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Severine Martini, Floriane Larras, Aurélien Boyé, Emile Faure, Nicole Aberle, Philippe Archambault, Lise Bacouillard, Beatrix Beisner, Lucie Bittner, Emmanuel Castella, et al.

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# Functional trait-based approaches as a common framework for freshwater and marine ecologists

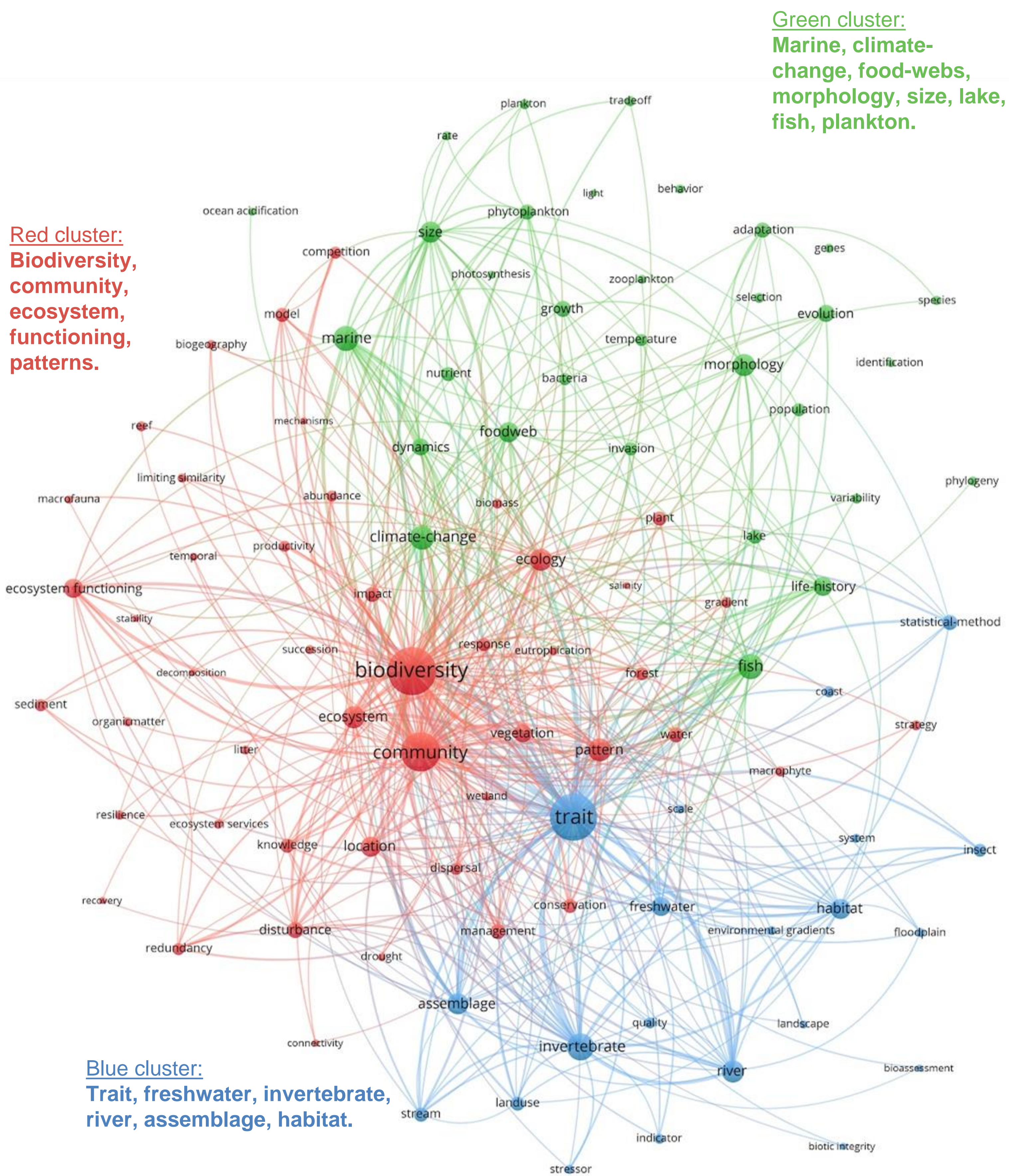
S. Martini<sup>1</sup>, F. Larras<sup>2</sup>, A. Boyé<sup>3,4</sup>, E. Faure<sup>1,7</sup>, N. Aberle-Malzah<sup>5</sup>, P. Archambault<sup>11</sup>, L. Bacouillard<sup>4</sup>, B. Beisner<sup>6</sup>, L. Bittner<sup>7</sup>, E. Castella<sup>8</sup>, M. Danger<sup>9</sup>, O. Gauthier<sup>3</sup>, L. Karp-Boss<sup>10</sup>, F. Lombard<sup>1</sup>, F. Maps<sup>11</sup>, L. Stemmann<sup>1</sup>, E. Thiébaud<sup>4</sup>, P. Usseglio-Polatera<sup>9</sup>, M. Vogt<sup>12</sup>, M. Laviale<sup>#9</sup>, S-D. Ayata<sup>#1</sup>

