

RISE-ATTER Autumn School 2022 (RAAS) 'Ways of Knowing for Agroecological Transitions'

3 - 10 October 2022 at Monkton Wyld, UK
REPORT

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REPORT of the RISE-ATTEr Autumn School 2022 (RAAS) on 'Ways of Knowing for Agroecological Transitions' written by the RAAS facilitation team: Chris Maughan, Barbara van Dyck, Jasber Singh, Lucy Aphramor, Nina Moeller, Michel Pimbert, Doriane Guennoc, Jocelyn Parot, and Georges Félix.

Cover illustration: Georges Félix

Introduction

(Background on RISE ATTER; thematic focus; objectives; pedagogy, etc.)

As part of the RISE ATTER project, consortium partners co-designed and delivered a 7-day event at Monkton Wyld Court in Dorset, UK. This is the first of three summer/autumn schools planned to take place over the course of the ATTER project. The main objective of this week-long collective space was to bring together researchers and practitioners from across the world who want to exchange, learn and advance their thinking and practice on agroecological transitions.

The programme for the school was designed around the ATTER project, itself a community of practice of researchers and practitioners working on 'agroecological transitions of territorial agrifood systems.' The Autumn School drew on the expertise of the consortium - built from eighteen universities, research centres and civil society groups from six countries - to offer an exciting and transdisciplinary programme, alongside insights from participants' experiences throughout the week.

Objectives/vision/intentions

1. Build a 'community of practice' relating to participatory action researchers that wish to commit to fostering socially just food systems in their territories.
2. Facilitate exchanges around tools and methodologies intended to support agroecological transitions at the territorial level.
3. Honour and incorporate 'diverse ways of knowing' as a key component of agroecological transitions.
4. Create a nurturing and non-judgemental environment so that optimal learning and exchanges can happen.
5. Create a transformative moment for participants grounded in experiential learning.

Pedagogical approach

The school was an attempt to highlight the importance of the diversity of knowledges that exists in territorial food systems. Transition processes affect everybody - even if in highly uneven ways - and for that reason we believe that all perspectives are needed to understand, facilitate and effect them with a particular attention on the most marginalised voices. Moreover, how we view 'transitions', 'territories' or even 'agroecology' will be different depending on who we are and where we are coming from. With this in mind the school explored multiple methods and tools, relevant to a range of scales, that have potential to transcend the subordination of nature and of people along intersectional lines of race, class, caste, disability/ability, sexuality, and gender.

Our approach also reflects how we conceive of the learning process in itself. As such, the school was based on the principles of critical and decolonizing pedagogies. Using dialogue, mutual exchange, feminist participatory methodologies, amongst other horizontal approaches, we will organise spaces for sharing ideas, experiences and research, unpacking problems in research, and exploring together the collective experiences and uncertainties of the group, as well as our hopes and dreams for the future.

Development process

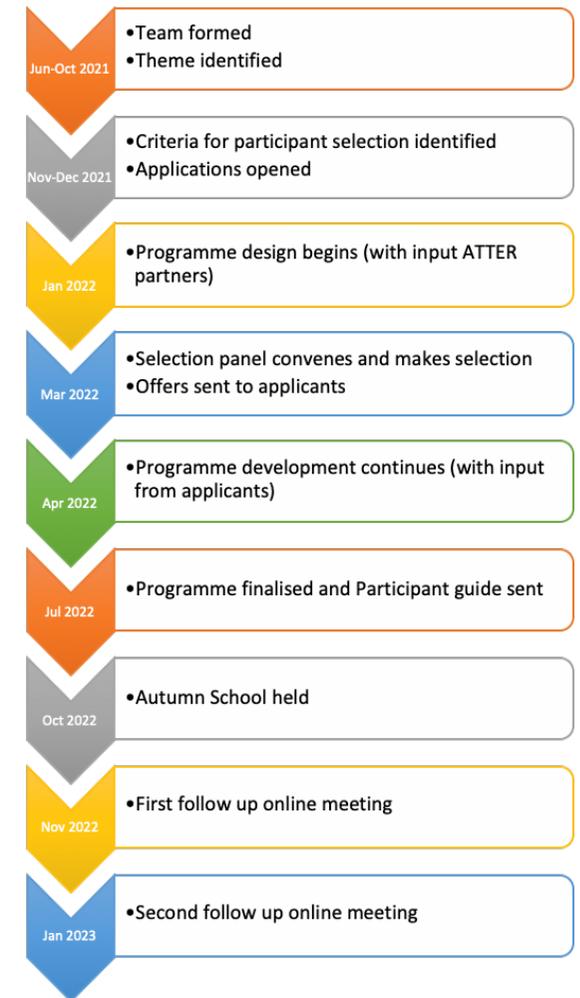
(Short account of how the process was organised: selection; programme design, etc.)

The RISE ATTER Autumn School (RAAS) design process was iterative and participatory from conception to delivery (and beyond), at time of writing lasting over 18 months. From the beginning the intention was to form a core team to handle the bulk of administrative tasks, while creating regular opportunities for wider team and consortium members to contribute to the design and delivery. This process is summarised in the diagram to the right, but some key elements are pulled out and described below.

Participant selection: Our intention was to ensure a diverse set of participants, spanning geographies, disciplinary backgrounds, and worldviews. A process was designed with coordination group input for participant selection including application questions and assessment criteria. Funding was also allocated for three bursary places. A selection panel was formed to assess the more than 70 applications that were submitted and make a proposal selection of 25 participants to be considered by the wider coordination group.

Programme co-design: The programme evolved over a period of about 8 months, including initial brainstorming by the core group, workshops with wider consortium members, and alterations based on participant applications (which included space to suggest content). The final programme was organised by day theme (described below), each of which had a key facilitator. This allowed high level of variety in content and delivery and helped to share responsibility across the facilitation team.

'Community of Practice': Active participant involvement during and after the school was a central aim of the coordination team. A key concept in the design and delivery of this was the idea of a 'community of practice', which means a group of people who «share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly». A number of elements of the schools design were included in a deliberate attempt to lay the foundations for this group during the school so it would continue afterwards. For example, creating space for participants to share their own work, identify shared interests, and establish trust. The programme also built towards the final day which was participant led.



Programme overview

Time	Day 1 [Mon] Participant arrival	Day 2 [Tues] AGROECOLOGY AND WAYS OF KNOWING	Day 3 [Wed] WAYS OF LEARNING & RESEARCHING	Day 4 [Thurs] SKILLS FOR TRANSITION	Day 5 [Fri] AWAY DAY: AETs at Fivepenny Farm	Day 6 [Sat] WAYS OF COLLABORATING	Day 7 [Sun] PARTICIPANT-LED DAY
8.00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9-11		EXCHANGE Getting to know each other	Morning reflection/ buddy check in	Morning reflection / collective check in	Morning reflection/ buddy check in	Morning reflection/ buddy check in	Morning reflection/ buddy check in
			EXPERIENCE /EXCHANGE Image Theatre - academic research and decolonising knowledge (1/2)	EXCHANGE Facilitating AE Territorial Transitions in different contexts (participant contributions)	“Web of life” Farm visit and its space in AE transition England	THEORY/EXPERIENCE Collective reading and listening on knowledge and collective practice	PARTICIPANT OPEN SPACE
11-11.30		Break	Break	Break		Break	Break
11.30-13.00		THEORY Session on ways of knowing for just agroecological territories	EXPERIENCE/ EXCHANGE Image Theatre exercise on academic research and decolonising knowledge (2/2)	EXPERIENCE “Visioning the future by acknowledging the past in the present” Transect Walk (1/2): (Agro-) Ecosystem components, structures and functions	Farm visit and its space in AE transition England	EXCHANGE Intervision on infrastructures of collective action for transition	PARTICIPANT OPEN SPACE
13-14		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch at Five Penny	Lunch	Lunch
14-16	Mística & Opening session	EXCHANGE/EXPERIENCE 'Shared challenges' exercise	EXCHANGE World Café: Critical engagement with PAR/decolonial approaches	EXPERIENCE Project planning (2/2):	Experience (A) Interview the cow Experience (B) Plants and soil health	EXCHANGE Building together Co-creating from journaling and harvesting	PARTICIPANT OPEN SPACE
16-16.30		Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
16.30-18	Opening Session continued	EXCHANGE/REFLECTION AETs and ways of knowing in & across different contexts	REFLECTION Journaling writing	REFLECTION Journaling drawing	REFLECTION: Journaling Poetry	EXCHANGE Building together Prepare open day	Cocreating : bringing it all together
18-19		Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
19 ...	Learning buddies	Free time [Facilitation team debrief]	Free time [Facilitation team debrief]	Free time [Facilitation team debrief]	Free time [Facilitation team debrief]	Cultural Exchange [Bring & share]	Closing ceremony

Programme day-by-day

Day 1: Introductions / Creating a container

One sentence description of theme: A space to orient participants, introduce methodologies, and 'create a safe container' for the activities throughout the week.

Session name: *Mística*

Session content: a 'mística' is a ritual of arrival. It helps to mark the creation of a rarefied space, in this case suitable for mutual respect and intentional thought and action. For this, we asked all participants to bring something symbolic to offer the group. It could be a small object, a line from a poem, or even a physical gesture. Participants (facilitators included) took turns to place/speak/perform their contribution.



Session name: 'Creating a container' / orientations

Session content: This session was designed to introduce participants to the many tools selected and adopted to guide us through the week (e.g. the 'buddy system', morning reflections, welfare team, participant-led spaces). It was also a key moment to continue the work of creating a safe container for the week. Space was given for participants to consider suggested group agreements, suggest additional ones and reflect on what they hoped to get out of the week.

Tools/methods used (with links): Energiser games / Solo reflection + pair work; consent rounds.

Day 2: Theme: Agroecology and Ways of Knowing

One sentence description of theme: An introductory day, establishing key concepts and fostering discussion as a way to initiate participation.

Session 1: Introductions - a session designed to map participants' backgrounds.

