Two decades of action education in agroecology

Impact on alumni's professional and personal life

AGROECOLOGY EUROPE FORUM 2023 IN HUNGARY
CONVERGING MOVEMENTS FOR **RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS**
16-18 November 2023
Gyöngyös, Hungary

Not Student centred

Not theory (teacher) centred

But **WORLD CENTRED !**

Towards Sustainable Farming and Food systems

Geir Lieblein
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Norwegian University of Life Sciences

ORGANISED BY:

Agroecology Europe

SESSION 3: Transforming education and extension services: From top-down knowledge transfer to more horizontal farmer-to-farmer approaches

#AEEUForum2023

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:

Fondation de France

Healthy Food Healthy Planet

MSc Agroecology at NMBU 2000 –

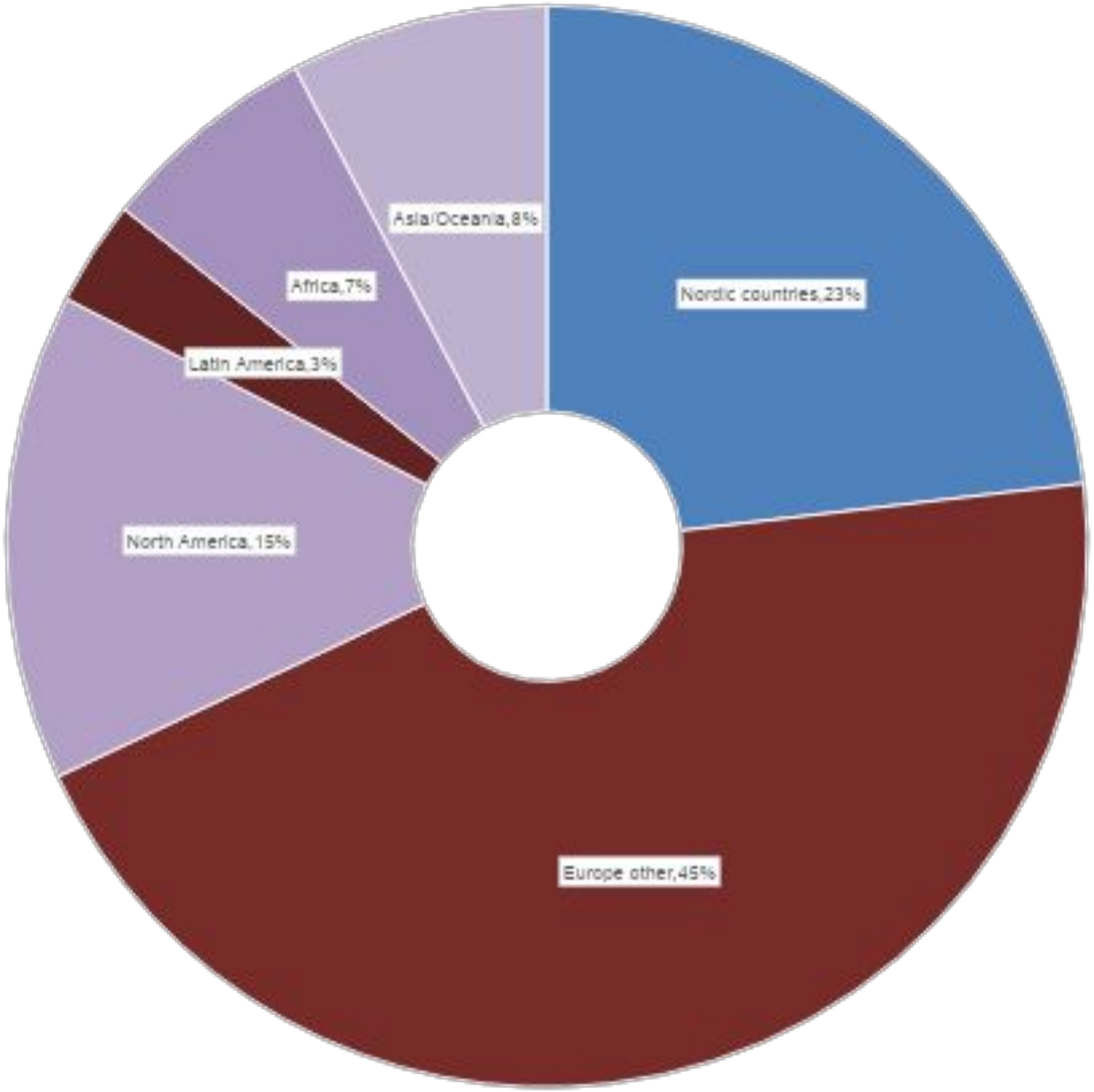
Agroecology: A holistic and action-oriented approach towards sustainable farming and food systems

