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PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEMS IN SPAIN: BUILDING A SYSTEM TO ASSESS AND FOSTER AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

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Abstract: There are many initiatives of short food supply chains in Spain that have been implementing participatory guarantee systems, with great involvement of producers and, in some cases, consumers.

In this context, a research have been developed to systematize the criteria that ten Spanish PGS have developed, to assess conformity. Through the review of the documentation provided by the initiatives, we have analyzed the criteria that are shared among the experiences and how they are evaluated. We highlight the way these initiatives foster the agroecological transition by establishing criteria at different levels of obligation and periods for the different criteria to be adopted.

To identify the differences between the agroecological framework these initiatives entail, and the definition of organic food that the European official regulation impose, we have generated a comparative table to highlight the main differences between both definitions.

Introduction: Short food supply chains mean a new approach between producers and consumers at many levels (Seville et al. 2012, Renting et al. 2012, Rucabado and Cuellar, 2018). Associated to them, Participatory Guarantee systems emerge as an alternative way of confidence building around local, healthy and sustainable food. IFOAM (2008) defines PGS as "local guarantee systems that certify organic producers based on the active participation of different agents and built on trust, local social networks and the exchange of knowledge". Indeed, many PGS initiatives have emerged in countries whose regulations do not recognize them as valid to guarantee organic production. This is the case of countries within the European Union. Despite the consequence of non recognition, these systems are functioning and developing in countries such as Spain, claiming for an agroecological definition of organics that they do not find at the official regulation (Cuellar and Ganuza, 2018).

Through this work, what we aim to present is, on the first hand, the definition of Agroecology that these initiatives are building comparing the criteria and standards of 10 Spanish initiatives and, on the other hand, compare this common ground to the definition established by the public European regulation for organic food.

Material and methods: The research was developed through the case study of ten Spanish PGS. We have carried out an extensive bibliographic review of the existing documentation on their guarantee systems, such as: internal regulations, operating manuals and documents on PGS principles, farm visit guides or self-assessment guides, and documents on criteria provided by the initiatives themselves. In addition, the websites, the blogs and any public information on the case studies have been reviewed.

Building a mixed research group of researchers and members of some of these PGS, we have systematized the criteria and standards proposed.

After a first review of the different criteria, we built a table of variables that would facilitate the organization of all the information, using the libreoffice calc software. Once the table done, we started organizing the information of the different PGS on the table, identifying weaknesses and improvement needs of the table. A group discussion about the exercise ended into a final table model, where we introduced the different PGS indicators, organized through six axes of analysis and 49 indicators.

The same table was used to systematize the criteria and indicators established by the official regulation. The documents used have been the public regulation itself, together with the operating manuals of 2 Spanish public certification entities. The information organized in the table allowed us to discuss about the main differences existing between the definition of organic food after the European regulation, and the definition of agroecological producers established by the PGS studied.

Results: The criteria, following the exercise presented beforehand, have been grouped into six main axes of analysis: a. Characteristics of the productive unit; b. Elements of production; c. Elements of the territory; d. Energy issues; e. Socioeconomic elements and f. Sociocultural and political issues.

AXIS	CRITERIA	INDICATORS
FARM CHARACTERISTICS	Organic or mixed production	Organic or mixed production
	Biodiversity	Ecological infrastructure (hedge, natural barriers, secondary plants, nest-boxes, lagoons or rafts, etc)
		Local varieties
		Cultures diversification
		Cultures rotation
		Cultures association
		Ground cover (in fruits and trees)
		Presence of live animals
PRODUCTION CHARACTERISTICS	Weeds, pests and diseases management	Pests and diseases control
		Weeds control
		Tillage
		Phytosanitary products origin
	Seeds and seedlings	Seeds and seedlings: type

