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Get inspired by the global South: Peasant-led ecodevelopment strategies in Nicaragua.

R. Metereau*

Summary

The current context gives forces to alternative development pathways. Some still have to be invented; others just have to be reminded. The ecodevelopment heuristic framework draws some characteristics of self-reliant, culturally adapted and environmentally sustainable approaches of development. The Peasant-led cooperative movement in Nicaragua, organized in a multi-scale network, struggles for food sovereignty and poverty alleviation. In this struggle, peasant cooperative networks have been building their own alternative development pathways. This paper seeks to highlight the existence of an ecodevelopment project beyond the peasant-led cooperative movement. Following a qualitative data analysis, motivations for cooperation and collective action are identified. The resulting motivation panel demonstrate the presence of political and socio-ecological aims. Their structural significance for the cooperative movement is thus set out.

Key Words: Nicaragua, Peasant Cooperative Networks, social Movement, Ecodevelopment, Qualitative Research.

Résumé :

Le contexte actuel favorise l'émergence de stratégies alternatives de développement. Certaines doivent encore être inventées ; d'autres doivent seulement être rappelées. Le cadre heuristique de l'Écodéveloppement précise quelques caractéristiques d'une approche du développement reposant notamment sur l'autonomie, le respect des spécificités culturelles, la soutenabilité environnementale. Le mouvement coopératif mené par les paysans au Nicaragua, adossé à une organisation coopérative multi-niveau, lutte pour la souveraineté alimentaire et l'amélioration des conditions de vie. Dans cette lutte, les réseaux de coopératives paysannes construisent leurs propres trajectoires alternatives de développement. Cette communication vise à mettre en évidence l'existence d'un projet d'écodéveloppement porté par le mouvement coopératif paysan. Procédant à une analyse qualitative des données de terrain, les motivations à la coopération et à l'action collective sont identifiées. Le panorama motivationnel ainsi construit permet de révéler des motivations d'ordre politique et socio-écologique. Leur signification pour la structuration du mouvement coopératif et alors explicitée.

Mots Clés : Nicaragua, Système Coopératif Paysan, Mouvement Social, Ecodéveloppement, Recherche Qualitative.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 2008 World Development Report (World Bank, 2008), entitled *Agriculture for Development* definitely rehabilitated agriculture and the agri-food systems as relevant gateways for the development research field. To sustain small-scale agriculture and, more widely, farm and non-farm activities in rural areas is thus very important for poverty alleviation in developing regions (Valdés & Foster, 2010; Dethier & Effenberger, 2012). Almost at the same time, 2012 was declared as the International Year of Cooperatives by United Nations. The aim was to highlight “*the contribution of cooperatives to socio-economic development*” (UNDESA, 2012) and, more specifically in the context of rural poverty, to emphasize on the role of agricultural cooperatives to feed the world (FAO, 2012).

This movement lends credibility to small producers’ abilities in the struggle for the covering of basic needs and the reduction of poverty, to more specific and culturally adapted development pathways and, to cooperative-based organization forms of socio-economic activities.

In view of this, the Food Sovereignty Program (FSP) sustained by *La Via Campesina* and other Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAMs), does not appear as a simple alternative way to stamp out hunger. By laying down some principles as localized economic systems, political participation, gender equity, agroecology and so on, the FSP can be approached as an entire development program grounded on an alternative organisation of the agri-food system. Indeed the FSP enlarges the focus from a narrow sectorial vision – agriculture – to a more systemic and complex approach of the way in which humans produce, exchange and consume aliments – the agri-food system as a whole (Friedland, 2001). As Thompson and Scoones say, “*agri-food systems are embedded in complex ecological, economic and social processes*” (2009: 386). Then, this systemic and complex aspect must be addressed in the further adaptation of agri-food system (Ericksen, 2008; Fresco, 2009) and the construction of alternative development pathways.

Based on this framework, this paper seeks to highlight some characteristics of a singular peasant-led social movement¹ and its underlying alternative development program (Touraine, 1978). The research draws on a qualitative fieldwork in rural Nicaragua between September 2012 and January 2013, and a thematic analysis of 31 semi-structured interviews carried out within Nicaraguan peasants organized in cooperatives. Indeed, cooperativism and peasant-led social movement are closely linked in Nicaragua². Identifying peasants’ motivations to get engaged in the cooperative movement is then possible to gather scattered elements of their implicit development program. This, from their own perspective (Pratt, 2009), maintaining the vividness of a qualitative fieldwork research (Helper, 2000).

¹ Based on the conceptual framework developed by Alain Touraine, Social Movements are here characterized by the combination of three dimensions: Identity (being part of a social group or class); Opposition (need to struggle in order to defend common interests of the social group); Totality (normative character - carry a global alternative societal project).

² In this article, we will use both *cooperativism* (translation of the term used by most of the peasant that we interviewed) and *the cooperative movement* to name the same peasant-led social movement, based on cooperative organization, that we studied in Nicaragua.

The paper concludes that this implicit development program is congruent with both Food Sovereignty Program and Ecodevelopment heuristic framework. In that sense, it provides the basis for an alternative development pathway in the context of neoliberal globalization.

The first part of the paper focuses on the link between the agri-food system and development process, and gives an insight onto Latin American and International Agrarian Movements from that perspective. The second part is dedicated to the contextualization of the research and highlights some methodological aspects. Third, the paper draws up the motivational panorama of peasants engaged in the cooperative movement and offers some interpretation keys in terms of self-reliant development strategies.

II. AGRI-FOOD SYSTEM, DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN LATIN AMERICA

Historically, economists consider the modernisation of agriculture as a basic condition for development. More widely, the development and structuration of the modern agri-food system go hand in hand with the emergence of modern developed societies (Bairoch, 1999). Indeed, there has been a relative consensus among economists, recognizing that the modernization of the agri-food system – and its ability to feed humans – plays a key role in the development process (Timmer, 1988).

