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## **Transformative Social Innovation for Food Sovereignty: The Disruptive Alternative**

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**Abstract.** In the last decade, a new concept has emerged in Europe and the Americas to explain a ‘new’ phenomenon of societal and technological organisation oriented to the resolution of social and environmental issues: social innovation.

In certain contexts, social innovators confront dominant institutions in order to achieve their political, economic, and cultural goals. This confrontation has a transformative character. In this sense, transformative social innovation may be defined as ‘changes in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and/or knowing, which challenge, alter, and/or replace established (dominant) institutions in a specific socio-material context.’ This framework, developed as a result of the Transformative Social Innovation Theory Project, refers to the ability to design and implement new forms of social interaction that enable people and social groups to carry out strategies and deploy narratives that lead, under certain conditions, to transformative change that engenders modifications in social and/or environmental dynamics.

This article presents a conceptual framework to understand transformative social innovation, which is then used to analyse the case of the La Vía Campesina (the International Peasant Movement), focusing on: 1) the strategies employed in terms of a social innovation agent, and 2) the construction of narratives of change oriented to empower peasants and generate a collective identity of the peasantry at a global level.

Finally, the article presents closing remarks in order to conceptualise the social innovation capabilities of certain global movements (such as La Vía Campesina) and their achievements related to inclusive sustainable development, where food production and distribution, as well as territorial development, are fundamental.

### **Introduction**

In the last decade, a new concept has emerged in Europe and the Americas to explain a ‘new’ phenomenon of societal and technological organisation oriented to the resolution of social and environmental issues: *social innovation*. This new notion is analysed by a growing literature, addressing the different dimensions of the concept both theoretically and empirically (Mulgan, 2006; Murray et al., 2010; Franz et al., 2012; Moulaert et al., 2013).

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The concept of social innovation embodies, at least, three levels of theoretical debate which are useful to understand how social movements and groups foster its own interest and visions in the local and international arenas. First, there is no singular meaning for social innovation. The notion is overwhelmed by different meaning allocations that are used to produce theoretical and empirical definitions, conduct practices in the field, inform public policies, and legitimise alternative ways of living (Anderson et al., 2014). In some regions, this type of conceptualisation falls under other kind of labels and policy meaning allocation. In Latin America, the social innovation notion falls under the framework of ‘Technologies for Social Inclusion’ (Thomas, 20012; Thomas et al., 2015) and has informed public policies since the beginning of the 2000s (Gordon et al, 2017). However, there is support for the idea of social innovation as rooted in a general definition: social innovation refers to new ideas that work in meeting social goals (Mulgan et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2010) which create new social relationships or collaborations oriented to enhance the society’s capacity to act (Hubert et al., 2010) and has the potential to improve either the quality or the quantity<sup>1</sup> of life (Pol and Ville, 2009).

Second, unlike traditional theories about innovation (Schumpeter, 1928; Usher, 1955; Nelson, 1995; Freeman, 1987), social innovation proposes that the *locus* of innovation is not found only in for-profit firms. Rather, social innovation emerges from interactions among different types of actors: social movements, worker cooperatives, grassroots movements, unions, universities, local governments, public enterprises, and private companies (Smith et al., 2016; Becerra and Thomas, 2017). Considered in terms of innovation oriented towards social needs, this heterogeneous set of organisations can be thought of as a complex system of socio-cognitive interactions involving dynamics of generation and circulation of knowledge, problem-solution relations, and capabilities. Social innovation emerges and is fostered through the deployment of dynamics and mechanisms of learning (Lundvall, 1992; Johnson and Lundvall, 1994) that focus their attention on learning-by-doing, learning-by-using, and learning-by-interacting processes (Becerra and Thomas, 2017).

Third, social innovation presents disruptive empirical evidence in relation to ‘old’ versus ‘new’ ideas, products, and practices. Under current conditions, ‘new’ solutions imply the re-signification and adapting of ‘old’ ideas (e.g., the creation of cooperatives, the self-identification as ‘peasant’) that generate alternative means of achieving a better way of life (Mulgan et al., 2007; Avelino et al., 2017). Thus, the ‘novelty’ of an idea exists in the way of framing, doing, knowing, and organizing solutions in a particular socio-material context. What is new or what is old is not a matter of time, but rather of socio-technical adequacy (Thomas, 2009). To illustrate: a worker cooperative alliance (an ‘old’ idea) advocating for affordable housing (another ‘old’ idea) but fighting to reconceptualise the entire notion of ‘habitat’ in public policies (a ‘new’ kind of action) in Latin America and Europe can be understood as a social innovation.<sup>2</sup>

In some cases, social movements or groups confront pre-established institutions, regulations, practices, and values. This confrontation is the necessary result of a set of actions oriented to change the socio-material context in which social innovators live and the processes of resistance and resilience generated by dominant institutions. These kinds of social innovators can be defined as transformative, and the processes fostered by them as transformative social innovation.

