

Sowing Agroecology, Cultivating Organic Farming, Reaping Peace

This Letter to authors publishing their research in “*Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae*” (SEeB) intends to give further support to the recent “Call for papers” concerning a thematic issue on “Agroecology and Organic farming as levers of a new culture of Cooperation and Peace” (SEeB, n. 1, 2025). The argument deals with three consequential points, 1) the Urgency of a Paradigm Shift, 2) the Appeal to Cooperation and Peace, and 3) the Commitment to Action.

The Urgency of a Paradigm Shift

Agroecology is a transdisciplinary science and field of research for developing universal principles of sustainable land use and sustainable food systems. As such, it brings together different sources of human knowledge and wisdom, spanning from traditional rural culture (local experiential learning), innovative science (systems ecology), process philosophy (systems thinking), ethics (systems practice), art (creative power) and religion (transcendence human need) (Caporali, 2021)¹.

Due to these systemic characteristics, Agroecology has today recognition as a new system of values, i.e. a paradigm for changing behaviour, potentially suitable for re-establishing a balance between the whole (planetary and cosmic nature) and its most disturbing part (humanity). Among the most influential human activity systems, such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and agriculture, the latter one is unique in directly influencing all ecosystem’s components, whether biotic (plants, animals, microbes, humans) or abiotic (soil, air, and water as physical substrates), through the organisation of agroecosystems, spanning from the local dimension (field, farms, and local landscape) to the national and international dimension. In the globalised world we live in, humanity needs a common, cultural base for recognition of the interdependence of ecosystem’s components, both natural and manmade, in a structural and functional planetary unity, where all parts can flourish and sustain each other in the complex web of creative and regenerative processes of the living community.

This recognition is a service of cultural promotion by scholars of agroecology worldwide by showing how agriculture organisation based on agro-ecological principles can help build a planetary citizenship, consistent with the sense of belonging of both individuals and institutions to a larger and interdependent living community. With this shift in the mental attitude, a more responsible behaviour to make peace with the environment and among humans can emerge. Sustainable land use and sustainable food systems connect inevitably, identifying together a need for an ecological ethic respectful of both human and environmental health.

The Appeal for Cooperation and Peace

The title of this letter recalls a stimulating, metaphorical appeal advanced by José Graziano Da Silva, Director-General of FAO, in a “Peace and food Security Supplement”, May 2016, of the FAO’s journal “*Le Monde diplomatique*”, under the title “Sowing food security, reaping Peace”. This article makes three important statements on which I would like to put emphasis for an inspiring appeal for cooperation and peace mediated through a sustainable agriculture:

- a) “food security and a healthy agricultural sector can play a central role in our efforts to prevent conflicts and build peace”;
- b) “this can help to break the vicious circle of hunger and conflict”;
- c) this “is part of what is understood by the term sustainability, and international efforts need to last longer and reach further to take this into account”.

Recalling sustainability in terms of peace or war is meaningful for setting up an absolute scale of values in which war, bringing only disvalues, means absence of sustainability, while peace is a necessary condition for promoting any step of sustainable development. Consequently, Da Silva’s article congruently claims: “for human beings to prosper, they need to enjoy peace and freedom, and they shouldn’t live in fear. Together with the eradication of hunger and poverty, these three elements are vital if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals agreed by all countries”.

¹ Caporali Fabio, 2021. Ethics and Sustainable Agriculture. Bridging the Ecological gaps. Springer Nature.

At the end of the article, a final consideration about agriculture's role in today's society sounds as an appeal for scholars of Agroecology and operators in Organic farming to assure their commitment to help build a culture of cooperation and peace: "Agriculture is the main activity of poor rural populations, which are also the most vulnerable to the consequences of civil conflict, currently the most common form of armed conflict. Fostering agricultural prosperity helps to reinforce social cohesion, reducing tensions arising from opposing claims on natural resources and, through the creation of rural employment, undermines the breeding ground for violent extremism around the world [...] Without support, many more farmers in situations of conflict will have no other option than to abandon their homes and move elsewhere within the country, or beyond its borders [...] Sustainable peace is closely linked to sustainable development".

