

# transformative social innovation theory

# Transformative Social Innovation: LA VÍA CAMPESINA

A summary of the case study report of La Vía Campesina, Batch II.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 613169

### About TRANSIT:

TRANSIT is an international research project that aims to develop a theory of Transformative Social Innovation that is useful to both research and practice. It is co-funded by the European Commission and runs for four years, from 2014 until 2017. The TRANSIT consortium consists of 12 partners across Europe and Latin America. For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/>.

### About this Document/ Disclaimer:

This is a summary of a case study report on La Vía Campesina. Both, the case study reports and this summary, were guided by empirical research questions based upon a preliminary conceptual framework of the TRANSIT-project. These questions concern inter alia:

1. Emergence of Social Innovation
2. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics
3. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation

This summary presents the interpretations of the researchers, and does not necessarily reflect the views and nuances of the initiatives and respondents themselves. For a full account of each transnational network and local case, including interview quotes and expressed nuances by respondents, we refer to the case study report, which is available via [communication.transit@ihs.nl](mailto:communication.transit@ihs.nl). Both the case study report, as well as this summary document, are the basis for future research activities and publications.

### Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank Angel Strapazzón and Margarita Gomez from MOCASE-La Vía Campesina (Argentina) and for Andrea Ferrante from the European Coordination La Vía Campesina (Italy) for their valuable comments and suggestions.

We also want to thank to Josefina Moreira, Soledad Ayala and Gabriela Bortz (UNQ fellowships) for they help in the translation of this document.

### Suggested citation:

Juarez, P., Balázs, B., Trentini, F., Korzenszky, A. and Becerra, L. (2016) *Transformative Social Innovation: La Vía Campesina. A summary report of the case study on La Vía Campesina*. TRANSIT: EU SSH.2013.3.2-1 Grant agreement no: 613169

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2016

**Authors:** Paula Juarez, Bálint Balázs, Florencia Trentini, Anna Korzenszky and Lucas Becerra

**Contact:** [pjuarez@redtisa.org](mailto:pjuarez@redtisa.org)

## **Table of contents**

<b>1. Introduction to La Vía Campesina.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. The Emergence of Social Innovation .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5. References .....</b>	<b>11</b>

# 1. Introduction to La Vía Campesina

In the last two decades, visions of *food sovereignty* have inspired the origin of social movements, policy innovations, new experiments and debates. The perspective of food sovereignty is thinking by many authors as a '*dynamic process*', without a clear conceptual and practical definition (Edelman 2014). Many social and rural movements adopted this concept as "*the right of peoples, countries or unions of states to define their agricultural and food policy, without dumping towards third countries*". Many articles describe and analyze the case study. Some are focused on the study of the agro-ecological position in terms of their socio-productive practices for e.g., the authors of Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology-SOCLA like Altieri, Rosset, Martínez-Torres, Osorio, and Lastrada. Others authors focused on the right of alimentation (Aguirre, P.; Filardi, M), and the agro-economic system of food production (Campbell and LeHeron, 2007; Fisher, 2007; Sylla, 2014). Mainly, the Marxist authors are the ones who analyze disputes and power struggles presented by the international peasant movement.

In the 90s, the initiative of **La Vía Campesina** ('the way of the peasant' - LVC) emerged as an international movement of peasants with the main objective of opposing the prevailing global economic system - neoliberalism - and to defend the inclusive rural development. Gradually, the peasant movement created or rebuilt a proposal of food sovereignty for proactive intervention based on agroecology as a "*peasant way of life*". The movement is based on the Cuban experience (ANAP) which developed the teaching-learning 'farmer to farmer' ('campesino a campesino') methodology to learning by doing and by interacting.

