

«Agroecology is a way of life!»

Insights from the first local stakeholder workshop in the Spanish case study of the MASURE project

Under the question «Can the Alt Penedès County be a flagship in the transition towards agroecology?», we successfully held our first participatory stakeholder workshop last week in our Spanish case study in Catalonia (Alt Penedès region).



In the town of Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, about 40 minutes by train from Barcelona, we were pleased to welcome 15 regional stakeholders from the farming community, farmers' organisations and the local administration, last Thursday afternoon, November 17th. In a lively exchange, we discussed potentials and challenges of an agroecological transition of the region, which is already a pioneer in organic viticulture.

Along the following three questions, participants shared their experiences and knowledge:

- What do you understand by agroecology and what role can the Alt Penedès play in promoting agroecology in Catalonia?
- To what extent can agroecology contribute to improving economic performance and quality of life?
- To what extent can agroecology contribute to improving the ecosystem services provided by agriculture in the Alt Penedès?

The exchange was very fruitful for everyone since, even many share the same territory, guests provided different perspectives on regional dynamics and experiences with business and farming models.

A first insight into the results of the workshop shows that even though the term agroecology is often not actively used, the participants have a very differentiated view on agroecology and its possible benefits.

Accordingly, agroecology encompasses different characteristics that can be divided into an ecological and a socio-economic dimension.

From an ecological point of view, it implies applying concrete practices in the field that help to increase (1) water retention capacity, (2) improvement of soil conditions and reduced erosion, as well as (3) presence of micro biota in the soil.

To achieve this, agroecology advocates for (1) improved efficiency of field treatments, (2) diversification of production, (3) limiting/eliminating external inputs, (4) applying alternative pest management methods and (5) including integrated agroforestry management.

From a socio-economic point of view, stakeholders defined agroecology as a model that puts people at the centre of the agri-food system and is therefore perceived as a «way of life». The latter involves valuing those who work the land, both symbolically and economically, for instance through the payment of fair prices. It was also associated with a model of proximity production and marketing that implies a more direct relationship with consumers.

However, during the discussion many challenges for the promotion of agroecology in the region came up, which we now will analyse in more depth.

Our aim is to continue our participatory work with local stakeholders and to develop a strategy paper (in the form of a «decatalogue») containing concrete demands and proposals from the region for the promotion of agroecology at the territorial level.

Stay up to date on our work within the MA4SURE project and the stakeholder engagement activities we are carrying out. We will publish news here in the coming months.