Johnston and Mellor (1961 : 572-580) formulated five proposals in order to specify the contribution of agriculture to Economic Development: (1) *Increased food supply* for domestic consumption; (2) *Enlarged agricultural exports*; (3) *Transfer of manpower from agriculture to non agricultural sectors*; (4) *Contributions to capital formation* (domestic savings); and finally, (5) *Increased rural net cash income as a stimulus to industrialization*.

That very cramped economic-centred vision³ can be enlarged within a Human Development perspective. In that multidimensional perspective (Anand & Sen, 1997), the organization of the agri-food system appears thus even more clearly as a cardinal point for poverty alleviation and improvement of living conditions. Basically, access to sound and adequate food and nutrients is a prerequisite for human health, for children capacity to benefit education, or for gender equity, etc. (Horrihan, 2002; Valente, 2014). Land grabbing is also, in the context of neoliberal globalization, one of the underlying effects of the current agri-food system's organization. This phenomenon, most of the time associated with foreign investment and economics growth, is simultaneously depriving such rural communities of one of their basic means of subsistence (De Schutter, 2011; Borras & al., 2011): the access to land that previously allowed them to be self-reliant. Therefore, as the substantial contribution of smallholder producers to feed the world and alleviate poverty is recognized (Lipton, 2005; World Bank, 2008; Nwanze, 2011), the link appears clearly between the way in which agri-food system is structured on one side – involving here related policies for smallholder agriculture and development (Birner & Resnick, 2010) – and, the chances of a real improvement of living conditions on the other side.

³ The vision of Johnston and Mellor is consistent with the mainstream economic paradigm. In short, economic growth is the necessary and sufficient condition for development. Development, and sustainable development (Vivien, 2004) would be, in accordance with the idea of Rostow (1959), the latest stages of economic growth.

Some other evidences appear of this entanglement, when the multidimensional character of development is further enlarged to include environmental concerns. As an interface between human societies and ecosystems (Gomiero & al., 2006; Altieri, 1997), agriculture is a key sector for sustainability issues. This is even more evident when taking into account, not only the way in which aliments are produced, but rather the entire agri-food system, including transformation, distribution and consumption processes. Current globalized agro-industrial food system clearly appears to be no longer viable (Altieri & al., 2012): It depends largely on fossil energy and inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, etc.); it produces a lot of pollutions and “wastes” (unused sub-products) (McMichael. & al., 2007); it contributes to biodiversity losses and soil sterilization.

All in all, the more integrated and multidimensional the conception of human development is, the more obvious the central role of agri-food system’s structure appears. In a historical and political-economic perspective, the “Food Regimes” are called to be determinant in the successive capitalism’s configurations (Friedmann H., 2005; McMichael, 2005; 2009), setting the conditions of Human (Rural) Development.

In the current context of neoliberal globalization, persistence of rural poverty, and permanent food crisis – more than 1 out of 10 people in the world are suffering hunger (FAO, 2014) – TAMs are promoting an alternative framework to ensure both access to adequate food and self-reliant rural development pathways.

Food Sovereignty Program and peasant movements in Latin America: getting engaged in the politics of rural development.

The food sovereignty project has first been promoted by peasant-led organizations throughout the early 1990s. *La Via Campesina* is a social movement that brings together local and national peasant organisations from 73 countries, in a worldwide network. In 1996, *La Via Campesina* brought into light the FSP by presenting the manifesto “*Food Sovereignty: A future Without Hunger*” (La Via Campesina, 1996) during the World Food Summit in Rome. Food sovereignty is then presented as « *a precondition to genuine food security* ». It lays down the basis for an alternative agri-food system that counterpoise the one who gets structured along the excluding process of neoliberal globalization (Garcia Pasqual, 2003; Grigsby & Perez, 2009; Rubio, 2010) and led to the world food crisis in 2008 (Rosset, 2008).

Therefore, the promotion and the development of this program have been carried out by a wider range of organizations representing the civil society. Even some government have taken in account the FSP since the beginning of 2000’s (Beauregard, 2009). In 2001, the federal state of Mexico implements the *Sustainable Rural Development Law*, introducing Food Sovereignty (*Chapter XVII: Self-determination of the country for the production, supply and access to food for the entire population, based mainly on domestic production*)” (CDCU, 2001: 51). This, in total contradiction with the new era of market-led agricultural policy lunched with the NAFTA (Eakin & al., 2014). Then, other countries have been going the same way and integrating FSP in their development programs, as subject of a specific law, or even as a constitutional element (Chiriboga, 2009; Peña, 2013).

This process gives force to the peasant-led socio-political movement in Latin America, which is merely dynamic, not as anachronistic as we could believe, and which seems to constitute an effective force of social change (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Mc Michael, 2008, Welch, Mançano Fernandes, 2009).

In Latin America, several examples are observable, highlighting the way in which the peasant led social-movements and their underpinning organizations are implementing the FSP, as a whole or partially (Teubal & Ortega Breña, 2009; Holtz-Gimenez, 2008).

Those national-based social movements are heterogeneous and do not always have strictly similar motivations and political agendas (Edelman, 2008). Nonetheless, they reach the objective of building various transnational networks, enabling strong advocacy actions with governments and intergovernmental organizations. They constitute the so-called Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAMs), today involved in several lobbying processes, for Food Sovereignty, for the Right of Peasant, for the Right to Land, for the Right to Food, etc. Despite having a pluralist ideological and political framework (Borras, 2004; Borras, 2010) these coalitions have been able to build solid cooperation within various peasants and other rural workers' struggle.

