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# 1 Agroecology as farmers' situated ways of 2 acting: a conceptual framework

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## 13 14 Abstract

15 The limits of numerous agricultural systems developed on principles set after the Second World War  
16 are increasingly highlighted. Meanwhile, agricultural and food systems associated with agroecological  
17 principles are progressively institutionalized in various countries. Whereas a dominant research  
18 production by agronomists consists in deduction of "agroecological practices" from fundamental  
19 agroecological principles, a gap remains between those principles and the specific management  
20 actions on farms that allow to build new agroecological framing systems. In this study, we stem from  
21 an analysis of management actions in 8 different case studies corresponding to farmers' collectives  
22 engaged in an evolution of their practices towards agroecology. We review the agroecological scientific  
23 literature in order to identify shared principles and system properties deduced from them, that we  
24 iteratively compared to the practices implemented by farmers, making the transition in our case  
25 studies. Our proposal is then to describe agroecology "in the making" as 4 interconnected *ways of*  
26 *acting*, each corresponding to specific relations between management actions and the systems'  
27 properties. Lastly, the analysis of agroecology from the actors' management practices allows us to  
28 support a new viewpoint about a research agenda for agronomists, giving reflexive benchmarks to  
29 relocate research activities within the institutionalization dynamics of agroecology.

30 Keywords: agroecology, management, transition, practices, principles, ways of acting.

## 31 1. Introduction

32 The dominant agricultural systems developed after the Second World War no longer allow them to  
33 fulfil the goals that were set for them at the time, in particular their environmental and social goals. In  
34 various countries across the world, one of the possible orientations for the sustainable development  
35 of agricultural and food systems is now considered to be agroecology – which implicitly challenges  
36 current agricultural paradigms and the management systems underpinned by them (Hubert, 2012).  
37 The conditions of the implementation of agroecology still remain to be defined, however, especially  
38 since the emergence, institutionalization (Lamine et al. 2012), and practices related to ecological forms  
39 of agriculture differ from country to country (Wezel *et al.*, 2009), as do the different models (e.g.  
40 ecological intensification, eco-agriculture, diversified systems, biodiversity-based agriculture,  
41 agroecology(Tittonell 2014)).

42 Yet consensus does seem to be emerging around the fact that sustainable agroecosystems, as  
43 opposed to conventional farming systems relying on the use of synthetic inputs, are grounded on the  
44 maintenance and strengthening of biological regulation and ecological interactions (Gliessman 2005).  
45 For example, the literature describes a number of general principles<sup>1</sup> on which it is claimed to be based,  
46 such as strengthening the natural control of biological pests, making use of regulation systems  
47 (nutrient cycles, water, etc.), promoting agro-biodiversity, and so on. Given their diversity, these  
48 principles result in partial consensus on the agricultural practices stemming from them (e.g. Altieri  
49 1999; Dumont et al. 2013; Wezel et al. 2014; Duru et al. 2015; Nicholls and Altieri 2016) and the  
50 properties<sup>2</sup> of the systems managed. Properties such as elasticity, resilience, robustness, flexibility, and  
51 adaptability are contrasted with the efficiency, constancy, and predictability of more conventional  
52 systems (Milestad et al. 2012). Lastly, while Duru et al. (2015) argue that the implementation of  
53 agroecology “relies on agroecological principles that have to be adapted to problems and places”,  
54 these specific principles and properties are rarely described in such a way that they provide concrete  
55 benchmarks for the practice. Yet, the management of agroecological farming systems<sup>3</sup> appears to be

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<sup>1</sup> Here, the term "principle" is used in the sense of a general proposition from which the reasoning for the management of the agro-ecosystem is derived.

<sup>2</sup> A "property of the managed system" is a distinctive attribute of the system that we can relate to the ways of acting of nature or mankind. These properties are a set of phenomena and attributes which are specific to a particular system that can determine how it reacts under specific conditions.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, we use the term “agroecological farming system” to refer theoretical developments that intended to integrate technical and ecological aspects with the human dimension (e.g. “livestock farming systems”; Gibon et al. 1996). In line with Darnhofer et al. (2012), what we call “agroecological farming system”

56 marking a significant departure from that of conventional systems. Standard descriptions of  
57 “agroecological practices” (e.g. Wezel et al. 2014) contribute nothing to establishing this link between  
58 principles and ways of constructing new agroecological farming systems.

59 Many studies on the implementation of agroecological farming systems show that the practices and  
60 approaches in these systems are very different from those of the farming systems developed during  
61 agricultural modernization (Boiffin et al. 2013; Girard et al. 2015; Coquil et al. 2017). The optimization  
62 extolled by this modernization, with the condition of eliminating chance and uncertainty, leads to the  
63 definition of systems management strategies that aim to control biophysical processes and to limit  
64 disturbances in order to obtain the maximum productivity permitted by the genetic potential. Farmers  
65 therefore have to apply the technical itineraries derived from these strategies, which are seen as  
66 “methods” to achieve set goals, and must apply practices pertaining to “increasing levels of top-down,  
67 command-and-control management to natural resources” (Holling and Meffe 1996).

68 Agroecological management of systems undermine this idea that is primarily planned and partially  
69 disconnected from local conditions and from the uncertainty that farmers face. “Strategic planning”  
70 appears to be based mainly on predicting the future states of the system and the ordering of actions  
71 in a plan (Thévenot 2006). It meets its limits in designing and managing agroecological farming systems,  
72 as it does in the corporate world where it leads to traps and mistakes, and particularly “*the illusion of*  
73 *control*”, the formalization of general programmes, the assumption of the predetermination of  
74 context, and the detachment of thought from action (Mintzberg 2000). Agroecology, by contrast,  
75 implies recognition that agroecosystems cannot be entirely controlled, and that the results of technical  
76 actions cannot always be known (Berthet *et al.*, 2015). Some authors therefore propose to study the  
77 resources and means allowing farmers to retain a capacity for adaptation and flexibility, for instance  
78 through their learning processes (Coquil et al. 2014; Chantre and Cardona 2014; Cristofari et al. 2018).

79 A gap nevertheless remains to be bridged between the design of agroecological farming systems on  
80 the basis of agroecological principles, and the analysis of specific systems practices showing a low  
81 degree of artificialization (Toledo et al. 2003; Altieri 2009; Malézieux 2012; Girard et al. 2015). Setting  
82 general principles for the operation of agroecological farming systems while granting a central place  
83 to adapted and local practices within it puts agroecology at risk of a divide between aspects pertaining  
84 to generic scientific knowledge and always-specific ways of doing things from which no lessons can be  
85 learned. While agroecology calls for a process of relocalization of knowledge production (Warner

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“include material objects (e.g. soils, plants, animals, buildings) as well as subjective perceptions, values and preferences, i.e. how farmers ‘make sense’ of their practices”, and situates the farm “in a territory, a locale, a region, with its specific agroecological setting, economic opportunities and cultural values”.

86 2008), the question remains of how to produce generic knowledge from agroecological practices  
87 embedded in context (Lyon et al. 2011). In the lines of Bell and Bellon (2018), we assume that  
88 agroecology entails contextual thinking, encompassing “*trying to do different things in different places*”  
89 as well as “*doing different things in the same place*”. However, although these authors suggest to  
90 “*focus not on agroecological systems but agroecological principles that have general relevance but not*  
91 *universal outcomes*”, the literature rarely studies what is contextual farming (Lyon et al. 2011). As a  
92 result, the distance between agroecological principles that aim to support the expected properties of  
93 agroecological farming systems, and contextual agroecological management, appear to be under-  
94 investigated.

95 Faced with the challenges of re-conceptualizing agroecology in action, the aim of this article is to  
96 propose a conceptual framework that theorizes the links between the principles put forward by the  
97 agroecology (AE) literature, the properties of agroecosystems, and the ways of acting on  
98 agroecosystems. In particular, this framework is based on the assumption that agroecology in action  
99 should be viewed as specific ways of acting. Grounded on a large number of case studies of AE practices  
100 (N=8), our conceptual framework represents AE in action as the combination of 4 dimensions of “ways  
101 of acting” related to 10 properties of agroecological farming systems. We show how it enables  
102 identifying knowledge gaps and builds a new agenda for research, aimed at understanding and  
103 contributing to AE implementation in the field. Figure 1 summarizes our approach, which we will detail  
104 in the respective sections of this paper.

