



Looking back and forward: Lessons from farming system research in France

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Plan

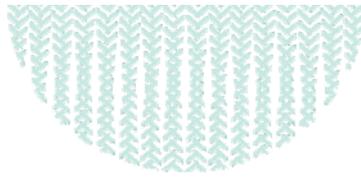


- > **30 years of history: the SAD Department within INRA**
- > **Knowledge production in the French FSR**
- > **What is to be learnt for the IFSA Community?**

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Thirty years of history : the SAD Department within INRA



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An organisational innovation creation of SAD Department in 1979

- INRA : a research institute committed to the modernization of agriculture during the 50's and 60's
- Some researchers start to question top-down approaches of innovation in the 70's.
- A strong habit of pluridisciplinary work in so called agronomic « engineering schools »
- Planning issues and pluridisciplinary research programmes in rural areas to limit drift from land
- Over production, environmental damages : first signs

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SAD Department: interdisciplinarity, systemic modelling, action and innovation

➤ agronomists and economists ...and animal scientists
management scientists, social and human scientists,
ecologists, geographers,...within permanent research units to:

- build and explore new objects
- develop systemic modelling
- address problems expressed by farmers or various collectives

➤ Action-research or intervention-research: transforming the world to understand it, supporting innovation

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Knowledge production and FSR Research objects, key principles



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Farm functioning and typologies: diagnosis and decision tools

- A systemic research tradition based on adaptive or bounded rationality and systemic modelling (Operating, Information, Decision, Memorizing system)
- The project of the farmer and his(her) family : at the core of FS
- Diversity of farms = diversity of farm functioning
- Practices as a key analyser of the relations between different parts of system (practices versus techniques)
- New entities to be considered (« sole », batches..) to develop decision support systems

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Collective action, norms building, learning processes: example 1

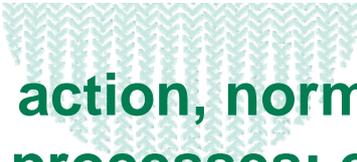
Fire management in the Mediterranean scrublands

- Reformulating the problem: strips or pastoral management to prevent bushfire ?
- Results:
 - new agreement between forest owners, local authorities firemen and shepherds
 - training for shepherds and new fodder references
 - new knowledge on animal nutrition: the MEAL model

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Collective action, norms building, learning processes: example 2

Water management: mineral water and nitrogen leaching

- Finding an indicator to create the dialogue: the marginal cost of nitrogen
- Results
 - Methods to measure nitrogen dynamics in a water catchment
 - An organisational innovation : role and skills of a third part in finding new agreements enabling learning processes at farm and collective level
 - Insight in an action-research and interdisciplinary work to support the emergence of a new management process.

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Collective action, norms building, learning processes: example 3

Developing on-farm products in Corsica

- Finding a new concept: the pork sausage « ready to extend the eaten date »
- Results
 - New technologies to produce pork sausage
 - knowledge in food technology but also in the building of collective food standards
 - Empowerment of local farmers and traders
 - Rules of co-ordination to develop new product qualification and food standards (AOC, IGP)

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Collective action, norms building, learning processes: example 4

Supporting local authorities in building a LEADER project

- Proposing an « empty » concept as a boundary object:
« intermediate areas »
- Results
 - Lessons to build an transdisciplinary project : individual and collective skills in the research team
 - Role of an « empty concept » to build a collective vision for the future
 - A LEADER proposal written with the various groups concerned by the local development of the French Pays Basque area.

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Collective action, norms building, learning processes: common features

- Systemic thinking and modelling applied to: local food systems, local resources management, landscape and biodiversity
- Developing tools and concepts: intermediary or boundary objects among researchers and their research partners
- The socio-technical dynamics of the collective action as central to understand/support innovation
- Modelling: paying more attention to the process than to the resulting model

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Some key principles in French FSR

- « In situ » research , local involvement
- Problem finding as important as problem solving
- Projects and management entities as entry point for systemic modelling and systemic thinking
- Management entities and practices as socio-technical constructs
- Change and risk are key analysers to define the limits of the system with the concerned actors
- Reflexivity on action-research and research inquiries meant to address the technical and the cognitive and social dimensions

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What can be learnt from this history by the IFSA Community?



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IFSA Community: open and creative

- A community in movement: new comers, new ideas, new theoretical background and a risk to never set the Thames!
- A community which might have to
 - build a research tradition which can be transmitted ?
 - avoid vampirism: others pick the ideas but forget the research practices and tradition!
- Organizing the capitalization
 - State of the arts ?
 - Book editing
 - An IFSA sponsored journal ?

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IFSA Community: pluridisciplinary

A community which might have to:

- identify research objects which address the complexity of the situations and as well allow to carry on inter- and trans-disciplinary researches ?
- to investigate further system modelling and thinking as processes to support problem finding and solving in local situations ?
- take responsibility for developing ID skilled researchers
 - spaces for experience sharing (skills and abilities) ?
 - training courses across Europe ?

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IFSA Community: local is beautiful!

A lot of nice and rich case studies ...how to create opportunities to build more generic knowledge within the Community ?

Being local...but thinking global :

- linking what is at stake in local situations to global issues
- developing a dialogue with policy makers and stakeholders dealing with global issues

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By way of conclusion

Diversity is nice and relevantbut has to be organized to keep the dialogue going on amongst

- the disciplines
- newcomers and old fellow travellers
- researchers and their partners in local situations
- researchers involved locally and policy makers and stakeholders dealing with global issues.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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