Currently, the LVC initiative is extended territorially in 73 countries and about 164 organizations. And local manifestations differ substantially in the way they have generated social innovations to achieve social transformation. LVC is the international network of groups and organizations of smallholder peasant farmers that *addresses public policies on food and agriculture and promotes the concept of Food Sovereignty, the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.*

The global movement of peasant farmers has various manifestations. This summary report will focus on **La Vía Campesina** movement and two local manifestations quite different from each other, the "**Peasant Movement of Santiago del Estero**" (MOCASE-Argentina) and "**MAGOSZ**" of Hungary. The research reviews the emergence, evolution and organization of each organization. **MOCASE** is currently one of the cases that the international movement LVC shows when thinking *agroecology in the territories*. On the other hand, **MAGOSZ** was only registered in 2005 in LVC as an observer member under the coordination of the European peasant and rural organisation, Confédération Paysanne Européen (later renamed as European Coordination of La Vía Campesina) *advocates for strengthening small-scale family farmers in the given historical, economic, social and political context of Hungary.*

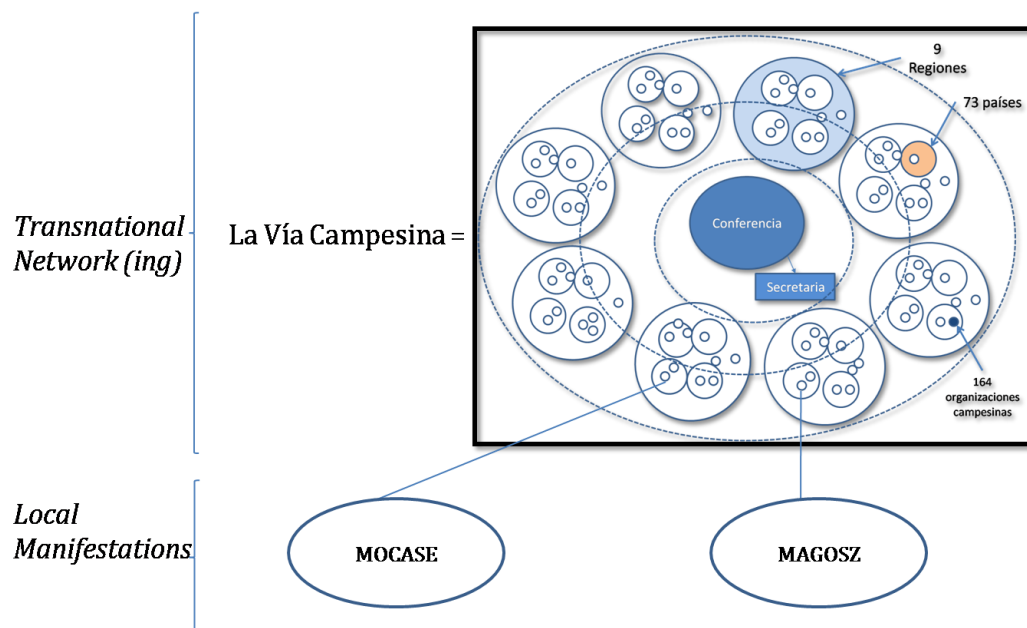
# La Vía Campesina International Network

