15th
LET'S LIBERATE
DIVERSITY!
FORUM

23/24/25 MAY 2026

SCANDICCI

15th Let's Liberate Diversity!
& 72h of Biodiversity

Forum report

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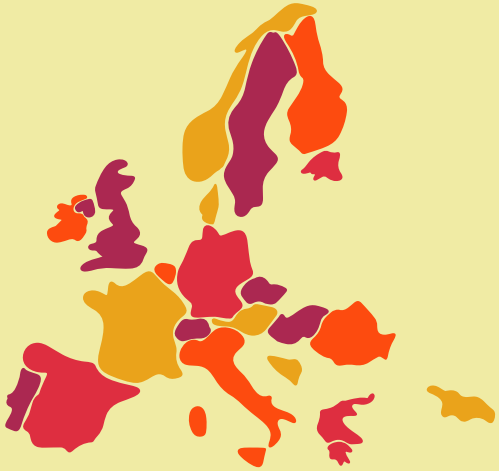
Introduction

The European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity! (EC-LLD) draws its origins from the annual gatherings on cultivated biodiversity known as the Let's Liberate Diversity! Forum. Since the first edition in Poitiers, France, in 2005, the Forum has travelled across Europe and become a reference event for those working on seeds and agrobiodiversity. It rests on a simple principle: agrobiodiversity should not merely be preserved but actively used, because the dynamic management of cultivated diversity is what keeps it alive and able to respond to a changing world.

The 15th edition was co-organised and hosted by Rete Semi Rurali, the Italian EC-LLD member, and held within the "72 Hours of Biodiversity" at the Castello dell'Acciaiolo in Scandicci, near Florence, Italy. Marking the handover from SEED Luxembourg, host of the 14th edition, it brought together 117 participants from 34 countries across Europe and beyond — including the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Armenia, Georgia and Central Asia.

The programme featured nine thematic workshops and more than 30 speakers and facilitators, combining field experience with policy discussion around the reform of EU seed legislation, new genomic techniques and patents, farmers' seed systems, genebanks and breeding innovation, local and municipal food policies, on-farm agrobiodiversity, and agroecology living labs.

Alongside the sessions, a field visit, shared meals and informal exchanges gave the Forum its convivial character and helped build the alliances that carry the movement forward.



Who we are

The European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity (EC-LLD!) is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the **dynamic management of plant genetic resources** for food and agriculture. Our core belief is that the **diversification** of our food systems can be achieved through the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders involved in **cultivated biodiversity.**

As an influential platform, EC-LLD! serves as a unique space for facilitating the **exchange of practices and information** among farmers, seed savers, NGO members, and emerging small enterprises, fostering local actions on agrobiodiversity and promoting participatory dialogues.

The Coordination boasts a robust network of **25 members** with a network of **170 national organizations** operating across 23 European countries with a membership base exceeding **35,000.**

In collaboration with approximately **15,000 farmers**, we actively engage in the conservation and management of around **40,000 plant varieties.**

Forward

A handover message from Frank Adams, on behalf of SEED Luxembourg Technical Agricultural School, which hosted the 14th LLD Forum in Luxembourg.

On the occasion of the 15th LLD Forum, please allow me to say a few words on behalf of SEED Luxembourg Technical Agricultural School, which hosted the 14th LLD Forum in Luxembourg last year. In 2025, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of our network, which was founded in Poitiers, France, in 2005.

Anniversaries are always a good occasion to celebrate, but they also mean that one is getting older. Growing older is not a bad thing if one accumulates valuable experience whilst maintaining the openness to evolve and even reinvent oneself.

2026 seems on track to become a decisive year for cultivated biodiversity in the European Union. Two important regulations are on the verge of being adopted: one on new genomic techniques and one on the marketing of seeds and other PRM.
In this context, I would like to propose an optimistic outlook for the future. Whilst seeds on the official market are becoming increasingly standardised, centralised, technologised and privatised, there is a growing awareness that the better path to sustainable food production lies in developing decentralised, diversified and regional structures that incorporate traditional genetically diversified seeds as a starting point. It is time to increasingly present our work on cultivated biodiversity as a path to the future, in order to dispel the image of preserving the past once and for all.

I believe we should increasingly highlight the specific benefits and services of our work, which are not yet well understood by society and policy-makers: namely, the diversity between varieties, the diversity within varieties, and the evolutive processes on farms and in gardens. This is how I understand the objective of the "sustainable use of plant genetic resources", as set out in the International Seed Treaty and the Global Plans of Action.
Perhaps this argument could be the approach we focus on in order to gain greater recognition and support from public authorities.
All the best wishes for your future endeavours,

Frank Adams,
SEED Luxembourg

The 72 Hours of Biodiversity

72 Hours of Biodiversity' Festival – 2026 Edition, organised by RSR and the Municipality of Scandicci on 22, 23 and 24 May 2026.

As in previous years, the initiative was held to mark World Biodiversity Day on 22 May, with the aim of raising awareness amongst citizens, institutions, schools and industry professionals about the importance of protecting, conserving and promoting agricultural biodiversity as a fundamental element for the health of ecosystems, food security and the well-being of communities.

The festival took place at the Castello dell'Acciaiolo, the Orti della Diversità in Vingone, the Casa dell'Agrobiodiversità and the Cabiria cinema in Scandicci, offering a varied programme of cultural, scientific, educational, informative and social events.

The fifth edition of the festival reaffirmed the approach adopted in previous years, aimed at promoting a culture of biodiversity through initiatives targeting different audiences: the agrobiodiversity market, with free participation by local farms; workshops and cultural performances for the public; initiatives dedicated to schools; and events open to the general public, such as the official launch of the Florentine Organic District.

