

There are “two kinds of international organisations”

A case study of La Vía Campesina’s reaction to the WTO and the FAO opening up

Abstract

A prominent movement for change of the current food system is Vía Campesina, a peasants' movement advocating that food policy should incorporate perspectives from the most affected. Since the 1990s, international organisations (IOs) have opened up to non-state actors, allowing movements like Vía Campesina to occupy spaces 'inside' organisations instead of opposing from the 'outside'. This thesis examines how Vía Campesina perceives and responds to the opening up of space within the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). These IOs were identified as examples of 'outside' and 'inside' strategies respectively, although both IOs had opened up toward civil society. To explore this interaction a theoretical framework developed by Anderl et al. (2021) on perceptions of opening up was applied to the two cases. The opening up of the WTO was mainly perceived as a legitimisation attempt, while the opened up FAO was perceived as a strategic opportunity for Vía Campesina to establish their own space. Thus, the framework offers some explanatory potential to movement's perceptions of the quality of IO opening up in shaping consequent reactions. However, other factors, such as the ideological framework, resource availability, and the movement's own strategizing against perceived international power structures, were also identified as influencing responses.

Keywords: La Vía Campesina, social movements, international organisations, opening up perception

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1 Introduction

The world is moving backwards in decreasing the number of hungry, with the intensification of economic shocks, conflict, and climate change as major drivers of food insecurity (FAO et al. 2022, pp. xv-xvi). Globally, efforts to address hunger are focused on emergency aid and a longer term increase in agricultural production and global trade, which has come under scrutiny from several directions. A prominent movement for change of the current food system is *Vía Campesina*, a peasants' movement advocating that food policy should be developed with the incorporation of perspectives from the most affected and knowledgeable, a salient claim by the movement since its initiation in 1993 (Desmarais 2008). The usual equation of “knowledge” as formal and quantitative science is also criticised for disregarding the historical wisdom and knowledge of peasants, their ways of working the land, and their relationships with nature (Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 624).

Vía Campesina's standpoint can be said to have materialised in the last decades with regard to global politics. Historically, international organisations (IOs) have been limited to national governments but, especially since the 1990s, opening up of IOs toward non-state actors has increased (Tallberg et al. 2013). While opening up generally has been seen as a positive step, the perception of civil society towards this space is complex. While some welcome the opportunity, others criticise it as tokenistic and argue that decision-making power remains in the hands of governments and IOs (Morgan 2007, p. 274). Social movements are a crucial part of civil society that publicly address and oppose IOs, but their distinct features differentiate them from NGOs, which have often been conflated with civil society in international relations (IR) literature (McKeon 2009). Social movements are characterised by conflictive relations with opponents, a shared collective identity and dense, informal networks (della Porta & Diani 2006, p. 20), all of which impact their interactions with IOs. To effectively implement social movements perspectives in global politics, I argue, an understanding of their reactions – i.e. what drives them toward cooperation or opposition – is crucial.

In line with this argument, Anderl et al. (2021) hold that access to IOs alone is an incomplete predictor for the response of social movements (p. 1276). Following this logic, this thesis focuses on the reactions to and perceptions of IOs opening up by Vía Campesina. To explore this interaction, insights from international relations (IR) theory and social movement (SM) studies are integrated. The thesis is structured as a case study, where Vía Campesina is analysed in regard to its response to opportunities of access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the perceptions that shape these responses. Both are institutions that have provided spaces for non-state actors, and have been frequently addressed by Vía Campesina. As Vía Campesina founding members Desmarais & Nicholson (2013) put it: “Whenever and wherever international institutions like the World Trade Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization meet to discuss agricultural and food issues, Via Campesina is there.” (p. 4). But where is ‘there’?

1.1 Purpose and research question

While IR scholarship addressing the interaction between IOs and civil society to a large extent has focused on why, how, and to what extent IOs open up, there is less research on the reactions of civil society, including social movements, to this phenomenon (Anderl et al. 2021, p. 1273). Within global food governance, common repertoires among social movements have been protesting and demanding change from the ‘outside’. The opening up of IOs to civil society has created new spaces for social movements like Vía Campesina to gain influence in global food and agriculture governance. The purpose of this thesis is thus to increase the understanding of social movements’ reactions to IOs opening up by investigating how Vía Campesina has responded to IOs in global food governance opening up, in particular the WTO and the FAO. Specifically, the purpose is to examine how Vía Campesina perceives this opened up space and link this to their reactions. This will be done by answering the question: *How has Via Campesina responded to invitations from the WTO and the FAO to cooperate, and to what extent is this response affected by its perceptions of the two IOs?*

1.2 Delimitations

This thesis examines the perception of Vía Campesina to opened up spaces in the FAO and the WTO, and to what extent this has affected their response. Although Vía Campesina, the FAO, and the WTO continue to interact and influence global food policy today, the years 1993 to 2004 are chosen as the period of investigation. During this time span, Vía Campesina was established and began mobilising internationally (Martínez-Torres & Rosset 2010, p. 149), coinciding with a period when several IOs began to open up considerably (Tallberg et al. 2013). Thus, the thesis does not claim to examine any developments in perception over time, mainly due to the fact that Vía Campesina has continuously opposed the WTO and cooperated with the FAO through the years.

Vía Campesina is considered an interesting case study due to its focus on IOs in criticising neoliberalism, and since its internationalisation process took place at the same time as the increasing trend of IOs opening up (Martínez-Torres & Rosset 2010, p. 149). It is one of the most influential transnational movements addressing food and agriculture globally and an extraordinarily long-lived movement (Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 610-611), indicating its relevance and scope in the international arena and global food governance. Another significant characteristic of Vía Campesina is that they make great efforts to reach consensus (Martínez-Torres & Rosset 2010, p. 165-166), leading to the expectation that the movement ultimately will respond coherently. Thus, domestic context factors that may shape individual organisations' perception will not be the focus of this thesis, but rather the movement as a whole since this is how it appears in global politics.

The choice to analyse a single social movement is made with regard to the thesis' limited scope and the assessment that I would otherwise risk a superficial analysis. My aim is not to showcase differences between movements, but to provide an in-depth analysis of how perception may shape responses. The decision to limit the analysis to two cases of IO opening up was also made with regard to the limited scope of a bachelor's thesis, but to still be able to provide a more nuanced understanding of how responses to IOs opening up is shaped by perception, by comparison of the two IOs.