## Context and objectives

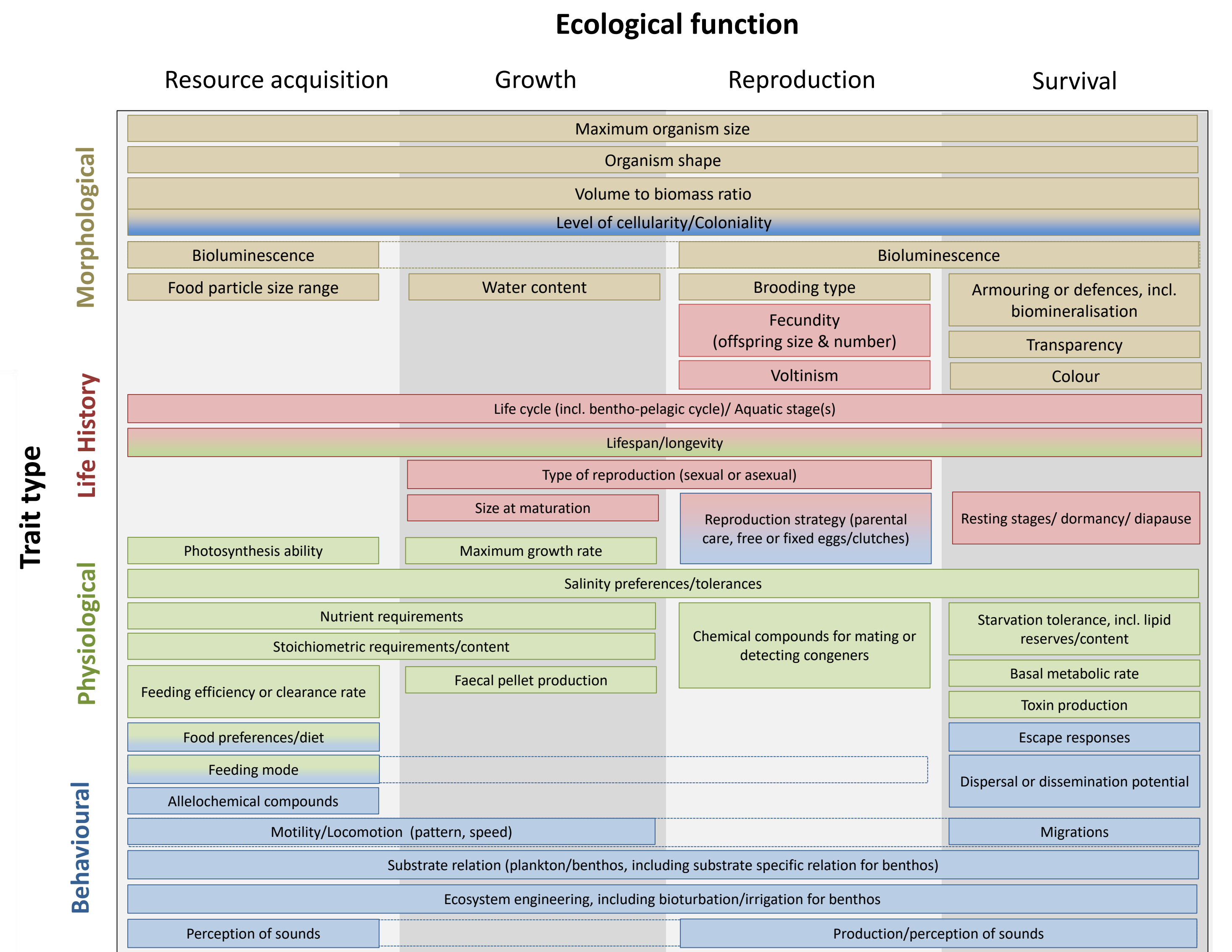
Aquatic ecologists face a common challenge: identifying the **general rules of the functioning of aquatic ecosystems** and developing a more predictive ecological understanding. However, freshwater and marine ecologists traditionally form two distinct scientific communities. A **common framework** is needed to transcend fields specificities and taxonomy by providing sharable tools.

