former concern the construction of common policy positions; the latter concern the exchange of practices.

The first LLD meeting was held in 2005. The first forum of Let's Liberate diversity was organized by the Réseau Semences Paysannes (French Peasants' Seed Network - RSP) and the National Coordination for the Defense of Farm-Saved Seeds (CNDSF) in November 2005 in Poitiers, France. The 150 participants, farmers and associations, have since exchanged on the rights of farmers linked to the production, exchange, and conservation of seeds. The forum was followed by a strategy session on seeds, GMOs, and GMO-free regions in the European Parliament in February 2006¹. Every year the meetings have alternated between the different member countries. The policy issues covered in these meetings were the European Directive on Diversity (2006 in Spain); GMOs (2007 Germany); peasant rights (2008 Italy); the revision of European seed legislation (2010 Austria); Farmers' Rights related to the conservation, sustainable use and development of agricultural biodiversity (2011 Hungary); the celebration of Crofters' Seeds and Breeds and analysis of how these contribute to sustainable land use, agricultural biodiversity, and the high nature value of the crofting counties (2012 Scotland).

In 2013, the meeting took place in Basel (Switzerland). The forum dealt with practices -'from planting to plate'- which contribute to the sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity as outlined in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT PGRFA).² Those involved in the defense of landraces will remember the clash over the political position of EC-LLD on the revision of European seed legislation (called "Better regulation"). Some of the actors present, including Via Campesina and the Réseau Semences Paysannes (RSP), defended a position within a text that was not shared by all of the actors. The French association Kokopelli, at the head of the opposition against the position defended by Via Campesina and the RSP, took the position that they defend free access for all to open-pollinated seeds (see Kokopelli case study). They rejected the proposal to recognize organizations by size of the company (number of employees and turnover), the proposal at hand to revise the legislation.

The tension related to the mode of access (and therefore protection) to landraces. The question was 'what type of right best "protects" while leaving access as open as possible?'. On the one hand, the Réseau Semences Paysannes defended the right of collective use. This notion is more a matter of positioning than a legal element³. This difference in

¹ liberatediversity.org

² liberatediversity.org

³ On the other hand, Kokopelli defends the use of public domain only. Kokopelli proposes to organize the circulation of seeds with "open pollination" only within the public domain through free access for all. Regarding the risk of deception on the goods contained in the bags, Kokopelli recommends the application of consumer law: the requirement that the content must correspond to the indications mentioned on the label. In our opinion, the RSP and Via Campesina are opposed to a total opening to the public domain for two reasons. On the one hand, they fear appropriation by anyone of the

perspective, and the method trying to impose one or the other, has almost defeated the attempt to build a European EC-LLD network. This "clash" illustrated and still demonstrates the difficulties of dialogue between organizations from the peasant world and organizations from the "Seed Savers" networks.

Since 2009, 4 meetings of the "Let's Cultivate Diversity" group have been held. These meetings deal with the exchange of practices concerning both seed production, cultivation and processing. These events take place on farms where collections of landraces and populations are visible. The first meeting was held in June 2009 in France and focused on wheat. The EC-LLD website indicates the participation of more than 150 farmers, bakers and researchers from 19 countries. The second took place 4 years later (June 2013) in Italy and they said the following about this event on their website: "During the three-day [event] over 250 farmers, bakers and researchers from 10 countries shared their knowledge and practices on the processing of cereals. The knowledge of craftsmen bakers and pasta makers in Europe and the Mediterranean were the ingredients of a comparison of recipes for the preparation of bread and pasta. In those days a living field-catalogue with wide range of varieties of cereals - over 150 parcels - was visible, which had been produced with the seed contributed by farmers who participate in the event or in on-farm research programs"⁴.

After Basel, EC-LLD redirected meetings only to "Let's Cultivate Diversity" practices. In 2017, 4 years after the Basel clash, a meeting on practices was organized in Belgium with the specific aim of having farmers and amateur gardeners as a public for the meeting. In parallel to this meeting, a general meeting of EC-LLD was held, which had not happened for several years. The Belgian meeting led to an opening toward the involvement of gardeners in a network which had, until then, been led solely by farmers' organizations. In addition, this meeting marked the relaunching of EC-LLD as a legitimate coordination mechanism.