1.3 Disposition

This first chapter has briefly introduced the peasants' movement *Vía Campesina* that advocates for the incorporation of peasants' struggle and knowledge in global food politics, coinciding with a broader context of IOs opening up. Further, the purpose and research question of the thesis was presented, before an account of the delimitations that have been made within the scope of the thesis' research question. Chapter two covers the general context for the thesis, accounting for a background on *Vía Campesina* and global food governance. Chapter three provides insights into previous research on the topic of IOs opening up to civil society. The fourth chapter presents a theorising on perceptions of opportunities that will guide the empirical analysis. After that, chapter five presents the methodological approach, including a discussion on research strategy, case selection and the methods of data collection. Chapter six empirically explores how *Vía Campesina* has reacted to the opportunity of access to the WTO and FAO, combining empirical findings with the analytical framework. Finally, in chapter seven the analysis is summarised, emphasising the most important findings. These findings are also discussed in relation to the thesis' purpose and research question.

2 Setting the stage

This section provides an overview of *Vía Campesina*, including its origin, strategies and goals, as well as a (non-exhaustive) account of the institutional landscape of global food governance. This is done in order to provide an overview for those without previous knowledge of the movement, and to further contextualise it within the global food policy domain among other important actors, including the FAO and the WTO.

2.1 La *Vía Campesina*

Vía Campesina was officially established in 1993 in Mons, Belgium, as a response to the growing threats faced by small farmers and peasants in a time of increasing corporate globalisation and neoliberal agricultural and trade policy. The movement, or movement of movements as it is sometimes called, was initiated by a group of representatives from small farmers' organisations mainly from Latin America and Europe, who shared a similar analysis of the roots of peasant struggles and acknowledged the importance of not letting others speak on their behalf (*Vía Campesina* 1996c, p. 10; Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 615-616). Their proposal, food sovereignty, is defined as “people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems” (*Vía Campesina* 2003). The concept is promoted as an emancipatory alternative to neoliberal food policy, with agroecological production methods as a key component (Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 618).

Since its inception, *Vía Campesina* has grown to become one of the largest and most influential radical social movements in the world, not just by surviving for 30 years but also for firmly asserting their presence globally (Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 610-11; FAO 2013). Currently, the movement comprises 182 organisations in 81 countries from the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe, and claims to represent around 200 million small-scale food producers (*Vía Campesina* 2021, p. 2). The movement operates on a decentralised,

democratic model, with decision-making power vested in its member organisations. It is organised into regional and national networks, each of which is composed of member organisations representing small farmers, peasants, and rural workers. The International Coordinating Commission (ICC) is the movement's key decision-making body, with two representatives each from its seven regions in order to ensure that Vía Campesina's work and decisions are rooted in local struggles (Ibid, p. 3).

Vía Campesina's activities range from grassroots organising and advocacy to direct action and campaigning, where IOs such as the WTO and the FAO have been common targets (Desmarais & Nicholson 2013, p. 4). The movement also engages in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, and organises regular meetings and assemblies to share knowledge and build solidarity among its members. Their activities on the national level, which are highlighted as perhaps the most important (Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 618-619) are in no way to be forgotten on behalf of international strategies. However, these activities are not the focus of this thesis.

When it comes to participation in international forums, the movement has a clear view of under what conditions it will participate. In the "Position Paper: International Relations and Strategic Alliances", Vía Campesina (2000) declares that the movement:

must have autonomy to determine the space it will occupy with the objective of securing a large enough space to effectively influence the event. It is not acceptable to participate on the invitee's terms in ways which subsume or erase our identity and use our credibility without giving us space to articulate our own interests and select our own representatives. (Vía Campesina 2000, p. 2).

Here, Vía Campesina expresses its active assessment of encountered opportunities of access to IOs, where the movements' own agency and influence is stressed as critical when considering participating and collaborating with actors internationally. Thus, the responses toward IOs opening up are indeed expected to be strategically deliberated internally.

2.2 The institutional landscape of global food governance

The (mostly still) exclusive political decision-right of nation-states through their electives has, since the Cold War ended, seen an increase in non-state actors that join them in setting

the international political agenda and exerting power in decision-making processes (Bjork-James et al. 2022, p. 595). Global food governance is no exception in following this trend. Today, global food governance constitutes a complex system that involves various actors at different levels of government, IOs, civil society, and the private sector. Holt Giménez & Shattuck (2011) divide these actors into four trends: Two main trends, “neoliberal” and “reformist” and two “critical” trends, “progressive” and “radical”. While the authors aim to examine the convergence/divergence between the latter two, I will only use their framework as an informative overview of the many different actors involved in global food governance.

The Neoliberal trend is built on economic liberalism and market-driven global trade. It includes a wide variety of actors such as the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF, along with corporate actors such as Monsanto (Holt Giménez & Shattuck 2011, p. 115). The Reformist trend includes actors that seek to mitigate social and ecological effects of the current food system, albeit within the domain of neoliberal food politics. These are, e.g., the UN, the FAO, the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) (now liquidated), and Oxfam-America (Ibid, p. 121-122).

Actors placed within the Progressive trend comprise, among others, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the Community Food Security Movement, and food and justice movements, many of which are mainly located in the Global North. Most of these actors are also primarily active at local-national levels (Holt Giménez & Shattuck 2011, p. 125). The organisations and movements of the Radical trend pursue structural changes of food and agriculture production, and mostly originate from agricultural workers in the Global South. These include Vía Campesina, ROPPA, the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty (IPC), and the World March of Women (Ibid, p. 117; 128-129).

Many argue that the private sector, including agribusinesses, food processing companies, and retailers, play an increasingly prominent role in the food system – a ‘corporate food regime’ (Holt Giménez & Shattuck 2011) or a ‘corporate capture’ of global food supply chains (McKeon 2021). Although agribusinesses are key players in global food governance, and indeed a main locus for opposition from civil society actors, the focus in this thesis is on institutions dealing with food issues globally and that have opened up for the inclusion of civil society. As also mentioned in the introductory chapter, the WTO and the FAO constitute two important institutions within global food governance that fulfil these criteria, and are also frequently addressed by Vía Campesina. Thus, I argue that it is interesting to explore in more

detail how *Vía Campesina* relates to the WTO and the FAO respectively, as an instance of the IO–social movement interactions in this global policy domain.

3 Previous research

Before turning to theoretical and methodological discussions, I will situate my analysis within literature on the thesis' areas of coverage. Since the purpose is to analyse Via Campesina's perception of and reactions to IOs opening up, previous research on IO–civil society interactions will be considered. Moreover, Vía Campesina will be shortly discussed with regard to IO interaction.