This year, particular emphasis was placed on the RSR's international network: running alongside the festival was the 15th International 'Let's Liberate Diversity' Forum, a key European event for dialogue between farmers, researchers, technicians, associations and institutions committed to the protection, dynamic management and development of agricultural biodiversity.

The festival also highlighted RSR's partnerships within European projects, such as ECO-PB (European Coordination for Plant Breeding) and COUSIN (Crop Wild Relatives and Underutilised Species Improvement Network), which aim to promote more sustainable seed systems, participatory genetic improvement, and the conservation and use of cultivated biodiversity and underutilised agricultural species.

Some figures:

- 1 large market with 80 stalls selling organic and artisan products
- 3 outdoor sporting activities
- 25 workshops and hands-on activities for young and old
- 4 conferences and presentations
- 4 participatory workshops on agroecology
- 3 theatre performances
- 4 tastings
- 3 communal lunches involving more than 500 people
- 3 concerts
- 1 musical reading
- 1 film night
- 1 farm visit
- 3 art exhibitions
- 1 fashion show

The 72 Hours of Biodiversity

It is estimated that over the course of the three days and the opening evening on Thursday 20th, more than 6,000 people were involved, including members of the public, industry professionals, speakers and guests.

It is worth noting that the festival succeeded in bringing together a broad and diverse organising committee, which proved to be an excellent draw and platform for promoting and raising awareness of the themes at the heart of the festival.

The organisations involved in the organising committee were:
Scandicci Town Council
European LLD Coordination
Km vero
DEAFAL
Ricciorto
Mani Tese Firenze
Tuscan Horticultural Society
WWOOF Italia
COSPE

The Forum in numbers

117 participants from 34 countries *and around 90 organisations took part in the Forum in Scandicci. Among them were farmers, seed savers, breeders, researchers and academics, advisors and consultants, students, NGO and civil-society representatives, policy makers and a journalist.*

Headline figures

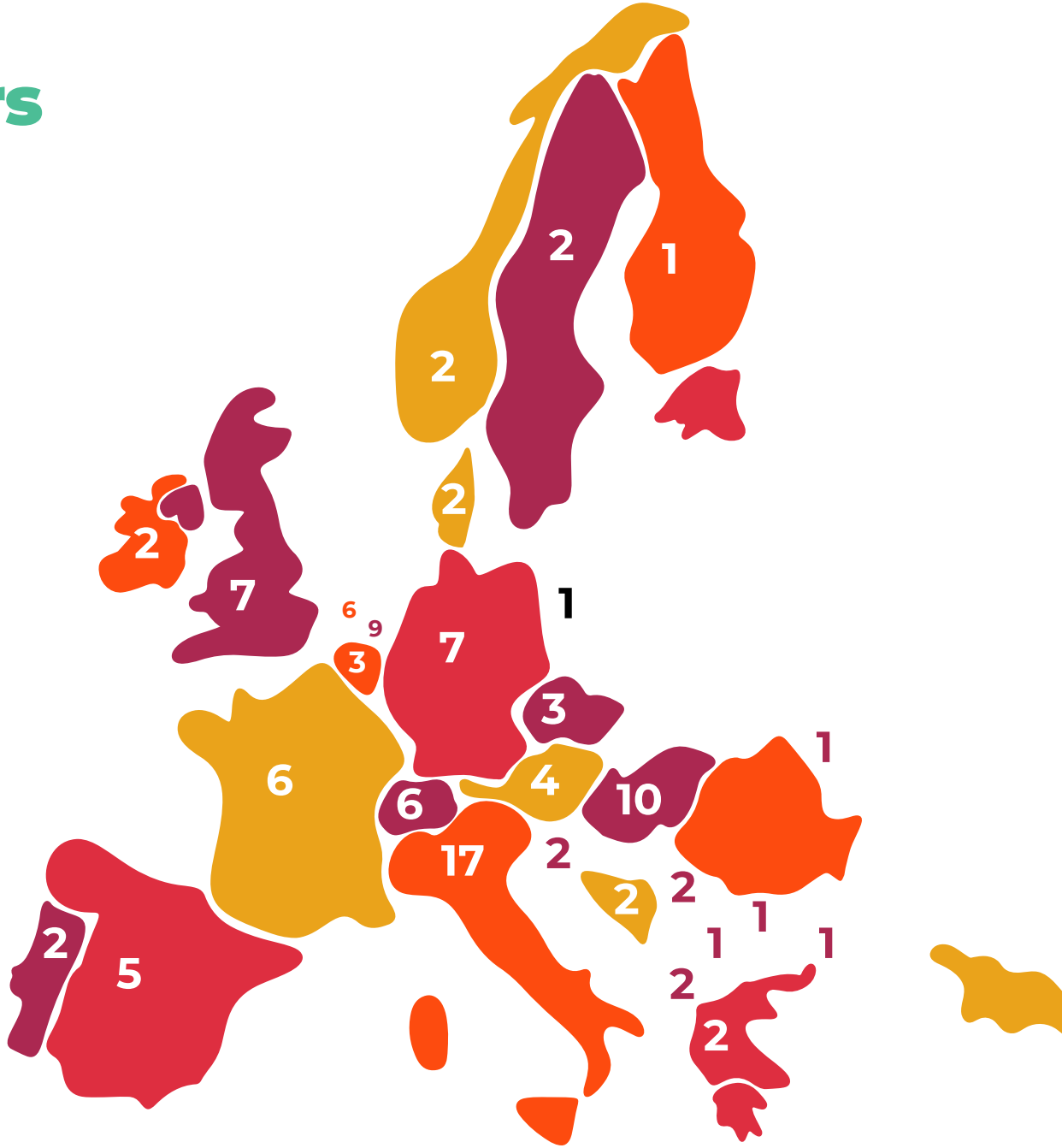
- 117 participants
- 34 countries
- 91 distinct organisations (rounded to “around 90” in the running text)
- 9 thematic workshops
- more than 30 speakers and facilitators
- 66 participants registered for the field visit