Purpose:
To equip students with the necessary sustainability competences (core agroecology competences), as well the aim that the students should end up as individuals who can think for themselves and take responsibility for their actions

International program: So far students from more than 50 countries have participated

Each cohort of around 20 students has on average students from 10 – 12 countries

Broad study backgrounds: Agronomy, social sciences, environmental sciences, human sciences, economics



The case: MSc agroecology at NMBU 2000 –

Double degree collaboration with ISARA-Lyon since 2008

“Agroecology: Action learning in farming and food systems – The introductory 4 months full time course“

Becoming an agroecologist through action education

THE WORLD
(outside)

THE STUDENT
(inside – the «I»)

What is the desired future?
A vision

What are the implications for my future as an agroecologist?

FARMING SYSTEMS

FOOD SYSTEMS

In groups

How can we get there?
A plan of action

What is there?
The present

How am I thinking and learning?

What is my task?

The curriculum: To give the students ways to meet the world and themselves

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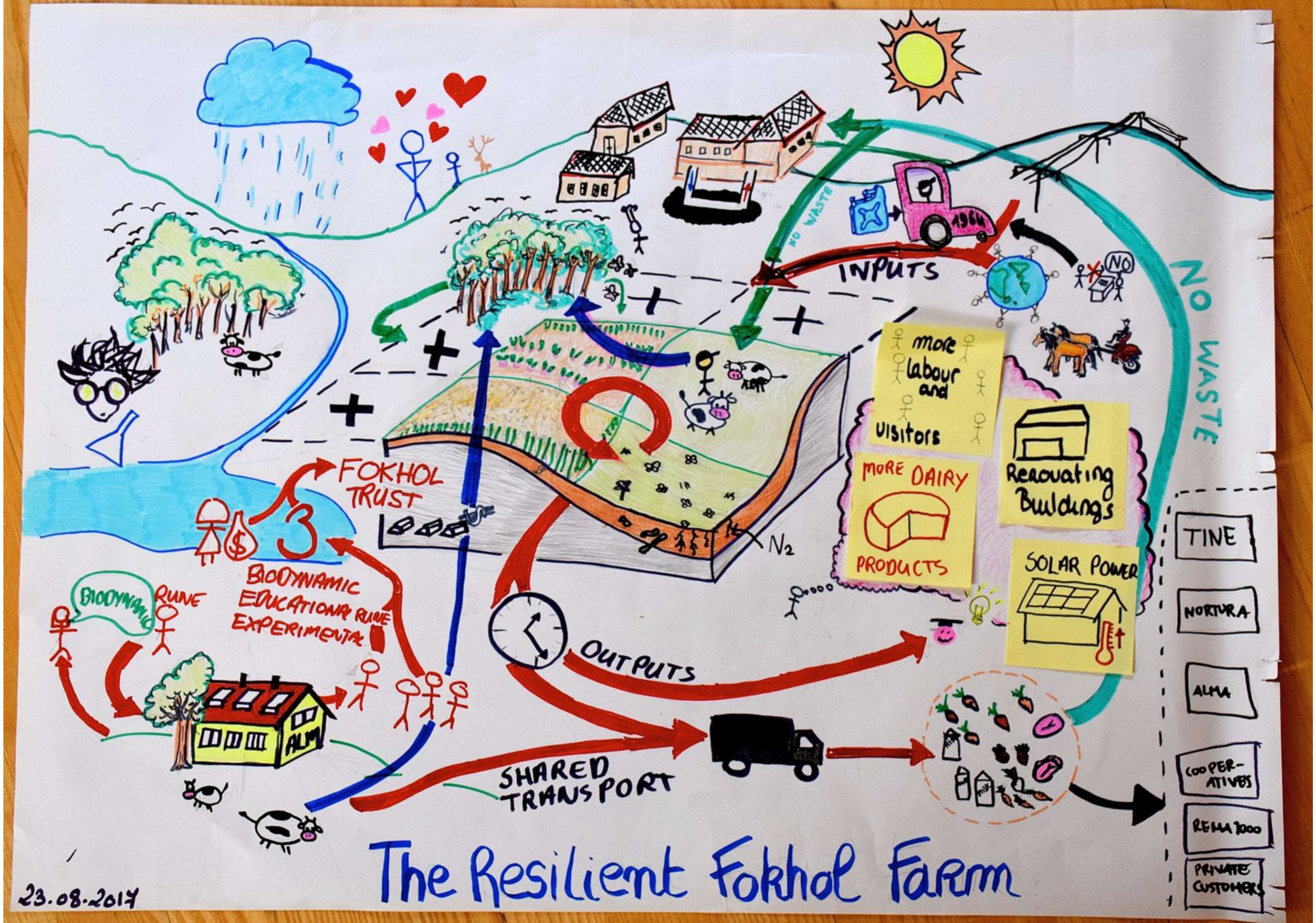
Starting with the Phenomena