Session 2: Session on ways of knowing for just agroecological territories - this session was built around three 'provocations' from different session facilitators, introducing key concepts that illustrate "ways of knowing for agroecological transitions" as a way to foster discussion and build a collective understanding for the process ahead; see Appendix 1a and 1b for write-ups of two of the provocations; the third intervention was an exercise that made use of food items to spark discussion about the diversity of ways in which people experience food.

Methods: (1) Short, so-called 'lightning talks' to spark new understandings and discussion, as well as provide a frame for the key concepts guiding the autumn school; (2) interactive reflection aided by the use of food items and images of food that had inscriptions such as "I am starving, but I won't eat that if it's not organic", "I am allergic to wheat", "I cannot eat that ever since what happened", "I love this but it gets stuck in my dentures", etc.

Some relevant literature resources:

Anderson, C., Buchanan, C., Chang, M., Sanchez Rodriguez, J., & Wakeford, T. (2017). *Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system*. Coventry University. <https://doi.org/10.18552/9781846000751>

De Sousa Santos, B. (2015). *Epistemologies of the south: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.

Feyerabend, P. (1975). *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*. New Left Books.

Gosden, C. (2020). *The History of Magic: From Alchemy to Witchcraft, from the Ice Age to the Present*. Viking.

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Cornell University Press.

Pimbert, M. (2006). *Transforming knowledge and ways of knowing for food sovereignty*. IIED.

Pimbert, M. P. (Ed.). (2018). *Food sovereignty, agroecology and biocultural diversity: Constructing and contesting knowledge*. Routledge.

Session 3: Shared challenges exercise - this session used the '1-2-all' method, beginning with solo reflection, small group discussion to identify the major challenges in our work, then plenary. Participants were asked to identify two main challenges and share with the group as a way to determine some commonalities and begin forming working groups.



Day 3: Theme: Ways of Learning and Researching

One sentence description of theme: A day devoted to exploring the need for intersectional decolonising pedagogies and research.

Session 1: Image theatre workshop - an introduction to issues underlying decolonising pedagogies and research approaches, using image theatre as a tool. Participants were given a brief introduction to the image theatre method. Participants were then given space to practice the technique using the following questions:

1. What does traditional academic research mean to you?
2. What does decolonising knowledge mean to you?
3. What steps do we need to take individually, and collectively, to move towards a decolonising direction?

Methods: Image theater how-to guide.

Session 2: Critical issues and challenges in decolonising/PAR approaches.

Content: We presented five problems/challenges in PAR and decolonising research. Five groups each discussed one of these challenges and provided feedback to all participants. Link to the 'challenges' document.

Methods: Problem-based learning using a World Café approach.

Some relevant literature resources:

Fals Borda, O., & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research*. Apex Press.

Freire, P. (2017). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. Abingdon: Routledge

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. 2nd edn. London: Zed Books

Day 4: Skills for Transition

One sentence description of theme: a series of tools and approaches for beginning participatory-action research on transition processes, featuring especially key biophysical factors such as dialogue of knowledges, landscape assessment, and scientific communication.

Session 1: presentations and discussion on participant experiences of facilitating agroecological transitions. During this session, three participants shared with the rest of the group their experiences, challenges and opportunities from their own contexts, including Zimbabwe, Mexico, and Brazil.

Method: The discussion was facilitated collectively using the 'fish bowl' method (['Fish-bowl' discussion method](#)).

Session 2: Transect walk of Monkton Wyld site - in three small groups participants were guided through the site with a community member. Participants were tasked to gather information about six key locations from the site.

Method: Transect walk as described in [Geilfus 2008 \(p.65\)](#).

Session 3: Plenary discussion and analysis of transect results. Participants were re-shuffled into three new groups, plus a facilitator group. Notes taken from field observations of status, performance, and changes to site management (session 2) were then synthesized to create two outputs: a topographic transect table with key indicators, and a site sketch map, acknowledging the information shared by the guides and the group's analyses.

Method: Individual group presentation of results, and plenary discussion, including Q&As.



Day 5: Away day - visit to Fivepenny Farm (with Jyoti Fernandes (LWA))

One sentence description of theme: An opportunity to spend some time away from the Autumn School venue visiting and experiencing first hand an important initiative in the region active in catalysing agroecological transitions.

Session 1: Web of life exercise - an energiser game designed to 'warm up' participants and get them to think ecologically. All participants represent an important 'node' in an ecosystem (e.g. a tree, or an animal, or resource) are connected together by a long string. A series of shocks are introduced which affect the ecosystem in different ways. For a fuller description of the exercise [see this link](#) and picture below.

Session 2: Farm tour - participants were given an interactive tour of the project by Fivepenny Farm co-manager Jyoti Fernandes. Highlights included the micro-dairy (an important shared resource for a number of small-scale dairy producers in the region), the market garden and orchard. For more info on the farm see [this article](#).

Session 3: Parallel activities designed to help participants explore the farm.

1. Weeds as bioindicators: a workshop designed to introduce participants to the concept of plant bioindicators and a method for using them as a proxy for assessing soil condition. [Link to methodology](#).
2. 'Interview the Cow' demonstration: an alternative method for exploring details about livestock operation. Instead of interviewing the farmer directly, the farmer is asked to speak on behalf of the cow. For a full description of the method see [Geilfus' 80 Tools for Participatory Development \(p.125\)](#).
3. Apple picking and processing: participants helped out with apple picking and processing happening that day on the farm. Participants were encouraged to gather information about the process using the 'Flowchart of activity' framework, also from the [Geilfus text \(p.103\)](#).

Tools/methods used (with links):

- [Web of life exercise.](#)
- [Plant bioindicators methodology.](#)
- [‘Interview the cow’ and ‘Flowchart of activities’ methodologies.](#)



Day 6: Ways of Collaborating

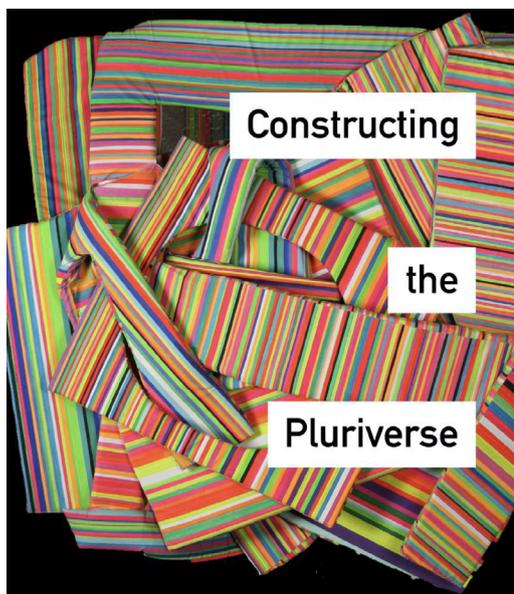
One sentence description of theme: A day of collective practice or restoring the art of collaboration.

Session 1: Historically used in the anarchist workers’ circles of the 19th century, ‘arpage’ is a method of collective reading of a work, by disassembling it. With a view to its critical appropriation and to nourish the articulation between practice and theory we collectively discovered the text ‘constructing the pluriverse’. It is a method that aims to de-elitise knowledge, to (re)appropriate knowledge while sharing ideas and experiences.

Session content: Collective reading. After situating the book “Constructing the Pluriverse” in its context, we physically tore apart a text, took some individual reading time, and collectively made sense of the book and its ideas. Five chapters of the book were distributed among small groups of 4 or 5 participants. Everybody read individually around 4 pages and then pieced the chapter together by sharing per chapter: what does the reading make you feel? What struck you in the text? Maybe share a quote and some of the key ideas you get from it. In a plenary session we shared about what could be learned from the book regarding ways of knowing for agroecology transitions. A discussion that ended up in deep sharing around coloniality, representation, whiteness and eurocentrism of so much of the agroecology debates.

Tools/methods used (with links):

- Collective book survey or “arpage” (on the method see [here](#) or [here](#) (in French))
- Starhawk. *The empowerment manual: a guide for collaborative groups*. New Society Publishers, 2011, download via Libgen [here](#).
- Reiter, Bernd (Ed) with contributions from W. Mingolo, R. Connell, S. Harding, A. Escobar, A. Ziai, U. Oslender, I. Ouattara, M. Samnotra, C. Walsh, M. Boatca, H. Burchardt, Z. Ahmad, V. Metha and E. Kashfi. “*Constructing the pluriverse: The geopolitics of knowledge.*” (2018) Duke University Press, download via Libgen [here](#).



"The pluriverse, I find immensely helpful as a political compass to do agroecology transitions work. The pluriverse, a term that has become known through indigenous communities in central and south America, and the Zapatistas in south Mexico more specifically refers to making space for diversity to truly co-exist. It is about creating a world where there is space for many worlds, with their ways of knowing, of living. This goes against the claims to know how another world should look like, what knowing should be informing alternatives except for the fact that many worlds should be able to exist where no one is subordinated and where self-determination can be achieved for all." [Barbara, contextualizing the book before disassembling it on DAY 6]

Session 2: Collective exchanges on dilemmas

Session content: This session was organized to create a space for discussion about participants' own challenges on their practices. Few participants were asked to prepare a dilemma, ideally oriented toward collective action practices, and the others adopted the role of active listener. During the one hour session in small groups of 3 to 6 people, the rhythm was given by the alternation of the challenges presentations (prepared beforehand) and the questions from the group.

Tools/methods used (with links): Method of "Mutual interview group". Sources (in French). [Source 1](#); [source 2](#).

Day 7: Participant-led day

One sentence description of theme: A day planned and delivered by participants as a way to transition to a post-event self-organised community of practice.

Session 1: Exchanges and challenges: A session built around small group exchanges on the challenges we face in our work, modeling a community of practice.

Session 2: Agroecology Coalitions discussion: a discussion session identifying already existing coalitions of Agroecology activists and researchers and discussion of the power dynamics that exist within them.

Session 3: Network mapping and Next steps: A session built around mapping the networks we belong to and gathering ideas for how we will organise and what activities we will undertake, post-event.