Participants by main activity

Employed 36 · Researcher 32 · Others 20 · Farmer 10 · Advisor 6 · Student 4 · Self-employed 4 · Teacher/Professor 3 · Policy maker 1

Participants by country

Italy 17 · Hungary 10 · Belgium 9 · Germany 7 · United Kingdom 7 · France 6 · Netherlands 6 · Switzerland 6 · Spain 5 · Austria 4 · Czechia 3 · Luxembourg 3 · United States 3 · Albania 2 · Bosnia and Herzegovina 2 · Croatia 2 · Denmark 2 · Greece 2 · Ireland 2 · Norway 2 · Portugal 2 · Serbia 2 · Sweden 2 · Argentina 1 · Armenia 1 · Bulgaria 1 · Finland 1 · Georgia 1 · Kosovo 1 · Kyrgyzstan 1 · Mexico 1 · Moldova 1 · North Macedonia 1 · Peru 1



Workshops

Room 1 / LiveSeeding

Room 2 / Seed policy and political framing

Room 3 / Community-based experiences and movement building

Room 1 / LiveSeeding

Three of the nine workshops were dedicated to the Horizon project LiveSeeding, and shared key outcomes and reflections emerging from the project as it comes to a close. The sessions focused in particular on local food policy, the right to food, and living labs in relation to organic breeding and agroecological transition.

About LiveSeeding

LiveSeeding — Organic seed and plant breeding to accelerate sustainable and diverse food systems in Europe — runs from 2022 to 2026 and is coordinated by FiBL Europe. It is funded by Horizon Europe as an Innovation Action, together with the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation and UK Research and Innovation (grant agreement 101059872), and brings together 37 partners across 16 European countries. EC-LLD and Rete Semi Rurali are among them.

The project's aim is to foster the growth of the organic sector and the transition towards more sustainable local food systems, by delivering high-quality organic seed of diverse cultivars adapted to organic farming across a wide range of crops. A large part of its work runs through a network of 17 Living Labs, where farmers, breeders, seed producers and other actors along the food chain co-create innovation in real settings.

What the room covered

Two of the three sessions (WS1 and WS4) approached the same question from different angles: what municipalities can actually do. Cities and local authorities are emerging as actors in shaping food systems, through public procurement and local market infrastructure, but they operate with weak legal foundations for food policy at EU level and with seed systems only marginally integrated into food-policy frameworks. WS1 used the right to food as the frame that links biodiversity, food policy and rights; WS4 worked through concrete experiences from Bergamo and Granollers, and connected local action to the multilevel governance changes needed to support municipalities, including Resolution 5/2025 of the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Both sessions build on a line of work that LiveSeeding has developed with the Spanish Network of Municipalities for Agroecology and Granollers City Council, and that runs from the 1st European Symposium "Fostering Cultivated Biodiversity through Local Food Policies" (Granollers, April 2025) to the Granollers Manifesto and, through it, to Resolution 5/2025 adopted by the Governing Body of the Plant Treaty in Lima in November 2025.

The third session (WS7) turned to Living Labs as collaborative spaces where farmers, researchers and agrifood stakeholders co-design and validate agroecological solutions in real-world settings, with an emphasis on cross-fertilisation and peer learning across European territories.

All LiveSeeding outputs

Project website
liveseeding.eu

Full publication list on Organic Eprints —
orgprints.org — LiveSeeding

WS1. Seeds, Biodiversity and the Right to Food: The Role of Municipal Food Policies

WS1. Seeds, Biodiversity and the Right to Food: The Role of Municipal Food Policies

The workshop looked at how cities and municipalities are emerging as critical actors in shaping food systems, through public procurement and local market infrastructure. It addressed two gaps: the weak legal foundations for food policy in the EU, and the limited integration of seed systems into food-policy frameworks. The LiveSeeding project served as an entry point connecting these two dimensions.

The session clarified the role of the right to food in enabling municipal food policies, showed how seed systems support resilient food systems, and identified connections between top-down frameworks and grassroots practices. Participants worked towards a better understanding of the place of seeds and cultivated biodiversity in food resilience, identified policy and funding gaps between the EU and local levels, considered the scope for municipal action within current constraints, and recognised the right to food as an enabling framework linking biodiversity, food policy and rights.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/seeds-biodiversity-and-the-right-to-food-the-role-of-municipal-food-policies/

Related LiveSeeding publications:

Manual on the Integration of Cultivated Biodiversity in Local Organic and Agroecology-oriented Food Policies (2025) — doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15914176

Granollers Manifesto: Fostering Cultivated Biodiversity in European Municipalities (2025) — orgprints.org/id/eprint/56440

Facilitator

Mariano Iossa
(LiveSeeding Coordinator)

Organizers

LiveSeeding

WS4. Enhancing Cultivated Biodiversity through Local Food Policies

WS4. Enhancing Cultivated Biodiversity through Local Food Policies

The workshop explored how municipalities can play a stronger role in supporting the dynamic management of cultivated biodiversity through local food policies.