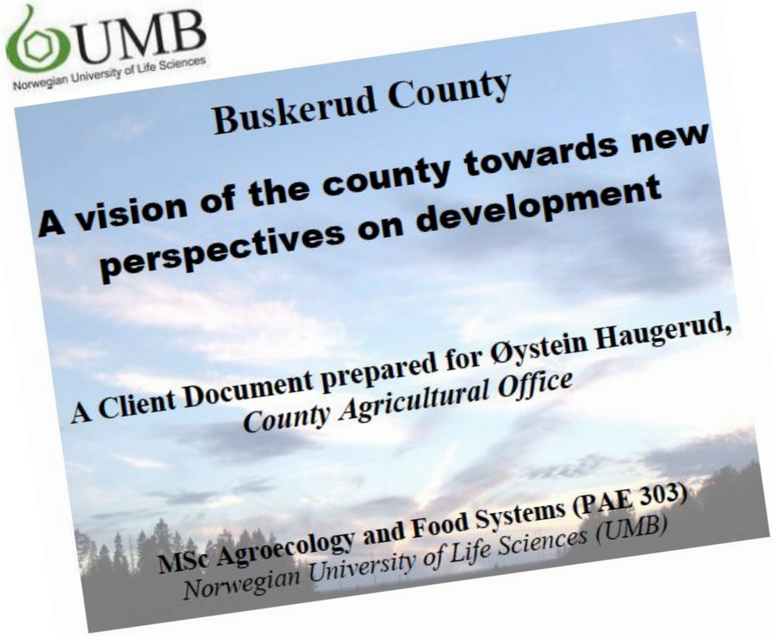
Rich picture



Rich picture

Visioning

Visioning



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November 28th, 2005

NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES

MSC. IN AGROECOLOGY

DEVELOPING A VISION FOR EVA'S FARM

2013

Aschjem Gårds Farming System: A Vision for Sustainability

Karin RUEDE
Christopher BRADBURN
Jenna SMITH
Matthieu THABARD
Eva KARACHRISTIANIDIS
Laura CAZAUX

Empowering Local Food System
Through Innovation and Cooperation

Report on Public Food Procurement of Tolga Kommune

December, 2022

Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Ana Madeleine Fuvel, Giovanni Zucca, Katrin Schmidt, Kushal Poudel, Thea Marie Kvam

Prepared for the course 'PAE302-Action Learning in Farming and Food System from the M.Sc. Agroecology at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)

INCREASING ORGANIC FOOD IN HIGH SCHOOL CANTEENS

November 2019

Agathe Anthonioz, Joanna Costello, Elsa Michel, Synneve Øien Frøyen & Benjamin Stewart