The final day also included a trip to the beach for a cold water swim and a closing Mistica, in a mirroring of the opening of the 'container', during which participants were asked to reflect on what they were taking away from the experience.



Outcomes

A summary of decisions taken and outcomes designed to sustain the RAAS community of practice.

- **Regular online check in:** a regular online meeting to help all participants remain in contact and continue to develop the community of practice. So far there have been two meetings (November 2022 and January 2023), and another is planned for March 2023.
- **ATTER Autumn School Community Conference** - 24th January 2023 15-17.00 on zoom. This virtual gathering was organised by two RAAS participants in order to provide an intimate setting for sharing research updates, soliciting feedback, and identifying future collaborations. Five short presentations were given and around 25 people from across the ATTER network attended.
- **Whatsapp group** - an informal place for participants to keep in contact and share relevant information.
- **PhD-retreat** - six participant-facilitators spent 3 weeks together at ATTER-partner CIHEAM to support each other in their respective PhD-projects

Facilitator reflections

(A series of short reflective pieces from facilitators)

Reflections on Image Theatre as a technique for (Jasber Singh)

The image theater activity fostered a playful environment to explore and unpack complex and challenging questions. From what I could see, people enjoyed harnessing their creative energies and using their bodies to make visual images alongside working collectively. The discussion that the performances generated were nuanced, complex, and layered. Many of the images performed showed that academic knowledge was structurally hierarchical, rooted in historical racialised, gendered, and heteronormative logics. To illustrate, in one image participants stood on a chair representing academic knowledge and beneath the elevated figure were images of destructive colonial historical forces that the knowledge was built on.

The afternoon session provided an opportunity to critically engage with some of the challenges within PAR and decolonising. The world café style discussion revealed the problematics of the 'western' positionality, the inherent and vexed power relations between the global south and global north, the different needs and the often but not exclusively classed power relations between academics and the community/research participants, the logics of white supremacy and anti-blackness that are constitutive part of food studies and nutrition discourses, and the problematics of writing about research as an individual when the knowledge was generated through a collective process.

There was a lack of time to go deeper into colonial logics and decolonisation. There was a need for this which was evident in two ways. Firstly, coffee discussions that I had with participants expressed a real hunger to go deeper into the one of the biggest shadows that follows agroecology in the global north: race. Secondly, in the formal teaching space there was a general sense of being 'stuck' on imagining decolonising futures. The enthusiasm to think about race and being stuck is learning, and arguably suggests that agroecology pedagogy is stuck on race.

We did not have time to stay in the 'stuckness', or as Donna Haraway calls it, staying with the trouble. That colonial trouble did show up in other sessions across the course, however. For example, there was a familiar racial tension in the air the following day, when discussions about the global south brought up questions about race, representation, and baked in racialised power dynamics between us. Who gets to narrate the 'Other' was questioned by bodies that are still Othered. The tension in the autumn school room taps into Edward Said's Orientalism which outlines how racialised ideas of the Other by European imperialism shaped knowledge production. Historically, there was no clear ditch between knowledge production and the violence of colonialism, and thus, discussions about the Other are not separate from the violent and traumatic colonial history and legacy. It is no surprise therefore that emotions viscerally change when we discuss representation as it puts a finger on a deep ancestral colonial wound.

We rarely have time to stay with the trouble, in my experience partly because of white fragility, partly because of a strong post-race paradigm in educational settings, and partly because there is a nervousness to engage with the gravity of the issues unless it is wisely held. Staying with this trouble perhaps is the learning that is often absent in agroecology pedagogy in the global north, and it is also vividly present at the same time, as the pulsating colonial wound inevitably opens and bleeds into the space. It's also becoming more evident that discussing decolonisation can't bypass the difficult and the political, be that reparations, integrational trauma, healing and intersectionality. As such, agroecology pedagogy in the future will hopefully face the post-race paradigm, white fragility, reparations, intergenerational trauma, intersectionality, questions of race and representation, alongside ecological collapse.

The long road of learning participatory practice - a reflection on the successes and 'near misses' of the RAAS (Chris Maughan)

Sometimes you have to experience things multiple times before you can truly say you've learned them. For me, the RAAS experience was characterised by a few of these experiences: things that I was certain

I already knew, but that the experience of co-organising the school showed me I hadn't fully grasped. The best example of this was the need to give adequate space for participants to introduce themselves; not just their name and where they're from, but really say something about their context, their hopes, and their struggles. In an intimate, and potentially very vulnerable and deep process like the one we envisioned for RAAS, there is no doing this by halves.

In some ways we took a gamble with how we designed the school programme. As ever with events like this, programme space is always tight, and there is invariably a certain amount of trial and error required to fit everything in. At a certain point we realised the way we really wanted to design the introductory sessions - using the 'River of Life' method - just wasn't going to work. This method, while perfect for small groups, would have taken over four hours with a group our size. So we decided to try to kill two birds with one stone - designing an experimental session where participants could introduce their work by identifying a challenge or problem they faced in their work. The thinking was this would give participants time to talk about their work and also identify possible collaborators.

Nice idea; but it didn't work. The session wasn't intimate enough for participants to actually convey where they were coming from, and arguably too early in the week for them to be able to properly identify the challenges they wanted to work on and talk about with their fellow participants. Some interesting discussions were had, but ultimately the session was a flop, and neither objective had been achieved.

As ever with failure (and I use that word lightly), the learnings for me were much more profound than any success. It wasn't long before we as facilitators started to get word that the participants were feeling the absence of a substantial opportunity to introduce their work. We ran a feedback session half way through the week (something I have never thought to do before) and for me it was the turning point of the whole process. Frustrations were vented and constructive criticisms voiced, which led to many immediate improvements, not least devoting time for participants to share one-on-one.

While I now know that in such intimate, participatory processes the time to arrive, to announce yourself as a participant, and convey something of where you are coming from is a sacred process - it should be given its due time and space. Without it, it is hard to build anything else. On the positive side, this process also revealed to me the strength of our process and our approach, our willingness to listen, consider and respond accordingly. We had built in multiple ways for this to happen, and we had a strong team that was there to help each other stay that course. If I ever do something like this again (and I truly hope I will), I will take with me these two lessons: create space for everyone to arrive and find their voice, and, be prepared to listen and be changed by what you hear.

Biophysical entry-points are key to agroecological transitions at the territorial level (Georges Félix)

Biophysical entry-points, for both farmers and technicians, are key to unravel the possibilities of amplifying agroecology at the territorial level (beyond the landscape) and simultaneously transforming ways of knowing and doing --- from plot, to farm, to landscape. Agroecology inherits from both socio-political and biophysical frameworks to describe, analyse, and (re)design sustainable farming systems that (1) produce healthy food for communities, (2) respect and improve natural habitats, and (3) promote human well-being, community self-organization, and overall ecosystem, organism and human health. Agroecology is thus complex and can be sometimes overwhelming to ground principles into practices because of its multifaceted approach to food and farming. From my viewpoint, there are basically two major aspects to transitions: concrete and abstract.

The structures that are 'visible' play an important role in the provision of 'invisible' services and functions that emerge from the farming activities (i.e. animal and products, ecosystem health, social links, and economic outputs). Throughout the 'Autumn School' held at Monkton Wyld Court in Devon (2022), many of the collective group reflections underlined the 'abstract' aspects to agroecological transitions at the territorial level. I personally enjoyed these discussions, but I find it very important to not forget that crops are produced by people on material farms, where the social and political dynamics are anchored on biophysical practices that care for the land.

As a natural scientist, the 'concrete' aspect of food and farming seems quite evident to me. Farm and

landscape diagnostics can be powerful methods to tackle 'higher level' discussions on agroecological transitions (what I name here 'abstract'). Understanding landscape elements in their context can support transitions by first understanding what is currently there and how the different infrastructures, activities and outputs have been shaped by heritage, history and dynamic decision-making processes. Moreover, to vision alternative 'futures' it is important to sketch out the 'present' and acknowledge the 'past'. In other words, catalysing change needs a baseline starting point from which to document and/or measure "change". This seems valid for both 'concrete' and 'abstract' aspects of food and farming, also known as "theory of change".

The link between farm and landscape is not always clear, yet each farm is composed of a series of plots, and each neighbouring farm on a watershed contributes to the overall quality of the sites. It is therefore crucial to explore individual plot effects on the farm, and the subsequent farm effects on the landscape, by aggregating the lessons learnt from describing and analysing plots and farm statuses and performances in the wider landscape context. Basically, the resulting services and functions at the landscape level can be simplified as "the sum of the smaller parts", where the 'abstract' (or invisible) aspects are often related to the opportunities presented by the 'concrete' (or visible) aspects. In terms of pedagogical approach throughout the 'Autumn School', the fieldwork sessions were well received by the participants, who not only enjoyed the time outdoors, but also allowed them to integrate some of the 'concrete' landscape observations into their more 'abstract' reflections around food sovereignty, participatory action research, and enabling public policies for agroecological transformations at the territorial level.

Some thoughts on transformative moments and collective learning (Barbara Van Dyck)

Transformative moments are often caused by small spontaneous things in life, surprising encounters, or by new experiences. They can be 'aha' moments, but often it is only afterward that one becomes aware of pivotal moments. For myself, I often think of the massive anti-war demonstration in 1983 as a transformative moment. I was four and half years old. It is only many years later that I would identify this moment as transformative. I now realize how this experience of being in the streets of Brussels with 400.000 others awakened a sense of 'yes we can' in me, a sense that still guides me.

One of our objectives of the autumn school (as outlined in the participant guide) was to "create a transformative moment for participants grounded in experiential learning". In a way, planning for transformative moments is an oxymoron.

In reflecting on how we prepared the terrain for a potential transformative moment for the group was the role of the collective experience. Whether small or big, moments become events when they have a 'before' and an 'after'. When something has a 'before' and 'after', it means that it has triggered change. And what really excites me is that it can be a shared experience, a moment of collective learning.