Figure 1: LVC members around the world



Source: Website La Vía Campesina

Figure 2: Case demarcation of La Vía Campesina Movement

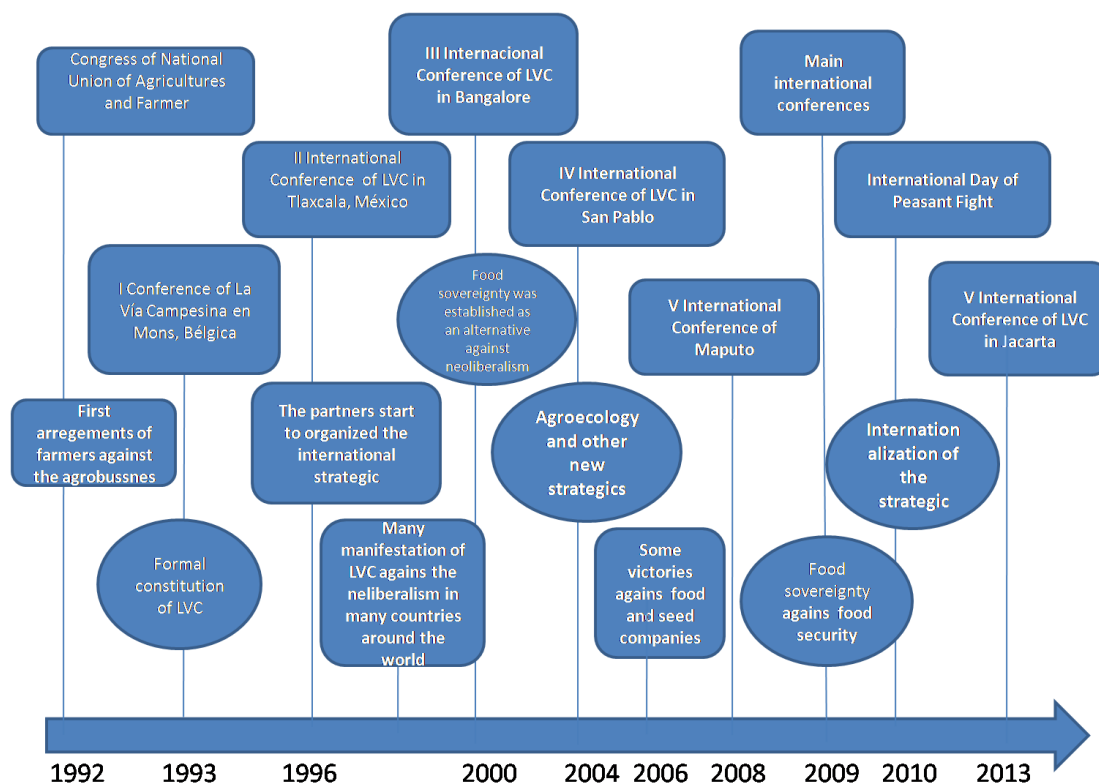


Source: Created by the authors based on LVC primary documents and interviews.

## 2. The Emergence of Social Innovation

**La Vía Campesina (LVC)** emerged in 1993 as an international movement of peasants, small and medium producers, rural women, indigenous people, landless people, rural youth and agricultural workers in order to oppose the economic system –neoliberalism– and to advocate for territorial development based on human rights and greater social equity. Its main *social innovations are social mobilization and building support networks to strengthen an alternative food production system based on sustainable rural development, which seeks to achieve food sovereignty from the strengthening of local identities.*

**Timeline 1. Transnational Network of La Vía Campesina**



Source: Created by the authors based on LVC primary documents and interviews.

Martinez-Torres and Rosset said that the evolution of **LVC** consists of five main phases:

1. State withdrawal from rural areas created autonomous peasant organisations first in Latin America, and then at a global scale (1980ies)
2. Peasant organisations participate on international debates (1990ies)
3. Leadership role in global struggles (from 2000)
4. Organisational strengthening, internal re-structuration (2004–2008)
5. Self-definition and self-identification as an opposition to transnational corporations (from 2008): peasant internationalism.

*The struggle is for food sovereignty, for the environment and health.* In each phase, the global movement suggested options such as direct action for peaceful purposes (march, protest or occupation); exchange of native seeds; educational training on a transnational company and its impacts on their school, local food co-op or farmers market; the projection of Marie-Monique Robin's film, "The World According to Monsanto"; asking the media not to broadcast Monsanto's or other similar companies' commercials; and carrying out small actions like planting a garden as a form of resistance to TNCs. These options were combined with a request of "creativity" to generate new strategies.

