



# Agroecology for Europe (AE4EU)

Towards the development of agroecology in Europe

## Deliverable report D5.3 – Draft road map and EU agroecology strategy

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Agroecology for Europe



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## Executive summary

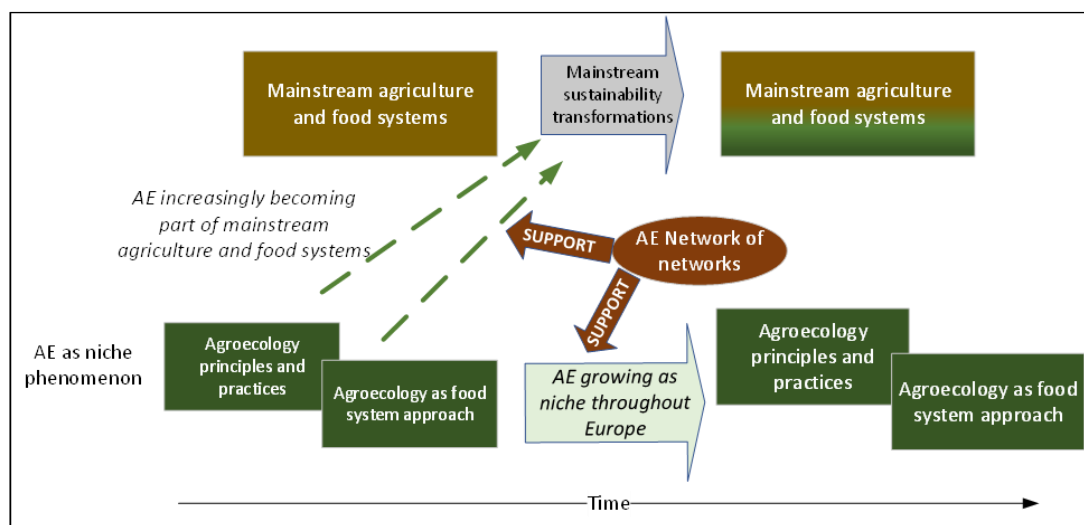
This document describes the initial progress and development of a roadmap to build a European network on agroecology that will help to accelerate the transformation to sustainable agriculture in the wider food system. To build such network, agroecology grassroots and farmer representative organisations were consulted after which an initial group of participants was established to co-create such network. This is what is referred to in the task description as a European living lab (LL) for agroecology (ELL4AE).

This network is meant to complement, and support the collaborative effort of a range of already existing groups, initiatives, and programmes working on the development of agroecology. Therefore, this network has initially been designated as a European agroecology (NofN). This network will strive to enhance the collective efficacy of initiatives which are labelled differently, but have much in common in relation to subscribing to agroecological principles and practices.

After an initial process of outlining ideas for the intended European network by AE4EU partners, a transition to more intensive co-development took place early 2022 by asking envisaged participants in the network what they thought about those ideas, and asking them whether they would be interested in co-creating a NofN so that it would become something that could be ‘owned’ by many, thus supporting the potential for playing a role in accelerating the transition to sustainable agriculture and development of the wider food system. Since then, over 30 organisations and initiatives are now part of this co-creation process. The shape and form that the European agroecology NofN will take still needs to be established, since it will evolve from an organic development process which is currently taking place through a variety of working groups. These will determine specific aspects of the NofN.

The efforts of the ELL4AE revolve around a series of co-design workshops. Initially, this was envisaged to take place through three of such co-design workshops. Effectively, we found a need to adapt this approach to a larger number of co-design workshops, complemented by working group meetings that take place in-between the co-design workshop. So far, there has been an initial getting-to-know-each-other workshop, one co-design workshop, and the second co-design workshop is scheduled for September 2022. AE4EU work packages are represented in these co-design workshop, which allows for continuous fine-tuning rather than having – an initially planned – one-time workshop to connect related processes.

The NofN is intended to cater to both conventional farmers who want to make steps in applying a subset of the 13 agroecology principles and to those who embrace the full scope of these principles, as illustrated in the Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Strategically positioning the EU Agroecology network of networks.

# 1. Introduction

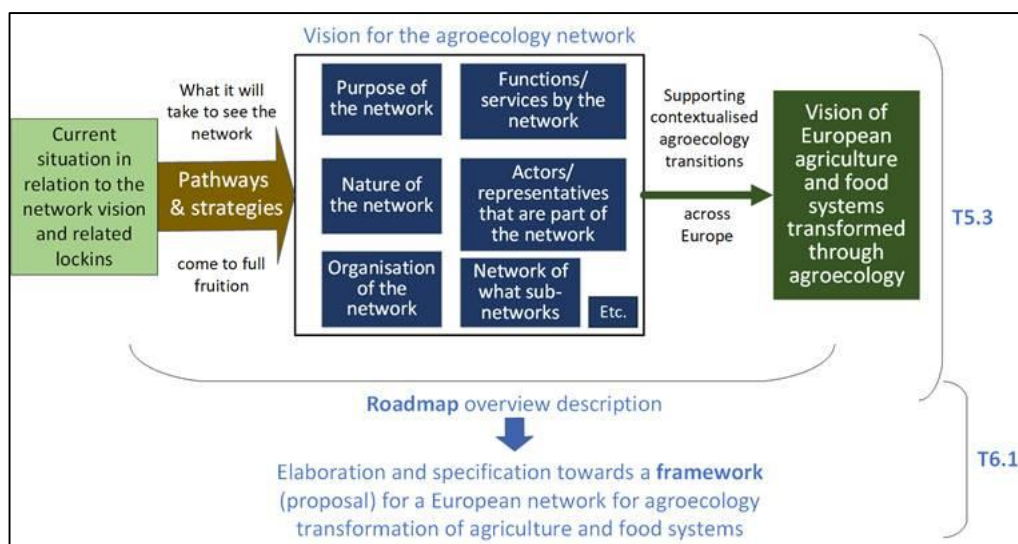
As is stated in the introduction of the AE4EU project Description of Action (DoA), the project builds on the following diagnosis:

“Although a certain development of agroecology and its different facets in Europe can be stated (Nicot et al. 2018, Wezel et al. 2018b), it remains so far too limited to allow a successful transition to sustainable agriculture and food systems with increased biodiversity, resource-conserving and climate resilient production and food systems. Therefore, a strong development with ambitious and longer-term joint actions at European level is needed in research, innovation, networks, training and education as well as in the funding domain.”

Hence, the AE4EU project acknowledges that there is a whole range of agroecological initiatives across Europe (both in research and in practice, see the work achieved under WP1, WP2 and WP4) with nevertheless a lack of progress in the further uptake, out- and upscaling of these initiatives. The project tasks 5.3 and 6.1 jointly seek to explore how this uptake process might be given a major boost. The main strategy to achieve this is not by doing something ‘completely new’ but by seeking to enhance the efficacy and effectiveness of the variety of existing initiatives by improving the interaction and joint learning between them and to identify and link to the needs these existing initiatives are experiencing in speeding up the transformation towards agroecology. We see the importance of building a new network that supports the collaboration of a wide variety of existing networks.

Task 6.1 seeks to develop the ‘framework’ for such a network structure. It will address what exactly the objective of such a network could be (to contribute to the overall goal of giving a boost to the take-up of agroecological practices), what kind of activities it should engage in, what its membership should look like, etc. Task 5.3 focuses on the process by which such a network could develop (called the ‘roadmap’ in the DoA). It will address what the key phases are in building such a network, who should be committed when, in which order activities should be carried out, etc. Figure 2 summarises this perspective.

## Introduction

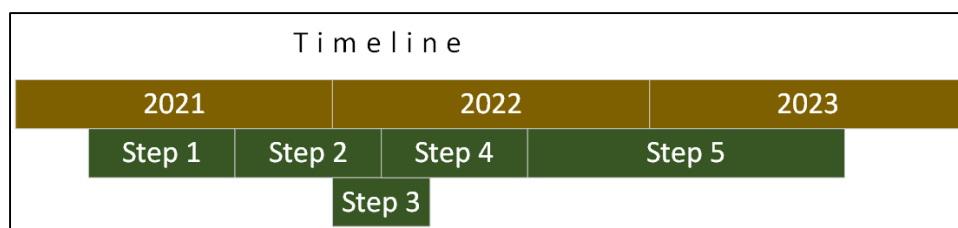


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**Figure 2:** A simplified perspective on the relationship between tasks 5.3 and 6.1

Since this is a NofN, it is key that agroecology practitioners and researchers across Europe feel committed and engaged with this new network. Consequently, to stimulate the development of ownership, tasks 5.3 and 6.1 focus on engaging these actors early in the process and several of them have already been invited to take part in the various activities that will be carried out in the AE4EU project.

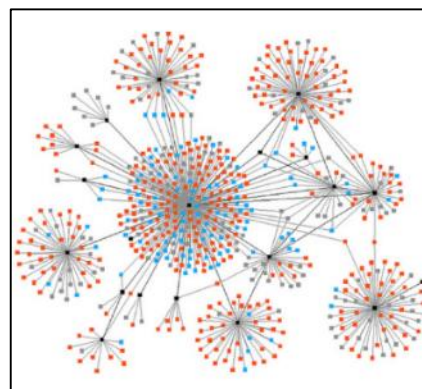
In this document, we focus on what task 5.3 has done so far in relation to the above, though some activities of tasks 5.3 and 6.1 have overlapped in implementation. The process of developing the draft roadmap and EU agroecology strategy, which we will discuss further in the following chapter, is design around five steps (see Figure 3 for a summary in relation to a timeline):



**Figure 3:** Summary of the steps on a roadmap and EU agroecology strategy building timeline

1. Step 1: Exploration by the AE4EU core team of ways in which agroecological transitions in agriculture and the wider food systems in Europe could take place and what would need to be taken into account.
2. Step 2: Based on that exploration, design a process to build a European network on agroecology that will help accelerate the transitions to sustainable agriculture and food systems. This was done in consultation with the wider team of AE4EU partners.