105 In the following section we present the theoretical foundations on the basis of which we examine  
106 both the properties of agroecological farming systems and the agroecological actions in these systems.  
107 We thus propose an organized interpretation of the properties of agroecological farming systems along  
108 with a conceptual framework that allows us to study the links between these properties and ways of  
109 acting (Figure 1, stage 1) (agroecological actions). In the third section we detail our approach as well  
110 as the different case studies used. In the fourth section we present the results of our analysis, that is,  
111 the combinations found between the properties of agroecological farming systems and what we call  
112 “ways of acting” in agroecology (Figure 1, stage 2). Finally, in the last section, we discuss how this  
113 review of agroecology in action leads us to reconsider the knowledge to be produced, as well as the  
114 tools and forms of support (Figure 1, stage 3).

## 115 **2. Theoretical background: agroecology as specific combinations of** 116 **system properties and ways of acting**

117 Our conceptual proposal therefore aims to associate the expected properties of agroecosystems  
118 with the particularities of “agroecological management”. We start by summarizing the former, which

119 are barely described in the literature, and continue by arguing for the change of standpoint that the  
120 management of agroecological farming systems implies.

121 First we carried out a scientific literature review focused on agroecology operating principles,  
122 regardless of whether these principles were clearly stated by the authors (Dumont et al. 2013;  
123 Bonaudo et al. 2014; Girard et al. 2015) or were implicit in redefinitions of human-nature relations, in  
124 the research field of the sustainability of agricultural systems (Lemery et al. 2005; Dedieu and Ingrand  
125 2010; Biggs et al. 2012). We then analysed eight case studies (both published and unpublished) based  
126 on interviews with farmers who claimed to act in favour of the agroecological transition or were  
127 detected by experts (local advisors, agronomists from research in agroecology related subjects) as  
128 using practices associated with agroecology in order to identify concrete management actions for  
129 agroecological farming systems (Figure 2 and Table 2). Our approach consisted in using an analysis grid  
130 to cross-reference the agroecological principles resulting from our bibliography with the design and  
131 management actions resulting from our case studies. This iterative process allowed us to illustrate,  
132 complete, and revise the properties suggested in the literature in order to identify a homogenous  
133 series of agroecological farming systems' properties in relation with agroecological management  
134 actions (Figure 2).

135

## 136 2.1. Agroecological principles and agroecological farming systems properties: A brief review

137

138 Autonomy is a dominant principal in the agroecological literature. It concerns both the ability to  
139 maintain one's own production resources, and to use existing resources for production processes. The  
140 principles related to it therefore concern diversity, complementarity, and exchanges between  
141 components of the agroecosystem.

142 Diversity is thus seen as the "ability of ecologically intensive farming to provide ecosystem services  
143 of support and regulation" (Tittonell 2014). Duru *et al.* (2015) mention three levels: planned diversity  
144 (i.e. crop sequences, intercropping, mixtures of species and varieties), associated diversity (i.e.  
145 corresponding to semi-natural elements on the farm), and diversity at the landscape scale. Diversity is  
146 the preferred way of optimizing resource use: Altieri and Toledo (2005) insist on the effects of  
147 facilitation between plants that have a different impact on the environment and the complementarity  
148 of the resources used.

149 This diversity approach contributes to a specific property of agroecological systems, namely the fact  
150 of being anchored within an ecosystem and a local agronomic and socio-economic landscape: the  
151 "locally-based" property (N°1 in Tab. 1). For example, Marsden (2012) speaks of an approach "which  
152 replaces, and indeed relocates, agriculture and its policies at the heart of regional and local systems of

153 ecological, economic and community development”. This has already been stressed by Loucks (1977;  
154 cited by Gliessman 2013), who insisted on the need for an agroecosystem approach for not only  
155 improving yield performance, but also determining the long-term stability of such yield improvements  
156 and their impacts on ecosystems in the broader landscape in which the agroecosystems were located.

157 Recycling is also a very common principle in theoretical research on agroecological farming systems  
158 (Altieri and Toledo 2005; Wezel and Peeters 2014; Tittonell 2014). Tomich et al. (2011) directly relate  
159 this principle to that of diversity, insisting on the fact that diversifying crop sequences allows the  
160 biological activity of soil to be maintained and to thrive, and facilitates the efficient recycling of  
161 nutrients. Bonaudo et al. (2014) associate this recycling principle with the goals of “clos[ing] the energy  
162 and material cycles; i.e. minim[izing] losses and external inputs, and substitut[ing] chemical inputs with  
163 natural inputs” and “optimiz[ing] the nutrient availability for crops and animals. Nutrient availability is  
164 more often a question of temporal settlement [...]”. Biggs et al. (2012) relate this to the management  
165 of “slow variables”, that is, variables which determine the structure of systems, as opposed to fast  
166 variables, the interactions and regulations of which induce systems dynamics and respond to the  
167 conditions created by slow variables. The physico-chemical composition of the soil is an example of a  
168 slow variable.

169 In the latter case, the properties targeted for agroecological farming systems are specifically  
170 “optimizing resource recycling and availability” (N°6, Table 1) and “maximizing ecological or  
171 production-based interactions” (N°8, Table 1).

172 The ability to adapt to chance and uncertainty (and the related properties of resilience, flexibility,  
173 robustness, and elasticity (Darnhofer et al. 2010; David et al. 2010; Sauvant et al. 2010) is a key  
174 principle in many texts on agroecology positioning. It comes in multiple versions, with specific levers,  
175 in contrast with the efficiency and assurance that constitute the basis of modernized systems.  
176 According to several authors (Dedieu and Ingrand 2010; Lin 2011; Milestad et al. 2012; Dedieu et al.  
177 2013; Darnhofer 2014)), the adaptation capacity of systems is based on three principles:

178  
179 a) a “buffer capacity” of the system, which could be said to be based on retaining room to  
180 manoeuvre. This idea manifests itself from the point of view of: i) the mobilization of production  
181 resources (e.g. keeping room to manoeuvre in the adjustment between animal needs and the offering  
182 of resources via a moderate animal load); and ii) the intensity of biological functions by remaining  
183 below the maximum expression of genetic potential (for example, limiting dairy production levels in  
184 order to limit sensitivity to diseases such as mastitis in dairy cattle, or accepting early nitrogen  
185 deficiencies for wheat which do not have a harmful effect on the production of seeds (Ravier et al.  
186 2017). Therefore, the systems properties related to this first principle are to be “balanced (regarding

187 needs-production adequacy” (N°3, Table 1), to be under genetic potential for production (N°4, Table  
188 1), and to be variable regarding the quality of productions (N°9, Table 1).

189

190 b) a system that stimulates the regulation between its different components in order to operate  
191 within an uncertain environment. Diversity is probably the most often-mentioned principle in the  
192 literature. It has two variants: one emphasizes the production of ecosystem services (see below), while  
193 the other stresses diversity as a means to reduce the vulnerability of agricultural systems. In particular,  
194 it specifies that it can provide *functional redundancy* (e.g. Gliessman 1998; Biggs et al. 2012; Nicholls  
195 and Altieri 2016) that is beneficial for flexibility (Chia and Marchesnay 2008). Altieri *et al.* (2015) detail  
196 the difference between functional diversity (“the variety of organisms and the ecosystem services they  
197 provide for the system to continue performing”) and the diversity of responses (“the diversity of  
198 responses to environmental change among species that contribute to the same ecosystem function”).  
199 It is thus accepted that the final performance is a result of the actions and reactions of varied  
200 components, and hence that the states of the system also vary widely, although *within controllable*  
201 *limits*. A more direct link with agricultural practices appears in Bonaudo *et al.* (2014), who associate  
202 this diversity with the heterogeneity of forms of land occupation and biotic and abiotic components;  
203 and in Dumont et al. (2013), in the form of the inter-specific diversity of farms, and intra-population  
204 and intra-herd genetic diversity (Ratnadass et al. 2012; Ollion et al. 2016).

205 Another principle that is often related to the previous two is that of “regulation” and  
206 interconnection. Nicholls and Altieri (2016) highlight the maintenance of connectivity or interactions  
207 based on production factors, such as those resulting from the integration of animal and plant  
208 components at a mixed crop-livestock farming operation (Bonaudo et al. 2014), as well as on the scales  
209 of the landscape and semi-natural elements. Connectivity is defined by Biggs et al. (2012) as the “way  
210 and degree to which resources, species, or social actors disperse, migrate, or interact across ecological  
211 and social landscapes”, which includes interactions between species, and corridors between different  
212 habitats. In livestock farming, the connectivity between the production cycles of paddocks enabled by  
213 the organization of multiple staggered reproduction intervals during the year, and reform rules  
214 authorizing reproduction failures and changes of paddocks for infertile animals, creates a diversity of  
215 production areas favourable to adaptation to unforeseen events (Cournut and Dedieu 2004; Tichit et  
216 al. 2004). Implementing and maintaining these regulations and interactions implies taking the  
217 properties of *integration into the non-cultivated environment* into account in the design of systems,  
218 and therefore also taking the “Integration of cultivated and non-cultivated diversity” (N°2, Table 1) into  
219 account, as well as basing production processes on elements of the local ecosystem.