The Central American sub-region is quite representative of this phenomenon (Rodríguez Rojas & Maxime, 2014). In the first place, peasant-led movements are active in many countries. In the second place, they have been historically organizing transnational coalitions, especially around the promotion of agroecology, Food Sovereignty and political participation (Edelman, 2008; Holtz-Gimenez, 2008; Rosset & al., 2011).

In the wake of Sandinistas Revolution, Nicaraguan peasant-led movement has been one of the most active. In fact, *La Via Campesina* was founded in 1992, by bringing together peasant representatives from North, Central and South America, during the annual Congress of the Nicaraguan Union of Farmers and the Breeders (UNAG: *Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos de Nicaragua*).

Embracing the specificity of national-based agrarian and peasant movements, and their engagement in the politics of rural development, this paper will focus on a specific movement and organization. In Nicaragua, peasant are still active and organized, mainly within the over-mentioned principal peasants' syndicate – which seems today to suffer from its really tight dependence to the Sandinistas political party (FSLN: *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) – and, the peasant's cooperatives network.

III. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

Context of Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbeans, with an HDI of 0.614 (ranking 132th world HDI, PNUD, 2013). The economy is largely relying on the agri-food sector, which is responsible for almost a third of the GDP (Banco Central de Nicaragua, 2013; Mayorga, 2008). Natural assets are generally favorable for agriculture and allow the emergence of an important export-oriented agro-industry since the 1960's (cotton, sugarcane, coffee, peanuts, etc). Agro-food production remains the main source of exports (table 1.) in Nicaragua.

With the exception of coffee – whose proportion (63,7%) produced by smallholders (< 35 ha) remains important (Bacon, 2005) – , export-oriented productions are mainly provided by latifundary producers. As an example, four agribusiness companies are holding 50% the surfaces cultivated with sugarcane and control the entire production of refined cane sugar and other derivatives (Lopez, 2003).

Table 1. Main exports of goods by product (FOB), 2012

Products	Million US \$	%
Total	2677,4	100
Coffee	521,8	19,5
Meat	451,4	16,9
Gold	422,8	15,8
Sugarcane	194,9	7,3
Dairy	171,7	6,4
Peanuts	132,5	4,9
Other agri-food products*	192,9	7,2
Total agri-food products	1665,2	62,2
Others	589,3	22

* The six others mains export-oriented agri-food products: Prawns, beans, lobsters, livestock, sesame, and bananas.

Source : Banco Central de Nicaragua, 2013, Nicaragua en cifras

Therefore Agri-food sector in Nicaragua can be divided in two subsectors: **The first one**, based on traditional export-oriented productions, is mainly in the hand of latifundary landowners with mostly conventional farming practices and a substantial contribution to the objective of trade balance equilibrium.

The second one is first and foremost oriented towards domestic consumption products as “*granos basicos*”⁴, and depends on poor smallholder peasants, working on less fertile lands and with very low productivity rates (Solà Montserrat, 2008). Thus, the poverty in Nicaragua is mainly concentrated in rural areas where peasants continue to ensure the covering of national food needs. Hence, Food sovereignty in Nicaragua relies principally on those peasants who represent 90% of agri-food producers (figure 1.). They implement diversified farming systems (Kremen & al., 2012), which allow to combine both on-farm consumption (Bacon, 2005) and market-oriented productions providing incomes for households.

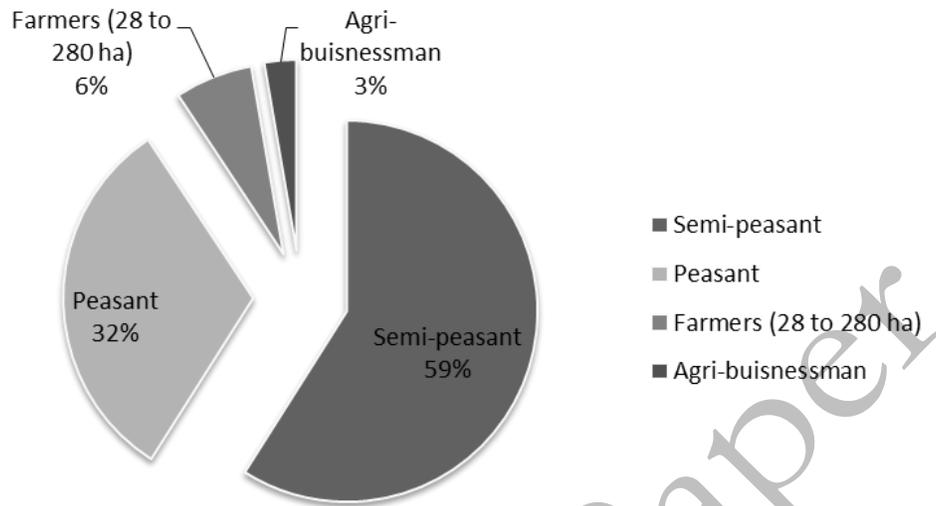
Peasant Cooperative Movement in Nicaragua

Gathering reliable data on the cooperative movement in Nicaragua is a challenge. Even the MEFCCA (*Ministerio de Economía Familiar, Comunitaria, Cooperativa y Asociativa*) does not provide solid data. The 2001 agriculture census survey (INIDE, 2001) is the last exhaustive study, which has been providing useful data to describe the cooperative movement. Albeit, institutional environment and cooperative development drastically evolved during the last decade and those data are inappropriate to characterize the current cooperative movement. Nonetheless, regarding the peasant cooperative sector, which is the main one in Nicaragua (Lafortezza, 2009), it is possible to realize some insights.

In Nicaragua, around 80% of smallholder peasants (FAO, 2010) are organized in a multi-scale cooperative system integrated with other governmental and non-governmental organizations (figure 2.).

⁴ “*Basic grains*”: Beans, Corn, Rice, and sorghum are the traditional primary food sources.