3. Step 3: Start that process by approaching the envisaged key partners outside AE4EU to test the appropriateness and attractiveness of the ideas with them and make adjustments where needed and by consulting these key partners identify gaps that limit the transition processes at European level, and specific needs and interests of key partners in building a European network.
4. Step 4: Implement a co-creation process of what came to be referred to as an EU Agroecology NofN (Figure 4) with a group of (at the start) about 30 European organisations and initiatives. This start-up took place in March 2022.
5. Step 5: Continue co-creating the NofN through an organic process in which participants outside AE4EU are invited to take active roles. This includes fine-tuning developments with processes related to the envisaged EU agroecology partnership and the CSA project ALL-Ready.



**Figure 4:** Towards not just a network, but a network of networks

The EU agroecology NofN is considered to hold the potential for making a key contribution to the acceleration of agroecological transitions in agriculture and food systems in Europe.

## 2. Contours of a roadmap for a European network

In this chapter, we provide an overview of dimensions of a roadmap on how a European network on agroecology can help to accelerate transitions to sustainable agriculture and wider food systems. The roadmap relates to question such as what kind of network should it need to be, what the network should focus on/be oriented towards, who should be part of it, how it should function, etc.

In this, we realised that the roadmap and the creation of the network, would need to be complementary to the efforts of relevant other initiatives, notably the EU SCAR AE partnership preparation processes<sup>1</sup>, and the ALL-Ready project<sup>2</sup>. The focus in those initiatives is strongly on living labs and research infrastructures. These indeed have the potential of playing an important role in accelerating transitions to sustainable agriculture and wider food systems. The roadmap development connects to those efforts, but also looks beyond the focus

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/agriculture-forestry-and-rural-areas/ecological-approaches-and-organic-farming/partnership-agroecology\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/agriculture-forestry-and-rural-areas/ecological-approaches-and-organic-farming/partnership-agroecology_en)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.all-ready-project.eu/>



## Contours of a roadmap for a European network

on LLs and research infrastructures (RIs) to include other entities and particularly to connect to where the energy and motivation for agroecology is strongest: agroecological grassroots/farmers organisations and initiatives. In addition, these organisations represent many farmers, facilitating scaling out with a democratic legitimacy of the NofN. These organisations are also motivated to play an active role in creating and shaping the network and secure its continuation when AE4EU will end.

This draft roadmap is therefore about exploring how this may be done. The outcome of the initial stages of developing the roadmap is the decision to focus on the establishment of a European agroecology NofN. What this entails and through what process (roadmap) this will be established is something that we elaborate on in the following.

In the following subsections, we briefly outline the kind of considerations that helped orientate the early stages of development of the NofN.

### 2.1. Strategically orientating the network

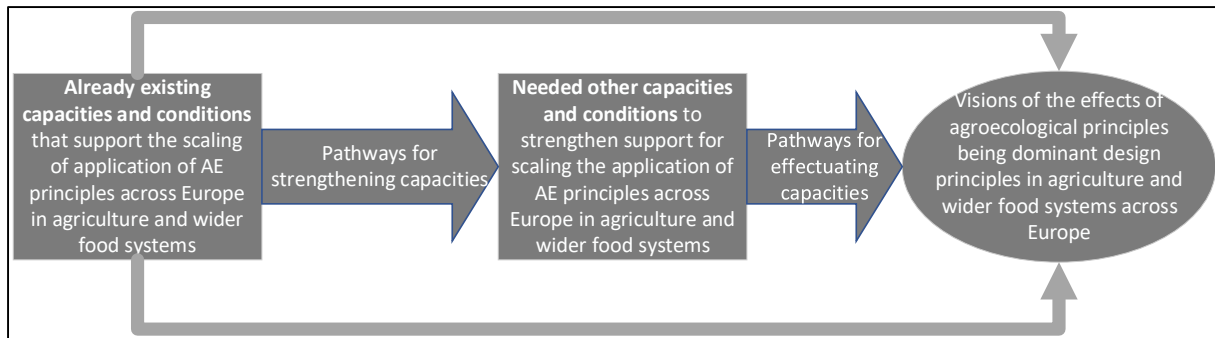
The network could be set up in many different ways. We chose to apply a particular orientation which sets it apart from similar initiatives.

An overarching European **network** to support agroecological transformations of agriculture and food systems needs to consist of diverse actors involved in agricultural and food systems, such as representatives of national and European farmers organisations, researchers, officials at ministries of agriculture, representatives of small-scale food producers organisations, movements, and national agroecology networks and other related civil society stakeholders. We chose to focus on farmers organisations, including agroecological farmers organisations as well as organisations interested in agroecological transformations. One may refer to this overarching European network as a European living lab on agroecology.

### 2.2. A capacity perspective on a roadmap

A roadmap perspective is essentially about connecting to capacities for change. Contributing to agroecological transformations to sustainable agriculture and food systems means contributing to capacities for sustainability transitions, specifically capacities to contribute to sustainability transitions through agroecology. This is first of all about connecting to existing actions, capacities and conditions (notably efforts of agroecology-oriented key actors that are already going on) and seeking to enhance those, e.g. through enhanced sharing of existing knowledge and resources, coordination of efforts, and through complementary collaboration which adds value to what is already there. See Figure 5.