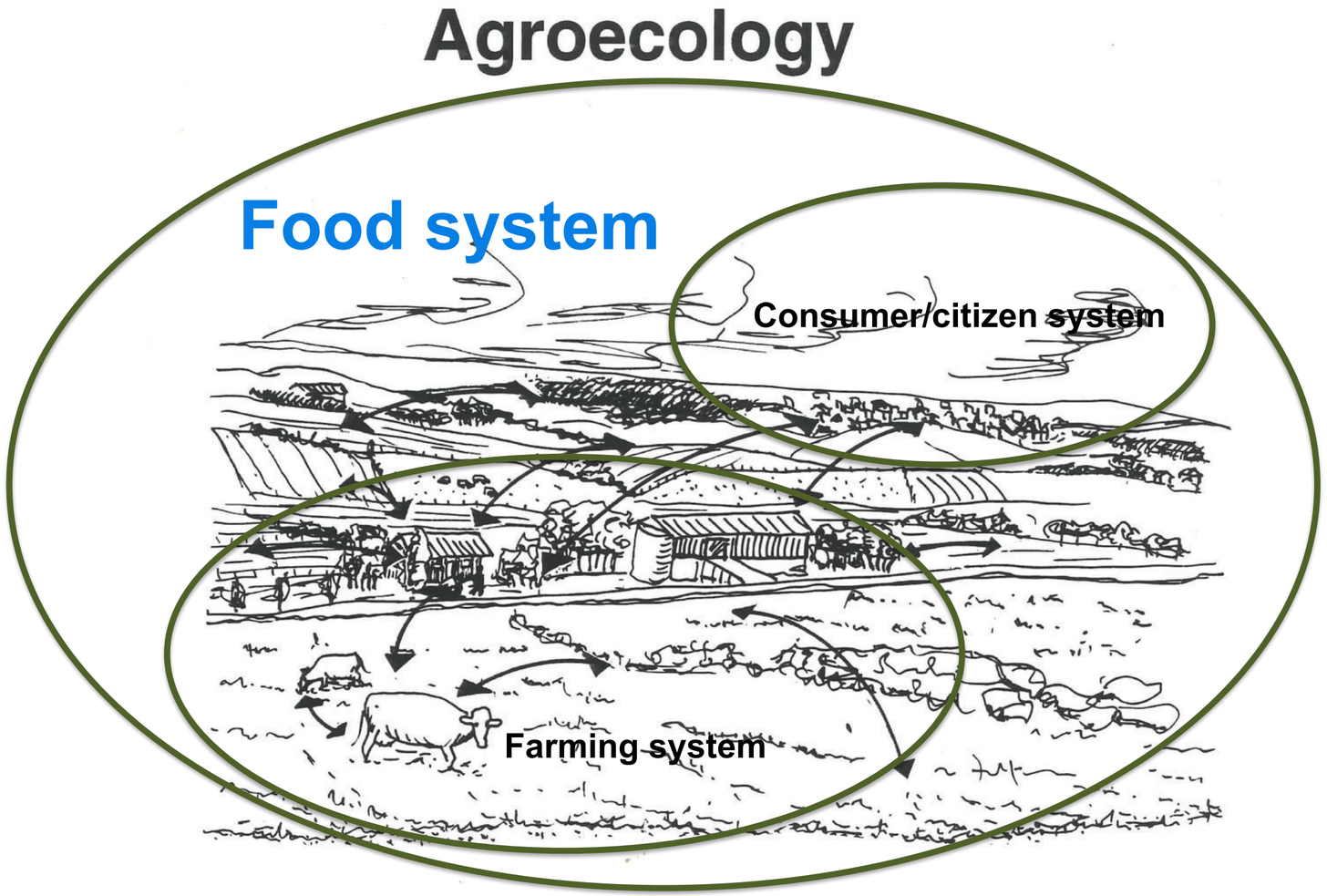
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

AKERSHUS fylkeskommune

Reflecting on Experiences
– Individually

and Together

The core agroecological practice:
Dealing with the challenge of the whole
Finding site-specific solutions towards sustainability
Reflecting on own experiences



The survey of alumni

Research questions

1. How do previous students view their action learning experience in the NMBU agroecology course in terms of strengths and weaknesses?
2. To what extent did they achieve the learning goals of the course and develop the core agroecology competences?
3. To what extent has participation in the action learning course had an impact on their professional and personal life

