
THE MAKING OF AUTONOMY



Using a practice-oriented approach to studying collective
action of farmers and artists in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Autonomy, lying at the core of interest of various studies about 'democratic spaces for citizen participation' (Cornwall 2004; Gaventa 2006), is often approached as an outcome of political emancipation. Collective action is then seen as a means to achieving empowerment vis-a-vis external control and influence. As an alternative, this thesis proposes the reading of autonomy from the perspective of practice, and its interaction with social, material and political environment. It highlights the significance of non-purposive (routine) actions, as introduced by Bourdieu. Within this framework, collective action is seen as a specific response to the wider context and a means to achieving practical ends. The technographic study of the 'making of autonomy' is enabled through the focus on underlying principles of practice within two case studies. First, the principle of labour organization is investigated within the practice of harvesting of small-holder farmers. Secondly, the principle of legitimation is explored within the practice of space-making for contemporary art. Both case studies are located in Ethiopia. The findings reveal autonomy as a capacity to make choices which are proper to the situated practice under various circumstances. This stresses the importance of functionality in dealing with constraints and opportunities presented by the environment. Thus, collective action remains instrumental to the practice, as long as it can functionally respond to these.

Key words: autonomy, collective action, technography, Ethiopia, harvesting, contemporary art

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1 Introduction

Autonomy is the core of interest elaborated in this thesis. The theme of autonomy is also an implicit point of reference of various studies investigating power and authority in relation to people's decision-making. Power, which is placed in the centre of the problem in these studies, is conceptualized in different ways, from seeing it as a capability of an individual, to its structural dimension which orchestrates the setting in which decision-making takes place (Wolf 1999). In this framework, collective action is often seen as a means to counter authority by claiming spaces in which less powerful actors can join together, be empowered and thereby generate resistance (Gaventa 2006). These spaces "may come into being as a result of popular mobilisation, such as around identity or issue based concerns, or may consist of spaces in which like-minded people join together in common pursuits" (Cornwall 2002). The theme of ideology and motivated action, as a way to substantiate and unite a collective movement against oppression, is often accompanying discussions about collective action from a power-centred perspective (Benford and Snow 2000).

Ethiopia belongs to one of the least free countries in the world, considering the extent of both the civil and political rights¹. Ever since the failed attempt for free elections in 2005, hopes for democratic transformation have been lost (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). The political space is to this day dominated by a one party system, with severe restrictions on any oppositional movements, including the freedom of speech and assembly². As a consequence of a law passed in 2009 (Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and the Charities and Societies Proclamation known as the CSO laws), many oppositional actors have been arrested including politicians and journalists². Moreover, the activities of civil society organization, both domestic and foreign, have been suppressed, thereby eliminating the number of human rights-, governance- and advocacy-oriented nongovernmental organization to close to zero².

For the majority of the population living in the rural areas, the interaction with the governmental structure is increasing in intensity (Chinigò 2014; Planel 2014). The bureaucratic structures of the state have expanded through newly established institutions at the local level (Chinigò 2014; Abbink 2011). The use of local administrative structures, however, is seen as a governmental strategy to enforce structural oppression and control at a level close to the individual citizen. As such, instead of opening more space for public decision-making, local administrative structures function as transmission belts for centrally defined agenda (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009).

In the context of Ethiopia, conceptualizing autonomy from the perspective of political emancipation might result in conclusions about relative passivity of local citizens regarding attempts to claim political space due to lack of oppositional movements and rights-based initiatives. This thesis, however, wants to talk against this misconception of autonomy as a result of purely political emancipation. In contrary, it tries to highlight the significance of non-purposive (routine) actions, as introduced by Bourdieu, in the pursuit of autonomy. These are informed, besides power relationships also by the social and material circumstances surrounding specific human practice. Autonomy is therefore not seen as a purely internal facet built up from conscious choices to counter the existing power structures, but more as something that emerges from the day-to-day interaction between practice and its political, social and material environment. As illustrated in the figure below, this boundary is a place in which autonomy emerges as a result of people's manoeuvring between different constraints and opportunities. As such, autonomy in its relational character emerges in the interaction of practice and its context, whereby the main importance resides in the middle of the two – in the

¹ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia#.VEu2Ak0cS71>

² <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/ethiopia>

actual 'making of autonomy'. This gives rise to the question: **How is some level of autonomy established in the interaction of practice and its context?**

This thesis proposes Bourdieu's concept of *relational autonomy* for the investigation of processes unfolding in the interaction (Maton 2005). This concept puts into question who's principles are those organizing the practice within a particular field. As such, instead of focusing on the form and design of social organization (such as the classical works of collective action by Ostrom), this thesis takes an interest in the underlying, *practice-specific principles* shaping 'human need-meeting activities' (Benton 1996). A specific form of social organization (collective action) is then seen as responsive and emergent from the interaction between the internal logic of the practice (the principles) and the contextual environment it is situated in.

In order to study these, the lens of technography, as the study of practice (Jansen and Vellema 2011), is used in two case studies of collective action in the making of autonomy. The first documents the practice of collective harvesting of small-holder farmers, and the second the practice of collective space-making for contemporary art in Ethiopia. Principles, which are relevant for the case studies explored in this thesis - *labour organization* and *legitimation* - are identified based on literature. This operationalization generates case-specific sub-questions: (1) **How is labour organized in a specific volume in time and space for harvesting?** and (2) **How is contemporary art-making legitimized?** Both of these questions are being referred to in a specific social, material and political circumstances of the situated practice.

