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New goals, roles and rules around agrobiodiversity management

*Adanella Rossi**, *Riccardo Bocci***, *Bettina Bussi****, *Giuseppe De Santis****, *Riccardo Franciolini****, *Claudio Pozzi****, *University of Pisa**, *Rete Semi Rurali***, *RSR****

Abstract

Introduction and objectives- The construction of sustainable food systems finds in the enhancement of agrobiodiversity a crucial building block. Embedding diversity in farming systems, however, appears as a complex process, that demands to address the issue from different perspectives and builds on the interaction among multiple actors, diversely involved. The importance acquired by this multi-actor dimension of agrobiodiversity management mirrors the evolution that has characterised the ways to address it, when conceiving, analysing, promoting and supporting these processes. Hand in hand with the recognition of the role played by the various stakeholders, the paradigm is also changed, moving from the traditional, conservative approach - conceived both as ex-situ and in-situ conservation - to that one of on-farm management, conceived as a dynamic, real space. Into a perspective of expanded farm management, embedded in the local territorial and social context, this approach has been further evolving towards a community diversity management (De Boef et al., 2013). This paradigm re-empowers farmers, giving them a key role in the management of seeds and varieties. It does represents an area of experimentation of innovative practices - from the selection of genetic material to the establishment of new set of rules and social norms, to the creation of alternative system for seed reproduction and circulation - , which are potentially able to trigger broader change. This paper investigates these aspects, looking at the processes through which initiatives for the enhancement of agrobiodiversity are set up by multi-actor networks, function and interact with each other, as well as try to generate changes in the system. A special attention is given to the role of facilitation of the overall process of change.

Methodology- The analysis draws on the evidences gathered and analysed through the EU funded project DIVERSIFOOD (www.diversifood.eu). It focuses in particular on initiatives that have been analysed in Italy. It develops a meta-analysis of the findings of the investigations done but also of the evidences stemming from the participatory and action-oriented research approaches adopted for the researches.

Results - The article sheds light on the process that sees the various actors that are involved in agrobiodiversity management acquire a new, active role and give rise to innovative collective systems. It confirms the key role of their interaction and of their capacity to mobilise all the resources available and to adopt a comprehensive approach (Brunori et al., 2018). In turn, this shows the importance of the presence of forms of facilitation of these processes, and how this function increasingly shows a distributed nature, being it provided by several actors involved around genetic resource management - from scientists, to farmers, to other civil society actors (Kilelu et al., 2011; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Concerning more challenging horizontal and vertical interaction, important for the expression of the transformative potential of these initiatives, it emerges the role played by specific actors, who can connect the various experiences but also facilitate their access to higher institutional levels (Sayfang, et al., 2014).

Keywords: biodiversity enrichment, on-farm diversity management, community diversity management, Diversifood