220



221 c) a systems that behaves in an adaptive manner, in other words “the ability of a system to adjust  
222 in the face of changing external drivers and internal processes, thereby allowing for development while  
223 staying within the current regime”; and a transformative manner, that is, “the ability to implement  
224 radical changes” (Darnhofer, 2014). This concerns humans and the actions that they undertake within  
225 the production system. It therefore corresponds to an ability to question their practices or even their  
226 production project (what zoologists define as the type of animal product, its quality features, and  
227 expected delivery periods, for example). According to conventional reasoning, defining the production  
228 project comes first: everything else follows (practices, the crop sequences, etc.). In agroecological  
229 reasoning, it is necessary for the types of products expected and their quality to be called into question,  
230 depending on the conditions of the moment (Williams 2011; Milestad et al. 2012; Girard 2014). This  
231 implies the adequate capacity and room to manoeuvre, to react and to modify how a project is related  
232 to the stages of its implementation(Toffolini et al. 2016).

233 This adaptive and transformative behaviour also concerns the ability of the other components of  
234 the agroecosystem to adjust. For example, in livestock farming, the ability to maintain health and  
235 production in a fluctuating environment may be an objective of selection (Knap 2005; Phocas et al.  
236 2014; Ollion et al. 2016).

237

238 These overarching principles originating directly in the literature lead us to consider the properties  
239 of certain agroecological farming systems mentioned by the authors. Here, we group them together in  
240 a homogenous list (Table 1), the categories of which we organize in light of the different case studies  
241 that will be presented subsequently.

242

243 The homogeneous whole thus constructed shows how general principles can be manifest through  
244 different properties of managed systems. Identifying them is not intended to establish them as  
245 prerequisites or necessary characteristics in order for a production system to be labelled as  
246 agroecological, but rather forms a basis for better understanding how, beyond general principles and  
247 those of these properties, it is a multitude of localized forms of action that make up forms of  
248 agroecology “in action”. Combining these agroecological actions with the properties of the systems  
249 managed is the main aim of this article, through the definition of “ways of acting”, specifically to move  
250 beyond the proposals of simply “farming without a recipe” (Lyon et al. 2011). For example, diversity is  
251 a principle that is directly related to multiple properties: functional redundancy, optimizing resource  
252 recycling and availability, maximizing ecological or production-based interactions, and the variable  
253 quality of production. Nonetheless, the way of managing diversity is specific to each farmer insofar as  
254 it involves locally adapted elementary actions with varying attention to different properties, depending

255 on the farmer's context and goals. These properties therefore transform the principle of the  
256 "maximization" of diversity into forms of action that allow one to directly orient the management of  
257 the system in a way that is adapted to the context.

258

259 2.2. Actions that target the described agroecological farming systems properties

260 2.2.1. "Ways of acting"

261 Agroecological management of agroecosystems leads to a different way of seeing the interactions  
262 between a farmer and his/her context, or more precisely the "situation" in the sense of Dewey, that is  
263 all the moments during which the interaction between a human being and his environment takes place  
264 in the form of a reciprocal action. In contrast with the instrumentalization of nature and the  
265 environment to the benefit of agricultural production, in this vision nature is considered an actor, with  
266 which human action must come to terms by adapting to situations. Conceiving of an agroecological  
267 approach therefore means conceiving of the ways in which the actions or dynamics specific to nature  
268 are combined with the human management of these systems. Accordingly, we analyse how  
269 agroecological farming systems' properties and ways of acting are combined, basing our work on  
270 approaches that theorize farmers' relationships with situations, in their management actions.

271 To express the idea that farmers are engaged in the world, we employed the notion of "way of being  
272 in the world", from Merleau-Ponty (1945). This notion emphasises the importance of the sensory  
273 relationship to the world, and the fact of no longer exclusively considering action as the result of purely  
274 cognitive processes. Our proposal is therefore to describe different "ways of acting" in order to  
275 formalize the different concrete registers of this "situated action" (Suchman 1993). From this point of  
276 view, the success of the action depends on the actors' ability to adjust their behaviour to the  
277 parameters of the situation, in which case plans – i.e. pre-existing representations or prescriptions –  
278 would be no more than one of the resources mobilized during a situated action (Suchman 1993).  
279 Therefore, we suggest focusing our attention on the way farmers *experience* the world, which, in the  
280 sense of the pragmatist philosophy, refers on a tension between "doing" and "suffering". We believe  
281 that this experience help them to develop a form of "vigilance" (Chateauraynaud 2011) of the situation  
282 : in other words, attention to the potentialities of the environment, based on sensory experiences  
283 which enable attention to details that are overlooked by prescriptive and ready-made solutions.  
284 Beyond a strategic plan to guide actions toward a fixed goal upstream, this vigilance would be  
285 accompanied by the construction of the meaning of the action as it takes place (Journé and Raulet-  
286 Croset 2008) and by a continuum between the ends and the means (Dewey 1929). This vigilance must  
287 enable farmers to develop a sort of "familiarity" with their situation, in other words, for them to be

288 comfortable with the adjustments to people and things required by their actions (Thévenot 2006), or  
289 more specifically, with “ecological embeddedness” (Whiteman and Cooper 2000).

290

291 2.2.2. Our conceptual framework

292 On this basis, our proposal consists in representing agroecology in action as the combination – which  
293 is specific for each farmer – of different “ways of acting” and the expected properties of agroecological  
294 farming systems.

295 Each “way of acting” is not completely dissociated from the others, and certain properties can  
296 correspond to two ways of acting (Figure 2). There is no linearity between a general principle, a system  
297 property, and a way of acting. Through this representation, we aim to show that these system  
298 properties and ways of acting are interdependent, and that each property can be associated with  
299 multiple specific ways of acting, as demonstrated below.

300

301 2.2.3. Implementing ways of acting

302

303 We analysed case studies (both published and unpublished) based on interviews with agricultural  
304 actors claiming to belong to the agroecological transition or who were detected by local intermediary  
305 actors as using practices associated with agroecology, in order to identify concrete management  
306 actions (Figure 2 and Table 2). We created a second analysis grid that allowed us to reveal 21 practices,  
307 which we were able to group together into 4 main ways of acting in agroecological farming systems.

## 308 **4. Results – Agroecology in action as specific combinations of “ways of** 309 **acting” and system properties**

310 The aim of our conceptual proposal is to identify the properties of agroecological farming systems  
311 in relation to the the ways of acting they correspond to. Based on the various practices observed in  
312 our case studies (grouped into 21 elementary practices, see Table 3), we distinguish four “ways of  
313 acting” and then show how they are combined with certain properties of agroecological farming  
314 systems.

315

316 4.1. Identifying four ways of acting based on 21 agroecological actions

317 The data resulting from the case studies as a whole revealed four “ways of acting” as combinations  
318 of elementary techniques or agroecological actions. These four “ways of acting” cannot be precisely  
319 delimited, but rather constitute axes for the aggregation of ways of doing things and practices with  
320 possible overlap (Figures 2 and 3).

321 The first way of acting, namely “adapting to local agroecosystems”, consists of managing the system  
322 consistently and in continuity with the pre-existing environment, the ecological dynamics present, the  
323 history of practices, and the changes that they produce (e.g. amount of organic matter in the soil and  
324 changes in this as a condition for the implementation and success of soil fertility management  
325 practices). The goal is to manage the system while asking not only “what is going to work in this  
326 particular situation”, but also and above all “what processes are underway and how is it possible to  
327 make do with them”. It is related to indirect actions, mainly based on the recognition of the “objects  
328 of nature” (Barbier and Goulet 2013) and their autonomous dynamics. The second way of acting,  
329 “intertwining multiple time (and spatial) scales and buffers”, is tied to the constant association of  
330 different scales of time and space. This involves taking into account not only the dynamics of system  
331 states at a given moment that will determine the implementation and success of a practice, but also  
332 those that will be produced by this practice over the longer term and that will configure and construct  
333 the structure and operation of the future system. It is therefore that which directly links the  
334 management of the system to its design on the scale of the time necessary for the implementation of  
335 biological regulation and the evolution of “slow variables” (Biggs et al. 2012). This way of acting  
336 underlines specific aspects that relate to designing while doing. The third way of acting, “flexibility and  
337 adaptiveness in management”, is at the heart of adaptive management theories. It consists of  
338 *increased and diversified observations*, which are often mentioned in theories of adaptive  
339 management and by farmers who claim that they “get off their tractor”, implying that they actually  
340 observe the state of their soil, the growth of their crops (Casagrande et al. 2012), but also the pests (or  
341 beneficial insects)(Lefevre et al. 2015) and diseases, and so on, similar to the action of “walking out on  
342 the land” to “gather ecological information” as identified by Whiteman and Cooper (2000). The fourth  
343 way of acting, “critical and reflexive engagement in action towards learning”, emphasizes the  
344 dimensions of practices related to opening up the farm to emergence, “surprise” (Milestad et al. 2012;  
345 Brédart and Stassart, 2017), and experiential learning (Kolb 2014). It highlights the knowledge  
346 constructed in action, as well as more generally an attitude that considers the situation to be a  
347 “managerial classroom” by developing openness to learning how to “mak[e] mistakes” and accept  
348 fallibility, imperfections and lapses (Whiteman and Cooper, 2000).