It examined practical opportunities for local authorities to integrate cultivated biodiversity into food strategies and public policies, drawing on experiences from Bergamo and Granollers, and connected local action with broader governance frameworks, including the multilevel changes needed to support municipalities and local entities. A representative of the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture presented Resolution 5/2025 and its relevance for territorial action. The session was run as an interactive workshop.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-4-local-food-policies/

Related LiveSeeding publications:

Manual on the Integration of Cultivated Biodiversity in Local Organic and Agroecology-oriented Food Policies (2025) — the manual behind the Manifesto, with 32 practical examples from European municipalities — doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15914176

Granollers Manifesto: Fostering Cultivated Biodiversity in European Municipalities (2025) — orgprints.org/id/eprint/56440

Module 24 — Stakeholder Engagement (Carrascosa, Gori, Koutis, Špicnagel, 2026) — orgprints.org/id/eprint/56639

Moderators

Maria Carrascosa (Red de Semillas)

Francesca Gori (Rete Semi Rurali)

Speakers

Nadia Tonoli (Bergamo Municipality)

Vicenç Planas Herrero (Granollers City Council, food policy officer)

Michela Tudini (FAO – ITPGRFA)

Francesca Cagnola (MUFPP)

Organizers

WS7. Agroecology Living Labs: Crossfertilization for Promoting Agrobiodiversity

WS7. Agroecology Living Labs: Crossfertilization for Promoting Agrobiodiversity

The workshop explored the role of agroecology-oriented Living Labs as collaborative spaces for supporting transformative change in agroecosystems and food systems.

It looked at how Living Labs bring together farmers, researchers and agri-food stakeholders to co-design and validate agroecological solutions in real-world settings, with an emphasis on cross-fertilisation, peer learning and knowledge exchange across European territories. The session facilitated exchange among Living Lab participants, encouraged mutual learning across different European contexts, and worked to strengthen international collaboration in agroecological innovation.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-7-cliving-lab-crossfertilization/

Related LiveSeeding publications:

Strengthening organic seed systems: a living lab approach to collaboration across the value chain and within society — LiveSeeding Booklet (Gori, Petitti, Lazzaro, Chable, Carrascosa García, Špicnagel, Đumbir, 2026) — orgprints.org/id/eprint/57768

Report on key factors of success for value chain and society-supported organic plant breeding, Deliverable 6.3 (Gori and Petitti, 2026) — orgprints.org/id/eprint/57708

Speakers

Judit Fehér (KVANN/ÖMKi)
Korinna Varga (ÖMKi)
Francesca Gori (RSR)
Virag Nagypal (ÖMKi)

Organizers

Room 2 / Seed policy and political framing

Room 2 was dedicated to seed policy and political framing. The sessions addressed broader questions around seeds as commons, democratic seed systems, the EU seed law reform, and current debates on NGTs and patents.

The timing mattered. The three sessions ran while the trilogue negotiations on the new EU Regulation for the production and marketing of plant reproductive material were about to finish, and while the political discussion on the deregulation of plants derived from New Genomic Techniques was still open. WS5 used that window to explain the reform process, set out the likely outcome of the trilogues, and encourage participants to take last actions to influence policymakers.

Several participants left having committed to concrete steps — a letter, a call to an MEP.

WS8 stayed with the legal architecture and its consequences for practice: patents granted and applied for on traditional breeding in Europe, the review of Community Plant Variety Rights, what NGT deregulation would mean for the practical work of seed savers and breeders, and how European free trade agreements are undermining farmers' rights in the Global South.

Two conclusions from the room are worth carrying forward: that organic breeding is currently more restricted than supported by policy and legal frameworks, and that most organic breeders feel they need access to more genetic sources to reach their breeding goals.

WS2 approached the same terrain from the side of conservation and access. Global genebank collections, access to genetic resources and intellectual property in the Americas, and sweet corn breeding across North and South America were the entry points into a discussion on in-situ and ex-situ conservation in which the room did not agree — which is itself a fair picture of the range of positions the network holds.

Read together, the three sessions describe a single problem from three positions: who decides what a seed is, who may keep it, and who may use it.

WS2. Seeds in Common: Genebanks, Breeding Innovation, and the Future of Democratic Seed Systems

WS2. Seeds in Common: Genebanks, Breeding Innovation, and the Future of Democratic Seed Systems

The three speakers presented background information regarding their respective roles with seed systems, genetic resources, breeding, and conservation.

The audience was comprised of several plant breeders, seed keepers, plant genetic resource experts and genebank managers. The speakers focused on global genebank collections (maize and wheat/CIMMYT), policies and challenges in the Americas regarding access to genetic resources and intellectual property, and breeding of sweet corn across North and South America.

Main outcomes

Participants were keen to discuss the importance of both in-situ and ex-situ conservation and there was disagreement amongst the audience about strategies, showing the diversity of opinions and backgrounds in the conference. The conversations were extremely generative and continued after the session ended.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-2-seeds-in-common-genebanks-breeding-innovation-and-the-future-of-democratic-seed-systems/

Presentations

Seeds in Common — slide deck (Lewis / McCluskey) — download (PDF)

Speakers

Laurajean Rehmke Lewis (CIMMYT

William Tracy (University of Wisconsin–Madison)

Cathleen McCluskey (Organic Seed Alliance / Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison)

Organizers

WS5. EU Seed Law Reform: What Does It Mean for Fields and Plates, and How Can We Safeguard Seed Diversity?

WS5. EU Seed Law Reform: What Does It Mean for Fields and Plates, and How Can We Safeguard Seed Diversity?