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<sup>1</sup> This expression refers to the potential capability of social innovation to preserve human and non-human lives. For example, preserving ecosystems, improving health services, changing the way in which “Nature” is conceived (Pol and Ville, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> For additional information, please visit <http://www.housinginternational.coop/>.

### The Transformative Social Innovation: A developing concept

During the last four years, as part of the Transformative Social Innovation Theory (TRANSIT) Project, we have been studying the relationship between social innovation initiatives (carried out by global networks of non-governmental institutions and social movements) and changes at institutional and societal levels. The main goal of the project was the generation of a middle-range theory of transformative social innovation. The project entails the analysis of 20 transnational networks, more than 110 related social innovation initiatives in 25 countries. In this process, the research team continuously interacted with social innovators, social entrepreneurs, policymakers and scientists in a number of workshops applying and reviewing the emerging theory<sup>3</sup>.

As a result, we can define “transformative social innovation” as a ‘process of change in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and/or knowing, which challenge, alter and/or replace established (dominant) institutions in a specific socio-material context’ (Haxeltine et al., 2016, p. 8).

The definition is useful for analyzing how social innovations —over long periods of time— are designed, grow, accelerate, and are scaled-up to the level of global systemic change (Grin et al., 2010; Markard et al., 2012), and how actors (e.g., social movements) navigate and make strategic decisions to support those transition processes (Jørgensen, 2012).

The approach to transformative social innovation is based on the hypothesis that social transformation is shaped and produced by the specific interaction patterns between social innovation, systemic innovation, game-changers, and narratives of change. Actors, efforts, and networks are empowered or disempowered and contribute to this process through different forms of governance, learning, access to resources, and monitoring (Haxeltine et al., 2013).

Transformation is not a unidirectional process. In fact, transformation is highly related to confrontation (e.g., the act of challenging, altering, and/or replacing established institutions). This relationship entails a deep, persistent, and irreversible change in the social values, perspectives, and behaviors of actors and social groups. The definition of the otherness (that which must be confronted) implies the definition of one’s own identity.

In other words, the process of social transformation entails a certain co-production of the social innovation initiative’s identity (Avelino et al., 2017). This co-production defines the positive (what should be) and the negative (what should not be) aspects of that identity and informs a process of structuration of the social relationship between the social innovator and the dominant institutions.

Under this empirical and theoretical umbrella, in this article we attend two analytical questions: *how are social innovators engaged in power relations with dominant institutions?* And, more precisely: *how is the social innovator identity co-constructed in relation to these institutions; and what types of actions do social innovators deploy?*

In order to answer these questions, we present the case of La Vía Campesina (LVC), a social movement based on peasant organisations and rooted in the Latin American socio-economic crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s. A social movement which could ‘birth and structure a global movement’ (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p.151) between 1992 and 1999. Since the 2000s, LVC has been gaining power in the international arena, participating in global struggles against transnational corporations and neoliberal policies, and fighting for a ‘peasant way of life’

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<sup>3</sup> For additional information, please visit <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/home>

(Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010; La Vía Campesina 2010 and 2015; Desmarais 2004 and 2007; and Patel, 2005).

This article analyses the strategies employed by LVC and the construction of narratives of change that empower peasants and generate a collective identity of the peasantry at a global level, in line with our conceptual framework of transformative social innovation. In this sense, we analyse how LVC uses the food sovereignty paradigm to gain global legitimacy and deploys its own view of social change. The article presents a series of concluding remarks that conceptualise the capabilities of social innovators within global movements (such as LVC) to achieve inclusive sustainable development, where food production, distribution, and territorial development are essential.

## 1. Methodological Framework

The case study presented in this article is part of the broader analysis of the TRANSIT Project. The theory of Transformative Social Innovation was formulated in a dynamic and iterative process that built on existing theory, grounded the emerging theory through in-depth case studies and tested it through a meta-analysis of the journeys of social innovation initiatives based on critical turning point data (Pel et al, 2015).

One of the 20 transnational networks selected for analysis was La Vía Campesina for the following two reasons:

First, on an empirical level, most studies of social innovation processes have been carried out in relation to global movements focused on environmental sustainability, which are generally the result of problems related to the urban nature of developed countries (i.e., the European Union, Canada, and the United States, among others). In this article, we propose a change at the empirical level: to analyse a social movement with a problem-agenda focused on generating broad processes of rural development and social inclusion, which is a political issue of priority in Latin America and other regions of the world. In particular, one driven by peasant struggles for the right to land, food, and natural resources (Juarez et al., 2015).

Second, analyzing LVC, using a new theoretical framework, offers an alternative point of view to understanding this ‘key case’ of a global counter-hegemonic social movement confronting a global production regime. The article therefore contributes to research by Desmarais (2004, 2007), Edelman (2003), and Patel (2005) in support of the idea that LVC is a disruptive and global voice against the neoliberal model of agriculture.