Contours of a roadmap for a European network



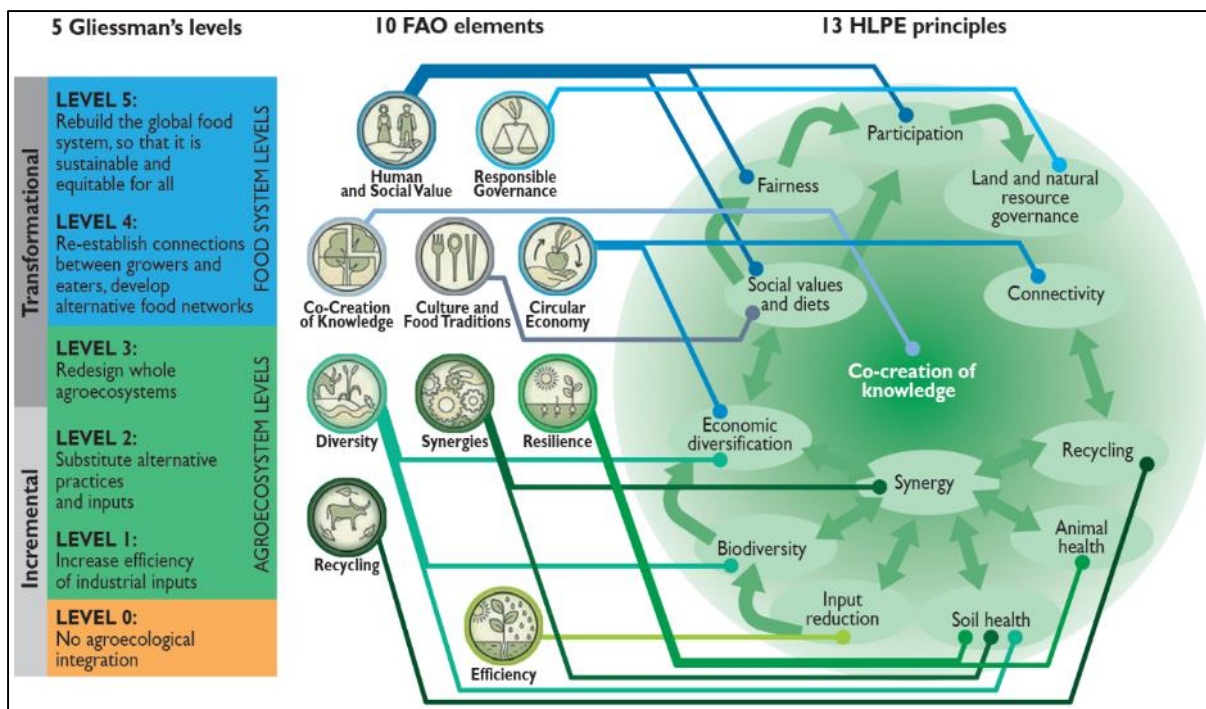
**Figure 5:** A capacity perspective on agroecological transformation of agriculture and wider food systems.

Accelerating transitions is about addressing both, and this is something that the future NofN needs to cater to.

2.3. Building on shared concepts in agroecology

A NofN will need common ground for envisaged participants in it, so that they can be in it together. What is agroecology? Several definitions have been proposed and a variety of properties are being discussed and proposed. Many things related to agroecology are a point for discussion. However, there are also a number of things to which most people actively involved in agroecological practice and theory would agree upon. Among this are notably the 13 agroecology principles (HLPE, 2019), the 10 elements designed by the FAO, the five levels of transition to sustainable food systems (Gliessman, 2007), as well the Nyéléni Declaration<sup>3</sup> which focuses on food sovereignty (see Figure 5). It will be important to activate such principles and premises in the network of network setup and functioning. It is also a value of the network, that these things can be discussed and agroecology can be made more concrete for the wider public.

<sup>3</sup> <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>

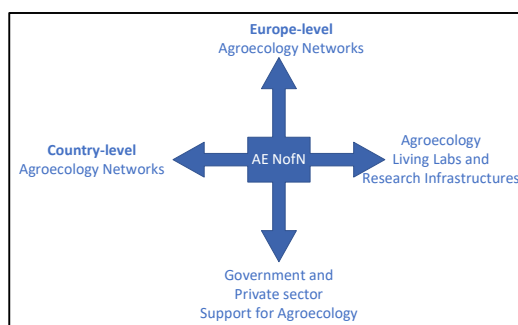


**Figure 5:** The five levels of food systems transformation and related elements and principles of agroecology. Source: Agropolis International, 2021 (who partly adapted material from Wezel et al. 2020).

The NofN is not meant to become some grand scheme, but something more along the lines of relating to a ‘mosaic’ of connected agroecology networks and representative organisation in which there is room for diversity whilst all subscribing to a set of core principles and premises.