349

350 4.2. Description of the four ways of acting

351

352 ***Locally-embedded***: This first “way of acting” is clearly strongly influenced by the expected system  
353 property of being *locally based*. This means *using local breeds and/or breeds adapted to local*  
354 *conditions* in terms of local adaptability as well as diversity with respect to the species and varieties

355 present in the surrounding agricultural landscape. It also implies *locally breeding to increase adaptive*  
356 *capacity*, with specific consequences in terms of selection practices, evaluation criteria, and the choice  
357 of cultivars, for example. In addition to the species introduced, this first aspect also refers to *adapting*  
358 *management practices to each species' biology*, for example with respect to the dominant self-  
359 propagating plant species in the local agroecosystem and understanding and using their life-cycle  
360 features in order to manage them.

361 With respect to the property of integration in the non-cultivated environment, this aspect also  
362 consists in *letting the field edges lie fallow*, in other words, integrating semi-natural elements of the  
363 landscape (hedges, the edges of land parcels, grassy strips, trees) into “actor” objects in regulation and  
364 production dynamics. This results in *using natural resources available on site and by-products*. The  
365 latter two dimensions of action lead to the need to be capable of identifying the resources present and  
366 the ecological dynamics that they permit: How to carry out an initial diagnosis of beneficial or harmful  
367 species that benefit the habitats provided by the semi-natural elements of the landscape? How to  
368 evaluate a biodiversity “reserve” and the functionalities or equilibrium that it provides?

369 Moreover, *adapting to local agroecosystems* also refers to adaptation in terms of the target  
370 productivity in relation to the system properties of being *balanced regarding needs/productions* (3)  
371 and *below potential productiveness* (4). Maintaining the structure and operation of the system  
372 consistent with the local agroecosystem specifically results in the fact that the *target is below the*  
373 *“potential”* and that the *target shifts from production to the state of the system supporting the*  
374 *production*. The goal is above all to conserve immunity and regulation functions for production (as  
375 opposed to maximizing production), and relates to the system properties of *optimizing resources*  
376 *recycling and availability* (6) and *maximizing ecological or production based interactions* (8). This  
377 requires identification of the limits within which the system can be managed, which are no longer  
378 reduced to a productivity ceiling but rather are states of the system that allow ecological practices to  
379 be maintained. Lastly, locally adapting to these processes means *tolerating defaults* with respect to  
380 products. Tolerating defects does not only mean accepting lower quality from time to time, but above  
381 all being capable of distinguishing between anecdotal defects and others that reflect a negative trend  
382 of change in support and production functions (e.g. significant drop in soil or animal fertility?).

383 **Intertwining multiple time (and spatial) scales and buffers:** The second major aspect of the  
384 relationship to system management actions once again consists in using local breeds/varieties and/or  
385 breeds adapted to local conditions, considering not only their suitability to local conditions but also  
386 the way in which they will act upon the situation, for instance by influencing the growth of perennial  
387 self-propagating plants based on the coverage capacity or by modifying soil structure through a specific  
388 root system. Regarding the target performance, this classically implies a shift towards performance

389 calculated on a multi-year scale (target shifts from production to the state of the system supporting  
390 the production), with priority being given to the changes in a slow variable, even if this temporarily  
391 prevents action to maximize production (e.g. maintaining simplified soil tillage to improve soil  
392 structure). More generally, this effectively consists in managing slow variables (e.g. soil biological  
393 activity, structure, weeds, and natural enemy population) and minimizing losses/optimizing the  
394 relocation of nutrients. To do so, the indicators are also specific in this aspect of the relationship to  
395 action. They imply diversification of observations and shifting from indicators of performance to  
396 indicators of states of the system supporting production. These are indicators that allow one to  
397 acknowledge and anticipate system change dynamics in order to evaluate long-term dynamics.

398 Finally, *intertwining multiple time (and spatial) scales and buffers* relates to different elements of  
399 practices pertaining to biodiversity management: *using cultivar mixtures and intercropping, managing*  
400 *heterogeneity in land-use patterns and biotic and abiotic components, managing indirectly-related*  
401 *biodiversity* as a potential resource.

402 ***Flexibility and adaptiveness in management:*** The third aspect of the relationship to action in  
403 managing systems undergoing an agroecological transition is flexibility and adaptability, which, along  
404 with the identified properties of managed systems (*local ecosystem based, integrating the non-*  
405 *cultivated environment, fluctuating within manageable limits*), allow one to define the specific  
406 directions of the development indicators and types of observations to which this may correspond (Cf.  
407 Section 2). This also consists in managing *slow variables* and *complementarities in time and space* (e.g.  
408 the continuity of habitats or resources for communities of auxiliaries). An identified way of contributing  
409 to this is by *managing heterogeneity in land-use patterns and biotic and abiotic components*, which  
410 also contributes to functional redundancy and the maximization of ecological interactions. Last of all,  
411 this aspect contains the elements of practices that are related to variability in productivity, and namely  
412 a *target below the “potential”, tolerating defects, and increasing harvest frequency* (when possible,  
413 especially for vegetables). In particular, this implies flexibility on the level of market opportunities in  
414 order to sell fluctuating qualities and quantities of products.

415  
416 ***Critical and reflexive engagement in action towards learning:*** This way of acting involves the ability  
417 to continuously learn and adapt practices. One lever is involvement within groups in different ways.  
418 The first one is about *drawing inspiration from/adapting to others’ practices locally* (e.g. others’  
419 practices as indicators for local climate effects on productions, and possible evolutions of the system).  
420 The second one is *situating oneself in groups* to establish reference points and assess the potentiality  
421 or limits of different agroecological farming systems and to better relate practices and their feedbacks

422 in a variety of agricultural contexts. . Another lever is experimentation<sup>4</sup>, which permits the production  
423 of both situated knowledge and knowledge for action, an understanding of the biological processes at  
424 work in the production system, and the continuous adaptation of production practices.  
425 Experimentation once again involves *tolerating defects*, especially when the experimental practice  
426 requires latency time prior to the appearance of results in the production system structure.

427

428 These aspects as a whole allow one to inter-relate the key dimensions of agroecology as “ways of  
429 acting”. Their originality is not in their novelty (as some of them correspond to aspects of research on  
430 adaptive management, for example), but rather in the way in which they allow one to associate the  
431 same practices with the properties of managed systems.

432

## 433 **5. Research agenda and discussion**

434 Agroecological management of agroecosystems leads to different ways of acting related to certain  
435 specific agroecological farming systems’ properties. In the last section of this article, we would like to  
436 discuss the existing knowledge and tools that today contribute to developing these different ways of  
437 acting, and to propose future pathways for developing this knowledge.

438

439 In this section we have made use of the heuristic frameworks built to identify needs for knowledge,  
440 tools, and research processes. We are thus proposing a research agenda for repositioning agronomic  
441 research in line with agroecological transition dynamics.

442

### 443 5.1. Existing tools and knowledge

#### 444 5.1.1. Diversity of tools and their functions

445 Numerous decision support tools have been developed by agronomists as a way to support the  
446 development of agroecological farming systems. However, the indicators used in these approaches  
447 primarily concern performance, are measured statically, and do not always correspond to observations  
448 directly related to production system management actions. As Duru et al. (2015) point out, for these  
449 indicators, such as that of the “visual soil assessment” method, “local interpretation of the result is  
450 needed to take local characteristics and key practice × soil/climate interactions into account”. Other  
451 tools are based on cropping models or cropping or farming systems, but their design all too rarely takes

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<sup>4</sup> Defined in this case as « *a process in which farmers plan the introduction of new ways of farming on their farm, implement it, takes the necessary means to follow it up, and finally evaluate the results*” (Catalogna and Navarrete 2016).