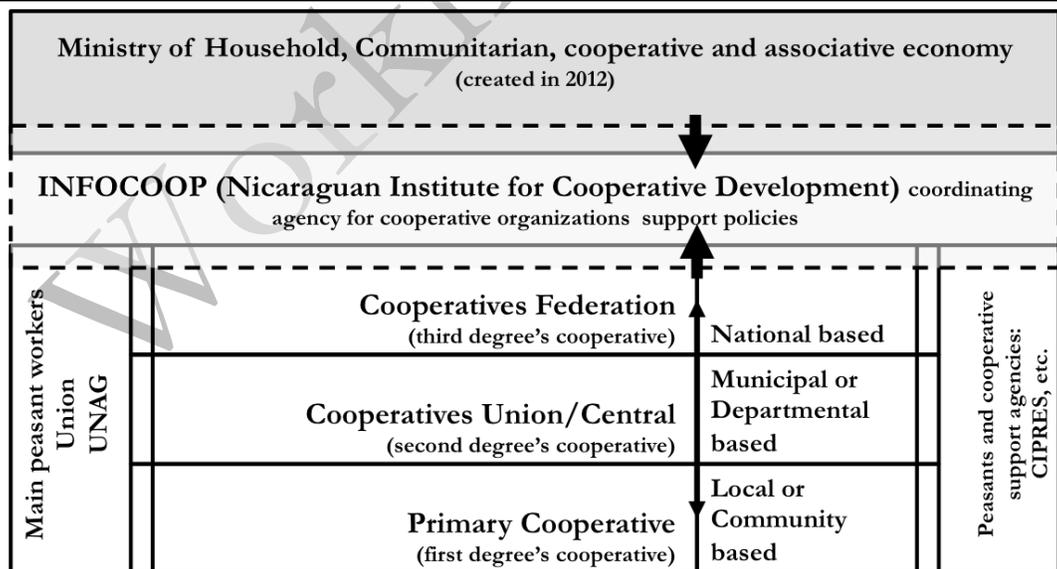
Figure 1. Typology and repartition of agri-food producers in Nicaragua



Semi-Peasant and Peasants have a poor access to land and financial and technical capital. Semi-peasants need a second activity in order to implement their incomes and cover their basic needs.

Source: Ruíz García et Marín López, 2005, from the 2001 census.

Figure 2. Structuration of Peasant Cooperative Movement in Nicaragua



Source: from the author

The peasant-led social movement leans on this organizational structure, which seems deeply embedded in the historical and cultural legacy of the Sandinista social movement (Damiani, 1994; Núñez Soto, 1996). Indeed, during the 1980's, the Sandinista's Government confiscated and nationalized Somocista's and large owners' lands (Broegaard, 2005). Those lands were massively allocated to small peasants and landless workers strongly encouraged to gather their land and to exploit it collectively in Agricultural Production Cooperatives (APCs) (Ruben & Lerman, 2005). Those APCs enjoyed an important technical and material support from the State and were in charge of food security in Nicaragua during the revolution (Austin et al., 1985). Despite the counter-revolution and external economic and military aggressions, Nicaraguan State handled a deep agrarian reform, reaching some objectives of land redistribution and the covering of populations' basic food needs. Albeit, both land reform and the implementation of a cooperative-based production system remain uncompleted processes within the revolution decade (Baumeister, 1999). The following decade has witnessed the deactivation process of the APCs. APCs massive support from the State stopped with the upcoming market-oriented governments, and put in evidence the weaknesses and the dependency of APCs from the State, in this configuration. The peasants turned to individual farming practices after the APCs dissolution. They cultivated individual plots originating in the division of previous collective land titles, with or without proper formalized individual landholdings (Broegaard, 2005).

Despite (or because of) this unfavorable politic and economic environment, peasants did not totally avoid cooperative organization (Ruben & Lerman, 2005) and in some cases, remained organized in cooperatives. A few months after the Sandinista's defeat against Violetta Chamorro in the presidential election, the first peasant agricultural federation was created in Nicaragua (FENACOO: *Federación Nacional de Cooperativas Agropecuarias y Agroindustriales*) (Doligez, 2013). The Cipres (*Centro para la Promoción, la Investigación y el Desarrollo Rural y Social*) was born during the same year. As a NGO supported by Sandinista's network, inside and across the national border, this organization aimed to pursue the revolutionary project of development, based on a model of "associative, self-managed and popular economy" (Núñez Soto, 1996)⁵. Moreover, the first peasant's Union (UNAG) founded in 1981 and kept on supporting small peasants during this period, even with a reduced budget. This constellation of peasant-led organizations and peasant support organizations, coupled with foreign NGOs, have facilitated the maintenance of some agricultural cooperative basis and contributed to develop the current cooperative system. Today most of the peasants organized in cooperative cultivate their lands individually. Primary cooperatives gather peasants from the same village or community. When it is possible, those primary cooperatives are grouped in local "Unions" or "Central". This second degree of vertical integration is based both on geographical localization and on agricultural sector or value chains (coffee is the main example). It allows more "powerful" commercial negotiation

⁵ Numerous peasants' cooperatives have been created under the aegis of the Cipres since the 1990's. The "Productive bounds Program" has been implemented by the Cipres. It consisted in the granting of productive lots (fruits trees, seeds, chickens, pigs, cattle, etc) to poor rural households (often, the women were the recipients). Those recipients of the Productive Bounds were urged to be organized in cooperatives and received support for the structuration and management of the cooperative. Those cooperative are today massively affiliated to the FENACOO or the FECODESA (cooperatives' federation created *ad hoc* to gather those primary cooperatives outcoming from the Cipres programs). The productive Bounds Program has been then extended by the government through the "Zero Hanger Program".

posture, and offers the possibility of managing wider development projects. The third degree of vertical integration is materialized through the creation of national federations of Cooperatives. The FENACCOOP and the FECODESA (*Federación de Cooperativa Para el Desarrollo*) are the two peasants' cooperative federations that seek to support primary cooperative through technical assistance, commercialization, networking, research and allocation of cooperation funding (both governmental and non-governmental).