The opening toward more organizations bringing together "seed savers" and amateur gardeners' organizations to become, together, members of the network, feeds into a discussion and line of questioning within the network. Some members are concerned about this mix, due to the different stakes between professionals and amateurs. Other members are pleased with this openness, although they know that it may change the network. Seed savers do not have the same political culture as the movements resulting from peasant fighting. The next 2019 meeting will take place in Denmark, organized by Seed Savers organizations.

1.3.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

EC-LLD communicates about its work and to each of its members via a website. National members organize and/or participate in public events. The meetings allow interested people to deepen their knowledge. The role of the coordination is more limited to raising funds for the organization of events and giving inputs, rather than to carrying out the events themselves. The diffusion of information about the events is carried out in a partnership with the national actor who organizes the event. That said, the recently hired coordinator is mobilizing to promote the sharing of experiences and announcements of training events throughout the year and is setting up a newsletter.

PART 2: ANALYSIS

2.1 Knowing

2.1.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

The "Let's Cultivate Diversity" practical meetings aim to share and co-construct practical and theoretical knowledge on varieties, while creating links between people involved in cultivated biodiversity. During these meetings, practitioners (farmers and gardeners) and researchers engage in co-constructing knowledge from scientific and "lay" or practitioners' standpoints.

EC-LLD wants to be a platform for diversity, including diversity of points of view. his position is easier to follow at the level of multiplication/selection practices than at the level of political orientations. The Basel event (2014) taught those involved about the difficulty of building a common position when one party wants to impose its point of view on the others. Achieving a common culture has become a focus for EC-LLD; creating a culture where members can agree that

varieties available in the public domain and the result of selection work. On the other hand, they seek legal recognition. However, the public domain does not offer the possibility of registering a specific right for this type of variety or for the practices that come with it. This tension reflects two postures that we describe as "protectionism" (at the risk of exclusion) and "liberalism" (at the risk of appropriation). The other organizations present were in one or the other position.

⁴ liberatediversity.org

they do not agree among themselves. This construction requires trust that is built from time spent together and on difficulties faced together.

2.1.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

The construction of the European network feeds the legitimacy of opening a legal space for population varieties reproduced on the farm. EC-LLD feeds the debate on the basis of members' practices. Coordination is needed to ensure that the voices of practitioners are heard as one of the biggest challenges is the recognition of varietal and social diversity.

Thus, through the "Let's Liberate Diversity" (LLD) and "Let's Cultivate Diversity" (LCD) meetings, coordination is based on the national and local dynamics of the country where the meeting is taking place. For example, in Belgium (2017) the meeting attracted people from the region interested in seed issues. The regional organizers at a specific time of the meeting brought together different people who wanted to act at a cross-border level (between the countries of Belgium, Luxembourg, northern France, Germany, and the Netherlands). This coordination made it possible to strengthen the network of the Meuse-Rhine-Mosel territory. Another way to legitimize seed issues is in this way, where the EC-LLD participates in projects (including DYNAVERSITY) that allow it to strengthen its network and provide the means to coordinate events and facilitate meetings between members.

2.1.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

We did not identify any specific transformation beyond the initiative. Since the exchanges of knowledge at the coordination level are intended to take place within each member organization, these transformations are more likely to be perceived at the level of national networks and their members than at the level of the European coordination. On the other hand, the evolution of EC-LLD led us to point out that an internal change would concern opening to more participation by "seed savers" (alongside farmers' organizations). Farmers' organizations (Réseau Semences Paysannes in France and Rete Semi Rurali in Italy) organized the first two meetings and while the third meeting included gardeners among the 150 people in Belgium on 23 and 24 June 2017, the fourth meeting will take place in June 2019 in Denmark and hopes to include many more types of participants besides traditional farmers.

2.2 Framing

2.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

EC-LLD comes from national organizations that share the need to "coordinate the **positions** and **actions** of national networks and other members to encourage, develop, and promote the dynamic **management** of **biodiversity** on-farm and in gardens".

2.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

EC-LLD relays national events on its website.