In this particular article, we used two analytical tools to study the transformative character of LVC: 1) Strategies for transformative change and 2) narratives of change. The notion of “strategies” refers to the concrete actions deployed by a group, an institution or a movement to materialise a core set of ‘narratives of changes’. In this sense, the observation of the strategies brings up information about how social innovators engage with dominant alter institutions and how its own identity changes with the praxis. The ‘narratives of change’, could broadly be defined as sets of ideas, concepts, metaphors, discourses or story-lines about change and innovation. Such narratives of change reveal, amongst other things, why the world has to change, who has the power to do so and how this can be done (Avelino et al, 2014 and Wittmayer et al, 2015)

These elements (strategies and narratives) are complementary and inseparable. Working together, they help us to analyse the relation of LVC’s agency to a particular socio-material context

in which the neoliberal paradigm dominates global food production: *the agribusiness model*. In the same way, we analyse the *transformative* nature of the LVC movement through an account of the articulation and coordination of strategies for transformative change and narratives of social change, aimed at empowering peasants and creating a collective identity of the peasantry. In section 2, we will analyse the strategies and narratives of LVC. How is LVC engaged in power relations with dominant institutions? How is the LVC identity co-produced in the current relationship with the global system of food production, and what kind of actions does LVC carry out?

Data collection began with a search and systematisation of primary and secondary sources (documents, videos, papers) existing on La Via Campesina movement. Then, we worked on particular local cases, with special focus on a main member of the international network located in Argentina: Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero – Vía Campesina (MOCASE-VC). The research data that was not covered by the documental sources were addressed through interviews with key actors and from participant observation. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, and from the technique "snowball" the number of respondents was extended. And we participated in four international network activities and case studies. The participant observation strategy aimed to analyse aspects of the movement, especially in MOCASE-VC, related to the everyday construction of practices (Adler and Adler, 1994; DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002).

## Interviews

Informal interviews with various leaders of the Via Campesina movement of Costa Rica and Argentina were conducted. We also interviewed the president of the Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology (SOCLA), as one academic reference of the LVC Movement in the region. These interviews lasted an average of 40 to 50 minutes. We also conducted five semi-structured interviews with members of the MOCASE-VC. Four of them have a solid trajectory in LVC, playing an important role in the development of the organisation and its scaling-up strategy.

**Table 1. List of Interviews**

Role	Date/place
LVC Costa Rica Leader	October 8, 2015 / La Plata City – Argentina (informal interview)
President of the Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology (SOCLA)	October 8, 2015 / La Plata City – Argentina (informal interview)
MOCASE-VC Leader	September 10, 2015 / Buenos Aires City-Argentina (semi-structured interview)

	October 8, 2015 / La Plata City – Argentina (semi-structured interview)
Coordinator of Agroecology School MOCASE-VC	October 8, 2015 / La Plata City – Argentina (semi-structured interview)
Trainee 1 at MOCASE-VC	September 20, 2015/ Buenos Aires City- Argentina (semi-structured interview)
Member of MOCASE-VC	October 16, 2015 / Buenos Aires City-Argentina (semi-structured interview)
Attorney of MOCASE-VC	October 16, 2015 / Buenos Aires City-Argentina (semi-structured interview)
Trainee 2 at MOCASE-VC	October 22, 2015/ Buenos Aires City-Argentina (semi-structured interview)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

### Participative Observation

Team members participated in three international events where LVC was present: Agroecology Congress (La Plata, 7 to 9 October 2015), the Tri-national meeting of the American Women's Collective Chaco (Córdoba 25 to September 27) and GLOBELICS (Cuba 23 to September 25). In the first event, a panel of LVC was held and they worked on the role of social movements in food sovereignty. There were various organisations from Latin America and the northern provinces of Argentina. In the second event they involved local organisations working on land rights and environmental protection. And the last one, the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), member of VLC in Cuba, presented different experiences of the success of the "Peasant to Peasant" (Campesino-a-Campesino) knowledge exchange method.

Participant observation was performed in Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero-La Vía Campesina (MOCASE-VC) in Buenos Aires, La Plata, Córdoba and Santiago del Estero. This includes, for example, participation in the work of the Training Brigades, participation in seed fairs and exhibitions of social and solidarity economy, among others.

### 2. Construction of a disruptive alternative: la vía campesina

LVC is a global organisation with operations in 73 countries, representing about 164 peasant organisations and approximately 200 million people (see Figure 1). Since its creation in 1992, LVC has positioned itself as one of the world's most important social movements (Borras, 2004; Patel, 2005b; Edelman, 2005; McMichael, 2006; Desmarais, 2007).

LVC describes itself as autonomous, pluralistic, and multicultural, with no partisan, economic, or other affiliations (La Vía Campesina, 2009 and 2010). This last characteristic has made it possible for LVC to have different regional, national, and local strategies regarding, for

instance, its articulation with governments, the United Nations, and other international rural organisations (such as the International Federation of Agricultural Producers and the International Land Coalition), and to protect its rights and advocate for inclusive and sustainable rural development.

LVC's 'transformative ambitions' are to produce agrarian reform that secures land for peasants and globally scale up its proposal for food-sovereignty based on agroecological production (La Vía Campesina, 2009 and 2010). Those transformative ambitions involve ways of knowing, doing, framing, and organizing. In particular, the positive relationship between peasants and agriculture, and the negative relationship with the agribusiness model, constitute the cornerstone of LVC's global strategies.