Regretfully, I have to say that the conflictual situation worldwide has worsened since this latest appeal, especially with wars expanding at the Europe's border in Ukraine and Palestine, whereby the appeal for cooperation and peace is more urgent than ever.

The commitment to action

Universal principles of Agroecology have been adopted for inspiring technical *Standards of production* by IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Movements) since 2005, together with the ethical principles of Health, Fairness, and Care, for promoting certified Organic Farming worldwide. In Europe, the Regulation 2018/848 "on organic production and labelling of organic products" defines Organic production as follows: "Organic production is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental and climate action practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources and the application of high animal welfare standards and high production standards in line with the demand of a growing number of consumers for products produced using natural substances and processes. Organic production thus plays a dual societal role, where, on the one hand, it provides for a specific market responding to consumer demand for organic products and, on the other hand, it delivers publicly available goods that contribute to the protection of the environment and animal welfare, as well as to rural development".

Moreover, taking in account that "the objectives of the organic production policy are embedded in the objectives of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) [...] farmers receive a fair return for complying with the organic production rules".

Ensuring a political recognition and an economic support for the ecological services (provision, regulation, support, culture) delivered to the community of life by Organic farming allows agriculture to achieve a more noble status in society, such as that of a public service of common utility, based on cooperation and peaceful mindset.

Since Organic farming systems organisation is expected to be in tune with the agroecological principles of sustainable development, the various farm components (cropping systems, livestock systems, soil and climate) should be so fully integrated, as suggested by Caporali (2008)², as to lead the farm to serve as:

- 1) a "solar plant", capable of converting solar energy to biomass throughout the whole year;
- 2) a rainfall water catchment in which infiltration is enhanced over water run-off and soil erosion;
- 3) an area where atmospheric nitrogen fixation is enhanced by the frequent and intensive use of legume crop rotation, intercropping, cover cropping and green manuring;
- 4) a mixed farm, which combines crop growing and livestock husbandry so as to attain the maximum integration of grazing and detritus chains and increased soil fertility;
- 5) an integrated biological community in which weed and pest control is a prevention measure due to the biodiversity inside (crop rotation, intercropping, etc.) and outside (hedges, tree rows, etc.) the cultivated field.

² Caporali Fabio, 2008. Ecological Agriculture: Human and Social Context. In Clini, C.; Musu, I. and Gullino M.L. "Sustainable Development and Environmental Management, pp. 415- 429. Springer.

Maintenance of soil fertility for crop production and maintenance of biological balances for crop protection are the two pillars of Organic farming, which mostly depend upon a technical management being based on biodiversity and re-cycling.

Organic farming has positive characters and assets as listed below:

- a) it is scientifically founded, and the founding discipline is agroecology;
- b) it promotes “the culture of life”;
- c) it has an educational value;
- d) it is a guarantee of the origin of food;
- e) it promotes the re-establishment of socio-environmental balances: more favourable balances of human population density; a better distribution of livestock on the territory; the improvement of the agricultural landscape; the improvement of the functionality of agroecosystems; the maintenance of the quality of natural resources as well as agricultural products; the enhancement of local economy.

“For the above mentioned characters and assets, organic agriculture is the first human activity system consciously and legally devoted by the civil society to implementing sustainability in practice and therefore, to operating for the common good” (Caporali,2008)³.

This letter, addressed to scholars, researchers and teachers interested in Agroecology and Organic farming, complies with the recommendations for education for peace and human rights provided in UNESCO’s *42 C/5 Approved Programme and Budget 2024-2025*. This *Programme* sets “its focus on four pillars, ‘greening curricula’, ‘greening teacher training and education sector capacities’, ‘greening schools’, as well as ‘greening communities’.

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³ Caporali Fabio, 2008, Ibidem