Since 2007, institutional context is more favorable to cooperative movement. A new law has been voted (Law No. 499) and is supposed to facilitate the cooperative development. The INFOCOOP acts as a decentralized entity of the MEFCCA and is in charge of the cooperative development policies coordination, hand in hand with the cooperative unions and federations.

In that context and on that structural basis, the peasant cooperative movement in Nicaragua is implementing political participation, agroecology, gender equity, agro-industrial development, mutual health system, and so on. Gathering those dispersed aims could lead to the definition of an implicit development program closely tied up with the FSP.

Methodology

Given the central role of agri-food system's configuration for Human (rural) Development process, and, taking into account the increasing engagement of Local, National and Transnational Agrarian Movements in the politics and policies of development (Borras, 2010), numerous forms of peasant-led development strategies become more relevant. This research seeks to explore the singular Nicaraguan peasant-led movement in order to put in evidence some characteristics of the underlying development project.

By conducting a field study based on semi-structured interviews within peasants engaged in the cooperative movement in Nicaragua, this qualitative research allows to highlight the peasants' motivations and objectives from their own perspective (Pratt, 2009). As organisations, cooperative federations disseminate an "official" discourse about their aims and missions. The implementation of the Food Sovereignty Program appears clearly as a central objective, as well as the willingness to contribute actively this way, to (rural) development process. The research then aims at a deeper understanding of the motivations of the peasant involved. However, this understanding will not emerge from the official organisations or their leaders' discourses, but rather from the discourse of a heterogeneous panel of peasants interviewed in their ordinary surroundings. That is to say, in unprompted conditions, in their daily environment, where the "*everyday politics*" materializes through the very act of being a peasant and getting involved in the local community's political thoughts and actions (Scott, 1986; Tria Kerkvliet, 2009). In this way the research provides an input to the understanding of peasant-led movements in Latin America and its engagement in the politics of (rural) development

To carry out the interviews, we chose three diversified agro-socio-ecological areas throughout Nicaragua: the first in the central-north tropical-dry and hilly area (Department of Estelí and Madriz), the second one in the Pacific tropical-dry and flat area (Department of León and Chinandega), and the third one in the south tropical-humid area (Department of Rio San Juan).

The thematic content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2003; Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012) is based on 31 semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2012 and January 2013 within the main peasants' cooperative networks: FENACCOOP and FECODESA. In addition to semi-structured interviews, the research relies on a 6-month stay in Nicaragua. It allowed numerous observations and the conduction of 52 other open interviews with peasants, craftspeople, producer organisation leaders, government representatives (from the MEFCCA), "Young-people" rural associations, etc.

Participants were recruited through multiple criteria in order to diversify the corpus. We interviewed both men and women with different degrees of engagement in the cooperative network⁶. We enjoyed a strong support by local delegates of each cooperative networks, facilitating the access to community and the first contact with peasants, in all survey areas. Then, we used a snowball sampling method based on purposeful selection through community networks. We systematically endeavoured to build the most equilibrated relationship possible with the interviewed (as much as it is possible in an unprompted meeting between a French researcher and a Nicaraguan Peasant!). Every interview started with an invitation to an "open" discussion about the peasant cooperative movement in Nicaragua and their own involvement. However, we also made an effort to assure our independency from the national cooperative network, from the government, and especially from every kind of Foreign Aid Provider (Governmental or Non-Governmental).

The interviews lasted 45 min on average and were conducted in Spanish. They have been transcribed but not translated, seeking to maintain the rawest verbatim and to avoid the bias of interpretation during the translation. We finally code the interviews and built a *thematic tree*, assisted by two CAQDAS softwares: Sonal and NVivo10⁷.

IV. GET ENGAGED IN NICARAGUAN PEASANT COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT: A MOTIVATIONAL PANORAMA

Reviewing the corpus of our 31 semi-structured interviews, we coded 224 themes that we first regrouped by topics (the same topics that served to "structure" the interviews). From there we were able to carry a sequence of intellectual operations – identify salient thematic sets; regroup themes; define thematic axes – (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012), which led to the construction of a thematic tree that reflects the motivational panorama of the peasants interviewed (Figure 3). This process was iterative, first extracting themes from the interviews in a most likely inductive way, and then combining research aims and interviews insights to build a representation of peasants' motivations to cooperate. The resulting thematic tree reveals three axes, namely three categories of motivations. We regroup, under the first axe, all themes and corresponding verbatim extracts, which refer to economic-centred

⁶ By the degree of engagement in the cooperative network, we wish to signal the level of the cooperative networks (see figure 2.) in which the interviewed are engaged, reflecting in a sense, a degree of leadership (no leadership or community leadership (primary cooperative > degree of engagement: 1), local leadership (cooperative centrals > degree of engagement: 2), national leadership (cooperative federations > degree of engagement: 3).

⁷ Sonal is an open-access software that facilitate both transcription and topic splitting in the same time. It offer the possibility of overlap different representation of the interviews : soundtrack, text (verbatim) and colored topic splited representation (Alber, 2010). This software was more convenient for the first steps of the analysis that we pursued with Nvivo.

motivations. The second axe cover the expression of motivations directly linked to strictly organizational concern (be organized to be organized) or with technical advantages that a clustering process could bring. In a third axe, we gather all extracts and themes that highlight the socio-political content of the motivational panorama.

Economic-Centred motivations: responding to necessity in the context of poverty

For peasants involved in the cooperative movement, economic motivations are central but not exclusive. As it could be expected, economic motivations are ubiquitous in the interviews and appear explicitly.