452 into account usages and therefore their application, which results in low levels of use by practitioners  
453 (e.g. McCown 2002; McCown et al. 2009; Cerf et al. 2012; Rose et al. 2016). On the other hand, recent  
454 research by Prost et al. (2016) demonstrates four important aspects of decision support tools: (i) the  
455 involvement of living entities (intermediary between natural and artificial), (ii) variability and  
456 unpredictability, (iii) the collective dimension, and (iv) the use of heterogeneous forms of knowledge,  
457 which may echo the way of acting in the world that we have presented here.

458 Moreover, research increasingly takes into account the relationship between cultivated systems and  
459 their development contexts. To focus on the links between cultivated systems and the context of the  
460 landscape, it appears to be important to describe and characterize the diversity of flora and fauna in  
461 given situations. However, this no longer consists of inventory-type lists of species, but also of taking  
462 into account the interactions between these species and establishing and using functional  
463 categorizations with respect to the cultivated systems in question. The characterization of plant  
464 species as a function of their role as food in grazing (Agreil and Meuret 2004) or the description of land  
465 parcels as a function of their role in an annual food strategy (Bellon et al. 1999) are examples of this.  
466 However, ways of evaluating biodiversity and the ecological processes from which certain effects can  
467 be expected, including in uncultivated spaces (edges, hedges, boundaries), are yet to be developed.

468

#### 469 5.1.2. Spatial-temporal scales and dynamics

470 Considering the links between cultivated systems and their development context also implies  
471 considering spatial scales that are larger than those of the land plot or group of plots. The development  
472 of agroecological farming systems research has thus led to an expansion of the spaces and time frames  
473 considered by agronomists, who have since been integrating multi-year and landscape scales, along  
474 with a diversity of factors that may be involved in the object studied. For example, this is the case of  
475 the development of experimental systems, which aim to study a question by considering a combination  
476 of agronomic factors and which may at times go so far as to analyse the impact of the business channels  
477 through which the product of the experiment will be sold (Lechenet et al. 2017). In this respect,  
478 zootechnicians, and in particular in the Livestock Farming Systems community (Gibon et al. 1996), have  
479 a viewpoint which is far more focused on the farm, their herd(s), the diversity of resources, and  
480 associated business channels. The progress made by this research specifically covers the ability to  
481 integrate multi-animal species systems approaches, with certain species having the main purpose of  
482 providing services and recycling (Dedieu et al. 1991, 1992); the integration of crops and livestock  
483 farming on the farm and territorial scales (Lemaire et al. 2014; Bonaudo et al. 2014; Moraine et al.  
484 2016, 2017); and last of all, the consideration of the different facets of anchoring livestock farming  
485 activities within territories (Ryschawy et al. 2012).



486

487        Developing agroecological farming systems furthermore requires the production of knowledge on  
488 much more flexible management mechanisms. Because this consists in addressing the agroecological  
489 system along with its context, management rules must be able to adapt to different situations, thus  
490 leading to an increase in research on “adaptive management strategies” (Williams 2011). For example,  
491 in the case of the market gardening experiment based on the use of natural regulation discussed in  
492 this article (case study 1, Table 2), the agronomists aim is not to produce knowledge on the  
493 management and modelling of the above-mentioned crop system, but rather to provide future users  
494 with methods for assessing natural regulation at work, so that they can plan the technical interventions  
495 best suited to this regulation.

496        Behind this notion of flexibility and its variants of static, reactive, and proactive flexibility (Chia and  
497 Marchesnay 2008) lies the preparation for a diagnosis and an adaptation to a diversity of system states,  
498 and for an understanding of the dynamics according to which they evolve under the effect of the  
499 actions of nature, humans, or both. Understanding these dynamics implies the ability not only to  
500 monitor populations (e.g. pests, self-propagating plants, auxiliaries) or the animals in herds over  
501 several years (Ollion et al. 2016), but also to interpret changes in them in terms of trends and rates.  
502 This is counter to the still dominant definition of decision-making rules based on references in the form  
503 of thresholds (Ollion 2015). It also consists in being able to distinguish anecdotal performance defects  
504 from those that correspond to a trend in the deterioration in resources or production processes. This  
505 calls for a renewal in the use of indicators (Toffolini et al. 2016), shifting it toward the description of  
506 system states in their complexity (e.g. soil structure not reduced to compaction or porosity but rather  
507 which indicates the dynamics of root growth, the composition of agglomerates, leaching) and their  
508 potential or desired changes. Traditionally oriented towards evaluation functions, and in particular the  
509 stages of establishing productive, social, and environmental performance, indicators should have  
510 anticipation and learning functions, given that they are primarily *descriptors* of intermediate agro-  
511 ecosystem states and the pathways of change that they indicate. We currently have little insight with  
512 respect to these indicators and the way in which they are mobilized and combined in action. Last, some  
513 recent work from Brédart and Stassart (2017) puts forward the fruitfulness of thinking about farmers’  
514 trajectories of change as “*a constant process of adjusting goals and means that is punctuated by*  
515 *events*” and thus to develop their attentiveness to events.

516

### 517        5.1.3. Sharing experiences within groups of farmers

518        Last of all, adapting agroecological farming systems to different situations implies the adoption of  
519 critical and reflective standpoints with respect to the techniques proposed or the practices of other

520 farmers. Devices and tools have already been developed in view of this. The permanence of groups of  
521 farmers pertains to this prospect, because they allow farmers to talk about their difficulties, doubts,  
522 and solutions for implementing changes in practice (Lamine 2011). With regard to the recent  
523 development of tools as a part of the implementation of the EcoPhyto Plan in France, aiming to  
524 accompany the reduction in pesticides, information sheets were drawn up, describing farmers'  
525 practices to enable a reduction in pesticide use. While these documents were initially rather  
526 impersonal, essentially presenting graphs and statistics as a form of proof of performance, over time  
527 they were increasingly personalized to better highlight the context of the farm and the trajectory of  
528 the farmer, using photos, testimonials, and the increased consideration of the specific history of the  
529 farm in question. This consisted in better highlighting the interaction between the farmer's experience  
530 and practices, and the situation in which he or she acts, which was also described for the conservation  
531 agriculture community (Goulet 2017). Similarly, the technical information sheets produced by the  
532 Patur'Ajuste Network<sup>5</sup> describe ways of considering and organizing grazing areas, and are  
533 accompanied by highly personal testimonials from farmers. The appearance of tools based on digital  
534 technologies also allows for the creation of virtual communication groups, such as the online platform  
535 "Osaé", which aims to develop agroecology by explicitly making use of the "know-how" and  
536 "testimonials" of farmers<sup>6</sup>; or the website for information exchange and localized training between  
537 farmers, Agrifind<sup>7</sup>. This requires these users to have the ability to extrapolate if they are to use the  
538 subjective dimensions presented, depending on their situation. However, our various works in the field  
539 show that farmers very often seek out this type of information on others' experience.

540

## 541 5.2. New orientations for knowledge production

542

543 Development of the described ways of acting represents a minority in farming practices, but it  
544 nonetheless suggests new lines of research around new objects: tools as well as new ways of valorizing  
545 what is already produced.

546

547 Support for development of agroecological farming systems can be encouraged by increasing the  
548 possibilities allowing for sharing of experiences among farmers. Such possibilities can rely on dedicated  
549 devices or collective organization for the socialization of practices, and should especially allow to

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.paturajuste.fr/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.osez-agroecologie.org/temoignages-d-agriculteurssur-leurs-pratiques-agroecologiques.>

<sup>7</sup> [www.agrifind.fr](http://www.agrifind.fr)

550 combine the technical dimensions (for example, sharing the indicators used, ways of carrying out  
551 experiments) with the subjective and human dimensions that shape the strategies and experiences  
552 shared. Access to the subjective dimensions underlying practices can be facilitated through the  
553 creation of group support processes based on shared values that allow farmers to get to know one  
554 another better and that foster trust, thus encouraging communication not only around technical  
555 practices but also around values, personal experience, and the family history underlying them.  
556 Furthermore, in conjunction with the rapid growth in the development of agroecological farming  
557 systems, we are also witnessing a revolution – and specifically a digital revolution – in the means  
558 available<sup>8</sup> to build communication based on unique experiences. Yet the testimonies produced by  
559 these different tools (web documentary, videos, photos, texts, etc.) have seldom been considered in  
560 the analysis of practices' socialization. The same applies to the way in which they allow or do not allow  
561 generic knowledge to be produced. Last of all, how is it possible to identify, within these recollections,  
562 the indicators in the situation that allow the farmer to share the experience in its “temporal density”,  
563 in the way in which it allows action within uncertainty, or by making the sensitivity of his/her life story  
564 accessible in the management of complex and uncertain processes? Starting as early as the 1990s,  
565 authors such as Röling and Wagemakers (1998) argued for the development of social learning  
566 platforms to facilitate the transition towards sustainable agriculture, in particular through the  
567 development of Farmers Field Schools (Braun et al. 2006). A great deal of research in the humanities  
568 and social sciences has since studied the operation of collectives organized around the interchange of  
569 knowledge (Local Exchange Systems, for example) or experience (for instance the study of business  
570 incubators, the Agricool network<sup>9</sup>, the Atelier Paysan association in France<sup>10</sup>, or third places such as  
571 fablabs). However, as Latour (2012) put it, what are the “modes of existence” of a diversity of  
572 experiences, and how can they be made to dialogue with one another? How can a unique experience  
573 be described, analysed, and transposed to other contexts of action?

