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# A PARADIGM SHIFT

## *A new paradigm is called for after one century of standardisation in the agro-food system*

“From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems” is the title of the report of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems (IPSFood 2016). DIVERSIFOOD witnesses experiences from the ground to design more precisely this paradigm shift and to provide elements to involve a large community - from research to market - in redefining food chain organisations based on a holistic knowledge of living processes involved in resilience.

### *Diversity and living processes*

Uniformity invading all levels of modern societies has covered the overall food production and has broken the intrinsic link of agriculture with the living systems. At the other end of the food chain, most of consumers have no more idea of the farming realities, of the needs of their own body and of the quality of their food.

DIVERSIFOOD is deeply influenced by the messages of pioneers of organic agriculture as Howard (An agricultural testament, 1943) who pointed out the close connexions between health of soil, plants, animals and humans, meaning all living beings are interdependent. According to this vision, alternative food systems should be conceived through the holistic approach. Indeed, the new paradigm addresses all the practices from farming to food processing, distribution and consumption.



and collective approaches, and explores the conditions to create sustainable local markets able to appreciate diverse products.

### AT FIRST GLANCE

A paradigm shift refers to a radical change in beliefs or theory. DIVERSIFOOD has established diversity as the foundation of resilient food systems working with the hypothesis “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”.

Embedding crop diversity and networking for local high quality food systems



### ***Widespread diversity for a full resilience***

DIVERSIFOOD has established all its actions and studies within this "life-oriented" paradigm to boost diversity at all levels, exploring crop and food system diversity, considering different sources of knowledge equally and sharing them, integrating objectives for environmental and social sustainability within a holistic perspective. Alternative and resilient food systems should cover at the same time food production through sustainable systems, and local and global conditions of food democracy and community involvement in biodiversity management (Booklet 9 key concepts).

### ***A research commitment to a life-oriented approach***

In a perspective putting LIFE - all living systems in all their manifestations - first, DIVERSIFOOD has promoted collaborative, participative and multi-actor research and had adopted trans-disciplinarity. Whilst the formal seed sector have stored the living diversity from landraces as genetic resources in genebanks for one century, DIVERSIFOOD has brought to light the neglected diversity of several underutilised and forgotten species (IF #4) and has evaluated it within networks of farmers in different agro-ecosystems in Europe. DIVERSIFOOD has tested new breeding strategies (IF #2 and 11) with farmers to renew and increase cultivated diversity. DIVERSIFOOD has described and created links between Community Seed Banks in Europe (IF #1), shedding light on these informal seed systems that manage their seeds following common objectives based on shared values, knowledge and collective rules, developing awareness and a specific identity. DIVERSIFOOD has explored the multi-dimensional aspects associated with diverse food marketing approaches, and studied consumers' behaviours about diversity, labelling concepts (IF #8) and new local markets with diversified products.

### ***Promoting diversity to promote the harmonic reorganisation around life values***

The fact that the choice of seed determines farming practices and then all the steps of the food chain until the plate of the consumers, reinforces the initial idea of DIVERSIFOOD: "to provide an alternative food culture". The scientific hypotheses, mainly based on genetics for modern plant breeding, are completely revisited and enlarged when we breed for resilience and adaptation of social-ecological systems. As Howard observed, in organic farming all living beings are linked and evolving together: plant populations bred and multiplied on farm allow an authentic organic agriculture to progress toward resilience. Meanwhile, diversified food should stimulate a renewal of food culture, providing an alternative to the standardizing trend of the dominant food supply, helping citizens to connect their existence and wellbeing with the health of the planet.

### ***Renewing organic foundations to redesign our future***

Adopting a life-oriented paradigm is instrumental also to renew the current foundations of organics. The word "life" is the cornerstone of the paradigm shift, as it is for the organic movements. This qualitative paradigm shift could help to promote a radical redefinition of the dominant socio-technical systems in which they operate. All this seems to show a significant potential for a renewed, sustainable co-evolution of socio-economic and ecological systems.

### ***Suggested readings***

IPES-Food, 2016. *From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems*. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems. 96 pages. [www.ipes-food.org](http://www.ipes-food.org).

*This Innovation Factsheet is the result of the collective work of DIVERSIFOOD partners, coordinated by Véronique Chable (INRA) with the support of Adanella Rossi (UNIPI), Edwin Nuijten (LBI), Frederic Rey (ITAB), Riccardo Bocci (RSR) and Tina Kovács (ÖMKI).*