

**Environmental Law and the Challenges of the Decades  
Ahead: Promoting Transformative and Recovery  
Responses to the Planetary Emergency**

VI Tarragona International Environmental Law Colloquium (TIEC)

14, 15, 16 June 2021

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**PANEL 2.** Actions, measures and immediate responses to cope with the current critical times

**CONSERVATION VARIETIES AS A LEGAL TOOL  
FOR LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS**

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The malfunctioning of our globalised food system was exacerbated in the spring of 2020, when the restriction measures due to the COVID-19 crisis led to fears of supply chain disruptions. The dependence on foreign imports of seeds, plant protection products, animal feed and foodstuffs was highlighted, leading to a certain awareness of the fragility of our system, which many saw as robust. Faced with this situation, illustrated by images of half-empty supermarket shelves, populations increasingly turned to direct sales from producers. The need for indigenous and sustainable production became obvious to many. In the years to come, it will be necessary to find a balance between the human need for healthy, high-quality food and the preservation of the resources on which humanity depends for its survival. While seeds may seem like a tiny link in the chain, their transformative potential should not be underestimated. Seed regulation in Europe is tailored to meet the needs of industrial agriculture, thus participating to the dramatic erosion of biodiversity that has been observed throughout the 20th century, which is, in turn, suspected to have increased the risk of a global pandemic outbreak. Conservation varieties – which generally present a wide genetic basis and are well-suited to the climate and social needs of a particular region – constitute an interesting tool to re-anchoring agriculture at a local level. Their main features, as well as the criticism they encounter as a legal category will be highlighted in the first part of this presentation, which will then draw on these technical elements to suggest a few legal changes that could help improve the role of conservation varieties in protecting biological diversity and in creating sustainable food systems.