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IntercropVALUES partners met in Bonn after one year of activities to share their vision, achievements, and plans for the next year.

The second annual meeting of the IntercropVALUES project was held last week in Bonn (Germany). More than 60 participants, representing research teams from national or regional universities and technology institutes, development agencies, cooperatives, SMEs and rural networks, met from 4 to 6 October at the premises of the University of Bonn, the host institution of the meeting.

The project aims to exploit the advantages of intercropping to design and manage productive, diversified, resilient, profitable and environmentally friendly cropping systems that are acceptable to farmers and agri-food chain actors. This ambitious objective involves the development of 13 co-innovation case studies from the EU (9), UK (1), Serbia (1), Switzerland (1) and Mozambique (1). The members of the so-called CICS, representing both conventional and organic farming, as well as short and long value chains, have set their own objectives and agenda during this first year.

The project started last November when most of the participants gathered in Montpellier (France), where CIRAD, the French agricultural research and international cooperation organization and IntercropVALUES leading institution welcomed them. Now, after one year of activities, it is time to share the first results, which are linked to the methodologies put in place in the different groups to ensure that experiments, tests, and data sharing are done with common protocols and understanding. The success of the project and the subsequent impact are closely linked to the strength and robustness with which these first steps are taken.

At this meeting, the CICS leaders make every effort to share information and explain their objectives and planned activities to the scientists and other members of the consortium. Researchers from the environmental and social sciences, humanities and agronomists will collaborate with them throughout the process.

In Bonn, with a truly participatory approach (hybrid format) and very diverse sessions, participants dealt one after the other with topics such as identifying the blockages of intercropping _ and presenting the results of an extensive survey previously designed and completed by the Case Study members_ or describing and measuring the ecosystem services of intercropping _ for which participants were asked to show their drawing skills! They also discussed ways of integrating modelling tasks into the overall project to address partners' research questions with the models, and explaining to project partners how the data management system will work, or even holding a workshop to learn how to write convincing policy briefs. All agree that researchers are nowadays asked to explain to society and policymakers the knowledge derived from their experiments in a comprehensive way. This is key if project members are to have a real impact.

There was some time to enjoy a guided tour of the city of Bonn: the team from the University of Bonn explained to the participants some of the history and architecture of the city, on a pleasant walk from the campus to the centre, where the whole group enjoyed dinner. The participants come from places like Sweden, Spain, Mozambique, Reunion Island, China and the Netherlands, among others, and represent not only different farming systems, but also a great cultural and linguistic diversity. It is in these off-agenda slots that the partners have time to exchange more detailed information and resolve any remaining questions after a full day of sessions and meetings. The agenda is quite tight, as these meetings only take place once a year.

The first sawn crops last August in Austria were a good opportunity to lay the groundwork for the rest of the seasons. Some intercropping experiments will start this autumn and others in spring. Combinations include oat-lentil, wheat and legumes such as faba bean and pea, pea-barley or oat-lupin, sugar cane and cover crop (in Réunion island), and even vegetable intercropping, such as broccoli and vetch. Intercropping has proven to be beneficial for many reasons (such as less use of fertilisers and pesticides, more biodiversity, more water retention, and benefits for pollinator diversity), although new research results will come after 4 years. A step forward in this project will be to find market opportunities for intercropping products, such as bread, pasta, or beer, based on attributes such as taste, health, price, or reduced environmental impact.

IntercropVALUES, funded by the European Commission through the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Program, has a project website (www.intercropvalues.eu) and several social media channels where interested parties will be able to find more information about its activities and results in the coming years. A calendar with events, a section for scientific publications, and news are already available on the site. The project is also planning two summer/winter courses for postgraduates, webinars for the processing and machinery industry, training courses for farmers and advisors, and two multi-actor conferences.

INTERCROP VALUES

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