The collective is important. In modern societies (shaped by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism) we are confronted with an attack of anything collective. The focus on products, on outputs, on the rational individual is much to the detriment of the process, of the relational and of other ways of knowing. I believe that restoring the collective is a crucial part of agroecology and transition. The collective in that sense is about creating the power to create better worlds.

The autumn school was a place where I sought to restore that capacity of 'collectivity'. I believe the experience did generate a moment of collective learning with a before and an after.... Maybe we even have become a learning community? So, what contributed to this collective experience? We experimented with collective praxis, figuring out how collectives can function.

The school in a way was an experiment, in the way we have been living, playing, eating, sharing songs and rooms, gardening and learning together. The intensity this co-living generates fostered a deep level of connection.

The facilitators co-created the program. We designed activities and an approach that intended to ground agroecology in many different narratives, rather than grand discourses. As a facilitation team, we had made the choice for the difficult path to work toward finding a way, collectively, to give shape to the last

day and a half of the program. And, step by step, the facilitators' power over the program was handed over to the larger group.

Through allowing for feedback and by making a collective harvest on day 6 of the different notes that had been taken throughout the week, that transmission was taking place. The multiple notes and posters that now decorated our main working space reminded us about the many things that had been happening throughout the week. It also showed the frustrations about some of the things that had not happened yet.

Finally, after six days together - in what I thought was a magic moment - participants stood up and took up leadership in facilitating the design of the participant-led day and gathering post-autumn school ideas. It worked!

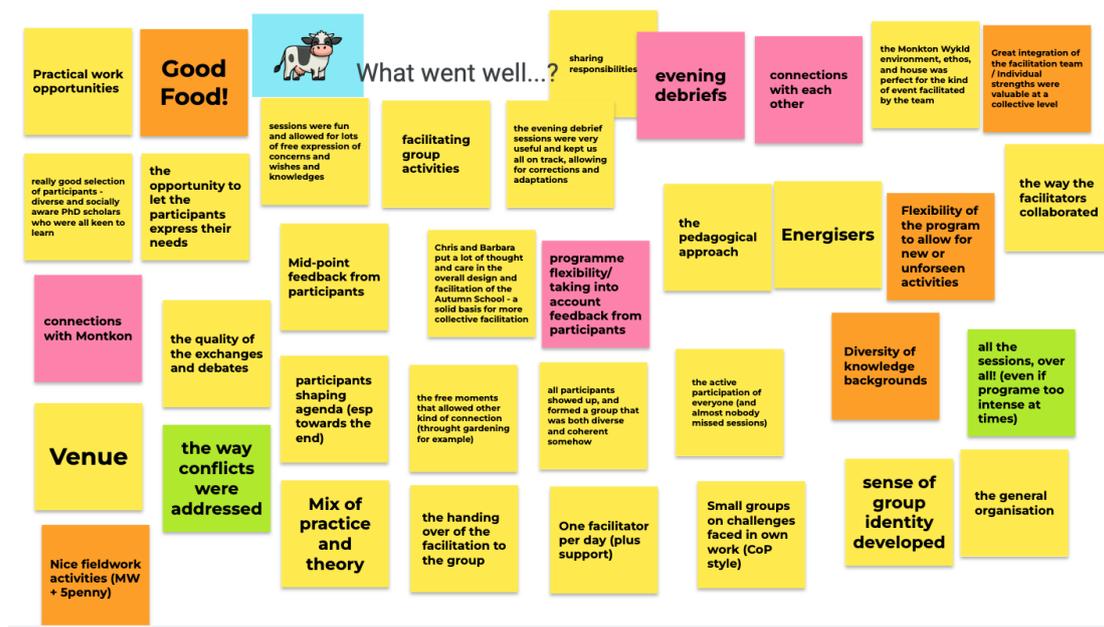
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Thinking back about the school as a moment of collective learning, I do think that we could have made more use of the experiences that existed in the group. For example, with the provision of a thinking framework about ways of knowing for agroecological transitions, did we not reproduce the colonial matrix of power with its hierarchically classified populations, their ways of knowing and life systems according to a Eurocentric standard? While we wanted to work with pedagogies that disrupt Coloniality, the matrix of global power, and its imposition of a certain way of knowing that is based on dualist thinking and hierarchy: man/women, black/white, urban/rural, ratio / emotion, modern/ backward. I remain puzzled about what scope the school opened up for diversity to truly co-exist. What did we learn from this experience in foregrounding epistemic justice? Bringing together this diverse mix of people in a wonderful setting definitely enabled connection and learning, but without doubt, it could go further in mobilizing radical pedagogies to foreground those voices heard less in the food transition knowledges and discourses we build and circulate.

Evaluations and recommendations for future schools and initiatives

Post-event facilitators debrief

Two weeks following the RAAS event, we ran a session for facilitators to reflect collectively on our experiences, to identify the things that went well, but also those that didn't, and discuss what we might do differently next time. Overall, facilitators felt that the event had been a success, with a strong sense that the pedagogical approach, facilitation team, and setting had combined well to deliver a school that was in equal parts nurturing and intellectually challenging for all involved. For a full summary of the positives see the screenshot below. Suggestions for improvements have been processed and are presented in the 'Recommendations' section, below.



Recommendations (for future ATTER schools / general gatherings of this type)

1. **Choose your venue carefully to ensure compatibility with aims, thematic focus and comfort needs** - a key to the success of RAAS was the venue, which not only offered comfortable amenities, but also clear thematic links to the ATTER programme, given its embeddedness in the territorial food system of the area. The quiet rural setting also created a sense that we were 'apart' from normal daily life, thereby fostering a deep engagement from all present.



- 2. Assemble an adequate facilitation team and be clear about roles and responsibilities** - our facilitation team numbered nine, with two main organizers (Chris and Barbara), and received the help from one person at their institution for administrative support on registrations, fee handling and visa arrangements. This was a useful arrangement for event design and coordination, with the two organizers handling most of the administrative tasks, the larger team were able to focus on content design. During the school itself, having such a large team helped with 'facilitation fatigue' as responsibility cycled on a daily basis. Clear roles were also assigned, including welfare, logistics, and venue liaison, which further helped to lighten the organizational burden.



Illustration: the Autumn school facilitation team (by Georges Félix), note that Michel is missing from the drawings

- 3. Design your programme based on clear objectives as well as input from participants** - by first agreeing a clear set of objectives meant other design questions (such as which venue, event duration, session themes) were possible to handle outside of full team meetings. We also asked for input from participants as part of the application process which provided invaluable guidance when finalising a programme tailored to the needs of attendees.
- 4. Ensure adequate space for participants to introduce themselves at the start of the event** - this is something we didn't quite get right. As Chris describes in his reflection above, there is no shortcut to doing this - creating plenty of space and time for participants to introduce themselves and their work fosters trust and enables much more deep and productive contributions later on.
- 5. Create space for participants to learn from each other and practice peer support** - this is something which we had made time for but which we increased substantially during the event based on participant feedback. This was strongly linked to our 'building community of practice' objective, but we feel it is likely to be something that all future schools will encounter; that is, a cohort of young researchers who feel isolated and as such have a substantial need to connect with their peers and share their challenges.
- 6. Hold a feedback session part way through the event** - we had a morning reflection slot everyday, but the decision to hold a substantial session based around feedback on day five, enabled us to hear participants' criticisms in a constructive way and adapt what we were doing. It also provided the important function of giving voice to participants and helping them prepare to take over facilitation on the final day.
- 7. Don't try to do too much** - allow plenty of space for ad hoc activities, rest and decompression - the tendency is always to 'pack the programme' with content, but unassigned time (for ad hoc sessions) and free time (for casual conversation, rest and decompression) is of paramount importance to avoid

burnout and create space for different types of connection. Participants were invited to take time off or offered the possibility to participate in gardening activities such as weeding or apple picking.

8. **Be clear in communication with participants, especially regarding financial issues** - RISE projects can be difficult to navigate administratively, especially when there are participants accessing the school through different routes (i.e. secondments, bursaries, external fee paying, etc.). It is therefore important to agree a detailed strategy early on, and to be clear with participants what the precise terms of their involvement is (i.e. deadlines for payment, amount, what payments include/don't include).
9. **Ensure adequate time for rest following the event** - some facilitators (and some participants) reported being exhausted after the event and regretted not booking time off to decompress. An event like this involves a lot of work, both before and during, so adequate time should be given to ensure full recovery.

Summary participant survey

Context, format and rhythm

The hosting venue, Monkton Wyld Court, was acknowledged as a key component for the smooth running of the autumn school. It helped to create "Convivencia" and to get "restoring" breaks. As the place is an agroecological farm itself, it was also valorized as a field visit.

The question of what would make for the perfect length for such an autumn school triggered quite a variety of responses. Although, quite a few participants mentioned that the school could have been organized in 5-days format instead of 7. Some participants would also have enjoyed more optional sessions.

Respondents mostly agreed that regular 30min breaks worked well, both in terms of their length and that they were "spaced out well". Furthermore, the design of the sessions allowed to reach specific objectives on a daily base.

Environment and pedagogy

It was recognized that the facilitation team made efforts in providing a comfortable learning environment. The importance of improving collective care even further was raised to ensure the participation of more introvert personalities and to tackle language and cultural barriers when necessary.

Questions around race, culture and background came up during a number of sessions and were perceived as an opportunity to go further in the collective reflection. In that sense, a proposition would have been to have a collective discussion at the end of each day to be sure to arrange the next days as best.

It was noted that the presence of large number of facilitators had provided the facilitators with the opportunity to also have a participant stance for at least some of the sessions. This gave a collective feeling of both "learning from and with".

