

Invitation to a project on:

Micro.Land.Grabbing: A challenge for local communities worldwide



What is it about?

According to conservative estimates, approximately one billion people, about 1/8 of the world population (Gawora 2011) live in local communities that organize their way of life and economy based on traditional values and beliefs. The lands and forests they manage often feature high degrees of agro- and biodiversity, high CO₂ storage capacities, and low rates of deforestation. Against the backdrop of the global sustainability crisis, local communities may, therefore, offer guiding principles for alternative modes of living and economy (UN Convention on Biodiversity). However, the global phenomenon of “land grabbing” increasingly threatens the existence of local communities, because financially strong actors exploit traditional territories in order to make more profits. This implies a fundamental change from perceiving land as a resource for local subsistence to a resource for capital investment. This turn often comes with challenges like the loss of food sovereignty due to the industrialization of agricultural land management and the globalization of value chains, a decrease of biodiversity, and increasing use of harmful pesticides.

We invite scientists, local communities and civil society organizations to participate in our interdisciplinary project aiming at finding solutions to these problems. So far, the phenomenon of land grabbing is mainly perceived as a problem of the global south. However, it has become increasingly relevant in the European context, too. Moreover, not only powerful international corporations but often regional and national actors push the commodification of smaller pieces of land little by little. This is what we call “micro land grabbing”. The project will focus on these recent observations and deepen the understanding of micro land grabbing as well as develop strategies to face it.

What are our aims?

- Increase awareness for the challenges of local communities due to micro land grabbing
- Share experiences and develop common strategies to deal with challenges
- Strengthen alliances between science, local communities, and civil society organizations

Who will participate?

Our participants represent or work with local communities in the global north (e.g. Italy, Austria) and south (e.g. Brasil, Malawi), either being:

- members of local communities and local administration
- scientists and university students or
- representatives of civil society organizations.

The organizing board invites persons from its network. Participants may propose additional persons from their networks to be invited to the workshop.

Who are we?

The organizing board involves scientists, representatives of civil society organizations, and local community members. The main organizers are Carolin Holtkamp, Markus Schermer, Tina Jahn, and Martin Coy from the Universität of Innsbruck, Dieter Gawora from the University of Kassel, Carlotta Schlosser from the Dreikönigsaktion Innsbruck, and Armin Bernhard from the “Bürgergenossenschaft” in Mals. We have a common interest in local communities and the aim of social transformation towards food sovereignty in the rural space.

Participatory scientific study

Starting with October 1st, 2020, the University of Innsbruck will conduct a participatory study on the challenges of local communities in terms of micro land grabbing and their strategies of resistance. We will circulate questionnaires to the participants in two rounds, first asking for the background of micro land grabbing and resulting challenges in their particular area and then collecting current strategies of resistance and further evolving topics. After each round, we will analyse the answers and return the results to all participants, to allow learning from other country cases. Participants are encouraged to comment and propose open questions to be discussed during a workshop in Innsbruck. The overall aim of the study is to increase the understanding and awareness of the challenges of local communities in the context of micro land grabbing. The estimated workload for participants during the study is as follows:

- 1) 28.09.-09.10.2020: answer the first questionnaire (app. 2-4 h)
- 2) 16.11.-28.11.2020: comment on results and answer the second questionnaire (2-4 h)
- 3) 04.01.-11.01.2020: comment on results and propose questions to discuss at the workshop (2 h)

Workshop - preliminary agenda

The workshop will take place on January 22nd and 23rd and involves one day of co-working at the University of Innsbruck and one day of field trip to the community of Mals. During the first workshop day, participants discuss the results of the study, co-create strategies to face challenges that arise due to micro land grabbing, and build new alliances across countries and professions. The participants will be involved in preparing parts of the workshop according to their backgrounds.

January, 22nd University of Innsbruck

08:30 - 09:00 am: Welcome reception

09:00 - 10:00 am: **Scientists: Analysing challenges of micro land grabbing**
Scientists present results of participatory study and discuss it with plenary

10:00 - 10:30 am: Break

10:30 - 12:00 am: **Local Communities: Exchange of experiences**
Community members discuss their challenges and strategies of resistance

12:00 - 01:00 pm: lunch break

01:00 - 04:00 pm: **All: Co-creating common strategies of resistance**
All participants develop strategies to face the challenges of micro land grabbing in an interactive format like Open Space or World Café

04:00 - 04:30 pm: Break

04:30 - 05:00 pm: **All: Consolidating results**
All participants present and evaluate the results of group work

05:00 - 06:00 pm: **CSOs: From talking to acting**
CSO representatives direct possible future steps to transfer the workshop's results into action and build an action network.

19:30 pm: Dinner

January, 23rd: field trip to the community of Mals, Italy
The field trip will take us to the community of Mals in South Tyrol/Northern Italy, which is located at the border of Europe's largest agricultural area of intensive apple production. Here, we will meet representatives of a local social movement engaging against tendencies of land grabbing in their community by external apple growers. The movement is called "The way of Mals" and gained a lot of attention in Europe and internationally because it organized a successful local referendum to abolish synthetic pesticides. At the same time, it develops alternative food networks in order to strengthen a sustainable and democratic rural development. Both the referendum and alternative food networks are interesting strategies to counter the concentration and intensification of land use. However, due to a powerful agricultural lobby, activists have not been able to solve the struggle for land yet. Therefore, we will discuss the action strategies which were developed during the first workshop day with the movement activists and see if and how they can be applied to the case of Mals.



Future collaboration and disseminating results

Based on the results of the study and the workshop, we will publish a practice-oriented handbook on strategies of local communities how to deal with micro land grabbing and a scientific paper in a peer reviewed journal. The aim is to make the results of the workshop accessible to a wide audience of practitioners and scientists. In addition, we will enable further networking and cooperation between project participants by setting up an e-mail list as a basis for follow-up actions.

Plan B – travel restrictions

Due to the corona pandemic, we plan the workshop in a hybrid, online and on-site, format and decide flexibly according to the actual situation on the on-site participation and excursion. In any case, we will encourage and facilitate the interaction between all participants during the entire project.

Venue, accommodation, and costs

The main venue of the workshop will be at the University of Innsbruck, Universitätsstraße 15, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria. Participation in the project will be free of charge; however we cannot pay any honorariums. We are currently applying for funding to cover the costs of traveling, accommodation and food during the workshop, especially for those who do not dispose of a travel budget from their institution.

Contact

For further questions, please contact:

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