This workshop was about the ongoing negotiations on the new Regulation for the production and marketing of PRM in the EU.
The workshop took place at a crucial time, as the trilogue negotiations were about to finish. This was therefore the perfect occasion to inform about the likely outcome of the trilogues and to encourage participants to do some last actions to influence policymakers to adopt measures that would enhance cultivated biodiversity, farmers' seed systems, and the diversity of food available in our fields and on our plates.
The session started with an exhaustive explanation of the reform process, focusing on how the new seed law will influence the conservation, exchange, marketing, and use of diverse plant varieties. ARCHE NOAH and IFOAM Organics Europe presented their main points of concern as well as the positive results. Many questions were raised by participants to understand the technicality of the text and how it will affect their activities.
Participants then split into small groups to discuss either the impact of the new law on their activities, or what they could do to influence the last steps of the negotiations.

Main outcomes

Participants developed a better understanding of a complex legal text and how it would affect them. Several participants committed to activities to influence the negotiations (e.g. send a letter, call some MEPs etc).

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-5-eu-seed-law-reform/

Speakers

Magdalena Prieler (Arche Noah)

Louise Windfeldt Schmidt (Danis Seedsavers)

Judit Fehér (KVANN)

Caroline Formont (IFOAM Organics Europe)

Organizers

ARCHE NOAH

KVANN Norwegian Seed Savers

IFOAM ORGANICS EUROPE

Frøsamlerne

WS8. Plant Variety Protection, NGTs and Patents / Updates on Political Debates and Cooperation amongst Organic Breeders, Growers and NGOs

WS8. Plant Variety Protection, NGTs and Patents / Updates on Political Debates and Cooperation amongst Organic Breeders, Growers and NGOs

We presented the latest research by NO PATENTS ON SEEDS! in regards to patents being granted and applied for on traditional breeding in Europe and the negative consequences thereof, provided information on the review process for Community Plant Variety Rights, and gave an overview of the political discussions surrounding the deregulation of plants derived from New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) in the EU, focusing on the consequences the deregulation of NGTs could have for seed savers and breeders in their practical work.

ARCHE NOAH presented an open-source breeding programme focused on developing resistance to the ToBRFV virus in tomatoes. ▸

Speakers

Johanna Eckhardt (No Patents on Seeds!)

Helene Maierhofer (Arche Noah)

François Meienberg (APBREBES)

Grietje Raaphorst-Travaille (Nordic Maize Breeding)

Lena Hüttmann (IG Saatgut)

Organizers

ARCHE NOAH

NO PATENTS ON SEEDS!

Nordic Maize breeding
Breeding for diversity in agriculture

IG Saatgut
Interessengemeinschaft für gentechnikfreie Saatgutarbeit

APBREBES

▸ Grietje Raaphorst-Travaille from Nordic Maize Breeding spoke about her experience as an organic breeder being directly affected by patents. And François Meienberg from APBREBES highlighted how European free trade agreements are undermining farmers' rights in the Global South.

Together with the participants, we aimed to facilitate an exchange on how breeders, growers and NGOs can navigate this challenging political landscape, how they can collaborate effectively, and which steps can be taken to safeguard traditional breeding and farmers' rights in Europe and elsewhere. The interactive second part of the workshop provided the opportunity to get to know the participants, their viewpoints and concerns. One conclusion was that (organic) breeding seems to be rather restricted than supported by current policy and legal frameworks. Another outcome was that most organic breeders feel they need access to more genetic sources for working towards their breeding goals.

Main outcomes

It will continue to be necessary to have a broad alliance of breeders, farmers, NGOs, policy makers, etc. to provide freedom to operate for breeding in Europe, in order to protect agrobiodiversity and food sovereignty and the right to seeds, and to avoid as well negative consequences of European policy in a global context. An in-person exchange at a meeting such as Let's Liberate Diversity provides a good basis to do so.

Participants appeared to be more familiar with patents and Community Plant Variety Rights than with NGTs. The discussion around NGTs was therefore somewhat more limited. From IG Saatgut's perspective, this highlights the value of further strengthening awareness and exchange on NGTs within the LLD community, particularly given the impact of the upcoming NGT-legislation on participants and their work.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-8-ngt-and-patents/

Presentations:

No Patents on Seeds! — Johanna Eckhardt — download (PDF)

Plant Variety Protection in the EU — François Meienberg — download (PDF)

ToBRFV / Bauernparadeiser — Helene Maierhofer (Arche Noah) — download (PDF)

NGT Update and Outlook — Lena Hüttmann (IG Saatgut) — download (PDF)

Nordic Maize Breeding — Grietje Raaphorst-Travaille — download (PDF)

Room 3 / Community-based experiences and movement building

Room 3 focused primarily on community-based experiences and movement building. It brought together local and regional experiences from different countries and contexts, including urban and rural initiatives, regional exchange in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, and a concluding session with an international perspective on coalition-building.

WS3 and WS6 both worked from the ground up. In the Balkans, partners of the Bilim Alliance shared how they support rural communities through collaboration, knowledge exchange and local innovation, with on-farm conservation presented as a way to protect biodiversity, strengthen resilience and secure food supply over the long term; the Croatian case study went further, into participatory plant population development, growing diverse varieties together and letting them adapt to local low-input organic conditions. In Central Asia and Eastern Europe, the discussion started from a shared history — collectivisation, the collapse of the USSR, rural outflows and economic shocks — that weakened smallholder organisational capacity and eroded local crop diversity, and moved to what is being built now: an e-school on para-legals on farmers' seeds, community-based seed production, and analysis of the gaps between formal and farmer-managed systems.
The same question surfaced in both rooms and is worth naming: how to integrate farmer-led knowledge and community-based seed practices into national, regional and international policy without stripping informal systems of their adaptive and localised nature.
WS9 closed the room by widening the frame, asking how organic and agroecological seed networks — which have emerged as alternatives to a privatised, consolidated seed industry — can build a global coalition, and what templates and collective strategies would let them share knowledge and evidence of successful resistance to consolidation.