	Fertilisation	Seeds and seedlings: origin
		Fertilizers: types
		Green manure
	Water management	Fertilizers: origin
		Irrigation systems
		Water quality Conservation and saving water techniques (water harvesting, storage,...)
TERRITORIAL ELEMENTS		Proximity to pollutants focus
		Adjoining plots
		Respect for wildlife
		Heritage structures protection
ENERGY	Energy efficiency	Technology, machinery and facilities
		Farm energy
		Closing cycles (composting, re-usage of green waste from the own farm and adjoining plots, synergies with adjoining plots, wastewater, etc..)
		Seasonal production, greenhouses
	Packaging and waste management	Energetic dependency
		Packaging and wastes Wastes management
SOCIOECONOMIC ASPECTS	Economy	Farm as core activity
		Farm Size
		Organizational model of the project
		Labor conditions
		Funding
		Products transformation
	Commercialization	Where do we commercialize
		Distribution distances
		Other farmers products distribution
		Type of transport Quality criteria for products
SOCIOCULTURAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS	Participation	Commitment with the PGS association or project
		Participation in other organizations
		Participation in the PGS (Minimum compulsory, proactive)
		Commitment with the cultural heritage and peasants knowledge
		Education actions
	Consumption	Consumption of agroecological products

There are several interesting results that emerged from the analyses carried out. First, official regulation is oriented to certify isolated products, and the way they are produced, independently of the activity that the operator develop in other territories or fields; while PGS are oriented to qualify producers, evaluating her/his/their whole activity.

Secondly, official regulation establish criteria under a technical perception of organics; while PGS introduce criteria related not only to a technical perspective, but also to a social, economical, cultural and political dimensions.

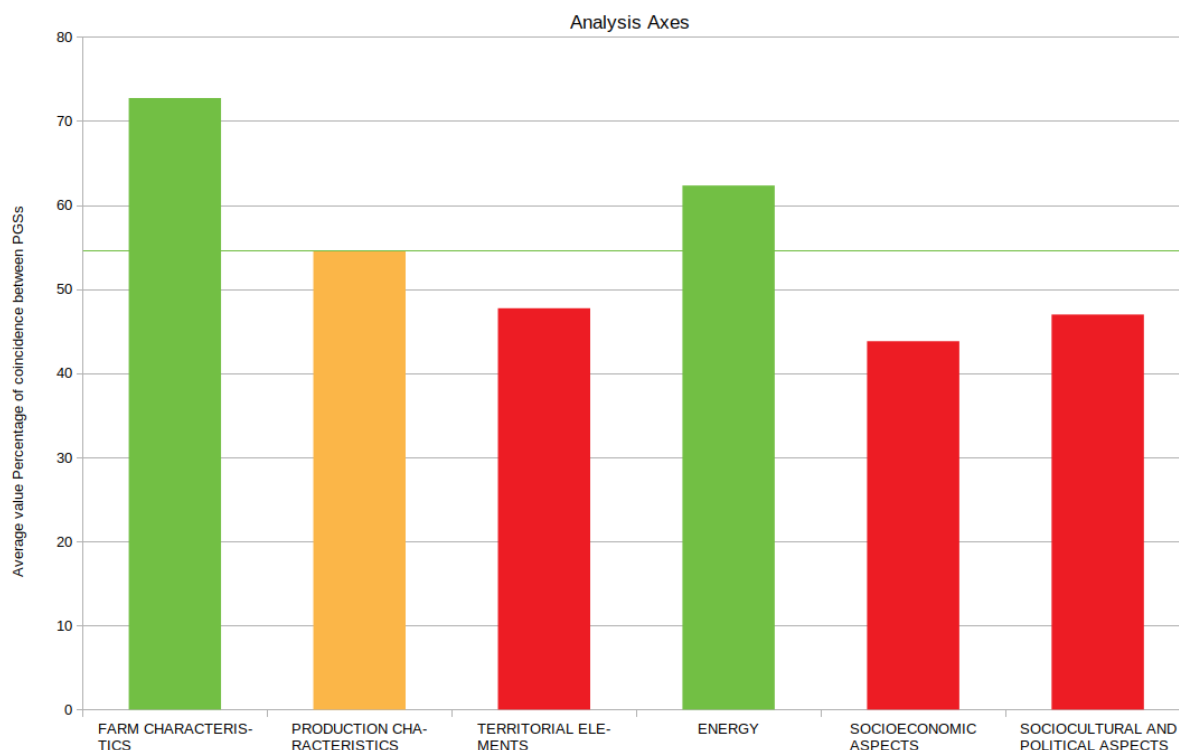
Thirdly, official regulation establishes one type of definition for every criteria, assuming a yes or not answer to its commitment. Meanwhile, PGS establish three levels for every indicator: the red line that will never be acceptable, a yellow band that includes acceptable situations that, however, must be improved in the short – middle term, and a desirable situation that foster the path towards the agroecological transition.