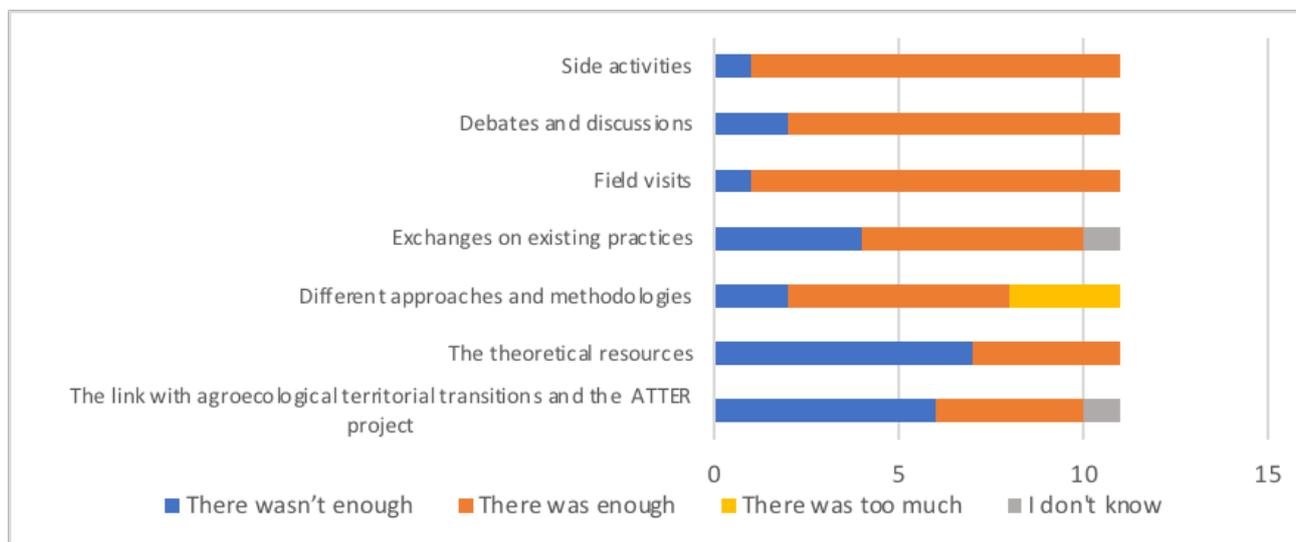
The content

The general feedback indicated a good balance between activities but with a "thirst for more". One person mentioned a need for more field visits and would have appreciated more contextualization for the existing field visit. Input on ways of knowing and on decolonial theories was particularly valued.

There was a general desire for more space for debates and discussions between participants, and for more expression of "grassroot experiences". More discussions on the theoretical material sent before the autumn school would have been appreciated as well. It was acknowledged that these ideas could also be met during self-organized follow up activities.

Participants

The acknowledgement of participants' cultural differences during the school was considered as an opportunity to "go deep in some aspects".



Precise feedback on the content

Proposals for future Activities

The activities planned and/or mentioned for maintaining the collective dynamic are the following:

- Mini-conference
- Virtual dilemma clinic
- Reading groups
- To read participants' work
- To have check-in meetings
- Repository of references
- Chats on the whats-app group

Appendix 1: Picture gallery



Appendix 2a: Ways of Knowing for Agroecological Transitions

Introductory talk by Michel Pimbert at Autumn School, ATTER, Monkton Wyld

Agroecological knowledge is co-created by combining farmer/ indigenous ways of knowing with scientific **ways of knowing**.

- The science of ecology and peoples' knowledge and ways of knowing are both involved in the co-construction of agroecological practices such as agroforestry, polycultures, ecological pest control, and soil fertility management.

It is useful to think of "ways of knowing" as how we "know" what we claim to "know". Ways of Knowing are the methods through which knowledge becomes apparent to us.

I offer here three reflections on agroecological ways of knowing based on my experience of facilitating knowledge exchanges between scientists and farmers, pastoralists, and indigenous peoples.

1. Recognising and including diverse ways of knowing

This workshop in Mali brought together peasant farmers, indigenous peoples, pastoralists and scientists from 6 countries to discuss their research on agroecological transitions in different territories (see Photos).



Photos : workshop on agroecological transitions in different territories, Mali (credit Michel Pimbert)

With such diversity of people in the same room there were many different ways of knowing at work, all interacting with each other. Some of these ways of knowing were:

- o intuition
- o reason
- o sense perception
- o scientific
- o experiential
- o language
- o imagination
- o spirituality/faith
- o emotion
- o memory

[Note: Each way of knowing was written down on a card and presented by a participant. When a particular way of knowing was mentioned by Michel the corresponding card was shown to all present and then placed by the card holder on floor in middle of circle of participants.... the beginnings of an interactive group activity on day 2].

It is important to consider:

- 1) how different ways of knowing for agroecological transitions interact, rather than looking at them in isolation.
- 2) how each way of knowing often differs across genders, ethnic group, class, and age group. There is diversity inherent in each one of these ways of knowing. This diversity in ways of knowing gives rise to different kinds of knowledges.

More generally, diverse ways of knowing for agroecological transitions are a manifestation of cognitive diversity and collective intelligence. This collective intelligence was palpable/tangible in the Mali intercultural dialogue on agroecological transitions and re-territorialisation of food systems (Photo 1).

- Knowledge democracy is key for the emergence of collective forms of intelligence needed for agroecological transitions

2. Power and the silencing of ways of knowing in agroecology

Mainstream histories of agroecological ways of knowing start with the formation of agroecology as a science in the 1930s. They mostly focus on modern day champions of agroecological thought. Whilst the importance of farmer knowledge is mentioned, far less attention is given to the fact that different agroecological ways of knowing are embedded in the farming and land use practices of generations of indigenous peoples, peasant farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, and men and women food providers in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and Polynesia.

Need to remind ourselves that academic research on agroecology builds on the intellectual contributions of indigenous and peasant communities – not the other way around! And yet most of today's agroecology text books are usually silent about indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge systems. Rational and scientific ways of knowing mostly dominate agroecology writings.

- For example in North America, agroecology has become institutionalized through universities like the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where a number of staff and faculty from different disciplinary backgrounds practice agroecology often in collaborative efforts. However, among all Agroecology program-affiliated interviewees, the depth to which settler colonialism and indigenous ways of knowing are integrated into their work is generally limited. (See thesis by Kase Wheatley, 2022 – one of the participants of the ATTER Autumn school)

Ways of knowing of interest to agroecology encompass those that are often unjustly [excluded](#) or [marginalized](#). These include tradition, storytelling, and emotion. They have been largely excluded by [white](#), Western men who established their own (typically Eurocentric, white, and/or masculinist) ways of knowing—like [science](#), reason, logic, and empiricism.

- For example, it is noteworthy that a new generation of feminist agroecologists has highlighted the extent to which masculinist and patriarchal ways of knowing are dominant in mainstream agroecology today.

3. Thinking critically about ways of knowing – whose knowledge, whose power?

Ways of knowing for agroecology thus need to be assessed critically. Asking the following simple questions can help:

- which ways of knowing are included and excluded in agroecological transitions?
- whose values and preferences are reflected in ways of knowing for agroecological transitions?
- whose categories and criteria count in accepted ways of knowing for agroecological transitions?

- what, - and whose -, ways of knowing are used for analysis and planning?
- whose action, and based on what ways of knowing?
- whose truth prevails - based on which ways of knowing?
- whose reality counts in ways of knowing for agroecological transitions and the re-territorialisation of food systems?

Appendix 2b: Data, evidence, plant spirits: why should we care for ways of knowing?

Lightning talk by Nina Moeller at Autumn School, ATTER, Monkton Wyld

I want to make three related points: on power, the progress myth and on magic.

POWER

Thinking about different ways of knowing we have to think about power. Power in the realm of knowledge actually has a lot to do with the ability to elicit trust - to make people trust.

One term that I think is useful in this context is epistemic authority.

This is about what or who confers legitimacy to knowledge claims. If I make a knowledge claim, let's say I say: "Only 2% of agricultural investments over the last 5 years have contributed to agroecological transitions" - many people would be likely to trust me more if I were a university researcher studying investments in the agricultural sector, rather than, let's say your pizza delivery person or someone very drunk in your local pub.

If that same statement appeared in a peer reviewed paper, most people would be more inclined to believe it than if it appeared on a political flier.

This might seem obvious - but think about it. What conditions need to be in place for you to accept a knowledge claim as a fact? You need to trust the source - either the person or figure making the claim, or else the study or experiment or experience or whatever other origin that the knowledge has sprung from.

Do you trust your grandmother's painful toe as a sign for bad weather? Do you trust the thermometer that tells you a child has a fever or that the sugar you are boiling is hot enough to become hard candy? Do you trust the shaman who insists that a particular plant will heal you because the plant spirit spoke to them? Do you trust the person begging in the street who says they just need another Pound to catch the bus back home? Do you trust Monsanto? The World Health Organisation? If you are an academic, do you trust the methodological framework you adopted to generate data? Can you always trust your own eyes? Why? Why not?

Trust is very complex of course, but it is suffused with power relations and unquestioned assumptions about who has epistemic authority, about whose knowledge counts and why.

And this brings me to the second point I want to make and that's about the progress myth.

PROGRESS MYTH

The progress myth is the belief, the false belief, that evolution is basically linear improvement.

This view is fed by a powerful discourse on progress and development, which was, and indeed continues to be, put in place by violent force. The idea of progressive advancement and societal improvement is very much the foundation of the way in which our world is organized today.

And this idea was necessary to enthrone the white man and place European civilisation at the supposed pinnacle of evolution, in order to justify and enable the pillage and plunder that has been conducted in its name across the globe, including in Europe through the extraction of labour and resources from peasants and artisans.

And part of that story about progress is also a celebration of literacy and some branches of modern science at the expense of all other knowledge systems and all other forms of information storage and recall.

But compared to indigenous Polynesians, a literate scientist knows barely anything about seafaring. They knew about trade winds and ocean currents and the statistical distribution of tropical cyclones, but they could also tell if land was ahead yet still beyond the horizon through cloud formations, the flight of birds, volcanoes at night, and the reflection of green lagoon waters in clouds!