**Figure 1. The LVC movement around the world**



Source: La Vía Campesina (2018). Available at: <http://viacampesina.org/map/members/map.html>

## 2.1 Transformative Social Innovation Strategies

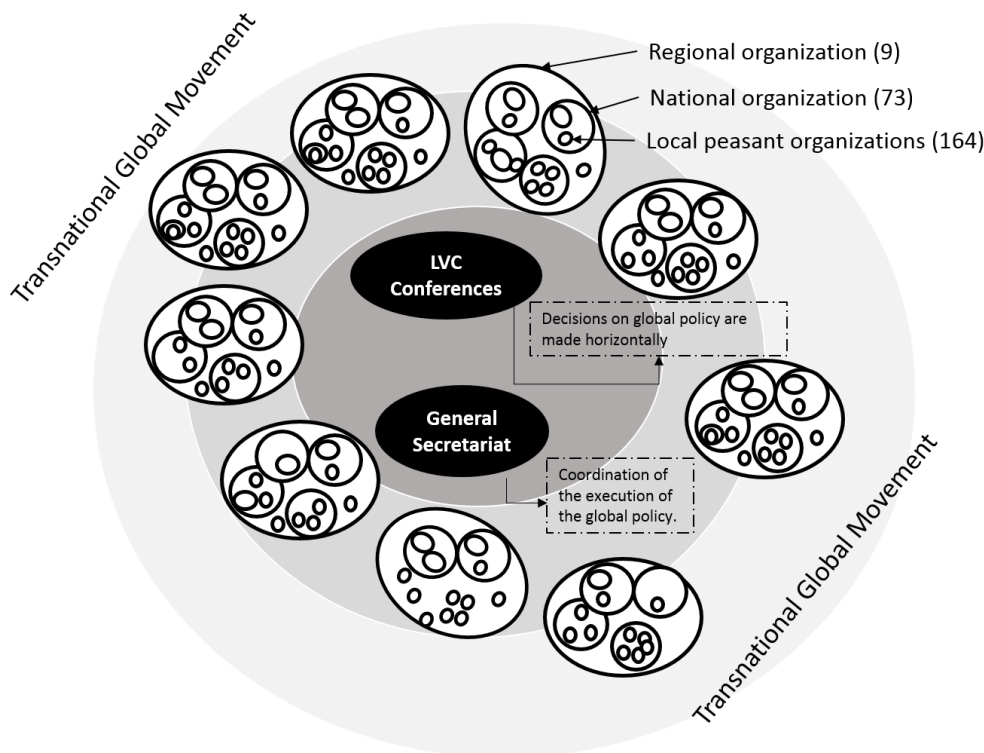
There is no common agreement on the LVC's primary goal as a social movement. However, it is possible to define a general goal (since the 2000s) in terms of fostering the food sovereignty of people attempting to secure lands and to promote alternative production strategies, such as agroecological production (La Vía Campesina 2009, 2010 and 2015). To that effect, it has developed at least four strategies: a) multifaceted governance and power construction, aimed at developing legal and political instruments to confront and oppose the corporate control of natural resources; b) the design and implementation of agroecological technologies as an inclusive alternative; c) global demonstrations aimed at holding inter-governmental agencies accountable for their roles in social exclusion processes, mainly in the agrarian sector; and d) social learning at the global-movement level.

### *a. First strategy: If otherness is global, transformative change needs a global movement*



LVC is primarily comprised of locally-based peasant organisations that have had to modify their organisational guidelines to achieve horizontal and vertical integration within the global movement. Through this process they have understood that, though isolated and scattered across the world, together they form a key part of the global food production process. They have a direct impact on the way food is produced and the quality of its production and have a real opportunity to change the productive system in which agribusiness dominates (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). Therefore, their refusal to surrender lands and move to urban centers, and their struggle to defend their territories, have become shared values. Unity and organisation under LVC provide peasants with a chance to not only survive, but also improve their living conditions (Borras, 2004; Hernández Navarro and Desmarais, 2009).

**Figure 2. Internal governance of the LVC movement**



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on Juárez et al., 2015.

The LVC movement's formal organisational structure is composed of the Conference, a global political organisational event; and a rotating General Secretariat in charge of the movement's organic representation, implementation of the work plan defined in the Conference, and global communication (Figure 2). The movement is divided into nine regional organisations, which are in turn divided at the sub-regional, national, and local levels. The organisation in charge of regional coordination typically rotates every two to four years and is responsible for aligning and articulating actions in the territories and the General Secretariat.

Akin to a tree, the articulation trunk is the LVC movement, which branches into the different regions, which further branch into regional, national and local organisations. The roots

of the movement, in the words of the MOCASE-VC leader, are made up of scattered actors (women, peasants, indigenous peoples, young people, small-scale producers, interns, militants, intellectuals, etc.) who organise themselves and consolidate the movement.

