

Compared trajectories of agro-ecology in Brazil and France: The role of scientists and social movements

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In Brazil, various forms of “alternative agricultures”, aimed at opposing the modern technological standards and their impacts in terms of social exclusion for small sized family farms, and supported by NGOs from the 1970s on, progressively gathered under the denomination of agro-ecology, in a context where certified and institutionalised organic agriculture was not very present at the scale of the country. In France, several social and professional movements started quite recently to put agro-ecology on the foreground, in a context where, as opposed to Brazil, certified and institutionalised organic agriculture is quite structured. Our analysis of the Brazilian case is focused on the interactions between scientists, social movements and policy makers, analysed through the study of a dozen key actors’ trajectories which show how some persons went from a strong involvement in NGOs (from the 1970s to the 1990s) towards participation in the construction of new public policies (from 2003 on), and often turned to research in order to legitimate their position. Meanwhile some public researchers turned to more participative methods and sometimes also to policy making, while others deal with agro-ecology in a more classical way in their own discipline. Such interactions and distinct trajectories generate competing versions of agro-ecology which we will distinguish on the basis of three main aspects: the conceptions of technical transitions, the type of farmers that are aimed at, and the relationships to the market and to the consumers. These differences, which can be related to both competing theoretical sources and specific socio-professional trajectories, could help analysing the case of agro-ecology in France in the next step of our common research program. We would study the apparition of agro-ecology— which seems more recent, except for a few pioneers - in two contrasted contexts: alternative food networks involving producers and consumers, partly as the result of a strong criticism of institutionalised organic agriculture, and sustainable agriculture movements based on more mainstream farms and productions such as arable crops.