Similarly, indigenous Amazonians, and other tropical forest dwelling societies, have still today an unfathomably extensive botanical knowledge, particularly of medicinal plants, which, many of them claim they have gained through direct communication with plants and their spirit masters.

Human memory is capable of incredible feats - techniques such as the memory theatre were also taught in European contexts until 100-200 years ago probably. But memory capacity seems to get eroded through literacy - maybe simply because we don't need to rely on our own memories any longer: we now store information externally.

It is the progress myth which has erased much human wisdom and understanding by devalorising and denigrating it, and by colonising our imagination in deep ways.

And that leads me to my third point, which is about magic.

MAGIC

Magic is probably the most denigrated type of knowledge system. It is widely seen as illusory, dangerous or at best hopelessly romantic. It's primitive. Some anthropologists study it and if they don't discard it completely as a curious primitive hangover, they explain it away through psychological mechanisms that explain its function in society through a scientific ontology that has no space for energetic forces or spirit beings.

Yet it is probably the most ancient form of being in and understanding the world - which makes it something that if we decide to discard the progress myth we ought to respect and honour or at least acknowledge as foundational for our species.

One theorist I really like, an archaeologist called Chris Gosden, he writes about magic and religion and science as these three interrelated modes of knowing, and he understands their differences as being about where power is located in the universe. On that account, magic is about human participation in the universe, it's about a direct human relationship with the world. Religion is about a hierarchical relationship between humans and the gods (or one god depending) who are in charge of the universe, and science radically repositions people by distancing them from the world and conceiving of the universe as working completely separately from either gods or humans.

What resonates with me in this account is that science becomes one of several ways of making sense of the world and our place within it, not the best, not necessarily the worst, but one amongst many.

What I have learned from the people and the plants that I have worked with in the Amazon is that science is one language amongst many others. We use it, like any other language, to name and distinguish between things (taxonomical/ontological knowledge), to be able to make sense of phenomena (to explain why they happen the way they do) in order to predict future events so as to expand our scope of effective action.

Whether we need to hunt deer, or shelter from a storm, or steer a ship, or grow maize, or build a space rocket, we name and distinguish elements of the world, we put them in relationship with one another (often one of causality, that is cause and effect), and we take into consideration the empirical regularities of the universe (rhythms, cycles - like the lunar cycle, the tides, the seasons, the movement of star constellations, menstruation) in order to help us make good decisions and thereby act effectively in the world.

All ways of knowing do this. All ways of knowing make sense of our place in the world and enable us to act within it. By doing so they also create worlds. And some of these are just more cruel and more boring than others!

Appendix 2c: Ways of Knowing for Agroecological Transitions

Introductory talk by Lucy Aphramor

In this talk I build on topics introduced by Michel and Nina by exploring some of the practices I use to destabilise and replace coloniality from my entry point as a dietitian practitioner and educator. Understanding how coloniality operates through ways of knowing is crucial for deep change.

I will demonstrate two simple activities and tease out some of the deep theory they rely on that seeks to disrupt colonial norms and values.

I began opening learning groups by offering the opportunity for people to take a moment to (energetically?) enter the group. For example, by inviting people to spend 30 seconds connecting with their body, 30 seconds connecting with their surroundings, and 30 seconds acknowledging the group. We can do that now if you like. I'll time each of the 30 seconds. If it's not your thing and you prefer to day dream or such like, that's fine!

Connected with this, another practice I am training myself into is opening learning groups as a sacred space. This upends expectations of white supremacy where learning is extractive and knowledge is deemed to be an abstract set of facts. Many indigenous peoples approach learning as sacred. When I first did this with dietetic students I wondered how it would be received as it emerges from and enacts a different set of values from those that shape our curriculum. It was heartening to learn how open students were in how they received my words. It was a joy to witness their appreciation and even delight. Some of the students called it a prayer, others said it was a poem or a blessing.

Thank you for being here. Respect for your stories, your imagination, your hesitations and ambivalences. Respect for the cracks. May you come to know through the wisdom held in your body, while recognising that our body signals are socially shaped so that body shame is always misplaced. May you leave knowing the value of your contributions and presence and enriched for your encounters with presence, place and persons. Respect for the wisdom held by the inhabitants and the land here, these grounds we are gathered upon as guests. May you be accompanied by any faith, traditions, lineages, Beings or entities that support you.

May we have each others backs. I hope that our collaboration builds knowledge that disrupts the deep roots of war and injustice and that we amplify the liberatory struggles and joys repressed by dominant narratives. In our time together may we contribute to ongoing production of collective infrastructures in and beyond the human that enact and prefigure freedom. May we leave changed and emboldened. May we show up for each other in this sacred entwined work of learning and healing. May we develop new understandings that repair and acknowledge the enduring nature of relationships across time and space in life-affirming and earth-honouring ways. May we be attentive to the very real differences in our positionalities and what this means for mutuality, repair, comfort, discomfort, and grace as we embrace our responsibilities to each other, our ancestors, descendants and this tenacious and wounded land.

May there be something useful for you here as you ferment new Truths to live by and compost those that no longer bring you in ever closer alignment with your calling. And lastly, may I, and all your guides and teachers reach you from a place of humility, compassion, and wonder.

(Moment of quiet)

Thank you. I think we can agree that something shifts when we make space for gathering and intent and assume that learning has a spiritual dimension.

When I first used this to introduce teaching sessions it felt like a risk. I might get pushback because it was unfamiliar and felt weird, maybe people would object to spirituality in a dietetics course, maybe it would cost me professional credibility. If we have had a western education we grow up cognitively

shaped and affectively co-regulated with the values of white supremacy. It makes sense that I was nervous about presenting learning as sacred as my entire education and socialisation had programmed me to feel this way. Our feelings emerge from context and our circumstances within this: we are meant to rethink and back-down when we feel uncomfortable. That's how social judgement, ridicule, and a sense of entitlement to emotional ease, are used to establish who's in and who's out. All of which works to protect the idea that there is one universal right - white - way. And which affects what and how we can know and imagine, of course.

Sure, students probably would find it odd. But that's not a reason for capitulating to the status quo!

So that's a simple practice that challenges several of the hallmarks of white supremacy. For example, it prefigures a world where teaching and learning are innately entangled or participatory, where spirituality isn't siphoned off but included as one way of learning among others. It sets the scene for centering relationships and for acknowledging time's nonlinear ongoingness. Importantly, it commits to creating knowledge that is earth-honouring, in ways that reject the colonial idea that only humans have agency, that is grounded in an ethics of care and repair, and that assumes pluriversality. You can probably come up with more.

A core feature of white supremacy, wielded in coloniality, is binary thinking. Undoing and replacing the binary is one of the ways we disrupt the roots of oppression in our thinking. We've made a start already by troubling the divide between Reason and Emotion. On the one hand binary thinking divides the world into oppositional categories where one of the pair is deemed superior to the other. A deep deep cut of white supremacy is the separation of the realm of nature into human nature and non-human nature. In this, the category human is deemed superior to and separate from non-human nature. This cut between categories aligns with the drive for Purity, a hallmark of white supremacy. It underwrites an agenda driven by the belief and affect of human dominion and entitlement that erases any notion of non-human kinship, reciprocity, responsibility, or humility. So, binary thinking divides and ranks. It creates a world that turns on hierarchies. An integral component of this is that the process of classification into binaries happens in a vacuum. There is no context in binary thinking, it maps the world as existing of atomistic, free floating people, ideas and things. In other words, it denies relationality.

An overarching principle of my practice as a dietitian is to help people make sense of their experiences (feelings, knowledge, behaviours) around food, eating, wellbeing and as a body. A key part of this is asking questions that expose relationships that have been hidden. This could be a question that helps someone make the link between ableism and healthism and their feelings of shame for having a diagnosis of diabetes, for example. Perhaps they become aware of how they have slotted foods into categories of good/bad, healthy /unhealthy and learnt to judge themselves and others as unworthy, as guilty of moral transgression if they eat 'unhealthy' foods.

I've brought an activity that loosens some of these knots. I think of it as creating space for movement. The aim is to surface underlying beliefs that keep people tied into ways of thinking that aren't life-affirming. For instance, the notion that food usefully exists in morally-coded categories that are real and rigid. I hope people become aware that this approach discounts context and ignores relationship and gets presented as the only possible option, or maybe the only right way. A bit of context is that it's one of a number of activities I designed for teaching as part of the health-justice approach I use, called Well Now).

Before we go into it, just to note that you're under no obligation to take any of what we discuss on board. I wanted to mention this in case you're having a tricky time with food at the moment. If there's something interesting for you in what we do that's great, you might want to sit with, turn it over, try it out. But there's no rule that says you have to. Be curious, yes, and be careful with yourself too.

Can I have five volunteers please. I'm going to ask you to select four foods each. As you'll notice, each food rests on a hi-vis starry label with a phrase on it - I'll ask you to read these out later. For now, can you pick up the food items and keep the text hidden, thanks.

Ok. Using the teachings from conventional nutrition education, can you hold up anything you chose that is a healthy food. Yup - satumas, bananas, nuts, dried fruit, and plain yogurt would all fall under the umbrella of healthy. Now, can you read the statements:

Banana - 'I'm not eating that I'm low carb'

Banana - Phew, I'm glad I brought this I'm famished

Banana - I'm famished but I'm not going to cave and eat it as it's not on my plan

Banana - Not for me thanks. I'm so hungry I could faint but I only eat organic food

Satsuma - Caution: this fruit is contaminated with arsenic

Satsuma - gets stuck in my dentures

Satsuma - sets off my symptoms

Satsuma - I've never liked citrus

Satsuma - I love them but it's too hard for me to peel by myself

Satsuma - interferes with my medication

Satsuma - I'm on an elimination diet and need to exclude these for now

Then there's different sorts of biscuits, chocolate, salted peanuts, cereal bars, delicious cake, crisps and more. What about these so-called 'unhealthy' foods? Here's a selection of statements:

Chocolate - This was my favourite but I can't face it after what happened

Chocolate - thank goodness I packed emergency rations, this walk is way longer than I expected

Chocolate - I've been looking forward to this all day

Chocolate - I wish this wasn't wrapped in guilt

Chocolate - yum!