***b. Second strategy: An alternative pattern of food production requires counter-hegemonic knowledge and technologies***

LVC's narrative of social transformation is based on *empowering* peasants by providing them with strategies and technologies (artifactual, process, and organisational technologies) to effect global agrarian reform through a new productive system based on agroecology. The formation of a new socio-productive paradigm, opposed to capitalist agribusiness, makes it possible to empower peasants through a new form of production and connection to territories: agroecology.

Agroecology emerges as a 'knowledge dialogue' and a 'technology for social inclusion', a crossing of epistemological frontiers (Rivera, 2009). According to Rivera, in the seventies, researchers of agriculture from different disciplines became interested in the empirical forms of production of local cultures, exploring 'environment-friendly' systems as a reaction to the agro-industrial model. Therefore, since its inception, agroecology has revisited the importance of peasant knowledge and links two types of knowledge that are seen *a priori* as opposites: scientific and local peasant knowledge. Agroecology refers to:

...the tactical use of different types of knowledge encourage as regards a productive problem, which in agroecology is political, as it attempts to reconcile environmental and social issues. It also refers to conflicts and tensions which make the types of knowledge face each other and, in that struggle, provide them with power. In this case, the relations of domination and subordination alternate and challenge each other, enabling agencies which go beyond the frontiers of the crossing (Rivera, 2009, p. 8).

Against this backdrop, the LVC movement proposes agroecological education and practices as its main strategy. Educational spaces, such as agroecology schools and peasant universities, offer political and productive training, with the goal of providing tools to enable discussions, participation, and the exercising of rights, fundamental in transforming peasants' everyday realities.

LVC also challenges the dominant productive model by positing an alternative one based on peasant agroecology. A coordinator the agroecology school of MOCASE-VC summarised what this space for the empowering of peasants entails:

*The school of agroecology creates grassroots militants, and also shows that we ourselves have the right to be the protagonists of history, that we are included in this right, and we choose the school because we feel we are being ourselves, and we know it is a way for us to be ourselves [...]. It gives opportunities to people from rural areas or the low-income neighborhoods who lead a difficult life [...]. It projects you forward, it entails a space of opportunity in which to show we are capable, that our voice is a useful tool for the fight for our rights (Interview with the coordinator of the agroecology school of MOCASE-VC).*

In this context, agroecological technologies are not only a form of production, but also an empowering strategy which is strongly linked to education through the 'peasant to peasant'

methodology (Holt Giménez, 2006; Machín et al., 2010), by which local knowledge is seen with renewed appreciation and articulated with scientific and technological dialogue (Rivera, 2009).

**c. Third strategy: Confronting corporate control requires grassroots organisation**

LVC has also attempted to effect social changes (*transformative change*) in the policies of international bodies (such as the United Nations), governments, and urban environments. In these cases, the strategies, such as demonstrations, marches, and the occupation of public offices and land, are deployed as part of the movement's transformative social innovation processes. These strategies make it possible to both raise awareness and continue to develop connections and networks beyond the rural areas in which peasants live. For instance, in 2006, in the United States, LVC organised several collective actions oriented to confront Monsanto in the public communication media (Zacune, 2012). This strategy was later taken as an example of a way to stop this type of corporation and intervene in public policy, initiated by institutions typically far from the mainstream.

LVC was able to raise global awareness of the ways in which food is produced, the need for a change, and the fact that such change is associated with who produces food and how they produce it (Altieri, 2009). This awareness-raising activity led to a series of milestones, which gave global visibility to the movement and made public some significant dates in the history of the global peasant struggles: April 17, in remembrance of the 19 peasants of the Landless Movement (*Movimiento Sin Tierra*, or MST), murdered at the Dorado dos Carajas in Brazil in 1996; the World Social Forum, an annual event which has, since 2001, convened representatives of the anti-globalisation movement to exchange experiences, get to know one another, and organise global campaigns; and September 10, the International Day of peasant struggles against the World Trade Organisation (WTO), in remembrance of Lee Kyung Hae, a Korean peasant who killed himself during a demonstration against the 2003 WTO Ministerial Conference while holding a banner that read '*The WTO kills farmers*' (Blanco, 2011). These and other actions based on mottos such as '*World Bank and International Monetary Fund: stop now!*', '*Say no to free trade agreements*', and '*Say no to transnational corporations*' were the methods chosen to disseminate LVC's political positions from the local to the global level.

Simultaneously, the movement has brought new issues into its agenda, such as the role of women, which has become more important against the background of a push to redefine socio-productive policies with a gender perspective (Palacios, 2011).

In 2015, the Declaration of the International Forum of Agroecology stated a set of strategies oriented to: i) build a common political agenda to defend the peasant way of life; ii) deploy actions of organisation, articulation, knowledge sharing, and movement building; and iii) establish a common commitment: "*We want to live in a free world with clean air and healthy food. Now we, all of us together, must mobilise as one person to face Capital*" (International Forum of Agroecology Declaration, 2015, p. 32).

