In ‘co-operative research’, researchers and non-researchers produce knowledge together. Going beyond interdisciplinary academic teams, co-operative research involves civil society in producing knowledge, thus facilitating broader forms of expertise. Going also beyond consultation, co-operative research engages with stakeholders in order to explore the diverse purposes, alternative orientations and wider implications of research.

Cooperation between academic researchers and civil society organisations (CSOs) is often called ‘participatory research’. As an idea, it has a long history, yet there are few practical examples or reflections on such cooperation in practice. What opportunities can be realised, in terms of better or more appropriate knowledge creation? What hurdles must be overcome? What lessons can be learned from this mode of research activity?

The CRÊPE project will seek to provide answers to these questions. It will empower and resource CSOs to participate in co-operative research on various agri-environmental issues. These will include: innovation priorities, agro-fuel production, participation in agbiotech issues, water scarcity and local agri-food networks.

Through such case studies, the project will pursue the following aims:
1. Capabilities: To facilitate co-operation between researchers and non-researchers, to enhance CSOs’ capacities to participate in research, to help them to network successfully, and to promote mutual learning.
2. Co-operative research methods: To design and test the methods used for co-operative research, as a basis to inform future efforts.
3. Agri-environmental issues: To analyse diverse accounts of ‘the environment’ in relation to agricultural methods, technologies, innovations and alternatives.
4. Priority-setting: To relate research more closely to societal needs, as a means to inform policy debate and research priorities for Europe as a ‘Knowledge-Based Society’.
5. Solutions: To suggest alternative solutions related to different understandings of societal problems, agri-environmental issues and sustainable development.

The project website will be run by the Transnational Institute.

Timescale: 2 years from May 2008

Project partners:
Open University, www.open.ac.uk/dpp
University of Twente (NL), www.mb.utwente.nl/stehps/
Fondation Sciences Citoyennes (FR), www.sciencescitoyennes.org
Transnational Institute (NL), www.tni.org
Consiglio dei Diritti Genetici (IT), www.consigliodirittigenetici.org
Food Ethics Council (UK), www.fec.org.uk
Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua (ES), www.unizar.es/fnca
Federation Regionale des Centres d’Initiatives pour Valoriser l’Agriculture (FR), www.civam-bretagne.org

Coordination team: Dr Les Levidow (Development Policy and Practice), Dr Sue Oreszczyn (Development Policy and Practice) and Dr Steve Hincliffie (Faculty of Social Sciences)
Contact: L.Levidow@open.ac.uk, tel. +44-1908-654782