In the context of poverty and of globalisation in which they cannot be competitive, reduce their economic vulnerability is the priority for most of the peasants interviewed. First of all, they have to “*continue to struggle. The struggle because of the need to survive*” (Interview, 2012a)⁸. Get organized in cooperative is then a way to reduce collectively this individual vulnerability by mutualizing, creating “brand”, developing small rural agro-industry, integrating the value-chain, etc.: every collective actions that could enable an increase of income or a decrease of costs. From the peasant’s perspective, most massive economic-centred arguments for cooperative organisation concern the obtainment of better prices for their production, a better access to market, and a cheaper access to inputs such as seeds or fertilizers.

Then, the access to credit and to an investment capacity is another priority. They expect, “*by creating the cooperative, a better access to credit, more viable, and with less precondition than those required today by a credit bank or a micro-credit bank, or, almost with a lower interest rate.*” (Interview, 2012b)⁹. Another expectation from the cooperative organization is to allow some agro-industrial development that could lead to a better integration of the value-chain. Even through the most simple transformation process – just packing to sell for example – the peasants seek to capture a bigger share of the added value. Cooperative are sometimes also expected to facilitate job creation, rightfully in the cases in which some agro-industries are set up or are in the process of being developed. This is more likely to occur at the cooperative unions level (2nd degree) where “*there are also jobs for cooperative members*” (Interview, 2012c)¹⁰.

All these elements, which incorporate a large part of economic-centred motivations revealed by this body of interviews, are consistent with the literature. They confirm the interest in the cooperative organization for poverty alleviation, especially through the improvement of market access conditions (Hellin & al., 2009; Trebbin, 2014; Altman, 2015).

Organizational and technical motivations: Being part of a collective and share technics and knowledge.

Be organized in cooperative to be organized! Most of the peasants interviewed merely seem to be interested in being part of the cooperative not to remain alone, and “*being organized*”.

⁸ Interview, 2012a: “*A raíces de eso seguimos luchando, la lucha porque hay que sobrevivir*”

⁹ Interview, 2012b: “*Y buscar conformando la cooperativa, un acceso al crédito más favorable, más viable, y con menos requisitos que te pone hoy en día una banca financiera o un micro-financiera, o sea pues, y con una tasa de interés más baja*”

¹⁰ Interview 2012c: “*hay trabajo también para las socias de la cooperativa*”

Even if there is no immediate and direct economic impact, they prefer to be organised, sharing knowledge, defending common interest, etc.

First, it seems that there is an attachment to cooperative organization, probably due, in a large part to history (Ruben & Lerman, 2005). As it is stated in the previous section, peasant-led social movement have been historically active in Central America. The Sandinista “*philosophy*”, which gives a central role to peasant in the process of social change, promotes both cooperativism and a spectrum of values and principles for a more inclusive development process (Núñez Soto, 2009; Vieta, 2009). Adhesion to cooperative and involvement to cooperative movement is therefore an adhesion to this set of values and principles. “*There had been no leg-up, no engagement from the government, open, frontal, to usher the structuration and strengthening of cooperativism. It had been a very personal pathway, very philosophical, all along the process*” (Interview, 2013a)¹¹.

The cooperative organization, as a rural poor producer organization, is attractive independently from economic advantages that it could bring. This interest shows a conscientiousness of being part of a same social group (peasant worker and rural poor populations) with common problems to resolve and common interests to defend. “*The one who integrates a cooperative, always does it with an idea, to solve a problem, a situation. A problem that you just can not solve alone, but together it becomes possible*” (Interview, 2012d)¹². Indeed, for different specific groups of producers (organic producers, women peasants, communities affected by climatic change, etc.), being organized in cooperative allows collective actions inside the group and across the group, by integrating a wider network (Simmons & Birchall, 2008). On the bases of cooperative organization and networking, peasants interviewed are looking for a better “visibility” and “credibility” than staying individual. As “*a collective*”, they can form a credible interlocutor for commercial partners, institutions, funders, and NGOs. They can also pool resources and reach together a better autonomy and the capacity to manage their own resources.

Cooperative members also make clear that being organized gives them the possibility of improving their production technics and process. The cooperative offer this possibility through networking and *peasant-to-peasant* learning (Holtz-Gimenez, 2008). They create together a chance of bettering both qualitatively and quantitatively their production skills.

Those organizational motivations are ambivalent. Most of the themes and corresponding abstracts, which have been coded and regrouped in this axe of the thematic tree, are also present in one of the two other axes. Peasants seem to be attached to cooperativism itself, because of strongly embedded historical and cultural dimensions of peasant-led organizations in Nicaragua. Even if, they do not benefit directly and substantially from the membership of the cooperative movement, they want to be part of it. Nonetheless, economic-centred motivations or political considerations often transpire in the background of these motivations.

¹¹ Interview 2013a: “*Pero no ha existido un empuje, un compromiso del gobierno, abierto, frontal para acompañar, la estructuración y el fortalecimiento del cooperativismo. Ha estado caminando de una manera muy personal, muy de la filosofía, a través de todo el proceso.*”

¹² Interview 2012d: “*uno que se forma una cooperativa, siempre se forma con una idea, para resolver un problema, una situación. Y que uno solo no lo puede resolver, pero en conjunto si lo podemos resolver.*”

Socio-Political motivations: defending common interest and sustaining an alternative development project.

Peasants involved in the cooperative movement express various and scattered socio-political motivations. Taken together and combined with economic and organisational ones, those motivations could be the components of a self-reliant development program.