2.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

EC-LLD highlights at a European-wide level that seeds are not only 'reproductive material'. Among the two collective meetings organized by ECLLD, "Let's Liberate Diversity" (LLD) shows the difficulties related to the acceptance or not of legislation around landraces. EC-LLD finds that it is helpful to reach some level of consensus to exchange experiences and practices. During the exchange, the actors can present and acknowledge their differences, while feeding each other elements for further discussion.

Aware of the importance to allow for different points of view to be expressed, EC-LLD looks for forms of dialogue in these meetings and beyond. The discussion between members helps in defining the involvement and limitations of what is being done on behalf of EC-LLD. Thus, each decision that involves EC-LLD in a project must be discussed with each of the member organizations. Even if EC-LLD is not involved in a project, all members learn from each other through discussion. This is how trust is built on a case-by-case basis.

Therefore, we can say that seeds lead this organization to seek democratic forms capable of hearing and recognizing the diversity of points of view. So, if EC-LLD does not get involved in a project, it ensures that different partners remain free to get involved if they want to.

EC-LLD was reframed following the Basel clash and they have taken it upon themselves to try to bridge political differences between actors. Thus, EC-LLD is moving towards strengthening meetings around and in the fields. The

meeting itself then seems to turn to practices. EC-LLD is therefore focusing on the establishment of "Let's Cultivate Diversity" (LCD) meetings.

2.3 Networking

Within EC-LLD, we identify three elements that facilitate collaboration. First, the network is based on the exchange of practices among members. Even if members are bound by the same European legislation, the way in which each of the Member States of the European Union implements this legislation differs. Thus, by way of illustration, the French are surprised when a representative of the Belgian administration underlines his role as an advisor and not as someone sanctioning seed companies. Supporting the organization of meetings, "Let's Cultivate Diversity" gives participants involved in a national EC-LLD member organization the opportunity to learn with other practitioners. This also allows them to perceive differences and similarities between countries and crops. For EC-LLD, there is now a priority to exchange practices. However, this orientation involves two difficulties that we were able to learn about during discussions with each other. On the one hand, this requires a balance between different types of crops to be addressed, in particular between cereals and vegetables. On the other hand, some organizations find it more difficult than others to mobilize practitioners - professionals or gardeners - to travel and participate in meetings.

A second point concerns the sharing of convivial moments. During these meetings, people share not only in the workshops but also in informal meetings and festive moments.

Finally, the continuous development of a common culture becomes an essential part of the functioning of EC-LLD. This culture is about how to engage in dialogue between partners. The network seeks to find out how, in addition to finding points of convergence, agreement can be reached, and points of divergence respected. We could say that a culture of solidarity is born by understanding the situation in which the other finds himself.

PART 3: SUMMARY

The development of EC-LLDs and the difficulty of building a policy dialogue between members, contributes, throughout the EC-LLD trajectory, to the building of a common culture. We highlight three essential points in relation to this.

First, EC-LLD, in order to bring together differences without overwhelming them, is evolving from defining policy lines to discussing practices. These practices, which are deeply political, stimulate exchanges on how to do things instead of over values debates. All members are keen to defend and spread the biodiversity cultivated by mass selection. This work reinforces the legitimacy of the practice and the diversity of practitioners.

Second, diversity is not just about plants or practices. It also concerns national situations and the ways of acting in response to them. EC-LLD has not formalized its operating mode, but the coordination has a kind of "gentleman agreement" that provides guidance as to how to work together. This consists of trying to understand the other's point of view, even if it is not shared. Decisions about a particular issue then go back and forth between the national and European levels in order to reach a group consented upon decision for any particular issue. These exchanges allow for greater reflection within each organization as well. A blockage by any one of the members, however, creates a risk. Thus, the EC-LLD experiments with diversity, looks for consensus, but does not block any of the efforts of organizations within it.

Finally, the third element concerns the opening of EC-LLDs to seed savers. For historical organizations, this means opening up to the inclusion of partners which have not taken part in typical peasant struggles. Seed savers are inspired by a culture of open access and open circulation. As such, the American cases, and more particularly the Seed Savers Exchange, show us how open sharing is central. Moreover, this organization is an international reference in this field. We cannot yet say how EC-LLD members will manage this difference, how they will open or not the governance of EC-LLD.