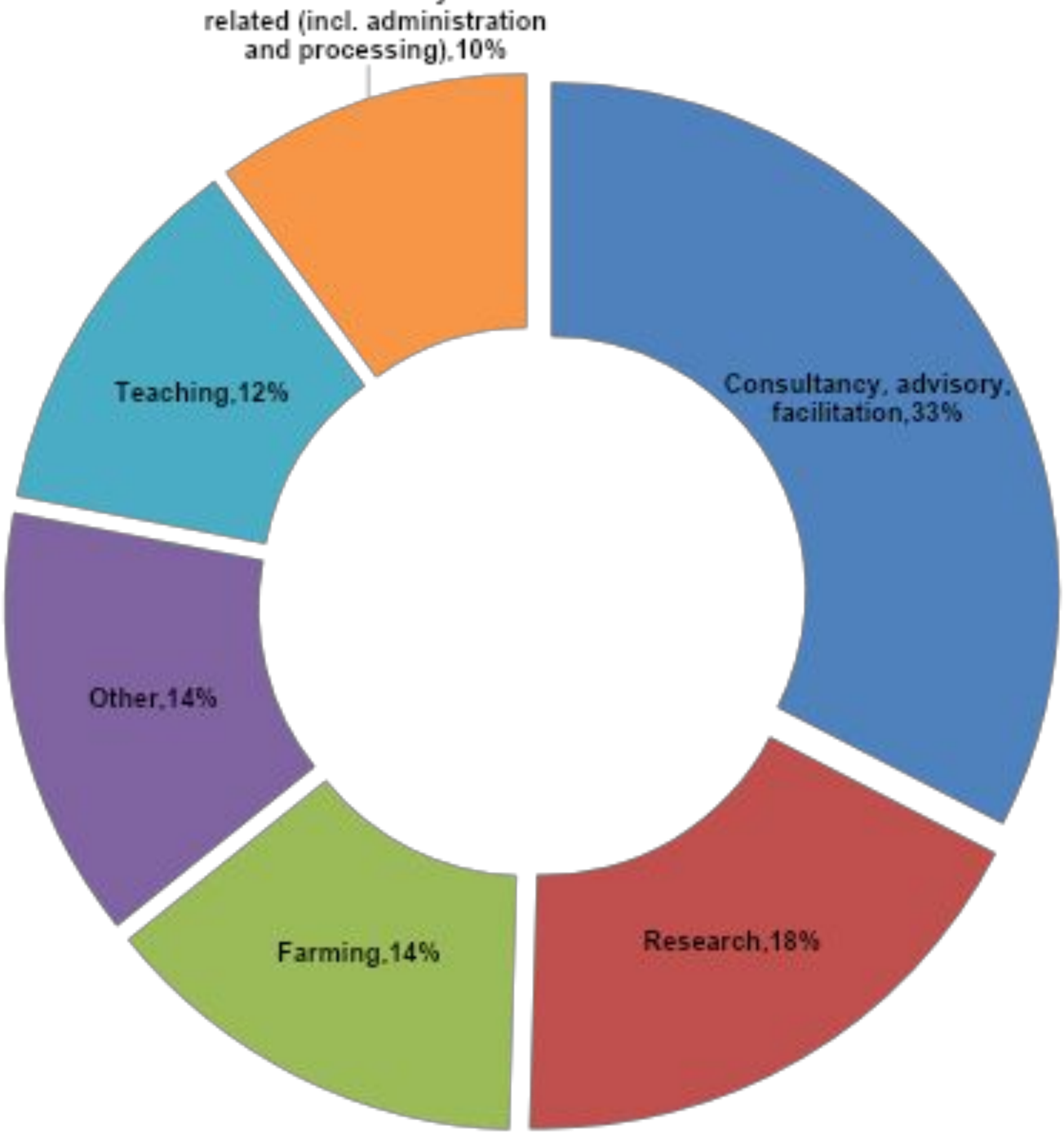
Methods

Data collection:
An online survey (May 2022)
Closed and open questions

Data analysis:
Descriptive statistics
Inductive content analysis

Year	Number of responses	Number of invited students	Number of students in total	Response rate (% of invited students)
2000	2	6	13	33
2001	2	7	10	29
2002	6	9	10	67
2003	2	9	9	22
2004	2	8	16	25
2005	6	13	21	46
2006	5	15	20	33
2007	2	12	16	17
2008	8	15	22	53
2009	7	19	21	37
2010	9	20	22	45
2011	6	22	23	27
2012	11	17	17	65
2013	10	20	21	50
2014	5	21	22	24
2015	4	20	22	20
2016	13	16	17	81
2017	12	20	21	60
2018	3	23	24	13
2019	5	20	20	25
2020	1	0		
SUM	**121**	312	367	**39**

Agroecologist alumni fields of work



Overall view on the experience

	Disagree fully	Disagree partly	Agree partly	Agree fully	Prefer not to answer
Participating in the course was generally a positive experience	0 %	7 %	12 %	80 %	0 %
			92%		
I question whether it was worth taking the course	66 %	17 %	12 %	4 %	2 %
	83%				
The strengths outweighed the weaknesses of the course	2 %	6 %	27 %	64 %	2 %
			91%		
All the elements of the course experience were helpful to my learning	3 %	16 %	41 %	39 %	2 %
			80%		
Some elements of the course experience hindered my learning	46 %	22 %	26 %	3 %	3 %
	68%		29%		

«Being sent out to meet real situations and projects is one of the most appreciated parts of the course. Even though it is a challenging course, I appreciated this in the end, because I learned a lot by being challenged in new ways, both academically and practically, but also I learned a lot about myself in different settings."

Influence of the course

Compared to other courses I took during my studies, this course was...	Much less influential	Slightly less influential	About equally as influential	Slightly more influential	Much more influential	Prefer not to answer
	2 %	6 %	11 %	21 % 80%	59 %	3 %

«It has been the most important course during my studies»

«The course was very inspiring and did create very significant impact on my worldview, ambitions, passion, and agency. This was very high quality and I am grateful for it.»

«Not to sound dramatic, but quite life changing. It did change my worldview on how we should re-think, change our food system and more broadly our society at large.»

Impact on professional life

