

## **How to circulate “population varieties” inside a locked seed system? Kaol Kozh’s case**

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### **Context**

In the late 1990s, early 2000, various practices are being established to provide selected seeds in field year after year (for example, Réseau Semences Paysannes, Kokopelli, Semailles, Bionatur, Kaol Kozh). In this paper, I will restrict my presentation to the Kaol Kozh case. A seed adaptability to soil changes contributes to a low input agriculture by an inter and intra varietal reinforcement (Papy and Goldringer 2011). Their work has the specificity to consider a selection at a varietal population level. What matters is the genetic diversity of individuals and not the homogeneity between individuals. These practices call into question the seed system without undermining it.

The seed system makes selection at individual level (pure line and F1 hybrid), where the variety meets the standards of Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS). Two legal standards are developed on this cognitive base. The first is the pre-market registration in the National Listing of agricultural and vegetable crops (in french : Catalogue). Only registered seeds, and thus DUS, are allowed to circulate among professionals. So, this framework excludes non-DUS seeds of “population variety” type (Bonneuil C., Demeulenaere E. and al. 2006) showing a genetic variability. Consequently, the farmer is forced to repurchase his seeds annually. The second standard concerns the intellectual property right by the Proprietary Variety Certificate (PVC). It grants royalties to the breeder of the variety. In order to get a PVC, the variety must meet the DUS standards. Therefore, the combination of these two legal standards lead to a profitable captive market (Hecquet 2015). I call it a socio-technical lock and lock-in as defined by Stassart and Jamar (2009); Vanloqueren and Baret (2009).

### **In the light of the Breton case**

The Kaol Kozh Association was created in 2007 in Brittany (which means “old cabbage” in Breton / “common good” in Russian). It seeks to reconcile the respect of the legislative framework with the circulation of non-registered seeds in the National Listing. How do they circulate? How are they managed?

I tried to answer these questions through 12 semi-structured interviews. Besides these interviews, I had the opportunity to make participant observation : International Meeting of Seed Houses in September 2012, Bio Bretagne Fair in Guichen in October 2013, training day about the seed legislation in January 2014 organized by Kaol Kozh. The 12 interviews were coded by the RQDA software.

The aim of the association is the individual reappropriation of the seed practice (self-production) and flow among professionals. Kaol Kozh shows a collective commitment to non-hybrid seeds which are not registered in the Official Catalogue. In organizational terms, the association deals with self-production by sharing seeds and practices. According to me, the idea is to be free because together. This “together free” takes

the form of a shared heterogeneity where everyone can come with his comments, questions and seeds. What matters is to enable a transmission of know-how via seed production by experimentation (trial/error, questioning, discussions, new trials). This work depends on each participant. In terms of characterization of a variety, they are free to orientate the plant differently (via their selection) according to their desires and constraints (regarding their marketing chain : short, long or towards chefs). Indeed, each of these chains have different expectations in terms of customers even if it is the same variety.

Sharing practices focuses on the seed object but what circulates is much more. They share livelihoods (seeds), learning ways (know-how) organized around a common philosophy (where laws of the living are superior to human laws). This drives them to oppose the ban on non-registered seed flow and on possession of individual variety ownership via the PVC.

In terms of managing their "population varieties", all members are co-owners of seeds, no-one has individual property. From the beginning, the association has been developing a system where it is an intermediate between members for the production and circulation of seeds among members. This, according to the association, makes it possible to circumvent the flow prohibition of non-DUS varieties among professionals. The association claims thus the flow of products within the association among co-owners and not in a bilateral relationship between two professionals. It is based on this argument that they consider not to break the law. This way of putting seeds between professionals into circulation is meant to be visible by the control authority for the enforcement of the regulatory framework. And that, in order to defend a right of flow confiscated by the construction of a captive and lucrative market. So far, this system has not been attacked. This is, according to the association, a sign that the system holds up.

## **Conclusion**

Kaol Kozh reflects the need of producers to revive and transfer a practice which was abandoned by the previous generation (for some of them, their parents) when moving to an agriculture focused on the productivist paradigm. These producers collectively revisit the varietal past of their region and explore other ways to get a seed flow producing vegetables adapted to the Breton soil and adapted to an agriculture requiring no or few synthetic chemical-technical products. This means bypassing the lock but not tackling it head-on as Kokopelli. They use the experimentation of collective management practices that strengthen agricultural autonomy.

## **Bibliography**

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