574

575       Aside from the interchange of knowledge via physical media, the interchange most important to  
576 include on the research agenda is that which takes place in practice or is based on more or less  
577 collective life experiences with varied modalities. The case study of the Vergers Durables group, which  
578 has brought together fruit growers, researchers, advisers, and experimenters over the past ten years,

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<sup>8</sup> Facebook Lookback – reliving their favourite memories on Fb -, video applications such as Animoto, WeVideo, presentation software such as Prezi; [www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/AEIVM\\_Tool\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/AEIVM_Tool_en.asp)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.agricool.net/forum/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.latelierpaysan.org/>

579 is an example of this. The group meets once a year to discuss the year's innovations, attempts, and  
580 failures. Over time, mutual acquaintance, trust, and conviviality have been established, which in the  
581 words of the participants themselves (case study 5, Table 2) allow the experiences of some to nourish  
582 the experiments of others. The same shared elements and learning are found in a homeopathy  
583 communication group that has gathered livestock farmers and veterinarians over the past ten years,  
584 and in which communication groups around practices, collective diagnostics, and a type of farmer-to-  
585 farmer advisory system are implemented. Moreover, experimentation of whole farming systems have  
586 multiplied over the past ten years, but are still rarely analysed as spaces within which occupations are  
587 reconfigured, and in which the exchange of knowledge and learning involving the diversity of actors  
588 composing them takes place (Fiorelli et al. 2014). Initial research is working towards this (Lechenet et  
589 al. 2017), but this method is frequently criticized with regard to its relevance for the production of  
590 biotechnical knowledge, which is often perceived as being highly context-dependent and therefore  
591 invalid. Such critics are not specific enough, if we consider the extension of these characteristics  
592 (embeddedness, context-dependent) even to laboratory science as demonstrated by Science and  
593 Technology Studies (e.g. Callon 1986; Jasanoff and others 2004), and that factorial experimentation  
594 can be equally invalid (Marliac et al. 2013). As of today, in terms of the research agenda, it seems  
595 necessary to capitalize on this type of experience and to analyse the interactive processes at work in  
596 these groups, along with the interchange of experience, and to identify the most appropriate formats  
597 for sharing experience. While such sharing is at the heart of certain philosophies, such as that  
598 advocated by American pragmatism (Dewey 1929), there is little research that can serve to define the  
599 necessary conditions for a unique and individual experience to be able to constitute a resource for  
600 others' action.

601 Lastly, it appears that the obstacles to constructing spaces for the interchange of agronomic  
602 knowledge are also epistemological. Addressing systems based on natural regulation requires that we  
603 work towards the re-articulation of agriculture and nature to one another. Beliefs that agriculture is  
604 based on a clear separation between the wild and the domestic, and on control of the environment as  
605 an instrumentalized resource (Larrère 2002), must be questioned. These beliefs became more deeply  
606 entrenched during the agricultural modernization of the twentieth century with the goal of developing  
607 techniques that would supposedly allow for abstraction from natural conditions or climactic hazards  
608 (Jas 2005). This explains why certain farmers or agricultural advisers have had difficulty in  
609 appropriating knowledge that aims to reconcile the management of agricultural systems with  
610 ecological dynamics. It invites us to revise our very idea of what constitutes agriculture, and with equal  
611 certainty, as advocated by some authors such as Francis et al. (2011), our way of teaching it.

## 612 **Conclusions**

613 In this analysis, we identified four different *ways of acting*, which corresponds to specific  
614 combinations of practices by which farmers target farming systems properties in line with  
615 agroecological principles. Together, these ways of acting contribute to define agroecology “in the  
616 making”, integrating human dimensions related to farmers work in agroecosystems and sociotechnical  
617 embeddedness. The eight case-studies on which our study was based were diversified in terms of  
618 farming systems and sociotechnical networks, which may provide a genericity of the identified *ways*  
619 *of acting* across a variety of agricultural production types. Applying the proposed conceptual  
620 framework to analyse agroecology institutionalization in practices in various production sectors or  
621 innovation systems may help identifying the favoured *ways of acting* or the hindrances for  
622 development paths.

623 The four *ways of acting* (locally embedded, flexibility and adaptiveness in management, intertwining  
624 multiple time and spatial scales and buffers, critical and reflexive engagement in action towards  
625 learning) also reveal and take in account two different dualities of farm management in agroecological  
626 transition. First, they combine the ecological dimensions of practices with specificities of designing  
627 while managing the agroecological farming system. In contrast with propositions of practices’ sets that  
628 would correspond to agroecology and offer some expected environmental performances and  
629 agroecosystems dynamic equilibriums, our description of *ways of acting* grasps the tensions in farmers  
630 work between the renewed expected properties of farming systems and the redesign of practices’  
631 combinations that progressively make possible to reach them. Intertwining multiple time and spatial  
632 scales and buffers perfectly illustrate this duality, and we underlined that it supposes particular  
633 indicators and identified new directions of research regarding how the sharing of experiences may  
634 support it. Second, the four *ways of acting* intend to address at a same level the technical or  
635 technological stakes and the social aspects of new practices development in agroecological transition.  
636 Namely, the *way of acting* called ‘critical and reflexive engagement in action towards learning’ tackles  
637 the collective practices (among farmers, intermediaries, agronomists) participating in socialization of  
638 practices. We do not pretend to fully explore what these dualities entail in terms of agricultural  
639 knowledge, rather we propose a basis for addressing them in future agroecological research.

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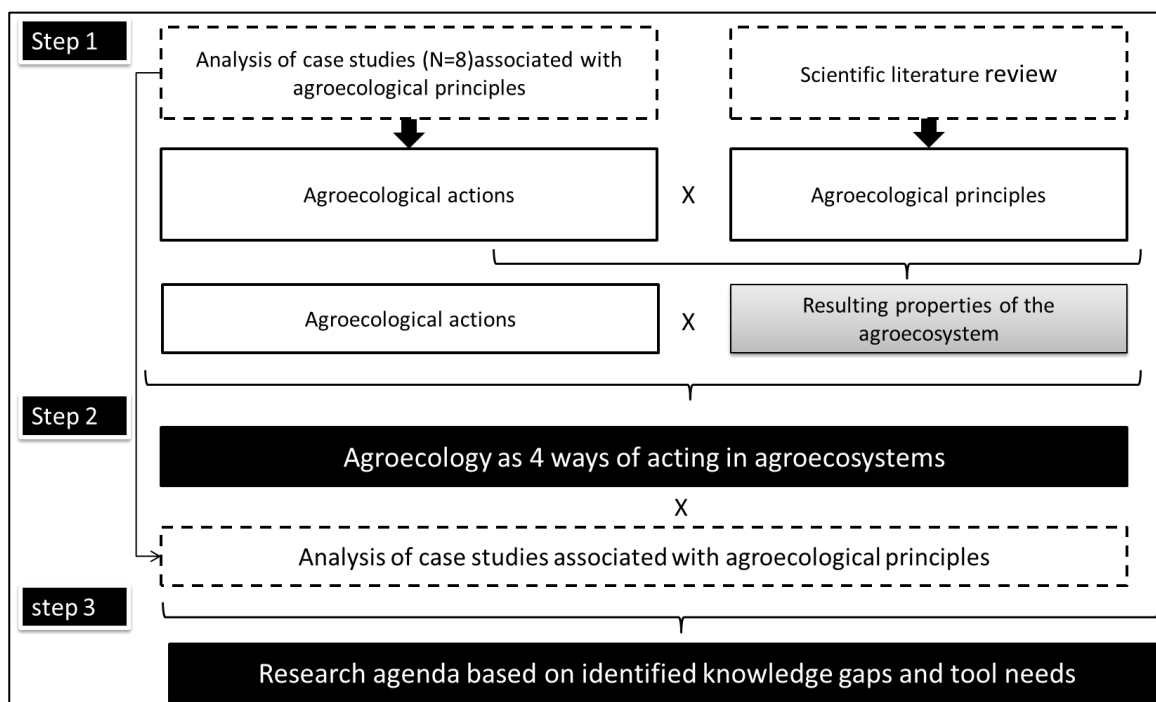
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861 **Figure 1: General approach**