**Our goal is to advocate the use of functional trait-based approaches as a common framework for aquatic ecologists.**

**Functional traits** are morphological, physiological or phenological feature measurable at the individual level, from the cell to the whole-organism level, which impacts fitness indirectly via its effects on growth, reproduction and survival (Violle et al. 2007, Oikos).



**Figure 1: Network map representing the keywords used in publications related to trait-based approaches in aquatic ecology.** The co-occurrence network is based on the top 100 keywords used in 2,476 articles extracted from Web of Science. It highlights the topics for which functional-trait approaches have been used. Three clusters are identified and underline the need of more interactions between freshwater and marine ecology.

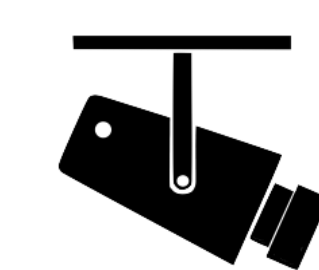


**Figure 2: Unified typology of aquatic functional traits.** This typology focuses on the key traits that transcend the taxonomic peculiarities of the different aquatic ecosystems. They are classified by type and ecological function as in Litchman & Klausmeier (2008, *Annu. Rev. Ecol. Evol. Syst.*).

## New tools for functional trait-based approaches



**EMPIRICAL:** traits measured in situ and in the laboratory. Recently, several databases became available, but often focusing on a limited number of organisms and traits.



**IMAGING/ACOUSTIC:** behaviour and traits with morphological or acoustic signature, measured automatically with high frequency. Opportunities from artificial intelligence recognition and classification.



**OMICS:** give access to structures and functions at different molecular levels.



**MODELING:** simulation of the distribution and dynamics of traits, in relation with biogeography, biogeochemical cycles or impact of human pressures.

## Opportunities and common challenges for aquatic ecologists

- ⇒ **Studying functional diversity over various spatio-temporal scales:** Using functional traits as a common currency among marine ecologists, these approaches could revealing hidden patterns of diversity.
- ⇒ **Trait-based monitoring, conservation, and management of aquatic ecosystems:** functional traits provide integrative tools for biomonitoring, ecological quality assessment of aquatic ecosystems, and biodiversity conservation in the context of global changes.
- ⇒ **Disentangling food web structures and trophic interactions:** functional traits provide new insights for studying biotic interactions, trophic structures, and relationship between diversity and ecosystem functioning.