**d. Fourth strategy: Social learning at the global level**

As a peasant-centered global social movement, LVC has developed techno-productive alternatives based on agroecology as a strategy to challenge agribusiness (Altieri and Nicholls, 2000). In this process, LVC has promoted different educational methods (learning-by-interacting, hands-on training), communication, and socialisation of knowledge ('knowledge dialogues'), all involving peasants and territorial grassroots organisations, making it possible to create new systems of

organisation in the territories and to design and implement new technologies capable of materially sustaining the *narrative of social change* of food sovereignty.

The main goal of the international movement is to promote solidarity and unity in diversity between small-producers' organisations, in order to encourage economic relations based in equality and social justice, the preservation of the land, food sovereignty, and sustainable agricultural production (Hernández Navarro and Desmarais, 2009, p. 90).

According to Blanco (2011), the very concept of education on food sovereignty (based on agroecological principles) implies that: 1) Education must be linked to a strategic political project of social transformation. As this project is currently being developed, education must contribute to it, providing questions, doubts and answers; 2) Education must be a part of the struggles and must make them stronger: actions are also a place for education; 3) the starting point must be the peasants' own practices. This makes it possible to understand, (re)orient, and correct and rethink theory and practice, while always increasing the value of peasant knowledge; 4) The education process must be of a grassroots nature, based on leaders' behavior in meetings and assemblies, demonstrations and marches, courses, and internships. That is, education takes place not only in courses or spaces devised for those purposes; 5) Education must be prepared and implemented on all levels and must be ongoing, through collective and open methods that are never authoritarian but rather participatory and aimed at strengthening the organisation's autonomy; and 6) The education process must start from the bases, enabling an assessment of what should be learned based on needs.

The LVC movement designs and manages social learning through several mechanisms, such as video dissemination, virtual newsletters, and activity in social networks and peasant radios; the provision of courses and seminars; participation in conferences, assemblies and congresses; and through educational strategies: agroecology schools, peasant universities, literacy brigades, and alliances with public universities. Through this learning, LVC has strengthened its socio-political foundation and established alliances and transnational networks with other social movements and with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

## 2.2 Transformative Social Innovation Narratives

LVC builds its change narrative based on its opposition to the agribusiness model. It is a proactive narrative, as it is aimed at recovering ancestral knowledge of agriculture and appropriating the principles of agroecology to improve peasants' quality of life and change the food production and consumption model. For LVC, creating a new narrative based on food sovereignty and peasant-centered agroecological agriculture represents a solution to problems associated with: 1) climate change and environmental crises; 2) different food crises facing the planet; and 3) the way to ensure a decent standard of living for peasants.

Thus, LVC narratives include mottos such as '*Defending the land and honoring life*', '*Small-scale agriculture to feed the world and cool down the planet*', '*Agro-industry disturbs the climate, peasant agriculture protects the planet*', '*Together we can cool down the planet*', and '*Peasant agriculture is a true solution to climate crises*' (La Via Campesina, 2015).

These narratives galvanise LVC's practices by adding meaning to the proposal for global social change at the level of economic structures, through a more equitable distribution of the income generated by the land, and with peasants as the key actors of production. LVC's narrative of change

may be seen as a source of legitimacy for different representations that challenge hegemonic relationships of power.

In this regard, the narrative of food sovereignty reveals the need for socio-political and economic change, but also the need for environmental sustainability, which has made it possible for LVC to garner support from non-peasant segments. The proposed new productive model is an alternative to the agribusiness model and the indiscriminate development that has led to an unprecedented environmental crisis (Altieri, 2004). Agroecology is therefore linked to ecologism and environmentalism, making it possible for peasants to forge alliances (which used to be unthinkable) and to posit and sustain an alternative production model that is capable of enabling the reproduction, subsistence, and food sovereignty of peasants at the local level, while protecting natural resources and the environment as a whole (Rosset, 2006). According to LVC:

[Our project] is a 'project of life' for rural areas with peasants, for rural communities with families, for territories with trees and forests, mountains, lakes, rivers and shores, and is strongly opposed to the 'model of death' of agribusiness, of agriculture without peasants or families, of industrial monocultures, of rural areas devoid of trees, of green deserts, and of lands poisoned with agrochemicals and transgenic products. With our actions and practices, peasants from all over the world are actively challenging capitalism and agribusiness, fighting against them for land and territory (La Vía Campesina, 2015, p. III).

The narrative of *food sovereignty* shows how LVC understands social change. It is associated with a world in which struggle is the way of life, in which peasants must join forces and challenge the model of agro-industrial production. This is a narrative that posits the need for collective action and community organisation, and for articulation with other social movements and governmental and non-governmental organisations.

[In] *La Vía Campesina*, we believe that, in order to rise up to the big challenges [...] in the international struggle —the fight for seeds, for water, for biodiversity [...]—, we must increase our analytical capability for working with nature. [...] that is why we set out to build an international peasant struggle. We want to educate as *La Vía Campesina*, and each organisation will educate as it sees fit. We have to make a collective effort to find out how we will make this a reality (La Vía Campesina, 2015, p. 1).