### 2.4. Cross-level and cross-sector connectivity

Realities between European countries are diverse, and also within these countries there is variation. Hence, the realities in which agroecological transitions are meant to take place, are diverse. This relates to different types of diversity: social/gender diversity, cultural diversity, climate and soil diversity, sector diversity, etc. Existing networks already represent such different focus areas. The NofN will need to go further than that by bridging such diversities, which will be challenging (Figure 6). In its development, it will therefore need to be informed by a variety of perspectives, from both local, country, and European-level, from men and women, youth (in particular) and older people, from a range of food system actors, from both the “agroecology

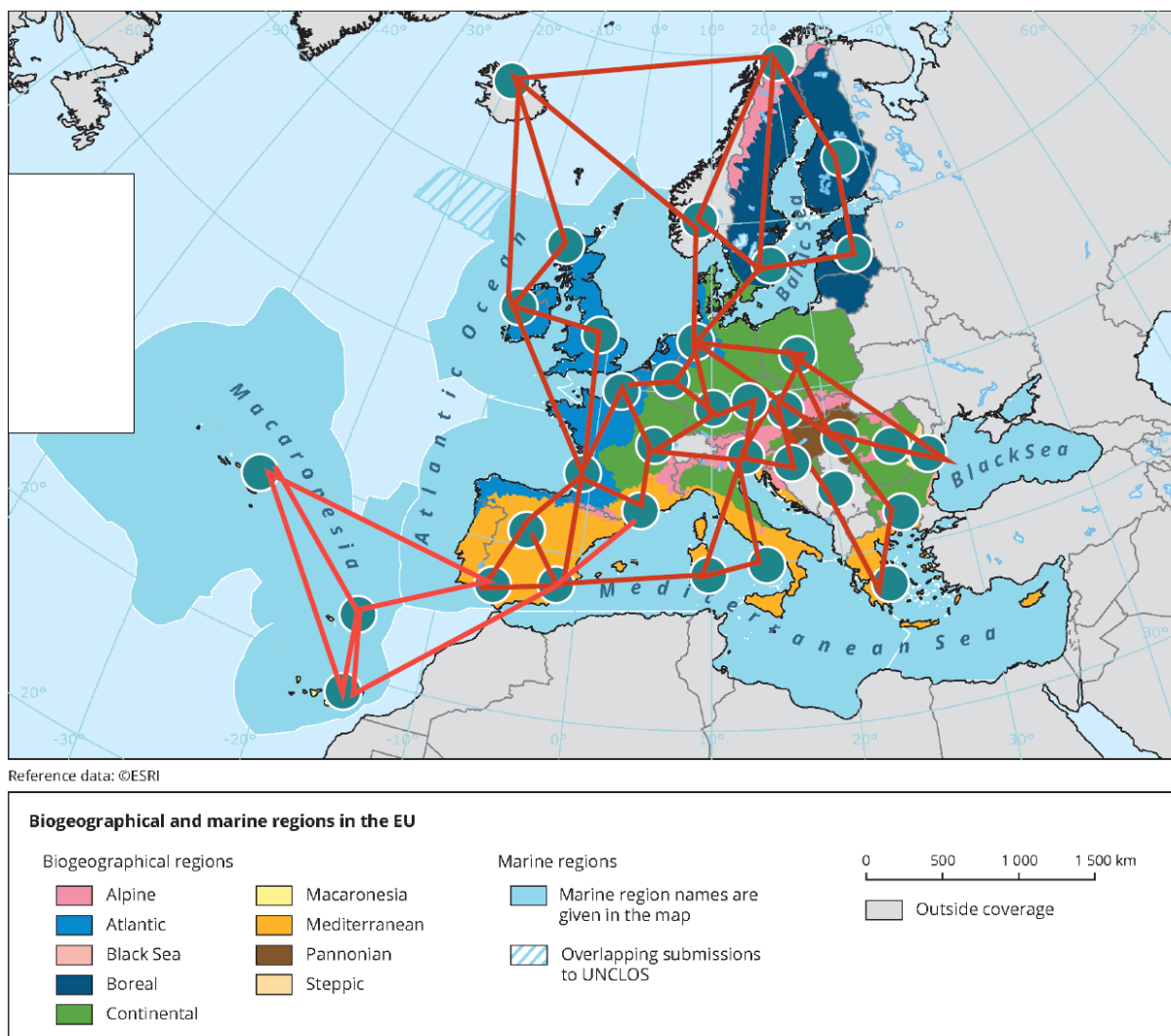


**Figure 6:** Illustrating the potential bridging function of the network of network.

Contours of a roadmap for a European network

converted” and from conventional farming. Figure 7 represents some of that diversity from a geographic perspective.

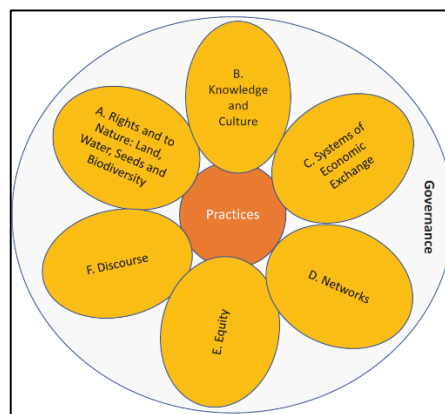
It will not be possible to connect to each and everyone. An appropriate focus will need to be established, and this is further discussed in Deliverable 6.1.