The course experience ...	Disagree fully	Disagree partly	Agree partly	Agree fully	Prefer not to answer
... inspired me to work with farming and food	1 %	5 %	33 %	60 %	2 %
			93%		
... led me to see myself as an agroecologist	3 %	14 %	39 %	43 %	1 %
			82%		
... Inspired me to work as an agent of change in farming and food systems	2 %	7 %	28 %	61 %	2 %
			89%		
... did not influence my professional connection to farming and food	59 %	26 %	10 %	3 %	3 %
	85%				

«The work I do today is directly linked to the agroecology course as it has inspired me profoundly and has helped me to understand my role as an agroecologist»

Impact on personal life

The course experience ...	Disagree fully	Disagree partly	Agree partly	Agree fully	Prefer not to answer
... was enlightening and led me to a change in worldview	5 %	10 %	46 %	38 %	1 %
			84%		
... did not leave a significant impact on me	68 %	26 %	4 %	2 %	1 %
	94%				
... inspired me to make changes in my lifestyle	10 %	14 %	49 %	26 %	1 %
			75%		

«To be honest, after 10 years, the impact of this education is still unfolding.»

Implication for further course improvements

Area for improvement	Theme
From single discipline to transdisciplinarity	• *Some students seemed to give up on the course which was very disappointing. I think they wanted more quantitative, positivist-style learning?*
Student expectations with regards to course content	• *I was often frustrated by the weak technical level of the discussions. I wished some more grounded talks or let's say, a dialogue more balanced in-between creativity and knowledges.* SUPERVISION
Feedback from teachers	• *-… wishing that we had more feedback from the professors during the course - while I understand the focus was on 'autonomous learning', I believe that we - as students in a university - would have benefitted from more guidance from the professors throughout the course.*
Assignments	• *I did not appreciate the final assignment, where if you didn't 'learn' or 'take anything away from the course', it was your personal failure, rather than the responsibility of the structure of the course or the facilitation.* ASSESSMENT
Innovative teaching	• The course is almost ahead of its time, and it can be difficult to integrate what we learned in our professional lives. ??