Chocolate - drat, I can't go near that because of allergies

What does this tell you about healthy and unhealthy foods? What about people's relationships with food within this paradigm? How far does binary thinking shape these relationships - is any impact useful, benign, detrimental etc? Whose agenda do standard (binary-thinking) 'healthy eating' messages serve? What values are enacted? Is anyone forgotten?

How does a standard 'healthy eating' approach influence understandings of wellbeing and illness? What assumptions are made about fatness and thinness? (The fat liberationist scholar Mikey Mercedes makes clear that public health nutrition is predicated on fat subjugation: it is an agenda that seeks the eradication of fat people. You can find Mikey's writing on her website and Patreon.)

Does the approach used to teach nutrition in a standard approach align with your values? How does the approach used to teach in this activity align with your values? How? Why does this matter to you? I think it enacts a liberatory pedagogy, what's your opinion of this?

Ideally there would be opportunity for people who wanted to pair up or go into small groups for discussion. What emerges is an understanding of how binary thinking creates an imaginary that discounts the value of relationships at the same time as it really screws up people's relationship with food. It becomes apparent that - short of a food being outright poisonous - the 'healthiness' of a food for a particular person doesn't lie in its nutrient profile but in the relationship between food and eater.

What are the goals of nutrition education? Does the current approach work to meet these goals? What are any unintended outcomes? Is it ethical to continue teaching nutrition from a conventional stance?

So, we can say that some foods are high in this or that nutrient or substance, but we need to rethink what

we mean by 'healthy food'. I mean, we can say a lettuce is healthy, or a chicken, but can we locate health in a food without an eater?

Some of you will already be familiar with practices where knowledge exists in relationship, such as in plant medicine.

Binary thinking knots together food, self-worth, eating, knowledge and entangles this amalgam with judgement. It channels thinking along the two lines of good and bad, activating white supremacy hallmarks of purity, perfectionism, one right way and all-or-nothing thinking. It gives rise to the smugness and certainty of the person who feels superior to sticking to a food regime, and their despair, guilt, dread, shame, self-blame and confusion when they stop. It is the template for fat stigma and body shame. And of course, it is also the template for anti-fatness, co-constituted with anti-blackness, and all other forms of oppression tied to white supremacy. In this, I'm echoing the work of black scholars, notably Da' Shaun Harrison's book *Belly of the Beast*, the politics of anti-fatness as anti-blackness, and Sabrina Strings book on the *Racist Origins of BMI*. These are two really important texts for that encompasses food and liberation.

This activity draws attention to relationality. Food no longer exists in a vacuum as a commodity: it is situated and the eater's history, tastes, desires, and struggles matter. The framing invites in personal and inter-personal experiences uncertainty, ambiguity, and shows how affect and self-concept are implicated in knowledge creation. It challenges the principle that there can even be one right way. It troubles objectivity and casts doubt on the ethics of the entire pedagogical approach of nutrition education.

The ontological and political commitments of 'healthy eating' and 'healthy food' warrant scrutiny at a deeper level of connection too. In a colonial, binary paradigm, the term 'healthy food' channels us to think of the impact of food on the person eating. So 'health' is reduced to nutrient composition. We are trained to use whiteness' poster image - a thin, middle-class, non-disabled, self-interested white man - as a standard reference point. The activity illustrated how this embeds ableism. This framing of 'healthy eating' and 'healthy food' refuses inter-connectedness. It is designed to externalise any impact of GMOs on farmer suicide, dangerous conditions for migrant workers in food processing, water pollution and other hazards from monocultures, and indeed the welfare of all human and non-human beings involved in getting the food to the eater - processes which strongly impact health.

Questions I try to remember to ask after this sort of activity are:

1. Have you learnt anything useful?
2. Have I told you anything you didn't already know?
3. How would things be different if I had shared bullet points of key ideas?
4. What does this suggest about knowledge creation?

Generally, people feel they have learned something useful - but not from anything I have told them directly. The experience of building knowledge collaboratively is felt to offer a more profound, more textured learning experience compared to receiving a handy check list of bullet points.

These reflections affirm the power of collectives to build knowledge by reframing ideas, rather than by adding 'facts' imparted by an outside expert. It reminds us as teachers that our role is to help people experience themselves as already knowledgeable and underline discussion (or non verbal interaction) as integral to the deep learning process rather than an instrumental means of exchange. As I am fond of saying 'people know stuff, we are all eaters and we all have bodies'. I want to puncture the professional elitism that devalues everyday knowledge creation and that teaches people to distrust themselves and what they know. I think we need to demystify nutrition and a useful way to do this is to offer suggestions that encourage people to think beyond the binary. This way we build a new generative infrastructure for thinking things through together. We can also think of this as queering food, or knowledge creation. Here, queering refers to the process of irreverently blurring boundaries and multiplying possibilities; it is a politics of refusal that snubs the presumed legitimacy of colonially inscribed categories.

As an ongoing project I try to find new ways of talking about food and wellbeing that are congruent with relationality, or at least cause some bother to the binary. For example, I teach “connected eating” and “kindful eating” as part of Well Now. Instead of ‘healthy eating’ I talk about ‘eating for wellbeing’ - it’s part way there, but easily co-opted, and it does nothing to directly challenge the underpinning neoliberal, capitalist logics of ‘healthy food’. The term ‘enlivening food’ recently occurred to me. I like it because it reaches towards relationship, interpolating the enlivened in its construct. It’s more process than noun. It invites situated engagement: can food served in degrading institutions ever be enlivening? Acknowledging the integral eater creates a spaciousness, the suggestion of a web of inter-connections. Enlivening food is not intended to be translatable to any metric of isolated nutrients. It’s not a substitute term for ‘healthy food’ intended to support sort of change that keeps everything the same. It inherently troubles the authority of truth claims that valorise neutrality and objectivity. It’s a bit woo and doesn’t sit well with white science respectability, which is in its favour too.

The gathering welcome, and Well Now activity, are two really simple ideas that refuse to validate the bedrock values and associated truth claims (including purity, binary thinking, universality, perfectionism, modernity) of white supremacy.

Thanks for your engagement.

Appendix 3: Participant Guide (sent to participants ahead of event)

RISE ATTER Autumn School Ways of Knowing for Agroecological Transitions

Participant Guide

Monkton Wyld Court - 3rd - 10th October 2022



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Introduction / background

This Autumn School on Ways of knowing for agroecological transitions has been organised as part of the [RISE-ATTER project](#). The main objective of this week-long collective space is to bring together researchers and practitioners from across the world who want to exchange, learn and advance their thinking and practice on agroecological transitions.

The programme for the school has been designed around the ATTER project, itself a community of practice of researchers and practitioners working on 'agroecological transitions of territorial agrifood systems'. The Autumn School will draw on the expertise of the consortium - built from eighteen universities, research centres and civil society groups from six countries - to offer an exciting and transdisciplinary programme, alongside insights from participants' experiences throughout the week.

1. Objectives/vision/intentions

- Build a 'community of practice' relating to participatory action researchers that wish to commit to fostering socially just food systems in their territories
- Facilitate exchanges around tools and methodologies intended to support agroecological transitions at the territorial level
- Honour and incorporate 'diverse ways of knowing' as a key component of agroecological transitions
- Create a nurturing and non-judgemental environment so that optimal learning and exchanges can happen
- Create a transformative moment for participants grounded in experiential learning.

2. Pedagogical approach

The school will highlight the importance of the diversity of knowledges that exists in territorial food systems. Transition processes affect everybody - even if in highly uneven ways - and for that reason we believe that all perspectives are needed to understand, facilitate and effect them with a particular attention on the most marginalised voices. Moreover, how we view 'transitions', 'territories' or even 'agroecology' will be different depending on who we are and where we are coming from. With this in mind the school will explore multiple methods and tools, relevant to a range of scales, that have potential to transcend the subordination of nature and of people along intersectional lines of race, class, caste, disability/ability, sexuality, and gender.

Our approach also reflects how we conceive of the learning process in itself. As such, the school will be based on the principles of critical and decolonizing pedagogies. Using dialogue, mutual exchange, feminist participatory methodologies, amongst other horizontal approaches, we will organise spaces for sharing ideas, experiences and research, unpacking problems in research, and exploring together the collective experiences and uncertainties of the group, as well as the our hopes and dreams for the future.

Co-creation - other than the 'mística', and a short presentation of yourself (see below), we are not asking participants to prepare anything specific as part of RAAS. That said, there will be multiple opportunities for participants to shape the focus and content of activities. For example, we have set aside time on most days for personal reflection, will invite your input and experience during most sessions, and have left the final day to be planned by participants. This final day is intended to provide an opportunity for you to bring what is most important to you as a group, as well as to begin to put into action what you have learned over the week. In preparation for all this, we invite you to start thinking about your own intentions, identify the most urgent challenges you face in your work, and the questions you most want answers to. While we have some content to offer you, RAAS is largely a participant-driven space and its success will largely depend on what you bring as a collective. *While much of the time is now allotted, please do get*

in touch if there is something specific you would like to offer and we can see if there is space to fit you in.

3. Preparation

Mística - we will commence activities on the first day with a 'mística' (a ritual of arrival). For this, we ask all participants to bring something symbolic to offer the group. It could be a small object, a line from a poem, or even a physical gesture. Participants will take turns to place/speak/perform their contribution. Bear in mind that this is meant as a ritual of feeling and you will not be expected to explain your contribution, though you can if you wish. Each contribution should take no more than one minute to complete.

Insurance - please note that the cost of Autumn School does not include individual insurance. Please make sure you purchase adequate insurance to cover you in the event of injury or illness.

Participant bios - you must all be curious about who else will be joining. We will facilitate activities so as to get to know each other. To get this process started, we kindly ask you to add your bio on this [shared pad](#) before September 15.

