Impact on alumni’s professional and personal life

Two decades of action education in agroecology

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

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

#AEEUForum2023
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)
- What is the desired future?
  A vision

- How can we get there?
  A plan of action

THE STUDENT (inside – the «I»)
- What are the implications for my future as an agroecologist?

- What is my task?

FARMING SYSTEMS

- In groups

FOOD SYSTEMS

- What is there?
  The present

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

- How am I thinking and learning?
Becoming an agroecologist through action education

THE WORLD (outside)
- What is the desired future?
  - A vision
- How can we get there?
  - A plan of action
- What is there?
  - The present

THE STUDENT (inside – the «I»)
- What are the implications for my future as an agroecologist?
- How am I thinking and learning?
- What is my task?

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

FARMING SYSTEMS
FOOD SYSTEMS
Starting with the Phenomena
The Resilient Fokhol Farm
Rich picture
A vision of the county towards new perspectives on development

Prepared by:
Marianne Le Petit, Project Director Agricultural Systems
Therese Olsen, Fasde
Birgitte Iversen, Farm Manager
Thomas Leydet, Photo
Nicholas Wilts, UIW, Norwegian University of Life Sciences

November 25th, 2005

Aschjem Gårds Farming System: A Vision for Sustainability

DEVELOPING A VISION FOR EVA'S FARM
Empowering Local Food System Through Innovation and Cooperation
Report on Public Food Procurement of Tolga Kommune
December, 2022

INCREASING ORGANIC FOOD IN HIGH SCHOOL CANTEENS

November 2019
Agathe Anthousas, Joanna Costello, Elsa Michel,
Synnove Øien Frøyen & Benjamin Stewart

Anna Madeleine Barlo, Gimunent Zino, Karin Schmidt, Katalin Póthelyi, Thes Marie Knorr.
Prepared for the course "Future Actions Learning in Farming and Food System from the MSc. Agroecology at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)."

Norwegian University of Life Sciences

AKERSHUS
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Number of invited students</th>
<th>Number of students in total</th>
<th>Response rate (% of invited students)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>2019</td>
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<td>20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUM</strong></td>
<td><strong>121</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>367</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Agroecologist alumni fields of work

- Consultancy, advisory, facilitation: 33%
- Research: 18%
- Farming: 14%
- Other: 14%
- Teaching: 12%
- Related (incl. administration and processing): 10%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall view on the experience</th>
<th>Disagree fully</th>
<th>Disagree partly</th>
<th>Agree partly</th>
<th>Agree fully</th>
<th>Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in the course was generally a positive experience</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>80 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I question whether it was worth taking the course</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strengths outweighed the weaknesses of the course</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the elements of the course experience were helpful to my learning</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>41 %</td>
<td>39 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some elements of the course experience hindered my learning</td>
<td>46 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

«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...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Much less influential</th>
<th>Slightly less influential</th>
<th>About equally as influential</th>
<th>Slightly more influential</th>
<th>Much more influential</th>
<th>Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>59 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

«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

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

«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»
The course experience ...

- **Disagree fully**
- **Disagree partly**
- **Agree partly**
- **Agree fully**
- **Prefer not to answer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The course experience ...</th>
<th>5 %</th>
<th>10 %</th>
<th>46 %</th>
<th>38 %</th>
<th>1 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... was enlightening and led me to a change in worldview</td>
<td>68 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... did not leave a significant impact on me</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... inspired me to make changes in my lifestyle</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

«To be honest, after 10 years, the impact of this education is still unfolding.»
Implication for further course improvements

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.

- … 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.

Feedback from teachers

- 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.

Assignments

Innovative teaching

- The course is almost ahead of its time, and it can be difficult to integrate what we learned in our professional lives.