Considering IO opening up as a relatively new trend in world politics, IO–non-state actor interaction has been increasingly recognized by scholars in the last decades. Within IR research, focus tends to be on explanations as to why, how, and to what extent IOs open up. For instance, Tallberg et. al. (2013, p. 23) provide a widely recognized contribution to this debate, arguing that this trend follows three theoretical explanations: functional demand for services and expertise, the need for legitimation in the face of popular opposition, and the increasing institutionalisation of a participatory democratic governance norm. While this research provides important insights into IO opening up, non-state actors' access to global policy-making, and potential impacts on political outcomes, it leaves little room for these actors' own assessments on the quality of these opened up spaces.

Related to the trend of opening up, it has been observed that several civil society actors choose not to cooperate with IOs. Dellmuth & Tallberg (2017) propose inside–outside strategies to explain NGO reactions to IO access, where more radical groups protest on the 'outside', and rely on 'inside' pressure from individuals or groups ideologically closer to the IO, but within the same NGO (p. 17). However, these coalitions do not fully explain cooperation in all cases, especially when complete rejection occurs. Further, those who do cooperate have been analysed with regard to risks of co-optation. Johnson (2016) argues that civil society organisations (CSOs) that share similar values and financing sources with IOs are more likely to be co-opted (p. 757), but leaves little room for CSOs' own assessment of this risk and how this could potentially influence interaction. Neither this conclusion can be generally applicable to all civil society actors, and further highlights the tendency of IR research to equate CSOs with NGOs.

According to Uhlin & Kalm (2015), the type of actor involved will crucially affect IO–civil society interaction, highlighting the need to more explicitly distinguish between specific civil society actors. By nature of their organisational forms and oftentimes oppositional repertoires, social movements’ interactions with IOs can only partially be explained by theorised CSO–IO interactions. This thesis therefore seeks to expand the current knowledge on IO–civil society relations by focusing specifically on social movements, and their perceptions of IOs opening up.

Turning instead to social movement (SM) studies, the interactions of social movements with institutions such as IOs have long been analysed through the political opportunity structure (POS) approach (Tilly 1978). Suggesting that specific political contexts and conditions create opportunities or constraints for social movements, an open political opportunity structure provides legal and institutional channels for social movements to pursue their goals. In contrast, a closed political opportunity structure refers to a political environment that is more restrictive, such as a lack of institutional access or repression by authorities (Tilly & Tarrow 2007).

Since its proposal, the POS approach has been criticised for being too static by downplaying the agency of movements (Jasper 2012). Another critique concerns the idea of an objectively open or closed political opportunity structure, suggesting instead that the decision to welcome an open opportunity for access is affected by the movements’ assessment of the intentions of their opponents. Following this logic, Giugni (2009) argues that the perception of opportunities are crucial in shaping the repertoires of protest (p. 364-365). In other words, it is how a movement *perceives* the opportunity in question rather than the opportunity per se that determines whether it will be seized. This assumption is adopted as a premise for the analysis, and developed in the theory-section.

Regarding social movements’ perceptions of IOs opening up, there is existing research where Anderl et. al. (2021) examine four groups in the transnational Global Justice Movement (GJM), two based in the UK and two in Indonesia. The authors’ main argument is that reactions vary significantly based on how activists perceive the nature of the opening up, and distinguish between the perception of ‘tactical’ (ad hoc) or ‘strategic’ (long-term) opening up as crucial for the reactions in producing disruptive or cooperative repertoires (Ibid, p. 1278-1279). Perception is also linked to factors such as the movements’ domestic history of institutional interaction and ideological differences, which are compared through intra- and inter-country comparisons (Ibid, p. 1294-1295). One of the four groups analysed by Anderl et al. (2021) is SPI, an Indonesian peasant union that is part of *Vía Campesina*. The

authors focus on domestic conditions and link these to reactions to opening up, concluding that a repressive national context, mainly through former president Suharto's regime, made the organisation sceptical of cooperation with state institutions and most IOs, such as the IMF, WTO, and World Bank, with FAO as only exception (Anderl et al. 2021, p. 1294). I build on this research by instead delving deeper in the transnational movement Vía Campesina and its IO strategizing, with the insight that domestic contexts vary significantly between Vía Campesina's members yet they act as one entity internationally. Thus, I will focus on Vía Campesina's collective analysis when considering reactions to opening up.

Interactions between Vía Campesina and IOs are frequently addressed both by scholars and by Vía Campesina itself, in articles, statements and the like. However, to my knowledge there are no concrete attempts to investigate the factors behind (non)cooperation in much detail. Regarding the WTO, cooperation generally seems to be deemed impossible since La Vía Campesina was founded in opposition to the neoliberalisation of global food policy, implying ideological differences as important in shaping repertoires (see e.g. Larking 2017, p. 17). Regarding the FAO, it is more unclear as to why cooperation was accepted since no previous research on the topic has been found. Focusing on these inconclusions, I draw on Anderl et al. (2021) by using the distinction between perceptions of tactical and strategic opening up as one factor potentially affecting reactions. This discussion will prove as the point of departure for examining the case of Vía Campesina and IOs operating in global food governance.

In sum, research on civil society's reactions toward opening up have premiered NGOs as analytical objects. Since social movements constitute an important and vocal part of civil society, I aim to build upon and nuance the knowledge about social movement's perception of opening up as one important factor explaining IO–social movement (non-)cooperation by applying it to the case of Vía Campesina. Further, I argue that an understanding of how social movements perceive and assess opportunities is relevant for IOs that do open up, and may provide an awareness of what qualities drive social movements towards continued opposition or cooperation. It also, as mentioned as a common critique directed at the POS approach, helps bring attention to the movement's own agency.

4 Theoretical and analytical framework

This thesis is situated at the intersection of IR scholarship and SM studies. In this section, a theoretical account on perceptions of opportunities within social movements, elaborated on by Anderl et al. (2021), will be presented. It should be noted here that my focus on the theorisation of perceptions is not made to obscure other factors that influence responses to IOs opening up, but rather the opposite. The theoretical background accounted for is chosen based on the argument that perception is an underlooked factor that may prove useful in explaining IO-social movements interactions, as put forth by Anderl et al. (2021). Social movements unite in the fact that they often take clear stances on certain issues, hence why perceptions of opportunities are argued to be one reason for the behaviour of them in need of further investigation. This is also true for Vía Campesina, who, as mentioned in section 2.1, is understood as motivating responses to opened up spaces through a thorough analysis of the assessed opportunities for influence. Thus, perception can be expected to be a prominent factor in this particular case, and proves as one motive for the use of the distinction provided by Anderl et al. (2021).