WS3. On-farm Agrobiodiversity in the Balkan Region: from Preservation to Plant Population Development

WS3. On-farm Agrobiodiversity in the Balkan Region: from Preservation to Plant Population Development

The workshop was organised in two sessions:

Session 1 — The Bilim Alliance Experiences (Okvir Života, Alica Foundation, Stina, Albanian Rural Development Network/ COSPE, Ekolinden);

Session 2 — Cosmic Gardeners: Seed Stewardship from Isolation to Population: Increasing Genetic Diversity of Common Crops in Rural Croatia.

Bilim Alliance brings together partners such as Okvir Života, Alica Foundation, Stina, the Albanian Rural Development Network/COSPE, and Ekolinden to share practical experiences in sustainable farming. ▸

Speakers

Andrea Ferrante
(Bilim Alliance Secretariat)

Sladjana Savic (Okvir Života, Serbia)

Gordana Djuric (Alica Foundation, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Danijela Kondić (Alica Foundation)

Tahir Halitay (Stina, Kosovo)

Rozeta Gradeci (Albanian Rural Development Network/COSPE, Albania)

Suzana Dimitrievska
(Ekolinden, North Macedonia)

Marcela Velfl
(Cosmic Gardeners, Croatia)

Organizers

Bilim

Оквир живота

Fondacija Alica, Banja Luka

▸ The first session highlighted how these organisations support rural communities through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and local innovation. A key focus was on seed-related activities, including the preservation, exchange, and improvement of traditional seed varieties. On-farm conservation was emphasised as an important way to protect biodiversity, strengthen resilience, and ensure long-term food security.

The second presentation focused on a local case study demonstrating how increasing the genetic diversity of crops can enhance resilience, food security, and sustainability in rural Croatia. The project explored participatory plant population development, in which diverse crop varieties are grown together and allowed to adapt naturally to local low-input organic conditions. Community cooperation, seed sharing, and local stewardship were highlighted as essential for preserving and further developing crop diversity. The ultimate goal is to create locally adapted, dynamic crop populations that can thrive under changing climatic, social, and economic conditions while supporting food sovereignty and affordable access to food.

Main outcomes

Strengthen cooperation and knowledge exchange among Balkan agroecological organisations.

Promote on-farm conservation and participatory plant breeding to enhance agrobiodiversity and resilience.

Support community seed systems and local stewardship as key elements of food sovereignty.

Develop future joint workshops and cross-border initiatives to scale up successful agroecological practices.

Additional contribution — Alica Foundation (Danijela Kondić)

Summary. Emphasis of on-farm and ex situ conservation of plant genetic resources and conserving traditional varieties and crop genetic diversity. Establishing and strengthening Community Seed Banks. Building local, national, and international seed networks and promoting seed exchange and collaborative stewardship of genetic resources.

Main outcomes. Each organisation should develop its own context-specific approach to governance and programme implementation, reflecting its institutional capacities, local conditions, and strategic priorities. The design of activities should be guided by the overarching objective of conserving biodiversity, with particular emphasis on agrobiodiversity as a fundamental component of sustainable food systems. Conservation efforts should focus not only on safeguarding existing genetic diversity but also on maintaining the evolutionary potential of plant genetic resources. Preserving diverse genes, alleles, and locally adapted germplasm is essential for future plant breeding and crop improvement, enabling the development of resilient varieties capable of adapting to changing environmental conditions, emerging pests and diseases, and evolving agricultural and societal needs. Therefore, organisational strategies should integrate conservation, sustainable use, and collaborative management of plant genetic resources to ensure that today's biodiversity continues to provide the genetic foundation for tomorrow's agriculture.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-3-on-farm-agrobiodiversity-in-the-balkan-region-from-preservation-to-plant-population-development/

Presentations:

Cosmic Gardeners — Marcela Velfl (Session 2) — download (PDF)

Okvir Života — presentation — download (PDF)

WS6. Farmers' Seed Systems in the Region of Central Asia and Eastern Europe: Experience, Challenges and Future Directions

WS6. Farmers' Seed Systems in the Region of Central Asia and Eastern Europe: Experience, Challenges and Future Directions

The session established a vital cross-regional dialogue space bridging Central Asia and Eastern Europe. These regions share a unique historical legacy, navigating post-Soviet institutional transformations and rapid socio-economic transitions, but have followed diverging policy pathways over the last few decades.

Central activities addressed:
It was explored how historical restructuring (such as collectivisation), followed by the collapse of the USSR, massive rural outflows, and economic shocks, severely weakened the organisational capacity of smallholder farmers and dramatically eroded local crop diversity.

While farmers continue to play a central role in adapting crops to local agroecological conditions, these informal systems remain highly vulnerable to market concentration, regulatory shifts, climate pressures, and a distinct lack of recognition in national policy frameworks.
A modern wave of civil society resilience was highlighted. Smallholder families, activists, and urban communities are demonstrating a sharp increase in demand for localised, community-based food and seed production.

The core of our workshop was built around four highly practical, localised case studies that demonstrated how different countries are tackling these structural gaps: ▸

Speakers

Aida Jamangulova (Agency of Initiatives for Development, Kyrgyzstan)

Anatolii Albin (Moldova)

Alvina Avagyan (Armenia)

Mukhabad Mamadalieva (Tajikistan)

Organizers

AGENCY OF DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

▸ “E-school on para-legals on farmers’ seeds”: showcasing innovative digital capacity-building to legally empower farmers, scientists and activists.

“Agriculture and Agroecology in Republic of Moldova”: restriction to sell the peasant’s seeds.

