

Workshop 4: Permaculture Design vs. Design in Agroecology. Same, same but different?

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The aim of this workshop was to compare permaculture and agroecology and to find out what the commonalities are on which synergies can be build. Permaculture is a design of sustainable agricultural systems, conceptualized by Bill Mollison. The convenor of the workshop collected many opinions from permaculture experts. It came out that permaculture is a multidimensional systems design concept (horizontal, vertical, temporal and relational) and that the strength of this systems design comes from its ethics and its principles, that are transdisciplinary and long-term oriented. When comparing both concepts, it was highlighted that permaculture comes more from grassroots initiatives while agroecology more from academics and their institutions.

During the discussion, the question of vocabulary was essential. The participants thought that it is not useful to debate about the difference of the two concepts because both are alternatives to conventional agriculture. Thus, they do not have to be split-up but to work together. These systems have also to be adapted to the local conditions, context and goals of stakeholders. Regarding the origin of these concepts, it appeared that permaculture in the Global South is seen more as a top-down initiative, while agroecology is a bottom-up movement (e. g. Latin America). The difference between agroecology and permaculture may come from a difference in scale: permaculture in its practice is more about smaller scale farming systems while agroecology also addresses food systems as a whole. Finally, some doubts were voiced around the viability of permaculture projects: some proofs are needed to show that it can be economically viable in order to be an example and to bring more people to practice it.