**Figure 7:** Illustrating diverse realities that the network of network will need to connect to – here referring to biogeographical diversity. Picture source: Saez, 2021

## 2.5. Connecting to existing insights in AE transformation processes

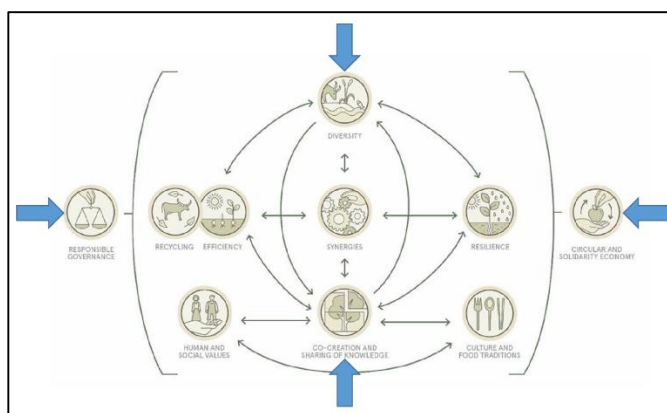
Anderson et al. (2021) identify a number of domains of agroecological transformation (Figure 8). They may also be interpreted as leverage points for agroecological transformation. Therefore, the NofN is not just about that one dimension of networks but incorporates all the identified domains. If it is to be relevant for the diversity of perspectives and realities as noted in the previous section, it needs to connect to all these dimensions.



**Figure 8:** Domains of agroecological transformation. Source: Anderson et al. (2021).

The roadmap therefore needs to address the constant interaction between a variety of leverage points such as social (relationship building and inclusivity, ownership building, bottom-up demand-driven, etc.), socio-cultural/contextual (catering to diversity, addressing connectivity between different scales, etc.), agroecological (ensuring agroecology integrity, i.e. corresponding to principles), technical/logistical (practical organisation of functions and services and how this can be done), as well as financial-economic (e.g. ensuring financial support).

Wezel et al. (2020) suggest four key entry points that hold a significant potential for accelerating agroecological food system transformations (Figure 9): responsible governance, circular and solidarity economy, diversity, and co-creation and sharing of knowledge. This provides further ideas on what the NofN will need to pay particular attention to in terms of enhancing current transformative capacities in relation to those entry points and/or complementing those with new capacities.



**Figure 9:** Key entry points in relation to FAO's ten agroecology elements, as suggested by Wezel et al. (2020).

## 2.6. Agroecology as a family of approaches to achieve sustainable food and farming systems

There is a great deal of activity at the national and European level regarding transitions to agroecology, both related to agriculture and to wider food systems. A variety of different groups and initiatives approach this from different, often complementary, angles. This

## Contours of a roadmap for a European network

involves grassroots movements and farmer organisations, research institutions, policy makers, private sector, and many more. Some articulate their approach as agroecology in so many words, and others articulate their approach along the lines of e.g. organic farming, agroforestry, regenerative farming etc. (see e.g. Vermunt et al. (2021) for a comparison of the approaches).

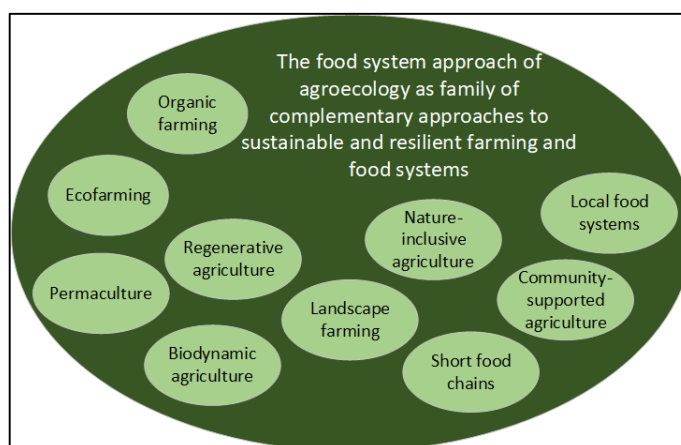
Agroecology may be presented as the extended family name for a range of approaches related to sustainable agriculture, not as an additional name. The process of co-creating the NofN may be a good opportunity to present it in this way.

Thinking in terms of family as analogy, “Agroecology” would then be the last/family name in terms of a food systems approach, and, for example, “organic farming” is one of the many first names. The “last name” indicates what the approaches have in common, or, rather, what they all connect to, and the first name indicates its specific own identity. Agroecology is about a food systems approach, and organic farming covers a particular dimension of that approach (but not the entire food system).

A particular farm may involve a combination of different approaches, e.g. by being focused on both nature-inclusiveness, organic production, and being community-supported.

In this way, it may help to make clearer how “agroecology” adds value to all the other existing concepts such as organic farming. It helps to see the trees as well as the forest. In other words, it helps to communicate better to wider audiences what the various approaches have in common, how they complement each other, and how together they represent specific expressions of a bigger picture of sustainable food systems (Figure 10).