4.1 Perceptions of opportunities within social movements

Drawing on Anderl et al. (2021), I distinguish between the perception of *tactical* versus *strategic* opening up, stressing the perceived quality of opening up. This distinction builds on Fox (2015), who reviews social accountability initiatives by dividing them into tactical and strategic approaches. Tactical, in this sense, refers to approaches which assume that simply providing access to information is sufficient in enabling citizens to influence public sector performance. In contrast, strategic approaches include not only access to information, but also enabling collective action for accountability and improving state capacity to respond to

citizens' demands, contributing to improved public sector performance (Fox 2015, p. 346). Connecting to IO–civil society interactions, tactical opening up are ad hoc measures taken to regain contested legitimacy, but without any identifiable policy impact. Thus, it may also be linked to co-optation. Strategic opening up, on the other hand, is aimed at long-term institutional learning, where perspectives of movements are respected and integrated into policy-making processes (Anderl et al. 2021, pp. 1276, 1278).

4.2 Operationalisation

In order to systematically address this thesis' research question, I adopt the framework developed by Anderl et. al (2021) on 'tactical' and 'strategic' opening up. The definitions of tactical and strategic opening up were presented in the section above, but relevant for this thesis is whether they are *perceived* as tactical or strategic since this is expected to affect reactions to these spaces. Hence, in order to connect it to social movement's perceptions they need to be operationalised for connecting the theory with the empirical research, and to prove useful in answering the research question. The two specific ways of opening up have thus been correlated with conceptual expectations on the response of social movements that would be observable. When the nature of opening up is perceived as 'tactical', social movements are expected to neglect the possibility for cooperation, and potentially radicalise their repertoire and objectives, turning to more disruptive actions. When an opportunity is perceived as 'strategic', in contrast, social movements are expected to adopt more cooperative repertoires and are more likely to accept the possibility to participate (Anderl et al. p. 1279).

The perceptions of opportunities for access are not necessarily mutually exclusive and the boundaries between them might be difficult to determine, leading to these 'expectations' potentially not being true in each and every case. As is also stressed by Anderl et. al., the experience of interactions with IOs may cause social movements to change their perception over time (2021, p. 1295). Hence, this set of perceptions should be viewed as a *conceptual tool* that structures the empirical analysis rather than a clear-cut reflection of reality, and rather aids in mediating on what grounds conclusions are drawn (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 39).

5 Method and material

After having depicted the framework that will guide the analysis in the case study, I now turn to a description of the qualitative case study method and a motivation of the material used to answer the research question.

5.1 Research design

To answer the research question I will conduct a qualitative case study where I investigate and analyse Vía Campesina with regard to its reactions to opportunities of access within the WTO and the FAO. Case studies are useful for the investigation of actors' considerations and decisions and limit the risk of false determination (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 13). These are important aspects with regard to this thesis' purpose and research question, and a case study is therefore argued to be a suitable choice.

Further, the qualitative case study approach enables for an in-depth investigation and analysis of the chosen case, providing detailed elaborations of the phenomenon in question (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 13). This attention to detail is an important advantage for the elaboration of the system of reaction by Vía Campesina to the opening up of WTO and FAO, and for the possibility to depict a representative picture of how Vía Campesina relates to the two IOs. In order to provide a scientifically relevant "description", it is further necessary to examine the phenomenon in question from the outset of a defined conceptual framework where only certain aspects of the case are relevant (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 24, 98). In this thesis, the set of perceptions presented in section 4.2 accounts for a systematic analysis, limiting the risk of producing a mere historiography.

Additionally, I turn toward the method of structured, focused comparison developed by George et al. (1971; 1994) as a tool to structure my analysis, since it is a straightforward way to conduct case studies (Drozdova & Gaubatz 2009, p. 5-6). The main principle of

structured-focused comparison is the usage of theory to explicitly identify the outcome variable of significance along with causal factors. These variables should be consistently defined and measured across deliberately selected cases (Ibid, p. 5). In this thesis, a theorisation on perceptions of opportunities is used to nuance the academic debate on what factors affect responses toward IOs opening up. However, I do not claim that perception is the *only* factor influencing reactions. Accordingly, I will be open to include other factors than perception in the analysis, to the extent that they appear in the empirical data. The openness to new insights is also one strength of the qualitative case study (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 10), and one purpose with the method of structured, focused comparison (George 2019), which may generate new understandings of IO–social movement interaction. Structuring the analysis of each case in the same way enables a systematic inquiry, where observations can be compared to each other and to theory.

Important to note is that case studies are limited in their capabilities of developing empirical generalisations (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 53). Vía Campesina is indeed a unique entity, and its reactions to the WTO and the FAO opening up as well. However, common denominators with this case and others still imply some possibilities for theoretical generalisability (Ibid, p. 48): my “unique” case constitutes a case of the theoretical population of ‘social movement’s reactions to IOs opening up’. Furthermore, by connecting to theory on perceptions, the results – which are also important in their own right – can be compared to previous results, in order to nuance the understanding of this thesis’ individual case and the theoretical population in general (Ibid, p. 48).

5.2 Case selection

The WTO and the FAO are chosen as cases since these are IOs that have, as highlighted in the introductory chapter, been frequently addressed by Vía Campesina ever since the movement’s inception. They were also identified as most frequently mentioned, both after consulting material on the movements webpage as well as scholarly and popular articles on the movement’s international activities and interaction with IOs. Further, the discussion in section 2.2 identified the WTO and the FAO as central actors in global food governance while also accounting for Vía Campesina’s differing strategies regarding the two IOs, which

is argued to provide greater opportunities for a broader theoretical discussion on Vía Campesina's perception of these IOs opening up.

5.3 Material and methods of data collection

The material utilised for the analysis consists of three sets of sources: Primary sources, secondary sources, and interviews with representatives of Vía Campesina and one transnational agrarian movements' scholar. Primary sources include official documents and statements by Vía Campesina. Secondary sources refer to existing scholarship regarding Vía Campesina and its relation to IOs, with specific focus on the opening up of WTO and FAO. Additionally, four interviews were conducted and will be discussed further below.