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	Properties of agroecological farming systems	Description	References
1	Locally based	The choice of productions, the resources mobilized to produce, and production factors mainly originate from the environment of the farm and draw support from the previous states of the agro-ecosystem.	Duru et al. 2015, Gliessman 2007, Caporali 2011
2	Integration of cultivated and non-cultivated diversity	The authors insist on maintaining connectivity or interactions based on production factors and on the scales of the landscape and of semi-natural elements.  Beyond the scale of land plots, this adaptation to existing conditions also results in the consistency between the spaces directly impacted by actions, and spaces that are not	Médiène et al. 2011 (Nicholls and Altieri 2016) (Biggs et al. 2012; Bonaudo et al. 2014) (Altieri et al. 2015)

		<p>cultivated or directly managed, such as the edge of a forest.</p> <p>Functional diversity (“the variety of organisms and the ecosystem services they provide for the system to continue performing”) or the diversity of responses (“the diversity of responses to environmental change among species that contribute to the same ecosystem function”)</p>	
3	Balanced (regarding needs in relation to production)	Dimensioning (e.g. size of livestock) is consistent with the resources available and existing flows within the ecosystem, or flows that can be maintained.	(Duru et al. 1998)
4	Below genetic potential for production	Not managed with the goal of maximizing productivity to prevent the exhaustion of resources; retain room to manoeuvre to react in the event of hazards (e.g. a drought that limits water or fodder resources for livestock farmers). Performance does not attempt to attain maximum production potential but rather to maintain the productive states of the system.	(Dedieu and Ingrand 2010) (Boiffin et al. 2013) (Milestad et al. 2012)
5	Fluctuating within manageable limits	The management of “ <b>slow variables</b> ” is related to this property: modulations in productivity, in system states (e.g. the chemical fertility of the soil), and in the availability of resources within the system are not controlled through fine-tuning but rather are maintained within limits beyond which the (effects of) possible management actions are no longer known.	(Biggs et al. 2012)

6	Optimizing resource recycling and availability	<p>The recycling principle is associated with the goals of “clos[ing] the energy and material cycles; i.e. minim[izing] losses and external inputs, and substitut[ing] chemical inputs with natural inputs” and “optimiz[ing] the nutrient availability for crops and animals. Nutrient availability is more often a question of temporal settlement [...]”.</p> <p>Recycling and diversity are directly linked to one another by insisting on the fact that diversified crop sequences allow the biological activity of soils to be maintained and to thrive, as well as permitting the efficient recycling of nutrients.</p> <p>Re-mobilizing a maximum amount of resources endogenous to the farm (whether these are resources related to soil fertility and in particular organic materials, water resources, radiation).</p> <p>Autonomy</p>	<p>(Altieri and Toledo 2005; Wezel and Peeters 2014; Titttonell 2014)</p> <p>Bonaudo et al. (2014)</p> <p>Tomich et al. (2011)</p>
7	Functional redundancy	<p>Multiplying means (within space and time) that make it possible to obtain or maintain functions deemed to be essential in the system. This functional redundancy is related to the availability of resources as well as to the numerous interactions and regulations that support production. Reducing the vulnerability of agricultural systems by combining functional diversity with the diversity of responses.</p>	<p>(e.g. Gliessman 1998; Biggs et al. 2012; Nicholls and Altieri 2016)</p> <p>(Altieri et al. 2015)</p>
8	Maximizing ecological or production-based interactions	<p>The authors insist on maintaining connectivity or interactions based on production factors and on the scales of the landscape and semi-natural elements.</p>	<p>Titttonell (2014)</p> <p>(Nicholls and Altieri 2016)</p> <p>(Biggs et al. 2012; Bonaudo et al. 2014)</p> <p>Duru et al. (2015),</p>

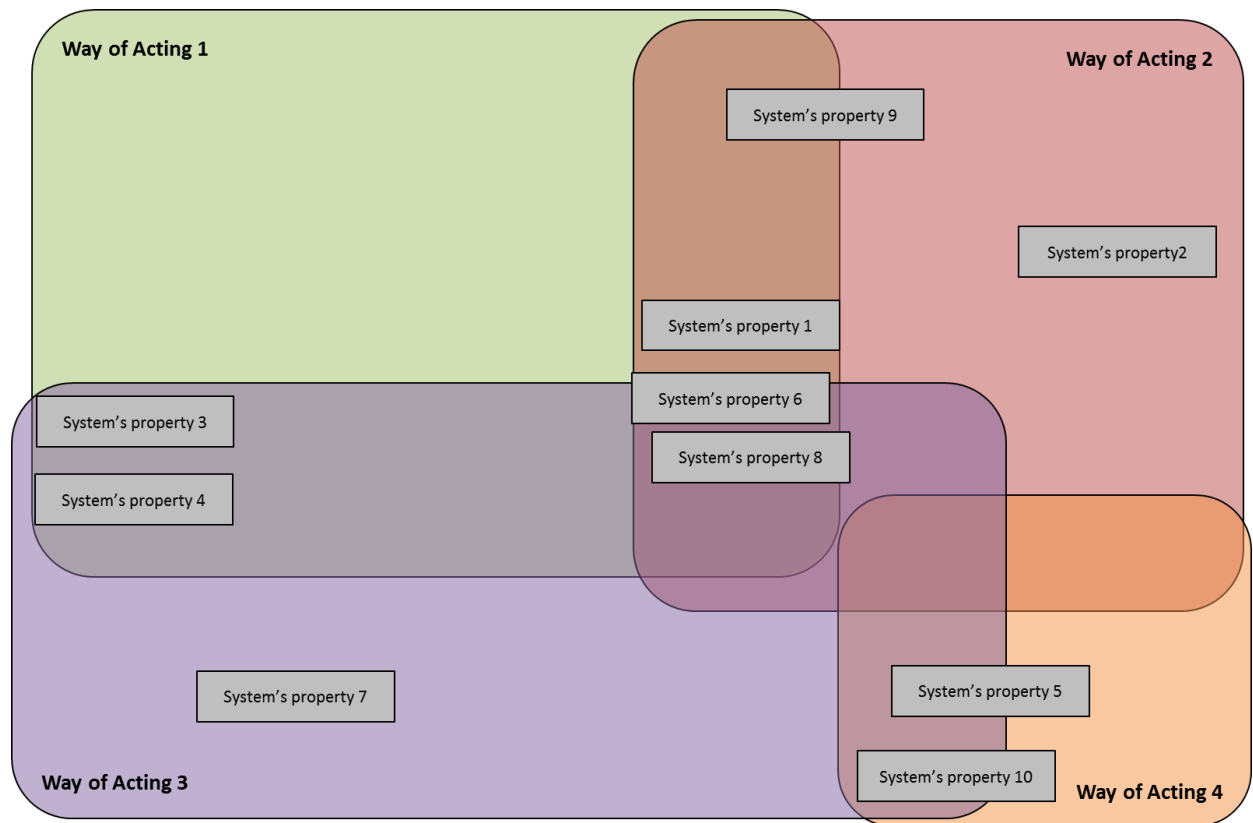


		Planned diversity, associated diversity, and diversity on the landscape scale to grant an “ability to provide ecosystem services of support and regulation”.	
9	Variable quality of productions	Variability in the quality of production is accepted as a consequence of management that gives priority to maintenance of production states over the long-term.	Boiffin et al. 2013, Dedieu et Ingrand 2010
10	Polycentric governance	Acknowledging the fact that on the landscape scale, a production system is never ecologically isolated (e.g. epidemics, transfers of pests or auxiliaries, the transversality of water resources), nor is it economically or socially isolated.	Duru, Fares and Therond (2015)

863 Table 1: Ten properties of agroecological farming systems

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Figure 2: Agroecology as specific combinations of ways of acting and system properties

Name	Zone	Time	Production	Actors Involved	Description (description of the situation)	Bibliographic Reference
CS-1	Alénya experimental station, Occitanie (France)	Since 2013	Market gardening	Researchers Experimenters Farmers Advisers	Design and experimentation workshops for a system based on a maximum reduction in pesticide use (replaced by natural regulation) with the goal of a short sale supply chain.	(Cardona et al. 2018)
CS-2	Brittany / Normandy (France)	2014	Dairy cow farming	Farmers	Collective reflection around the suitability of local fodder resources and the genetic selection of dairy cattle in order to move towards autonomous (maximum grass usage) and economical systems.	Ollion (2015)
CS-3	Picardy (France)	Project: 2002-2012 Study: 2013-2014	Large-scale farming	Farmers Organizers Advisers	8 farmers, integrated and organic cropping systems, numerous experiments (strips and complete land plots) over an eight-year period.	Toffolini (2016)
CS-4	Ile de France Burgundy Pays de la Loire Poitou-Charentes Picardy	2013-2014	Large-scale farming	Farmers	Large-scale farmers committed to a reduction in pesticide use.	Toffolini et al. 2016 Toffolini et al. 2017 NJAS Comm. IFSA, Toffolini et al. 2016 (How “fundamental knowledge” supports the cropping-system re-design by farmers?)