The strategies of change put forward by LVC are part of its narrative and are translated into its activities and the ways in which the movement gains visibility:

*We are then in this stage in which we have consolidated and are consolidating not the design of a new society, or a new system, but... in South America with the CLOC (Latin American Coordination of Rural Organisations), and LVC is CLOC, and in LVC we say 'for a socialism of Sumak Kawsay' ('good living' in Quechua). We agree with that, and we also agree with the idea of something really powerful that will be not only ecological, but agroecological. Agroecology is also a political idea, as a businessperson with money can go ecological [...], and he or she even may speak of agroecology, so there is no doubt that there will be a struggle to determine what agroecology is [...], that is why it is necessary to reorganise and update the contents of agroecology, of food sovereignty and agrarian reform, even the meaning of a comprehensive agrarian reform (interview with MOCASE-VC Leader).*

As per the above, LVC's narrative shows an alternative rationale of production and connection to the land, which opposes private property and the idea of producing only to maximise the profit rate.

Based on the analysis of narratives of social change, it is possible to show how social innovation efforts initiated by LVC are linked to and must be interpreted relative to their transformative ambitions. This meta-narrative of food sovereignty based on peasant-centered agroecological agriculture offers solutions to the climate, food, and environmental crises facing the planet, while simultaneously ensuring a life of dignity for peasants. The narrative of food sovereignty is thus opposed to that of food security, and its proposal opposes the neoliberal policies imposed by international financial institutions, such as the WTO and agribusiness corporations (informal interview with the president of SOCLA).

In this manner, LVC has managed to bring the narrative of food sovereignty into the international debate on agriculture. It has done so in international institutions, such as the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation, as well as national governments. Agroecology is a tool for food sovereignty, a practice, and scientific knowledge, which ultimately involves a new food system (Agosto et al., 2015).

### 3. INTEGRATING ANALYSIS: LVC AS TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL INNOVATION

Thus far we have analysed different facets of LVC in terms of the analytical dimensions of our theoretical framework. This has allowed us to evaluate LVC as a social innovation under an organised pattern of information and enables us at this point to produce a deeper analysis and to, in particular, consider the transformative nature of the social movement.

Based on what we have analysed, we may describe LVC as an international social movement that deploys strategies (at different levels of interaction) oriented towards a particular way of considering and acting in the techno-productive and socio-economic system of rural territorial development, food production, and distribution, marking a departure from the dominant global trends established by the food industry. This is LVC's center of gravity as a social innovation.

Having defined that aspect, it is possible to analyse second-order matters, such as *how it is possible to create social innovation to achieve systemic change and address the major social challenges of Latin America and the world*.

LVC's need to transform social relations stems from the adverse conditions of the rural territory, a space currently disputed over with the agribusiness system, which proposes a concentrated food production model that expels peasants and small-scale producers. At the same time, small farmers in general, and those who are part of LVC, suffer government neglect or absence, with few public policies adapted to their social, cultural and techno-productive frameworks (Altieri, 2009 and La Vía Campesina, 2010). While in the last few years there were examples of public funding for Family Farming projects in Latin America, LVC was one of the only movements to reject such funding, as it challenged neither the basic policy of access to land and water nor the implications of allowing the agribusiness system to persist and expand (interview with MOCASE-VC Leader).

The social bases in the territories of this global movement are the result of the organisation of several rural collectives that share the need to revert a long-standing situation of marginalisation, invisibilisation, exclusion, and dispossession of peasants (Altieri, 2009 and Holt Giménez, 2006). To this effect, strategies are aimed at empowering peasants as a collective that, even though it does not share a physical space, understands the need to share a 'plan' that guides and coordinates

collective action toward its goals (interview with LVC Costa Rica Leader). There is an understanding of the scale and scope of the problems they face, and they seek to demonstrate their capability of positing an alternative model of ‘good living’ in and for the land they inhabit.

In terms of *what this innovation entails, how it interacts with the exterior, and how it contributes to processes of social change*, the strategies of LVCs are telling. The LVC strategies that we analysed cannot be described as ‘new’ narratives, practices, or technologies. Creativity and innovation do not hinge on each element’s originality, but on the capability of creating social and technological alliances. This is achieved by developing a means of coordination of the heterogeneous elements and actors at the global level (narratives, forms of knowledge distribution, ‘knowledge dialogues’, peasants, universities, agroecological and ancestral technologies, multi-level organisations, etc.), and on doing so in a sustained and persistent fashion (see Table 2).

LVC has developed different strategies, in efforts to challenge the various elements that comprise the neoliberal accumulation regime (i.e., transnational corporations, free trade policies), and to strengthen and rescue peasants’ knowledge of production and rural life. It has developed ‘new’ techno-productive alternatives, such as agroecology, not only to empower peasants, but also to demonstrate their struggles against the agribusiness model and align other social groups, such as environmentalists, from developed countries. Agroecology made it possible for LVC to articulate narratives such as those of food sovereignty and environmental sustainability in a harmonic fashion. That core of narrative and practice, for instance, makes it possible to dispute lands and the control of food production in international forums.