The use and triangulation of multiple sources and data-gathering procedures allows for a both broad and detailed overview while not relying on a single set of sources, and is a common feature of case study research (Snow 2013, p. 2). Since the aim of the thesis comprises a subjective element in the form of Vía Campesina's *perception* of the opening up of the WTO and the FAO, interviews with (former) representatives as well as the use of the movements' own documents and archives are integral for gaining an understanding of the movements' reactions. Moreover, discrepancies and/or accordances within the material will further contribute to deepening the understanding of Vía Campesina and its perception and reaction to the opening up of IOs.

Two important criteria for data collection are time and authenticity (Teorell & Svensson 2016, p. 104). Primary and secondary sources have been chosen with regard to the former, and all three types of data adhere to the latter. However, some of the authors of the 'secondary sources' are current or former members of Vía Campesina which could be argued to not fulfil the data collection criteria of tendency (Ibid, p. 106). In this case, it is however argued to be an advantage with reference to the thesis' purpose and the discussion in the paragraph above. The secondary sources are thus partly used to complement the primary sources and reduce bias linked to retrospective views in the interviews, and partly as reflective of members' perception of opportunities of access. Since the purpose is to examine how the movement perceives opportunities of access, no empirical data was gathered from

neither the WTO nor the FAO as to their sincerity of opening up, since this is simply out of the thesis' scope.

The interviews were held from February to May 2023 on Zoom (see Appendix for a list of conducted interviews). The selection of interviewees was based on their involvement in Vía Campesina: That they had been around since its inception in 1993 and/or had first-hand experience from internal deliberations and discussions regarding WTO and FAO. Given the limited scope of the thesis, the fact that the movement is spread around the world, and first and foremost that most of Vía Campesina's members are small-scale food producers under enormous workloads (which, naturally, was respected), there were limited possibilities for conducting interviews in large quantities. Since it lies outside of the thesis' scope to investigate internal differences in much detail, a decision was therefore made to combine fewer interviews with both first and secondary sources where Vía Campesina as a whole or (former) members were the authors, to still be able to claim the aim to account for *perception*.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with questions centred around specific themes (see Appendix for a complete list). This was considered particularly suitable since it provides flexibility and enables the exploration of the reasoning behind certain perceptions and responses, as well as the possibility of requesting clarification (Barribal-While 1994, p. 329), which is difficult with other types of data. Therefore, interviews were considered an important advantage for developing an understanding of perceptions and responses, albeit with the acknowledgement that they don't provide a sufficient basis for drawing conclusions alone. Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were informed that they would be part of a study, that participation is fully optional, and that the interview would be recorded for transcription purposes only. This information was also reiterated in the beginning of each interview, providing informed consent and making sure that the interviewees were ethically treated.

6 Empirical findings and analysis

In this section, the empirical findings will be presented and analysed. The section is divided into three parts. Firstly, the case of Vía Campesina–WTO non-cooperation, and secondly, the case of Vía Campesina–FAO cooperation. Both cases will be discussed following the same structure: The general context by the time opening up occurred; Vía Campesina’s interaction with and reaction to opportunities of access to each organisation; and a summary of the main findings, including some reflectionate remarks on (non-)cooperation. This division is made to provide greater possibilities for comparison between the two cases, as according to the method of structured, focused comparison, and to ease the reading. Thirdly, the cases will be compared and analysed with regard to the analytical framework presented in section 4.2, connecting the cases to ‘tactical’ vs. ‘strategic’ opening up and expected reactions.

6.1 La Vía Campesina and the World Trade Organization

6.1.1 Context

As already discussed in section 2.1, Vía Campesina grew out of the experienced increasing struggle and inequality resulting from neoliberal policies and a determination to be included in agricultural policy development, along with the insight that this would only be possible by working together in the Global North and South (Desmarais 2003, p. 2-3). At Mons in 1993, it was understood that the GATT negotiations on agriculture, along with the ongoing creation of the WTO (then formally established in 1995) would lay the ground for the almost complete liberalisation of agricultural goods, something Vía Campesina was in clear and vocal opposition to (Ibid, p. 3). Further, the WTO was identified as a prominent actor in the corporate food system, with close links to agribusinesses which had been identified as main

opponents in *Vía Campesina*'s strive for food sovereignty (McMichael 2004, p. 4). Nonetheless, the WTOs Ministerial Meetings in the 1990s and 2000s offered opportunities for civil society to engage, *Vía Campesina* included.

6.1.2 Instances of interaction and reaction to opening up

When faced with the opportunity to gain access to the WTO, shortly after the movements' formation in 1993, *Vía Campesina*'s position was not immediately gathered behind. Some of its constituent organisations advocated for the dismantling of the WTO, while others believed that an international trade regulatory framework was necessary to counter the imbalanced power dynamics codified in trade agreements like NAFTA. Still others alleged that the WTO could be reformed to comply with human rights conventions (Desmarais 2003, p. 22). Before being able to express a collective position, *Vía Campesina* spent a lot of its time deliberating common positions and strategies, placing large emphasis on internal coherence (Desmarais 2010, p. 144). Ultimately, the position of *Vía Campesina* was a compromise: instead of calling for a complete abolishment of the WTO, the movement demanded a curtailment of its authority by excluding agriculture from its jurisdiction (Ibid, pp. 22-23). The shared analysis was that food sovereignty was not compatible with the WTO, and consequently *Vía Campesina*'s strategy was complete disengagement with an active 'outside' resistance towards the WTO (Interview 4, Nicholson 2006 p. 2).

In 1999, at the WTO's Third Ministerial Conference in Seattle, *Vía Campesina* joined the peaceful protestors in the streets of Seattle. By now, they had developed a firm belief that the WTO lacked the ability to bring about any meaningful reform (*Vía Campesina* 1999). The conference itself also proved to be a failure: The Millennium Round was failed to launch, leading the media to describe the meeting as a fiasco, the WTO as losing credibility, and the process itself as "unwieldy" and "arcane" (The Economist 1999, p. 17). For many of the movements opposed to the WTO, this blow to its legitimacy was seen as a significant achievement, and led to the organisation being forced to acknowledge the mounting dissent by vocal and growing movements (Desmarais 2003, p. 11).

In July 2001, the WTO organised an NGO Symposium to open space and dialogue with CSOs, following commitments made in Seattle for greater democracy and transparency.