	(France)					
CS-5	“Vergers Durables” Group (French-speaking fruit growers (France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Spain)	Since 2013	Pome fruits	Farmers, Researchers, Advisers, Experimenters	Collective and individual reflection around the development and design of apple orchards using organic agriculture aimed at a maximum reduction in inputs.	Personal source
CS-6	Paturajuste Network (France)	Since 2013	Livestock farming (cattle, sheep, goats)	Farmers, Advisers,	Collective and individual reflection around practices for valorizing semi-natural vegetation	Girard, N., Magda, D. (2017). Les jeux entre singularité et généricité des savoirs dans un réseau d’éleveurs agroécologiques. Presented at the 10 <sup>th</sup> International Symposium of the AGeCSO, Montréal (Canada)
CS-7	Practices of small-scale producers in the province of Misiones (Argentina)	2013	Various types of production, essentially market gardening	Farmers	Individual studies regarding their practices, in particular combinations of crops and varieties.	Girard N., Magda D., Nosedo C., Sarandon S., 2015. Practising agroecology: management principles drawn from small farming in Misiones (Argentina). <i>Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems</i> , 39(7), 824-840.
CS-8	Farmers involved in conservation	2015	Large-scale farming, cash crops	Farmers	Individual studies on their practices and learning.	Cristofari, H., Girard, N., Magda, D. (2018). Supporting transition toward conservation

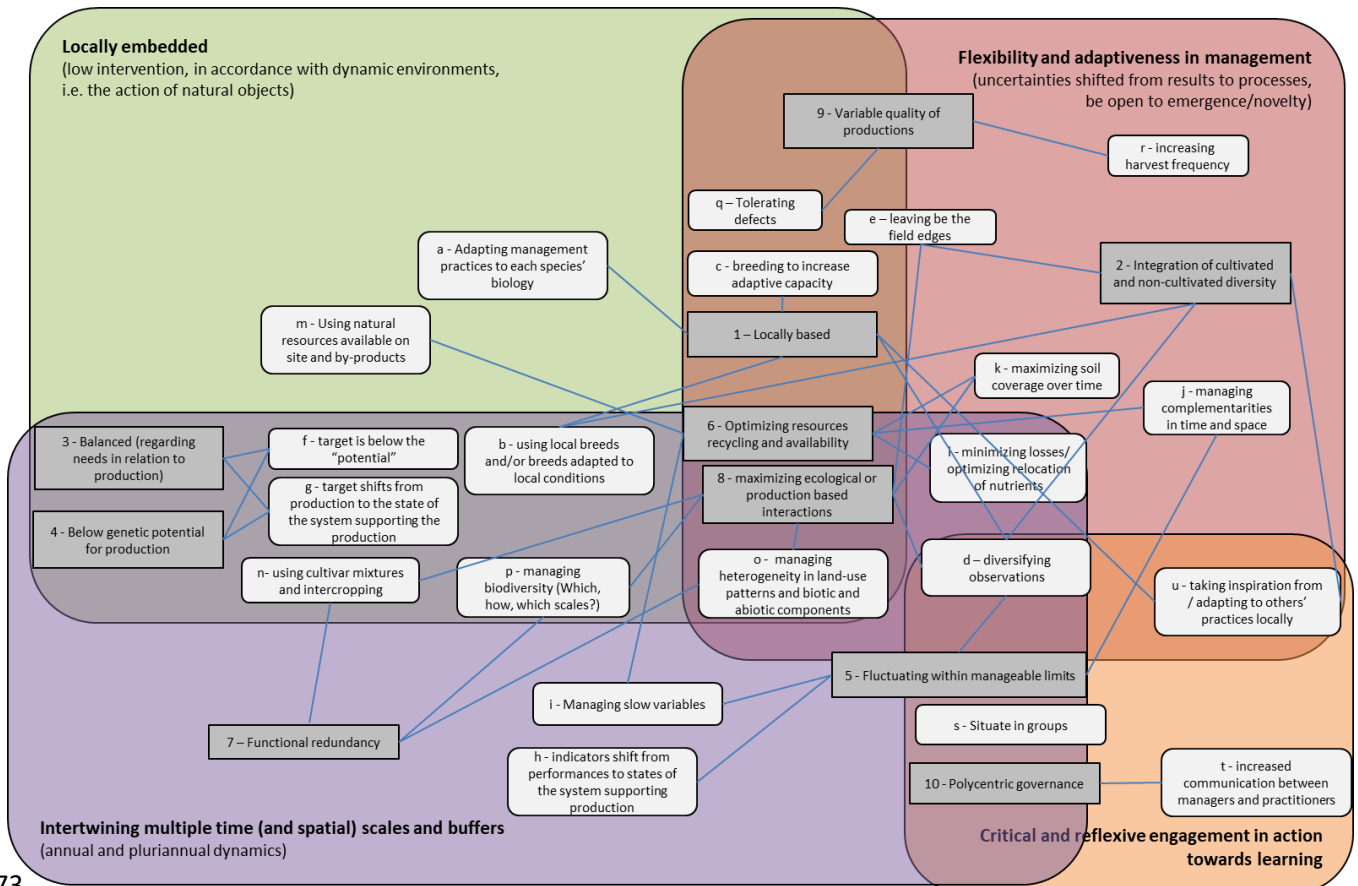
	agriculture (southwest, northwest and Brittany)					agriculture: a framework to analyze the learning processes of farmers. Hungarian Geographical Bulletin, 66(1), 65-76.
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868 Table 2: Description of case studies

	Ways of acting	Types of actions and objectives
1	Locally-embedded	a - Adapting management practices to each species' biology c - breeding to increase adaptive capacity b - using local breeds and/or breeds adapted to local conditions
		e - leaving be the field edges
		f - target is below the "potential" g - target shifts from production to the state of the system supporting the production
		m - Using natural resources available on site and by-products
		n - using cultivar mixtures and intercropping o - managing heterogeneity in land-use patterns and biotic and abiotic components p - managing biodiversity (which, how, which scales?)
		q - tolerating defects
		2
e - leaving be the field edges o - managing heterogeneity in land-use patterns and biotic and abiotic components		
f - targeting shifts from production to the state of the system supporting the production		
d - diversifying observations h - indicators shift from performance to states of the system supporting production i - Managing slow variables		
l - minimizing losses/ optimizing relocation of nutrients		
n- using cultivar mixtures and intercropping o - managing heterogeneity in land-use patterns and biotic and abiotic components p - managing biodiversity (which, how, which scales?)		

3	Flexibility and adaptiveness management in	c - breeding to increase adaptive capacity / robustness
		d - diversifying observations
		e - leaving be the field edges
		f - target shifts from production to the state of the system supporting the production
		i - Managing slow variables (soil biological activity, structure, weeds and natural enemy pop.)
		j - managing complementarities in time and space
		k - maximizing soil coverage over time
		l - minimizing losses/ optimizing relocation of nutrients
4	Critical and reflexive engagement in action towards learning	o - managing heterogeneity in land-use patterns and biotic and abiotic components
		q - tolerating defects
		r - increasing harvest frequency
		u - taking inspiration from / adapting to others' practices locally
		t - increased communication between managers and practitioners
		d - diversifying observations
		s - Situate in groups
		q - tolerating defects

869 Table 3: Four ways of acting and the elementary practices of the systems tied to them. The letters  
 870 "a" to "u" indicate the 21 agroecological actions identified based on case studies. Therefore, the same  
 871 letter can correspond to multiple "ways of acting".  
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**Figure 3: Relationships between ways of acting and agroecological farming system properties. The**

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gray rectangles represent the 10 different systems properties; the white boxes present the 21

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agroecological actions, identified by letters "a" to "u". The blue lines show the multiple relations

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between systems properties and agroecological actions that constitute each way of acting.