Funding the agroecological transition: The role of foundations in Europe

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Key highlights:
1. We observe a contextual, organisational and strategic diversity among researched actors
2. Climate action appears as the main driver for engagement
3. Actors were mainly located in Western Europe.
4. While some strategies explicitly refer to agroecology and its principles, other alternative approaches to sustainable agriculture are also used, partially interchangeably with agroecology.

Introduction

To transform the food system into a more sustainable one, an increase and shift of funds is urgently required. While public funding for agroecological purposes has started to be monitored\cite{1,2,4,4}, the private sector’s contributions have yet to be understood and analysed. Specifically, foundations as financially powerful and emergent actors who can take risks and consider approaches that others cannot\cite{5} are an interesting starting point.

Objectives

This research aimed to develop an initial understanding of private funding for agroecology and sustainable food systems by foundations in Europe. Beyond the estimation of funding and other financial support by foundations, this research aimed to explore their motivations and visions, often expressed through a theory of change, as well as their strategies to better understand their way of operating and managing money flows and thereby answering:

How are (philanthropic) foundations currently supporting the agroecological transition in Europe?

Results & Discussion

1. Context - Mapping foundations

The locations show a clear Western prominence. Together with the fact, that foundations mostly engage on a national scale, it suggests a similar trend concerning the resource distribution.

Heatmap: distribution of the geographic location of foundations (N=100); 7 foundations are in the US

2. Organisation – Size of resources

Agroecology is used in 35% of the foundations’ strategies and is often perceived as the desirable end-vision. However, some foundations explicitly do not use the term due to its political connotation.

3. Strategy – Themes of funding

Key takeaways & Future research

Foundations actively advance agroecology through policy advocacy and knowledge sharing, acting as enablers and facilitators. They can play a key role in supporting grassroots initiatives and innovation-driven approaches. However, the funding remains insufficient, and concerns about transparency and term co-optation persist, highlighting the need for future research and tracking of future funding.

References