The socio-political motivations refer to a wide range of motivations. They can roughly be divided in two categories. The first one renders more general statements on the nature of this implicit development program. A set of ethical values associated to cooperativism is often mentioned. The adhesion to a cooperative organization seems to be an adhesion to cooperativism, in the sense of an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. *“We formed this limited company and named Guardabarranco Limited Compagny. But we also realized then, that it was not ours philosophy, the limited compagny. So we decided to turn this into a cooperative.”* (Interview, 2012e)¹³. Right after the defeat of Sandinistas in the national elections of 1990, peasants started to organize themselves in order to affront the upcoming neoliberal oriented policies. *“First, since 1990, we could not be associated with neoliberalism. For this purpose, we have been struggling for 16 years against neoliberalism”* (Interview, 2013a)¹⁴. These struggles have to be contextualized in the poverty situation faced by the peasants. It appears therefore that this struggle materializes through the search of alternative ways to alleviate poverty and engine an inclusive development process. Cooperatives are created *“with the aim of reaching better conditions, to promote development in [the] communities”* (Interview, 2012f)¹⁵. In short, in the context of excludent neoliberal globalization, peasants implement a cooperative-based alternative development process. This way they hope to create more inclusive and autonomous pathways to alleviate poverty.

The second category of motivations express more specific aspects of the alternative development program that they are defending. Gender equity, political participation, and the work with nature – in addition to cooperative organizational and economic principles – appear as the main components of this development program.

The political participation and representation of peasants and rural populations seem really important. Nicaraguan peasants appear aware of their own collective significant contribution to economic and human development. Therefore, they struggle (through cooperative organization) to obtain the corresponding role in the definition of the political agenda – rather than a mere traditional or folkloric role. Through cooperative organization, peasants seek to gain influence at both local and national levels, and improve their capacity to defend their own interests and strides.

Gender equity issues are largely integrated in the strategic plans of cooperative’s federations. They are actively promoting women empowerment by addressing the problem of access to land, making them benefit in priority from the program “productive bounds”, supporting creation of women’s cooperatives, and providing training programs. In return

¹³ Interview 2012e: *“formamos esta sociedad anónima y le pusimos sociedad anónima Guardabarranco. Pero también nos dimos cuenta de que, de que no era la línea nuestra pues, La sociedad anónima pues. Entonces decidimos convertir esta sociedad anónima en cooperativa.”*

¹⁴ Interview 2013a: *“en primer lugar desde el año noventa, nosotros no podíamos asociarnos al neoliberalismo. Por lo tanto, pasamos 16 años luchando contra el neoliberalismo”*

¹⁵ Interview 2012f: *“con el propósito de salir adelante, para tener un mayor desarrollo en nuestras comunidades.”*

women are actively engaged in the cooperative movement and gain acknowledgement and protagonism in political processes. “*Now we do, the women, we are more...in charge within public institutions. Because before, we were nothing, they were just men.*” (Interview, 2012g)¹⁶. As observed in other cases, cooperatives appear as a vector of women empowerment (Lyon & al., 2010; Dol & Hambly Odame, 2013) and peasants mostly confirm this aspiration. Nonetheless, interviews yet show important discrepancies on that issue.

Finally, we observed important cross-links between the cooperative movement and the agroecological movement – most of agroecological small producers are organized in a producer association created in 2009 and called the MAONIC (The Nicaraguan Agroecological and organic producer Movement)¹⁷. During the survey, we observed very heterogeneous agricultural practices. The peasants interviewed are implementing both conventional and agroecological agricultural practices, but they often perceive the cooperative organization as a means to improve their practices and techniques. When producers are already engaged in an agroecological approach, they aim to promote it through the cooperative movement: “*We are trying to sway* » (Interview 2012d)¹⁸. Agroecology and work with nature stand out as vectors of autonomy (no dependence to chemical inputs), helping to reduce vulnerability (to climatic change and market volatility through diversification for example); offering market opportunities and improving incomes (especially through fair trade and organic markets).