Fourthly, all PGS analyzed base their technical criteria on the European organic production standards, establishing these criteria as the minimum acceptable (except in some cases where other regulations affects and are considered as discriminatory for small-medium size farms and peasants logic).

Fifthly, even within the technical criteria, PGS are much more exigent and have a more complex regard on the farms and the environmental ecosystems than the official regulation.

Related to the PGS themselves, there are some interesting results to be highlighted. Most of the indicators that more than a half of the PGS incorporates are related to the technical perception of organic agriculture (farm characteristics, production characteristics), in line with the official regulation. Another important axe of criteria that the majority of the PGS studied include are the energetic one, that are not even touched in the official regulation of organic farming.

Figure 1. Criteria in the studied GSPs. Percentage of coincidence.



However, and despite criteria related to the territory, socioeconomic aspects and cultural and sociopolitical aspects are supposed to be included in PGS, and despite all PGS studied include at least one or two indicators in all these axes, there is very little coincidence of indicators and criteria included in these axis in the Spanish PGS.

We have also identified that, in some PGS, in two cases, indicators are not well defined in terms of what is acceptable and what it is not. But the results of the evaluation are discussed in every visit, by the group of people that are taking part of the visit or the evaluation committee at that time. That is, criteria and indicators are just a list to look at in the visit, but the evaluation and the results of it will depend on the group that will develop this task.

Discussion: Through this analysis, we have reach interesting discussions. On the one hand, we identify the great coincidence between the initiatives when establishing criteria and definition on what Agroecology is, as they all include many different aspects of the productive units and not only technical components. All the initiatives have introduced criteria related to the "Characteristics of the productive unit" to focus on aspects related to the increase of biodiversity; in the axis of analysis of criteria related to the "Elements of production" the preventive techniques and the use of own and local inputs are established as desirable; criteria of "Elements of the territory" are introduced to identify polluting focuses and elements of mitigation; criteria are established that are going to define the energy efficiency and the management of containers and waste in the axis of "Energy elements" and innovative reflections are introduced regarding the energy dependence of the farms.

Finally, what we consider to be a great innovation and differentiation with respect to the criteria used in the official regulation are the criteria related to "socio-cultural, economic elements" and "cultural and political axis", which include the consideration of the dimensions of the farms, the orientation towards agriculture as the main activity, working conditions or relations of employees, the marketing of products through short supply chains and the active participation, both in different social organizations and in the guarantee system itself.

However, despite all PGS include criteria related to these axes, most of them are just including one or two criteria and there is not a consensus between them related to which criteria are included in these dimensions. That is, despite an interest to foster and defend more complex systems when referring to organic agriculture, than the notion included in the official regulation, in fact there is not a consensus on what criteria should be included in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical dimensions, and most of them are, in fact, guaranteeing very little criteria related to these axes.

Another element identified is that some PGS have not developed the indicators, in terms of what is acceptable or not. That means that some of the PGS are based on collective discussions about the visited farm, without a previous consensus on what is demanded or required and, so, on the results of the visits.

We see how despite PGS are related to agroecological visions and perceptions, and although in terms of technical indicators that include energetic issues PGS are in fact guaranteeing agroecological designs, in terms of socioeconomic and sociopolitical aspects indicators are not well developed yet.

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