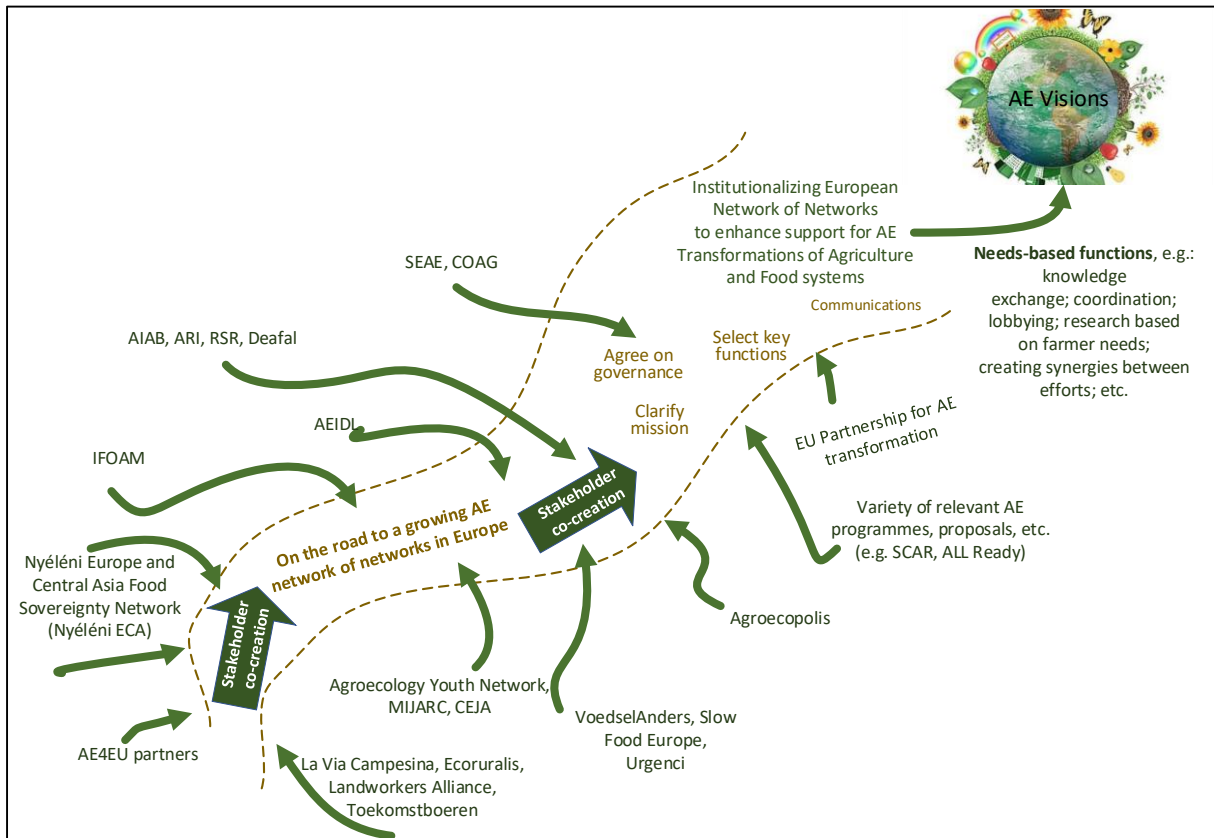
It also emphasizes how agroecology is not about a one-size-fits-all approach, but about contextualized and customized approaches which share a common ground and overarching approach (the family name) and are motivated by similar aspired futures. So agroecology as an overarching concept of a range of specific approaches that each put an emphasis on particular dimensions, but together are complementary in spanning the width of agroecology as food system approach. The NofN may be a suitable vehicle for this.



**Figure 10:** Agroecology as family of complementary approaches.

### 3. Co-creating the roadmap

After initial explorations of what an appropriate roadmap may look like, a range of stakeholders were approached (in different countries as well as European-level representative organisations). Figure 11 illustrates the process of engaging stakeholders (from now on participants) in the process of co-creating the NofN.



**Figure 11:** Participating groups work together on the road to growing an agroecology network of networks in Europe.

They provided their initial views on what a roadmap and the NofN that it should help establish, should link to. We summarise these in the following.

In terms of challenges and concerns, the following was suggested:

- There is a disconnect between bottom up initiatives and top down policies/funding;
- Influencing mainstream agriculture through agroecology, remains challenging;
- There is a disconnect between a focus on agriculture production and wider food system perspective;
- There are different views on agroecology and there is the risk of “green washing” because it is used for many different approaches;