4. Recommended reading

Key texts

1. Escobar, A. (2008). *Territories of difference*. Duke University Press.
2. Freire, P. (1969). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Herder.
3. Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
4. Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge, 2014.

Further reading

5. Anderson, C., Buchanan, C., Chang, M., Sanchez Rodriguez, J., & Wakeford, T. (2017). *Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system*. Coventry University. [\[Link\]](#)
6. Assessing the agroecological status of a farm: a principle-based assessment tool for farmers (Nicholls et al, 2020) [\[Link\]](#)
7. Amplifying Agroecological Farmer Lighthouses in Contested Territories: Navigating Historical Conditions and Forming New Clusters in Japan (McGreevy et al, 2021) [\[Link\]](#)
8. Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass* (First edition). Milkweed Editions.
9. Fals Borda, O., & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research*. Apex Press.
10. Reiter, B., 2018. *Constructing the pluriverse: The geopolitics of knowledge*. Duke University Press
11. [\[Web resource\] Cultivating ways of knowing for transformations.](#)
12. Pimbert, M.P. 2018. Democratising knowledge and ways of knowing for food sovereignty, agroecology and biocultural diversity. In M. P. Pimbert (Ed.), *Food sovereignty, agroecology and biocultural diversity* (pp. 259-321). Routledge. [\[Link\]](#)

5. Facilitation team bios



Barbara van Dyck I am a 'recovering engineer' at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR). I have a particular interest in the entanglement of the dominant economic and political interests with agri-food research & development together with the historically constructed organisation of the modern sciences in disciplinary silos. In exploring how plurality can be cultivated in agri-food knowledges, I am keen to explore pedagogies of hope. I am active in a number of networks and collectives in the UK and Belgium that seek to support peasant agroecology and food sovereignty.



Chris Maughan I am a researcher at CAWR with an interest in, (and personal commitment to), learning as a social movement strategy. In particular my work is focussed on farmer participation in agroecological research, ranging from in-field soil testing, botanical surveying, and open-source tool design, all with the larger aim of building capacity towards civic participation in food system governance. I have a transdisciplinary background in horticulture, social movement theory, and the environmental humanities, and have worked on numerous projects across Europe, though especially in the UK.

Doriane Guennoc I am a city planner engineer working in a small consultancy firm that I co-founded in 2021, called Terralim, and specialized in local food strategies support for local communities. I have been working for several years in the organization of local food systems with a particular interest in the link between food consumption practices and the spatial organization of territories (foodscape) in an inclusive and resilient perspective. My previous working experiences within public institutions and research, as well as my personal commitments, drive me to combine methods based on these two axes, «field» and «research» to carry out my mission and more especially my ongoing PhD project which focuses on storage mechanisms at a local scale.



Georges Félix I am an agronomist and currently working as a researcher at CAWR, interested in Agroecology and Agroforestry for the design of low-external input and disaster-resistant food and farming systems. My fieldwork experience draws from in-depth exchanges alongside peasant farmers innovating in Haiti, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten, Cuba, Mauritius, Burkina Faso, Senegal, The Netherlands, France, Spain, and the UK. I am passionate about reggae music, watercolours, and hammocks, amongst others.

Jocelyn Parot I am the General Secretary of URGENCI, the international network of Local and Solidarity-based Partnerships for Agroecology. This term encompasses both the Japanese Teikei, Community Supported Agriculture in the English speaking world, Solawi initiatives in Germany and many others. I have been part of numerous projects to spread Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and I have been building an unique network of relationships all across the globe, in every single place where there is something that looks like a CSA group ;-)

Danièle Magda I am a researcher at INRAE (France). With an academic background in ecological sciences I am interested in the plurality of ecologisation visions and human-nature relationship involved in the transition process of territorial agrifood systems, exploring a way to develop an experience-based approach where nature takes shape through actor's perceptions and experiences. I have an experience of research, with colleagues from cognitive sciences, on dynamics of heterogeneous knowledge in agroecological practices learning in livestock systems



Nina Moeller I am a researcher at CAWR, with a mixed academic background in philosophy, sociology and anthropology. My research interests comprise the dynamics of agroecology transitions, including their unintended social/ecological effects; diversity of knowledge and value systems; and more-than-human relations. My interest in plant medicine, traditional health and food systems goes beyond research and has been shaped in significant ways through friendships and exchanges with indigenous Amazonians and subsistence farmers across the world. I have worked in Latin America and Europe - as academic as well as consultant to indigenous federations, NGOs and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.



Jasber Singh: I was a youth worker whilst doing a PhD in plant molecular biology. I left academia for about 15 years and worked as a participatory action researcher and advocate with environmental, social justice, and race equality NGOs in the UK and India. I re-joined academia as a researcher at CAWR, where I am broadly interested in the mix between the politics of difference, structures of power and knowledges. I'm also deeply concerned with building an intersectional race (and caste) analysis on the right to food, food sovereignty and agroecology.



Lucy Aphramor I am a researcher at CAWR, and a radical dietitian and performance poet. My work centres on using conversations and practices around food, eating and 'health' to link personal and collective healing and learning as a route to social change. This move away from individualism and is a turn towards relationality, queerness and an agroecological mindset.



Michel Pimbert I have just stepped down as Director of the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University. An agricultural ecologist by training, I previously worked at the UK-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India, the University François Rabelais de Tours in France, and the World Wide Fund for Nature in Switzerland. I have been a Board member of several international organisations working on food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, environment, and human rights. My research interests include: agroecology and food sovereignty, the political ecology of natural resource and biodiversity management, participatory action research, and deliberative democratic processes.

6. Cohort summary

In terms of the composition of the cohort we mostly identify as women, with the remainder identifying as men or non-binary. In terms of disciplinary background, we mainly come from social science backgrounds, though we still have a healthy representation (around 6) from natural sciences, though none apparently from the humanities. Over half of us are PhDs or Masters students, though many of these are also practitioners in some form. The rest are either NGO employees, post docs, and full time researchers. We have one person who is doing landwork full time, though many others are also doing so alongside their PhD work. We are also overwhelmingly from the global north, though we made a deliberate attempt to open. While we managed to support a few people financially, restricted finances is unfortunately the main reason why we have fewer participants from the global south. Finally, 10 of the 32 participants will come from outside the ATTER consortium. Don't forget to add your own short presentation [here](#).

7. Logistics

Background on our venue: Monkton Wyld Court

The Autumn school will be residential, hosted by an intentional community with basic and shared accommodations and spaces for collective eating, learning, with opportunities to engage with local Agroecology and food sovereignty initiatives. The community, Monkton Wyld Court, is a rural community in Dorset, UK. The community was founded 30 years ago and is run and maintained by a resident Workers' Cooperative with the help of volunteers. They promote a lifestyle based on respect for the natural environment and strive to live sustainably. Decisions are made by consensus, and new members join through a process that begins with a volunteering visit.

Everyone will have responsibilities for looking after the community's living space, that is generously made available as our learning space during the week.

Food will be vegetarian (with vegan option and dietary requirements taken into account), local and agroecological, and it will be cooked by the members of the community. Internet access is limited in the community. Everyone of us will participate in setting and clearing tables, as well as in doing the dishes.

Alcohol - Alcohol is permitted, though some of us don't want to or cannot drink alcohol. Please be mindful of social dynamics whether you do or do not drink! There is a bar on site which serves a limited amount of beer, cider, wine, etc.

Arrival and Departure

The school starts Monday, October 3rd at 2pm. Please try to make your travel arrangements accordingly. Lunch is provided at 1pm. The school ends Sunday, October 9th at 9pm. All participants are welcome to stay overnight. Breakfast on Monday 10th is included.

Travel

By Rail

The nearest railway station is Axminster, on the main London Waterloo to Exeter line. Axminster is an hour and a quarter's walk away; alternatively, a bus (see below) runs between Axminster station and Raymond's Hill, from which it is a 30-minute walk to Monkton Wyld Court. Taxis are best booked in advance. Lifts from Axminster may be possible, please ask for details.

By Bus

The closest bus stop is a pleasant 30-minute walk away at the Hunter's Lodge pub in Raymond's Hill, on the X31 or 31 bus route which runs between Axminster and Bridport via Lyme Regis. Just be sure to consult the map before setting out. There is also a National Express coach from London Victoria which stops in Raymond's Hill.

By Taxi

Go Eco Cabs is West Dorset's first fully electric taxi firm run by a local couple. You can pay the same rates as other local firms but with reduced environmental impact. You can see their customer reviews here and you can call them on +44 (0)1297 445444 or visit their website.

By Road

MWC is located roughly 3 miles from Charmouth, 3.5 miles from Lyme Regis and 4 miles from Axminster. The hamlet of Monkton Wyld is signposted from the A35 halfway between Charmouth and Axminster. Ignore signs for Monkton Wyld Farm if coming from Axminster. You'll find Monkton Wyld Court just opposite St Andrews Church, about half a mile off the A35.

COVID19

Although this is no longer mandatory by the UK government, for the safety of all participants we would

highly appreciate it if everybody could take a covid test before arriving at Monkton Wyld Court. In the event that anyone tests positive while on site we will make arrangements for them to self-isolate.

What to bring

As you may be aware, British weather can be somewhat unpredictable, so do make sure to bring plenty of warm and waterproof clothing. We may end up doing some long walks and/or doing some work on the farm, so bring sturdy shoes appropriate to these kinds of activities. There are also swimming spots nearby, so a bathing suit and a towel might be useful.

There are no near-by shops, so it is important that you bring all you can need for the days staying in the community (e.g. medicines, snacks, etc.).

There are facilities to make tea, coffee, snacks

Contact telephone numbers in case of emergency

- Chris: +44 7531154167
- Barbara: +44 7392096860
- Monkton Wyld Court: +44 (0) 1297 560342

8. Hosting organisations

The Autumn School is hosted and organised by:

- [Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience](#) (Coventry University, UK)
- Agroecology Now! www.agroecologynow.com

As part of the RISE ATTER programme led by [INRAE](#) and in cooperation with [the Landworkers Alliance](#).