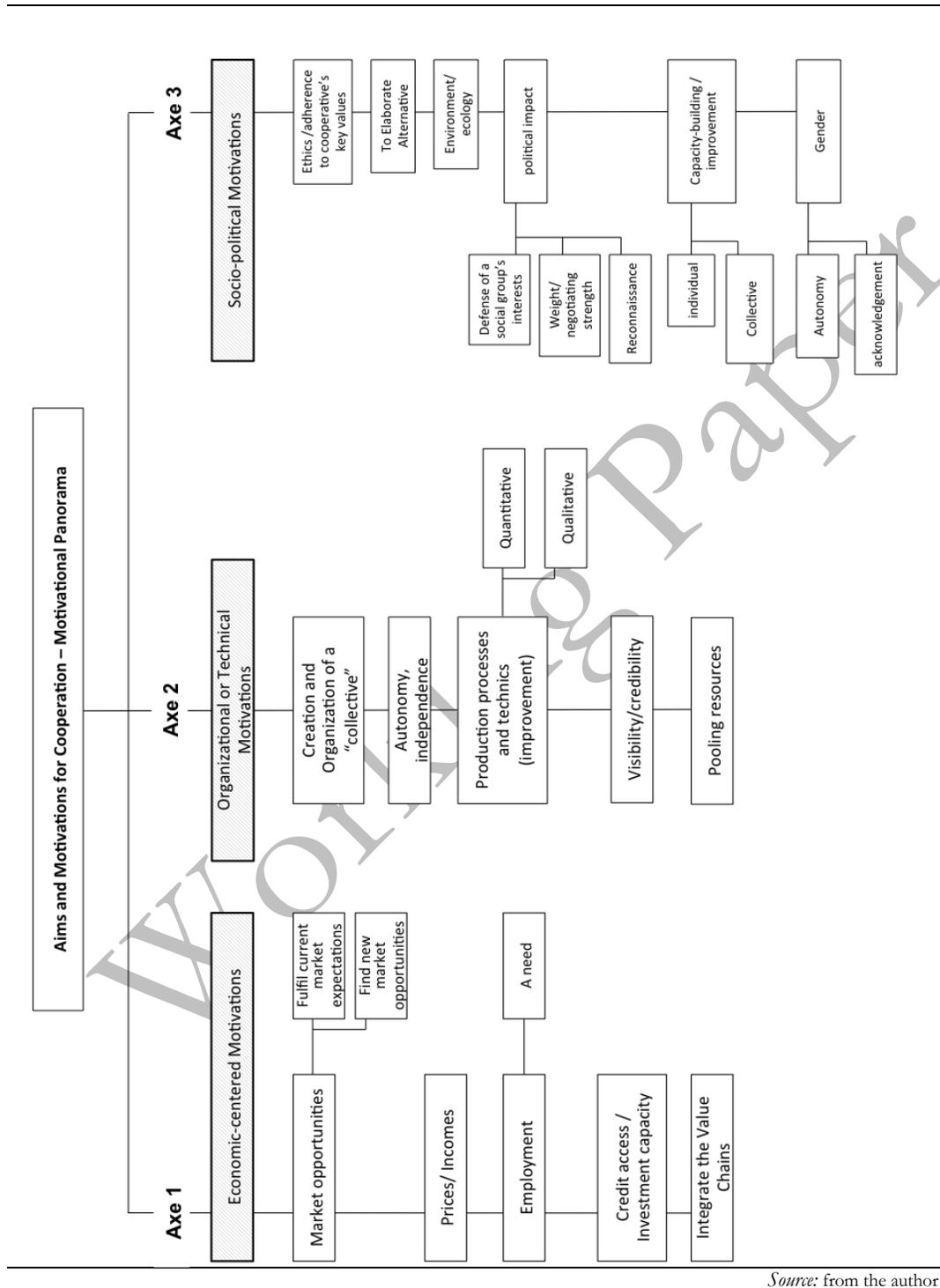
This last set of motivations tells us how the peasants engaged in the cooperative movement are committed to a multidimensional perspective of development. Indeed, both economic and organizational tools (developed through the cooperative-based organization), and other dimensions of development (as gender equity, political participation, autonomy, environmental sustainability, etc.) are integrated in an implicit alternative development project.

¹⁶ Interview 2012g: “*ahora si la mujeres si estamos más... ya hasta los cargos públicos. Porqué antes tampoco, estábamos en nada, solo los barones. Pero ahora ya hemos logrado bastante.*”

¹⁷ Movimiento de Productoras y Productores Agroecológicos y Orgánicos de Nicaragua (MAONIC)

¹⁸ Interview 2012d: “*nosotros estamos tratando de incidir* »

Figure 3. A motivational Panorama of Peasants involved in The Nicaraguan cooperative Movement



Source: from the author

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE HIDDEN ECODEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF NICARAGUAN PEASANTS' COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT?

In Nicaragua, peasant-led social movement is backed by a multi-scales cooperative organization. Indeed cooperativism and peasant-led social movements share a common history in this country. In fact, the current cooperative system takes roots in the Sandinista Revolution of the 1980's. On the bases of that association between peasant-led social movement and cooperativism, we carry out several interviews with the peasants engaged in that cooperative movement. This, in order to reach a better understanding of the motivations driving the peasants to join the movement and, to highlight a hypothetic alternative development program.

As a social movement, peasant cooperative movement in Nicaragua actually carries an alternative development program. It does not appear explicit and structured through peasants' discourses but, by gathering scattered elements it is possible to identify some characteristics of this development project.

Cooperative organization is then not just a tool, or a means to obtain a few economic gains. *De facto* it is; but it is above all an organizational base reflecting values that are constitutive of an alternative development project based on cooperation, self-reliance, work with nature (agroecology), gender equity, political participation, etc...

Those characteristics are consistent with both the Ecodevelopment heuristic framework laid down by I.Sachs (1974; 1980) and the Food Sovereignty Program defined and promoted by the TAMs led by *La Via Campesina* (Figuère & Metereau, 2013).

Appendix:

List of interviews referred to in this article

Interview, 2012a: Peasant; Female; 40-49 year old; degree of engagement: 1; main productions: Granos Basicos; Bananas; Cultivated surface < to 5 ha; Date of the interview: December 17th. Duration: 1'17"

Interview, 2012b: Peasant; Male; 40-49 year old; degree of engagement: 2; main productions: Granos Basicos & Cattle; Cultivated surface < to 20 ha; Date of the interview: December 14th; duration: 43".

Interview, 2012c: Peasant; Female; 40-49 year old; degree of engagement: 1; main productions: Granos Basicos; Cultivated surface < to 5 ha; Date of the interview: December 10th, duration: 30'

Interview 2012d: Peasant, Male, 40-49 Year old; degree of engagement: 2; main productions: Granos Basicos & Coffee; Cultivated surface < to 50 ha; Date of the interview: December 10th, duration: 1'12"

Interview, 2012e: Peasant; Male; 50-59 year old; degree of engagement: 2; main productions: Coffee & Granos Basicos; Cultivated surface < to 20 ha; Date of the interview: December 6th, duration: 1'05"

Interview, 2012f: Peasant; Male; 40-49 year old; degree of engagement: 2; main productions: Vegetables & Granos Basicos, Cultivated Surface < 20 ha; Date of the interview: December 14th, duration: 50"

Interview 2012g: Peasant; Female; 40-49 year old; degree of engagement: 1; main productions: Sesame & Granos Basicos, Cultivated Surface < 5 ha; Date of the interview: January 20th, duration: 32"

Interview, 2013a: Peasant & cooperative movement representative; Male; 50-59 year old; degree of engagement: 3; main productions: granos basicos & vegetables; Cultivated Surface < 20ha; Date of the interview: January 18th, duration: 1'13"

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