Despite these commitments, however, many CSOs were dissatisfied with the lack of measurable reform and the WTO's continued secretive and undemocratic practices (Kwa 2003 pp. 18-20). The WTO was also disregarding demands of countries in the Global South, meaning that support from 1500 organisations from 89 countries were ignored. Instead, powerful actors within the WTO pushed for a new extensive round in Doha, Qatar, where there would be few possibilities for CSOs to demonstrate. Consequently, the symposium was broadly viewed as a mere PR stunt, with no possibility of reform inside the WTO (Desmarais 2003, pp. 12; 29-30). This view was also held by Vía Campesina, who argued that the main reason for Vía Campesina to be invited was that they were one of the key movements opposed to WTO's Agreement on Agriculture. Thus, the WTO was entirely seen as trying to legitimise itself by meeting with civil society (Interview 2, 4). Vía Campesina further recognized that cooperating with the WTO could be exploited to neutralise opposition, leading to the watering down or suppression of their dissenting views (Desmarais 2003, p. 25).

The resistance and outright despair among farmers around the world to the agricultural policies of the WTO was perhaps pushed to its peak in 2003, during a WTO forum in Cancún. There, a South Korean peasant and member of Vía Campesina committed suicide while holding the sign "The WTO kills farmers" (Tinti 2019). As Nicholson (2006), founding member of Vía Campesina, reflects: "That sacrifice was an expression of what all peasants in the world suffer." (Nicholson (2006) in Desmarais n.d., p. 3). This perception, of the WTO as killers, is a clear representation of the view of the WTO as the enemy, making cooperation unthinkable.

6.1.3 Retrospective review

Regarding cooperation with the WTO, the general position can essentially be summarised in terms of a non-decision: The founding of Vía Campesina was more or less a reaction to the occurring free trade opening, which in turn made non-engagement with the WTO somewhat overdetermined (Interview 2, 3, 4). Vía Campesina's reaction was thus largely informed by its collective analysis of the WTO (and previously the GATT) as the source to peasants' struggles world wide, with neoliberal policy standing in stark contradiction to food

sovereignty. As mentioned in the previous section, some internal differences initially emerged when Via Campesina faced the opportunity of access to the WTO. Nonetheless, these were quickly consulted on and a joint stance was taken in opposition to potential cooperation.

Further, Via Campesina had realised early on that the WTO was not an organisation that could be reformed and that it would be wasting its time trying to engage in negotiations with that institution. Through interactions it had become more clear that the WTO was not a place where Via Campesina would gain any power, so the best strategy then was disengagement (Interview 4). The WTO's opening up was instead perceived as purely symbolic with no real space for civil society to press their demands, supported by experiences of the WTO process as being opaque and undemocratic (Desmarais 2003, p. 21; Interview 2). Through the years, the decision to decline participating within the WTO has not been reassessed, but rather remained a steady no (Interview 1, 2, 4).

6.2 La Vía Campesina and the Food and Agriculture Organization

6.2.1 Context

In 1996, during their II International Conference in Tlaxcala, Mexico, Vía Campesina identifies their own fundamental role as carers of nature and life, and the 'peasant model' that they must present and defend to international bodies (Vía Campesina 1996c, p. 10). Further, the newly established WTO was seen as becoming increasingly powerful on behalf of the FAO, which instead was viewed as losing some of its influence and power in the global food policy debate (Interview 4). This international context figured as a threat to Vía Campesina, who opposed the neoliberalisation of agriculture but was acutely aware of the importance of being represented internationally. At the same time, cooperation with IOs was a contentious question among Vía Campesina's member organisations (Borras & Franco 2009, p. 22).

6.2.2 Instances of interaction and reaction to opening up

In line with *Vía Campesina*'s self-assigned role as defenders of nature and peasant life, delegates of the II International Conference decided that *Vía Campesina* should be represented at the upcoming World Food Summit in Rome, in 1996 convened by the FAO, based on the realisation that malnutrition and food shortages won't be effectively dealt with without those who grow food (*Vía Campesina* 1996a). The decision to participate within the FAO was also based on the perceived power imbalance between IOs active in global food governance, and thus in part made in a strategic effort to counteract this, to help strengthen the FAO in the international realm (Interview 4; Desmarais 2003, p. 21). Further, Desmarais (2003) highlights that it is important to note that the focus on opening deliberative spaces through the FAO also meant less resources to participate in other forums (p. 21).

The 1996 Rome Summit spurred communication between *Vía Campesina* and other agricultural transformation movements, resulting in the formation of the IPC in 2000 (Dunford 2015, p. 153). Although food security and the right to food were the primary topics in the IPC at first, the concept of food sovereignty gained traction thanks to *Vía Campesina*, and was introduced to the UN through discussion in the FAO (IPC 2023; Anderl et al. 2021, p. 1285). The FAO went on to agree to work with the IPC as a civil society focal point, and set up a formal partnership in 2003 (IPC 2023). For *Vía Campesina*, this had the potential of becoming a substantial platform to press their demands. The one country-one vote along with its universal membership had led the FAO to be considered more hopeful than other institutions, such as the WTO and other financial institutions which were considered undemocratic (McKeon 2015, p. 244; *Vía Campesina* 1999).

Within *Vía Campesina*, there was nonetheless a debate whether to reject all UN operations as 'WTO-tainted' or try to influence other institutions, but ultimately no decision was made to abandon the FAO. While *Vía Campesina* demanded agriculture to be taken out of the WTO, the FAO was perceived differently with the assessment that it was relatively more open to critical voices (Desmarais 2003, p. 21). In the "*Vía Campesina* Seattle Declaration", the view pushed forward was that equitable and socially responsible trade regulations for agriculture and food should be developed, and would best be implemented through a transparent and democratically governed UN system (*Vía Campesina* 1999). However, the decision to agree to cooperate with the FAO was still somewhat disputed within *Vía Campesina*: by some, such as the Filipino member movement KMP, the 'peasant rights

frame' was regarded neoliberal and Western (Borras & Franco 2009, p. 22). After careful consideration and debate consensus was reached to engage with the FAO, specifically through the IPC, and then, later, the CFS which is based in the FAO's headquarters in Rome (Interview 4; CFS 2015). Hence, after internal deliberations Vía Campesina decided to set up "critical but collaborative relationships with some groups within the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN" (Borras 2008, p. 286).

Other tense internal discussions were about topics such as the amount of time, energy, and human resources that would be put into being involved with the FAO, with regard to the rest of the movement's work on other levels of influence (Interview 4). However, one previous staff member of Vía Campesina's international secretariat hold that the different poles of opinion within Vía Campesina historically has been possible to come around due to the movement being so large: despite some groups being more critical of cooperation with IOs, directing resources towards the FAO did not necessarily mean less work on national and local levels (Interview 1).