In this context, the two local experiences analyzed represent strong peasant organization experiences in Argentina (**MOCASE**) and Hungary (**MAGOSZ**). The emergence of both organizations involved *a change in social relations and showed new ways of doing and organizing, achieving visibility of farmers and forming networks with other sectors of society*. Both organizations provide support and containment structure for local communities/groups, in ongoing coordination with regional and transnational networks in the struggle against global capitalism and neoliberalism. It is worth mentioning that **MAGOSZ** (Hungary) is not a direct member of **LVC**, some of its members were/are in strong collaboration with the European Coordination of LVC, and the objectives of this local organization are closely linked to the objectives of the network and their dynamics of social organization.

### 3. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics

The international movement **La Vía Campesina** has generated various *social innovations*, both to fight against neoliberalism and to strengthen farmers' production knowledge and build new techno-productive alternatives that reflect their disputes against agribusiness. In this context, *social change is based on the construction of popular power and the recovery of dignity*, as a way to confront the hegemonic model.

**LVC** considered necessary to develop a common vision from the peasantry and fight for it: food sovereignty, defense of the land and opposition to the model of social exclusion of agribusiness. In order to achieve this goal, the *main strategy of the movement is the grassroots training, focused on young people*, through processes of *"learning by doing" or learning through interaction*; which both aimed to the political and productive aspects that occurs in different spaces. In this sense, **LVC**, as an international social movement articulator of peasant base, has enabled *socio-productive changes* in rural areas.



In this framework, **MOCASE** and **MAGOSZ**, the local cases, allow to highlight the *social innovations* generated at local and national level in the fight against agribusiness and the *empowerment of farmers*, enhancing and disseminating their knowledge and traditional practices. In both initiatives can be seen how organizations allow to stop (and make visible) eviction attempts (in the Argentine case) and land speculation (in the Hungarian case), ensuring that *peasants and farmers have access to land and more control over it*. Therefore in both cases the organization within the framework of these initiatives represents a fundamental change in the lives of rural families, a *social innovation* that is embodied in the possibility of constructing an *alternative production involving participation, organization, mobilization, local/traditional knowledge*.



## 4. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation

The vision of *social transformation* in the LVC movement seeks to *empower farmers by giving them the tools and strategies* to defend their land rights, preserve their way of life, and promote a comprehensive reform linked to a new production system and agro-ecology.

The *agency to an explicit internal* level of LVC refers to empower the farmers to generate social change in the form of production based on collective reflection and development of new production practices (such as agroecology), from questioning deeply who produce, for whom they produce and how it is produced in the world today.

*"La Via Campesina believe that to address the major challenges (...) in the international struggle -in the struggle in defense of seeds, water, biodiversity ... we have to increase our analytical capabilities to work with the nature. (...)So we challenge ourselves to build an international struggle of peasants. We want to train in the way of La Via Campesina and each organization will train their own way. We must make a collective effort to see how we will make it happen"*

Edigio Brunetto in MINAGRI, 2015.

At the same time, it is intended that the struggle for *"the land"* is a flag understood in broad, shared, common terms, and both a means production and a way of life. At this level, the training of *"farmer to farmer"* to empower peasants has been key, their knowledge and skills are conceived at the same level as the scientific and technological knowledge. They are different kinds of knowledge, but one does not prevail over the other.

The *agency at an external explicit level* refers to disempower large landowners and transnational agricultural and food companies from promoting a new form of sustainable and inclusive production. In this sense, LVC has developed *explicit strategies for agency*:

- 1) Communication networks about the struggles in the territories to confront the media monopolies;
- 2) Collaborative networks on the agroecological proposal linked to universities and other research and development organizations to support and validate the proposal;
- 3) Training networks for other external social actors to LVC. At an internal implicit level, the main strategies to empower peasants are: The territorial organization of each Member and encouraging creativity to create new intervention strategies and social change.