“Towards Resilient Seed Systems: Gaps and Challenges in Integrating Formal and Farmers’ Seed Systems (Case of Armenia)”: analysing the specific friction and integration gaps between state-level formal frameworks and traditional farmer-managed systems.

“Current situation on the formation of community-based seed production in Tajikistan”: providing a ground-level look at organising local, structured seed production networks.

A central, highly engaging debate emerged around the coexistence of formal and informal seed governance frameworks. Participants intensely discussed the delicate balance of how to integrate farmer-led knowledge and community-based seed practices into national, regional, and international policies without stripping informal systems of their organic, adaptive, and localised nature. The room strongly resonated with the shared need for cross-border cooperation to build evidence-based advocacy, ensuring post-Soviet and Central Asian farmer perspectives are no longer invisible in global policy discussions.

Main outcomes

The workshop successfully moved beyond regional dialogue to establish concrete, forward-looking strategic pathways for stakeholders in Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

A primary action item is the development of policy mechanisms that facilitate a complementary, legal coexistence between formal and informal (farmer-managed) seed systems. This includes creating balanced governance frameworks that protect agrobiodiversity without over-regulating local practices.

Establishing structured, cross-border exchange platforms between European and Central Asian civil society organisations, researchers, and farmers to share operational models (such as replicating the para-legal E-school model or community-based seed banks).

Mobilising collaborative regional initiatives to elevate the visibility of post-Soviet and Central Asian agricultural realities in international policy forums, ensuring that farmer-led knowledge is integrated into national and global climate-resilience strategies.

Future research must focus on a granular analysis of legal and institutional bottlenecks that prevent traditional landraces and farmer seeds from entering formal recognition processes. The group identified a critical next step to collectively seek targeted funding opportunities and international partnerships capable of sustaining grassroots seed-production initiatives.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-6-central-asia/

Presentations:

Moldova — Anatolii Albin — download (PDF)

Armenia — Alvina Avagyan (Towards Resilient Seed Systems) — download (PDF)

Tajikistan — Mukhabad Mamadalieva — download (PDF)

WS9. Affectionate Alliances and Exploratory Mindsets: Building a Global Coalition of Agroecological Seed Networks for Evolutionary Radical Futures

WS9. Affectionate Alliances and Exploratory Mindsets: Building a Global Coalition of Agroecological Seed Networks for Evolutionary Radical Futures

The workshop addressed how organic and agroecological seed networks have emerged as alternatives to a privatised, consolidated seed industry, and explored how these networks use participatory-based methods and radical imaginaries to build diverse seed systems.

Participants discussed templates and collective strategies to advance agroecological seed systems within nations and regions and across the globe, co-creating approaches to share knowledge and evidence of successful resistance to consolidation. Topics included community breeding projects, alternative intellectual property models, and the monitoring of public seed banks. The session was run as a participatory workshop, crowdsourcing existing resources and developing collaborative strategies.

Links and materials

Workshop page — https://liberatediversity.org/events/ws-8-ngt-and-patents-359/

Speakers

Holly Silvester (The Gaia Foundation — Seed Sovereignty Programme)

Edwin Nuijten (ECO-PB)

Cathleen McCluskey (Organic Seed Alliance / University of Wisconsin–Madison)

Organizers

ECO·PB | The Gaia Foundation | Organic Seed Alliance | Federatie van Agro-ecologische Boeren

Tasting activity / Cousin

The Forum hosted a tasting activity focused on food prototypes that could be developed from Crop Wild Relatives, organized by COUSIN project partners UCP (Universidade Catolica Portuguesa).

The activity reflected the project's research exploring how CWRs can be commercialized and used in culinary applications. For the successful mainstreaming of CWRs in the food systems, the development of food products that appeal to the consumer is essential where these food products should not only demonstrate technological feasibility but also possess market potential particularly in the current context where sustainability is gaining considerable attention. To introduce CWRs in the world of domesticated crops, it is crucial to adopt a strategic approach that incorporates the development of innovative food prototypes. Such prototypes can assist in understanding the consumer behaviour and preferences, ultimately contributing to greater consumer acceptance of the "Crop Cousins".

The event brought together COUSIN partners, participants of the LLD Forum and citizens attending the "72 hours of biodiversity festival". The tasting menu included roasted barley tea, lettuce pesto, pea and berry fruit leather, and barley muffins while the roasted wheat tea, wheat pasta and pea couscous was demonstrated as packaged food products. The prototypes were developed at the Kitchen lab at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto. The food product development activities involved experimentation with various formulations and processing parameters to achieve sensorially appealing and technologically feasible food products.

At the end of the activity, participants completed a survey to evaluate the proposed food prototypes, and comments from the tasters contributed to the project's research on future food applications of CWRs.

Field Visit / Rosario Floriddia
Peccioli (PI)

The field visit took place at Azienda Agricola Biologica Floriddia, an organic farm that collaborates with Rete Semi Rurali by dedicating part of its fields to research activities, experimentations and dynamic management of biodiversity.

The visit was organized with the contribution of the COUSIN project, coinciding with the start of its Annual Meeting. COUSIN partners involved in flagship crop group Wheat and in Task 4.3 organized a participatory evaluation of the experimental plots hosted by the farm. Among the materials showcased were several wheat crops developed and studied within the COUSIN project, provided by partners ATK and RSR.

Almost 100 participants were divided into four groups, and the field was organized into four stations, each one covering one part of the experimental plots. Groups rotated through the stations, examined the plots and completed the associated survey.