6.2.3 Retrospective review

The decision to cooperate with the FAO, despite a sceptical view towards IO-cooperation among many members, was in large part taken based on the assessment that Vía Campesina needed to be represented internationally in negotiations on agriculture policies, especially in the context of an increasingly influential WTO. Through the IPC, Vía Campesina was able to influence the FAO, who a few years later also engaged in a complete reform process of the CFS, providing a valuable space and voice to CSOs. These opportunities showed that there were real possibilities for influence within the FAO, and the IO was perceived as an institution where Vía Campesina could carve out a space (Interview 4).

Some critique has been directed towards the FAO, however. Despite Vía Campesina having a formal agreement to cooperate with the FAO, it entails no commitment from the FAO to actually implement any demands put forth (Interview 1). The same goes for the IPC's civil society dialogue with the FAO: Neither here is civil society given more than a voice – votes and decisions are still up to governments, meaning that much of the radical aspects of the language is reduced when the IPC's position papers are discussed by member states,

leaving CSOs, including Vía Campesina, with fewer gains than hoped for (Interview 4). Another problematisation is the FAO's adoption of the phrase food sovereignty, mainly with regard to its actual impact which so far has been unclear – yet, the official adoption of the concept still marked an important victory in the peasants' struggle and provided hope for future cooperation (Interview 1, 2). Pressure from Vía Campesina, among other civil society actors, can further be traced to some changes in the issues addressed by the FAO, such as the current agroecology debate in the FAO (Interview 1; Nicholson & Borras 2023, p. 611). The “critical but collaborative relationship”, as described by Borras (2008), along with the combination of victories and disappointments highlighted above, has led the decision regarding cooperation with the FAO to be constantly reassessed, attentively reviewing and reacting to developments within the FAO that might lead to a decrease in influence and scope for Vía Campesina (Interview 4).

6.3 Comparing the cases

After having explored the two cases separately, different qualities of the two IOs have come up as influencing the movement's different responses, with some possibly working in conjunction to produce certain repertoires. While Vía Campesina's response to the opening up of the WTO was disengagement, it reacted to institutional opportunities within the FAO by cooperation. These diverging qualities, potentially influencing reactions, will now be discussed by comparing the cases and Vía Campesina's specific responses to each opening up.

The discussion on opportunities for access to the WTO and the FAO and the responses of Vía Campesina are well summarised by one of the interviewees: “It is important to distinguish between two kinds of international organisations.” (Interview 1). These are the ones like the WTO, which Vía Campesina perceives as undemocratic and opposed to the peasantry, resulting in only protest and opposition, and those organisations that are at least theoretically considered democratic with meaningful spaces for critical voices, mainly the FAO (Interview 1). This distinction has been observed in previous sections, and identified as affecting Vía Campesina's reactions. Another differentiation made is between those that only open up to regain legitimacy, such as the WTO, and others that make efforts to include on the

ground perspectives and provide opportunities to meet with other movements and organisations, such as the FAO (Interview 2). This perception of opening up as a necessary legitimisation attempt, or to actually include perspectives and knowledge of civil society through institutional learning and reform could also be witnessed in the case studies.

Linking the WTO's attempts at providing spaces for civil society to the analytical framework, it was clear to Vía Campesina that they opened up tactically: Vía Campesina clearly identified the WTO's attempts to include civil society as merely a cry for legitimacy. This became even clearer when the very tactics that spurred the NGO symposium continuously shaped the IO's practices. Further, participating in the WTO process was seen as potentially risking co-optation. However, there was within Vía Campesina already from the outset a very clear analysis linking the WTO to peasant struggles that from the very beginning led to the movement's formation, and it detested the WTO accordingly. The ideological differences – the WTO's neoliberal and trade-oriented food policy was fundamentally at odds with Vía Campesina's concept of food sovereignty – was also part of the movement's initial internal deliberations. These are factors that imply that the perception of 'tactical' may have been secondary, but nonetheless relevant. A frequent claim by the movement, and as also highlighted in section 2.1, is that decisions to cooperate are to a large extent based on whether a sufficient space is provided for the movement to articulate its demands. Thus, the opening up of the WTO could potentially have worked to reinforce the position that Vía Campesina refused to cooperate: it confirmed that there would be no real space for Vía Campesina there.

Regarding the FAO, there were, and judging by some claims by interviewees, *are*, some groups sceptical towards cooperation with IOs, both in general and with the FAO specifically. However, Vía Campesina was convinced of the need to represent themselves internationally, and in FAO it was felt that there could be opportunities for the movement to be respected and in fact influence policy outcomes. As one interviewee openly reflects on the FAO: "it's not anywhere near perfect, but at least there is the possibility to change" (Interview 4), indicating a perception of the FAO as having opened up strategically. Through the IPC, and then later the CFS, Vía Campesina could engage in long-term dialogue and even influence fundamental discussion within the FAO, such as the adoption of the concept of food sovereignty and later agroecology. It also gained first-hand insights into institutional developments and reformations. During the years, the FAO transitioned towards a "human rights from below" approach (Claeys 2019), where institutional spaces were created based on the feedback and requirements of farmers. By engaging with the FAO, which was more supportive of farmers

than the WTO, Vía Campesina also saw the potential to affect the balance of power between the FAO and other institutions such as the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank (Desmarais 2003, p. 21; Interview 4). This strategizing indicates that decisions towards (non-)cooperation are not made in a vacuum but rather is a well thought through process taking many aspects into account, not just regarding their own eventual power in opened up IOs, but also regarding power structures in the global food policy domain.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate *Vía Campesina*'s perception of opportunities of access to the WTO and the FAO, and link this to their decision to cooperate or not. This has been done by analysing *Vía Campesina*'s interaction with the two IOs with a focus on how the movement has responded to offers to cooperate, based on the distinction developed by Anderl et al. (2021) between 'tactical' and 'strategic' opening up, in turn derived from Fox (2015) and critique of the POS approach. By conducting a case study containing a variety of sources, differences in perceptions and responses to opening up has been identified and analysed.

Frequently recurring, both in *Vía Campesina*'s own documents, scholarly articles and in the conducted interviews, has been the distinction made between two different types of IOs: Those viewed as undemocratic and those that are "theoretically" democratic. The perception of the WTO as unable to adhere to civil society demands and, basically, inherently evil due to market liberalizations policies, led *Vía Campesina* to decline cooperation and stick to opposition from the 'outside' – protesting, marching etc. Cooperating with the WTO was considered to entail risks of co-optation and legitimising the institution, and the opening up for civil society participation itself was seen as a "fire extinguisher": To suppress opposition voiced by civil society actors, but without any measurable reform or institutional learning. In contrast, the opening up of the FAO was perceived as strategic and earned cooperation, with regard to the institutional opportunity it implied. The IPC proved as a substantial platform for *Vía Campesina* to press and advance their demands, which then gained some traction within the FAO, indicating the sincerity in opening up.