As an international peasant-centered social movement, LVC has enabled changes in the social guidelines of rural areas, based on territorial organisation. It holds that there are no isolated, scattered families, but rather members of the movement who look after the territories together in order to maintain and strengthen a way of life. Grassroots organisations are built in each territory, with the goal of creating a global, organised social fabric to stand against the encroachment of agribusiness.

Moreover, this governance and global social mobilisation capability rests on a strong narrative which promotes collaborative work. In order for governance and mobilisation to be possible on an international scale, LVC has built its own means of communication in every territory and found communication allies throughout the world. This has been a key tool for LVC in expanding its alliances.

LVC has involved peasants and grassroots territorial organisations in large learning-by-interacting and education processes on different topics: legal, technological, methodological, communicational, etc. The strategies of education and socialisation of knowledge have included the establishment of LVC’s own universities, schools, and popular education groups, as well as spaces such as workshops, seminars, and meetings, in which knowledge is shared among peers. At the same time, alliances have been forged with public universities and research groups, which are developing inputs and technologies for LVC, with the goal of strengthening the option of peasant life and food sovereignty at the global level.

**Table 2. Summary: LVC’s transformative strategies and narratives**

<b>Global governance</b>	<b>Counter-hegemonic narratives and technologies</b>	<b>Social mobilisations</b>	<b>Social learning and its mechanisms</b>

<b>Decision-making in regional, sub-regional, and local networks. Legal and policy instruments to confront and oppose corporate control of natural resources.</b>	Design and implementation of agroecological inclusive technologies. Narratives on food sovereignty. Narratives close to environmental sustainability to attract supporters from other social and rural sectors.	Global and local social demonstrations. Organisational technologies to hold inter-governmental agencies accountable for their roles in social exclusion processes, particularly in the rural sector. Radio stations, newspapers and other forms of communication and dissemination.	Formal and informal knowledge and knowledge circulation systems. 'Peasant to peasant' methodology. LVC-owned agroecological universities and schools.
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Source: Prepared by the authors.

There seems to be a role for *transformative social innovations to empower people through globalised social learning*. As a network of networks, LVC has promoted ways of sharing successes and learning from experiences (both positive and negative) in a collective and collaborative fashion. Learning strategies include the movement's own institutions (universities, schools), educational institutions and organisations outside the movement, 'peasant to peasant' methodologies proposed by the Cuban Revolution, new tools of learning-by-interacting and exchange between peasants, and spaces for discussion and reflection created in the territories and at LVC global conferences.

This circulation of knowledge reaffirms cross-border support in an immediate, cohesive, and collective fashion. This makes it possible for peasant organisations to act with support from other organisations at the local, national, and regional levels. Its strength lies in the articulation and coordination of actions to achieve social change. In this regard, LVC is creating global social changes: at the economic structure level by repositioning peasants as key actors in the production model and proposing a more equitable distribution of the income generated by the land; at the decision-making level by including peasants in the policy discussions of international bodies and local governments; and at the environmental sustainability level by emerging as an actor which encourages the improvement of global environmental conditions through the agroecological use of land by peasants. Part of the movement's strength stems from this socialisation of learning.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Social transformation is a process of fundamental change at a societal level, and is also the result of macro, meso, and micro changes. Transformation lies between approaches focused on actions and approaches focused on socio-cultural contexts as drivers of transformative social innovation. What we have tried to show here is the relationship between a particular way of identifying the otherness (the agribusiness model) and the generation of narratives and concrete strategies that materialise the identity (a movement based on peasants' way of life and the agroecology way of production) of the social innovation initiative.



While it is not possible to claim that LVC's actions have modified the global agribusiness-based model of food production as a whole, we can say that: 1) LVC allocates a meaning, a label, to the set of global and local institutions that produce food in 'neoliberal terms', 2) LVC continuously generates and reinforces a global network oriented to preserve peasant ways of life, and 3) LVC can deploy its own 'existence' in terms of global narratives of change, as agroecology. It is possible to define the limits of LVC's actions. As part of transformative social innovation processes, actors are empowered and disempowered through different forms of governance, learning, resourcing, and monitoring. Empowering entails using the strengths of individuals and social groups to create for them the possibility of fulfilling new roles in society. It deals with competence, or the capability of maintaining control over events and processes; with impact and the possibility of altering or replacing dominant institutions; and with flexibility and resilience, that is, the capacity to overcome obstacles and failures and flexibly adapt strategies to changing circumstances (Haxeltine et al., 2016).

The fundamentals of this process are, nevertheless, not unique. Empowering processes usually rest on 'resistance' or 'progress' strategies. That is, they can be more focused on defending and strengthening spaces than on advancing on new spaces. What we mean by this is that we do not deny or underestimate LVC's efforts. Rather, we consider the institutions, ideas and rules that LVC strives to change so strong and so deeply-rooted in the ways in which food is produced and marketed, that the very act of resisting against the agribusiness model may be the most disruptive action possible.

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