## Co-creating the roadmap

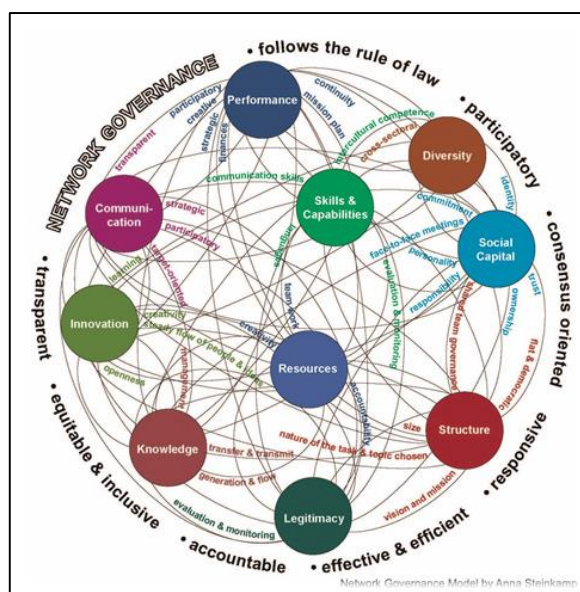
- There is limited visibility and capacity and coordination regarding efforts to see the application of agroecological principles and practices go to scale;
- There are different organisational cultures – e.g. younger generations do this differently, and they communicate through media that older generations not always do;
- Too much in terms of programmes on agroecology is in the hands of researchers and policy makers;
- There is a need for training and education on agroecology.

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In terms of ambitions, the NofN should set up in such a way that it would:

- Strengthen agroecological transformative capacity in Europe;
- Depart from a holistic approach: agroecology as food system approach;
- Be based on Nyeleni declaration and elements/principles of agroecology by FAO/HLPE;
- Be based on and linking existing “bottom up” networks as core;
- Link farmers-research-NGO’s-citizens-policies;
- Increase visibility of agroecology application and transformation efforts; Increase capacity and coordination of efforts related to agroecological transformations.

Figure 12 points to aspects to be considered in relation to an appropriate network governance setup, which is not the same as organisational governance.



**Figure 12:** Source: Network Governance Model by Anna Steinkamp

In terms of aligning opportunities and ambitions:

- Support and connect to enthusiasm/ power bottom up initiatives. In other words: find out where the energy is, and connect to this rather than trying to sell one’s own plans;
- Ensure participation of the younger generation;
- Create new funding options for agroecology by strategic linking with SCAR Partnerships on Agroecology and Food Systems;



## 4. Further steps in developing the roadmap

The efforts of the ELL4AE revolve around a series of co-design workshops. Initially, this was envisaged to take place through three of such co-design workshops. Effectively, we found a need to adapt this approach to a larger number of co-design workshops, complemented by working group meetings that take place in-between the co-design workshop. So far, there has been an initial getting-to-know-each-other workshop, one co-design workshop, and the second co-design workshop is scheduled for September 2022. AE4EU work packages are represented in these co-design workshop, which allows for continuous fine-tuning rather than having – an initially planned – one-time workshop to connect related processes.

Further steps as part of a roadmap for the development of the NofN (2022-2023):

1. More clearly defining the relationship with European initiatives and networks such as the EU agroecology partnership and the EU sustainable food systems partnership.
2. Connect to key stakeholders such as the FAO Agroecology group, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), the global research alliance, and food chain actors other than farmers organisations (who already are directly involved), to appropriately position the NofN.
3. Growing the network in its appropriate niche: it is a NofN, so it is not about connecting individual organisations and groups which are in most cases part of a network that can be connected to the NofN.
4. Building relationships among participants in the NofN. This is considered to be key for a network built on agroecological principles.
5. Identifying funding sources in line with ambitions of the NofN.
6. If found appropriate, identify a future host for the NofN as a long-term continuing effort.

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Annex: Ideas on priorities for co-creating the European agroecology network of networks as expressed during stakeholder meeting

## Annex: Ideas on priorities for co-creating the European agroecology network of networks as expressed during stakeholder meeting

to bring in other stakeholders not yet there	Make visible farm success stories	translation of the issues identified into specific objectives
Make visible more organizations	Vision	choose a topic on which we can work together. We are small and do not have a lot of time to participate strong
Organise in person meetings, knowledge exchange	Common goals	a common lesson, a strong vision, meetings where we can really reach "critical mass", networking, visibility of farmers
create a common and strong identity, in which farmers can feel safe and represented	common first information shared widely	Giving more stories of happy and successful cases where producers can explain their achievements ( restoring ecosystem services), achieving financial sustainability etc.
organise meetings with representatives of the networks involved	identify a few key points on which to work together	gather more feedback be concrete in messages (start now)
support existing organizations and networks	identify and use a common language in communication (shared glossary)	Synergies to be encouraged per sector of activities and needs of each stakeholder or regional community
Launch some issues and gather proposals	joined projects that would involve farmers and not just in education but help them to get to real resources	Make networking easy, accessible
collaboration on policy thematic on the EU-level	Who coordinates the network? Structural question - representation is f different constituencies must be done	Find ways to share knowledge about practices and know where to find that knowledge exchange in the future in a straightforward way
create a good organizational structure that allows for fluent communication and functional and efficient work	Putting an emphasis on farmers' perspective	link research with farmers and citizens through a movement for safe and quality food
Direct help to farmers (financial and knowledge support)	Contact organizations that can represent the variety of different territories at different levels.	Prepare trigger question to stimulate opinions, points of views and critical points
thinking of how to support farmers		