When consulting the empirical data, however, other factors potentially influencing *Vía Campesina*'s behaviour were also found. One prominent reason for non-engagement with the WTO was the inherent contradictions between food sovereignty and the policy put forth by the WTO, making cooperation unthinkable, especially when taking into account the effects of WTO policy on small-scale food producers around the world. Ideological differences could thus be argued to carry significant explanatory potential in this case. As accounted for in the

previous section, however, the perception of the WTO's opening up was nevertheless significant in reinforcing the view of WTO as unable of reform. Another factor potentially impairing Vía Campesina's possibilities to participate – i.e. direct energy and capacities, which is argued as necessary to make a meaningful impact – is resources, both human and monetary, which could be linked to the specific organisational forms of social movements in general. However, a lack of resources did not to a large extent seem to affect the possibilities for engaging in the FAO. Whether it meant reduced possibilities to engage in many international forums is however left unsaid, in part since my analysis only takes into account two IOs. The decision to lend resources towards participation within the FAO through the IPC, however, was also a highly strategic one. In its collective analysis, Vía Campesina identified the international context (at the time of my analysis) as skewed to financial institutions' advantage, including the WTO, on behalf of the FAO. By cooperating with the FAO, Vía Campesina thus saw itself as potentially helping in remedying international power imbalances. These are not necessarily competing, but complementing factors that complicate the understanding of Vía Campesina's responses to opening up.

My analysis further highlights the significant role of activists' evaluations of institutional openings in shaping IO-civil society relations. This insight contributes to the existing IR literature on interactions between IOs and civil society, which has often overlooked social movements and their perceptions of opening up. Vía Campesina takes great care to determine if an offer to cooperate is genuine and strategic, or a mere tactic to deflect their criticism. This case study indicates that in the former scenario, the movement would shift from protest to cooperation, while in the latter, they would stick to and intensify their actions in response to the offer of access, albeit after already stating its resistance toward the WTO. Thus, opening up itself is not considered a reliable predictor of Vía Campesina's response. This emphasises that the possibility of co-optation – which has been discussed as one reason to not cooperate, but also as one concern of Vía Campesina regarding participating with the WTO – may influence movements' reactions. I.e., the perception of institutional opening up as a co-optation or legitimisation tactic can affect movements' reactions rather than its objective existence.

Based on the theoretical framework and its application to the two cases, it can be concluded that while Vía Campesina accepted the offer to cooperate with the FAO, it chose to continue to oppose the WTO despite opportunities of access. Further, these different responses can be argued to, to a not insignificant extent, have been influenced by Vía Campesina's perception of the sincerity of these institutional opportunities. The analysis has

shown that the theoretical distinction between ‘tactical’ and ‘strategic’ opening up are clearly found in *Vía Campesina*’s consultations whether to cooperate or not, and it can thus further be concluded that the distinction made by Anderl et al. (2021) can be applied also in the case of *Vía Campesina*. However, it is important to stress that the theoretical framework utilised in this thesis does not sufficiently explain *Vía Campesina*’s reactions to opening up, but work in conjunction with or as complementing other factors, such as ideological differences and strategizing on power imbalances, that also help shape reactions. Thus, a topic for future research could be to investigate the interlinkage of several factors explaining social movements’ reactions to IOs opening up.

By focusing the analysis on the *perception* of *Vía Campesina* and its constituency, I have tried to underline the importance of studying *Vía Campesina*, and social movements in general, as a subject rather than an object. This has been done against the backdrop of the identified critique issued by scholars on the theoretical and explanatory shortcomings by analytically downplaying social movements’ own agency.

Since emphasis has been put on social movements as a distinct set of actors trying to influence global politics, there are implications for the possibility of drawing general conclusions. First and foremost, my analysis, when compared to the results of Anderl et al. (2021), shows that *Vía Campesina* also premieres strategic institutional opportunities on behalf of tactical ones – at least in the case of the FAO and the WTO. Further, my analysis has shown that the framework – also at least in my case – can be applied to a transnational movement. Further inquiry would however be necessary to be able to draw general conclusions, both on more IOs that *Vía Campesina* interacts with, and on other transnational movements. One interesting approach could be a statistical analysis, where identified factors that influence perceptions, and responses more broadly, are tested as explanatory factors.

In conclusion, reconnecting to the thesis’ purpose and research questions, it can be ascertained that *Vía Campesina* in fact bases its response to opportunities of access to some degree on their perception of the sincerity of the IO opening up. This insight, I argue, provides a useful point of departure if integrated with research on the “why’s” and “how’s” for the opening up of IOs, potentially enabling the development of mechanisms for meaningful civil society participation – both an academically and politically relevant question that I encourage further inquiry into.

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Appendix

List of interviews conducted (section 5.3)

- Interview 1** Peter Rosset. Specialist researcher in agroecology at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, ECOSUR. Worked closely with La Vía Campesina through the NGO Food First 1994-2004 as director. Volunteer for La Vía Campesina from 2005, member of La Vía Campesina’s international secretariat until 2018. February 1, 2023.
- Interview 2** Maximilian Isendahl. Master’s student at Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet, Alnarp. Board member of NOrdBruk, the Swedish branch of La Vía Campesina. March 16, 2023.
- Interview 3** Marc Edelman. Professor in anthropology at Hunter College and Graduate Center at City University of New York. Researched on peasants movements in Central America in the 1980s-1990s. Involved in the process in Geneva in the UNHRC that led to the UNDROP. April 14, 2023.
- Interview 4** Annette Desmarais. Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty. Former farmer and representative of the National Farmers Union (NFU) of Canada, involved in preliminary work to the establishment of La Vía Campesina in Mons 1993. Later technical support (staff) to La Vía Campesina until 1998 and then pursued her PhD, researching on and with La Vía Campesina. May 4, 2023.

Transcriptions of interviews are provided upon request

Semi-structured interviews: Themes (section 5.3)

- a. When the movement faced opportunities of access to IOs
- b. Which IOs they chose to cooperate with and not
- c. Why and how these decisions was made (focusing on perception of the respective IOs opening up)
- d. If, and if so why, any perceptions had changed over time