Three surveys were used in total:

- Best and Worst, and Why
- Scoring of different traits
- Scoring of overall appreciation

The activity provided participants with an opportunity to directly observe the COUSIN project's work in the field, exchange and compare perspectives, provide feedback, and reflect on different aspects of crop evaluation. The results and feedback collected during the activity were subsequently used in COUSIN's Work Package 4 session at the Annual Meeting, where they helped initiate discussions on the opportunities and challenges associated with participatory plant breeding (PPB).

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Rete Semi Rurali

72ore di BIODIVERSITÀ SCANDICCI

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cousin

COMUNE DI SCANDICCI

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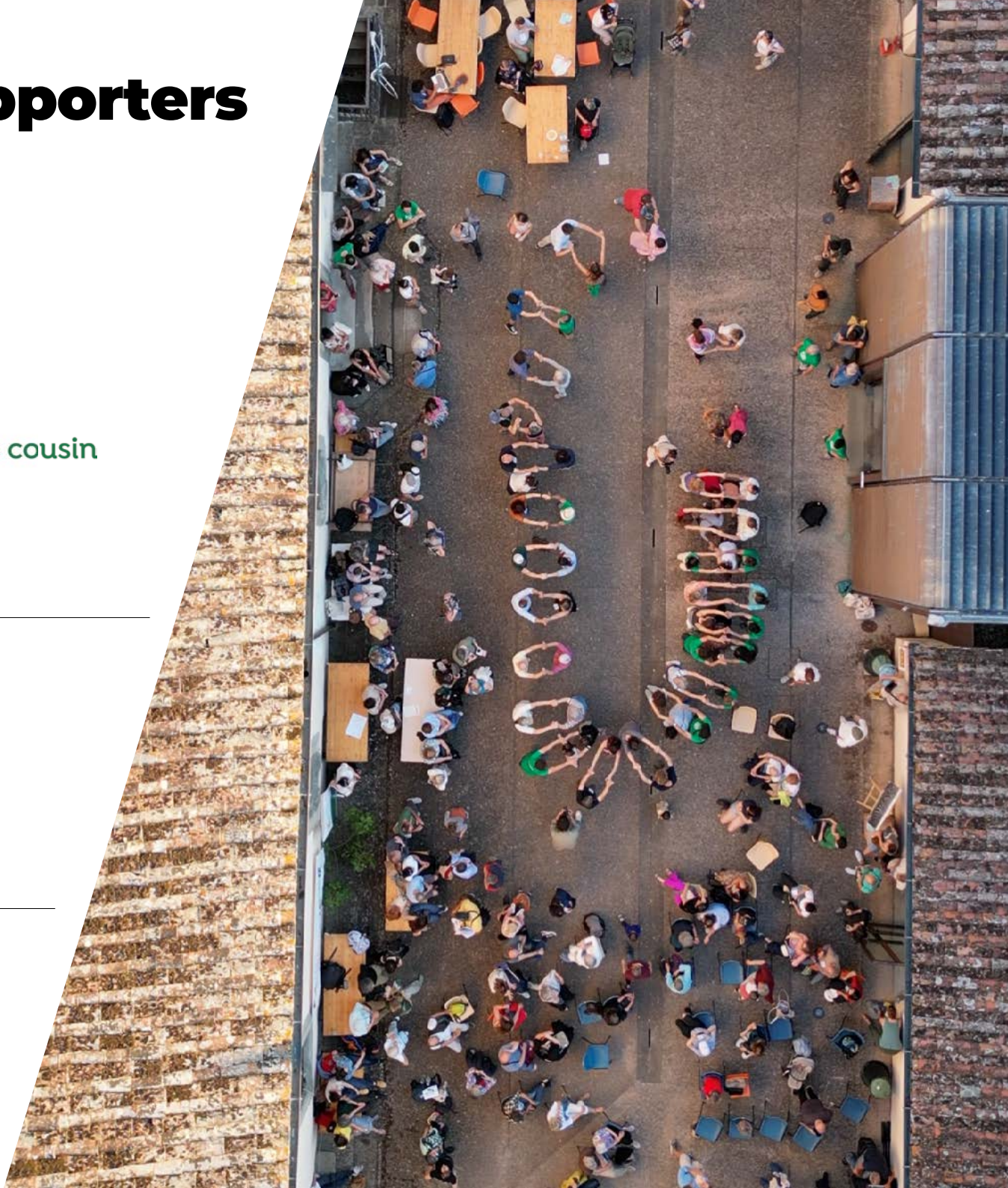

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Seed KnowledgeHUB

Sharing resources to support cultivated biodiversity

Several of the questions that come up in the Forum workshops - how to set up and run a community seed bank, how to handle seed health and documentation, how to read the regulatory framework - come back at every edition.

The Seed Knowledge Hub was built to keep the answers in one place.

It is an **open online repository** hosted on the EC-LLD website, developed within Seeds of Growth, an Erasmus+ small-scale partnership in adult education (KA210), coordinated by Semínkovna (Czech Republic) with EC-LLD and SEED Luxembourg as partners.

The Hub brings together **guides, technical manuals, case studies and policy materials on seed saving and cultivated diversity.** What was included into it was decided on the basis of a capacity gap analysis that reached **868 people across Europe** and collected 140 responses from seed savers, community seed bank managers and seed librarians.
The collection now holds **over 80 resources** and its growing thanks to the contributions of EC-LLD Members and the broader community. In the Seed Knowledge Hub you can also find the material from the LLD forums.

The Hub grows with what the community puts into it. If your organisation has produced a guide, a manual, a template, a study or a policy briefing that others could use, write to info@liberatediversity.org and we will add it. Material in any European language is welcome.

Find the resources:
liberatediversity.org/repository/

Seeds of Growth

The next edition will take place in Norway in June 2027. We look forward to seeing you there!