At an *external implicit level*, it is intended that **LVC** is linked with other social actors to permeate the techno-productive existing matrices. As can be seen in local initiatives, *the participation and coordination in communication networks, collaboration and training becomes fundamental in social transformation of these processes*. Participation in international forums, congresses and assemblies involve formative experiences that offer opportunities for local involved to know about new issues and find new ways of doing with the aim of further strengthening and developing sustainable agriculture or agro-ecology and achieve food sovereignty. Participation in these networks also allows these experiences to be made visible, contributing to the transformation of society to disseminating alternative forms of production and consumption. Thus, **LVC empower peasants as part of a new logic that disputes with capitalism and neoliberalism**. In this sense, what is clear from the cases analyzed (both international initiative as local initiatives), is that the dispute over the territory, food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture or agro-ecology, seeks *social change that allows the construction of a democratic and egalitarian society*. Therefore, empowerment of farmers implies disempowerment of large landowners and companies (domestic and foreign), and presents an **innovation in the way we produce, consume and connect with the land and the environment**.

## 5. References

- Agosto, P.; Cafardo, A. y Calí, J. (2004). "MOCASE Movimiento de Campesinos de Santiago del Estero. Una experiencia cooperativa". *Cuadernos de Trabajo* N° 53. Departamento de Cooperativismo, Centro Cultural de la Cooperación.
- Barbetta, P. (2006). "El Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero: entre el juarismo y la subjetivación política". Informe de tesis doctoral. Becario CONICET.
- Bringel, B. (2011). "Soberanía alimentaria: la práctica de un concepto". In: Pablo Martínez Osés (Ed.) *Anuario 2015 y más*. Madrid: IEPALA.
- Desmarais, A. y Whitman, H. (2013). *Farmers, foodies & First Nations: Getting to food sovereignty in Canada*. Paper presentado a Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue, International Conference, Yale University.
- Desalvo, A. (2014). El Mocase: Orígenes, Consolidación y Fractura del Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero. *Revista Astrolabio* N°12.
- Desalvo, A. (2009). Historia del Movimiento Campesino. Santiago del Estero (MOCASE), Congreso de Sociología.
- Flint, C. (2012). Nation-State. *Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Harper, K. (1999). Citizens or Consumers? Environmentalism and the Public Sphere in Postsocialist Hungary. *Radical History Review*, 1999(74), 96-111.
- Kulcsar, L. J., & Domokos, T. (2005). The Post-Socialist Growth Machine: The Case of Hungary. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29(3), 550-563.
- La Vía Campesina (2008). Carta de Maputo de la V Conferencia Internacional de la Vía Campesina en Maputo, Mozambique.
- La Vía Campesina (2011). Declaración sobre Semillas Las semillas campesinas son dignidad, cultura y vida: campesinos en resistencia, defendiendo sus derechos respecto de las semillas campesinas, Bali.
- Martinez-Torres, M.E. y Rosset, P.M. (2010). La Vía Campesina: The Birth and Evolution of a Transnational Social Movement. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37 (1): 149-175.
- Martinez-Torres, M. and Rosset, P. (2010): La Vía Campesina: The Evolution of a Transnational Movement, Global Policy Forum.
- McMichael, P. (2008). Peasants make their own history, but not just as they please. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8 (2).
- Michi, N. (2010). *Movimientos campesinos y educación. Estudio sobre el Movimiento de Trabajadores Rurales Sem Terra y el Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero Vía Campesina*. Editorial El Colectivo, Buenos Aires.
- MOCASE. *Conclusiones del Primer Congreso del MOCASE*. Santiago del Estero, 25 y 26 de noviembre de 1999.
- Patel, R. (2009). Food Sovereignty. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. 36 (3): 663-706.
- Rosset, P. (2008). Food Sovereignty and the contemporary food crisis. *Development* 51 (4).
- Rosset, P. (2003). Food Sovereignty: Global rallying cry or farmer movements, *Food First Backgrounder*, 9 (4).

Windfuhr, M. y Jonsen, J. (2005). *Food Sovereignty: Towards Democracy in Localised Food Systems*. Rugby: ITDG Publishing.