The overall framework is further elaborated on in the theoretical section of this study, relying on scholarly work of authors which have made Bourdieu's work more accessible. The methodological choices taken are explained thereafter. Next, the empirical evidence of the two case studies is presented and followed by an analysis informed by the research questions. As both case studies are very different in their nature, lessons about autonomy are drawn for each case separately. The integration of both is aimed at in the discussion. Lastly, conclusions about autonomy are drawn.

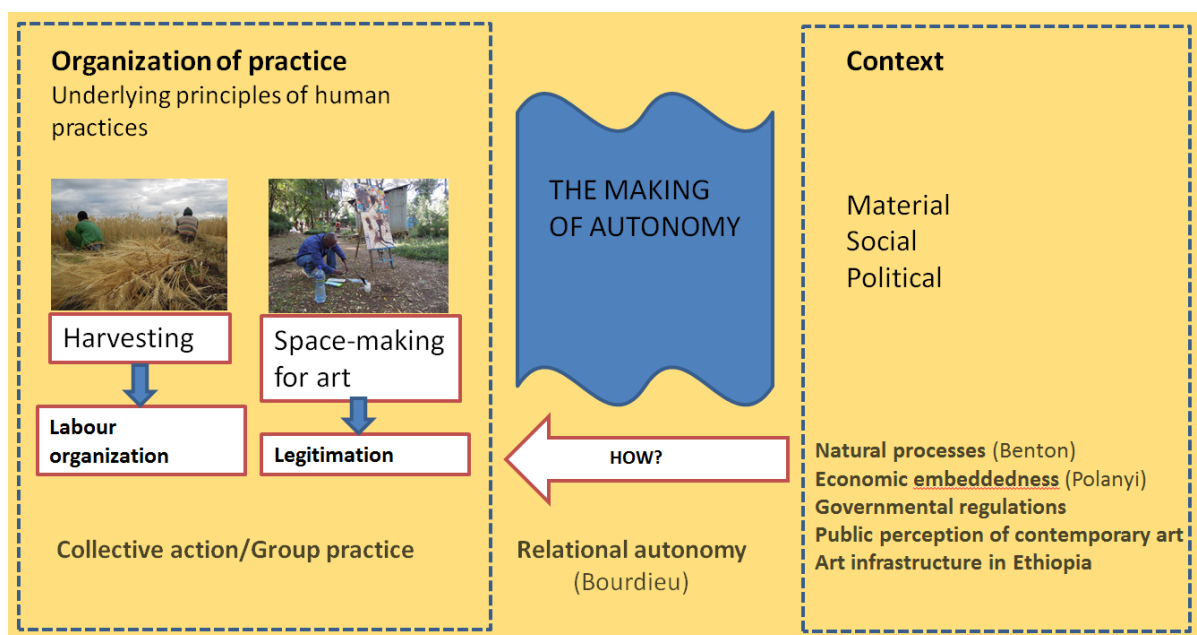


Figure 1 Research framework

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 The field

The theory presented in this chapter sources mainly from Bourdieu's study of the social *field*, described as a "configuration of relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 72-73). The *field* can be also understood as:

"[...] social space of relations, with its own laws of functioning, the site of ongoing struggle within which actors utilize the specific forms of capital (material and symbolic) effective in the struggle to impose and produce the legitimately recognized representations of the tangible world" (Rhodes 1994, p. 217).

The concept of social field helps to delineate boundaries around social action. As such, the field represents a micro-social structure made of relationships performed and recognized by its players, which can be observed and analysed (Ladwig 1994). Indeed, Maton (2005) reminds us that "the relational whole is more than the sum of its parts" (p. 689), and thus when studying the social structure of a field one has to see it as emergent from the field's actors and their practices, and at the same time consider the position of actors within the field and their relationship vis-a-vis other fields of political and economic power. In terms of operationalization of the concept of the field, one can utilize the perspective of the *topography* of the field. This can be seen as created by the *range of activities* taking place within the field and the *principles* which guide these (Grenfell and James 2004).

2.2 Understanding change within a field

Grenfell and James (2004) use Bourdieu's theory of the *field* for the study of mechanisms of change. He asserts that the concept of *avant-garde*, understood as an innovative and independent flow of ideas challenging the status quo, is key to such a study. Following the original point of Bourdieu, a new avant-garde movement is seen as generating change by "perceiving, moving to and opening up a space that runs counter to the present orthodoxy" and at the same time by articulating "the 'immanent necessity' of the field" (p. 510-211). The arrival of a new avant-garde brings about new articulations about what is necessary and desired within a field, and thereby sets aside and sometimes de-legitimizes current ways of doing and making. The source of the change might be both internal, as well as external to the field (Grenfell and James 2004).

In order to study the effect of outside influences upon the field considering the position of the field vis-a-vis other fields of political and economic power, Maton (2005) sources from Bourdieu's notion of *relational autonomy*. The fields are considered as relatively autonomous, however also as operating in an environment of other fields which, more or less, influence its structure and functioning. The autonomous principle is characterized by the 'disinterestedness' of the field concerning incentives and alternatives emanating from other contexts. The heteronomous principle, on the other hand, is characterized by the active seeking for acknowledgment and revenues outside of its own field. According to the degree to which 'fields can generate their own problems rather than receiving them in a ready-made fashion from outside' or in other words the degree to which activities run along principles internal to the field, the situation of the field oscillates between autonomy and heteronomy. The overall structure of the field then becomes a "*mediating context*" in which outer influences are transformed to affect the practice in the field in a specific way: "Like a prism refracts external influences according to the specific logic of the field" (p. 690).

To investigate the level of relative autonomy of the field, research should ask the question: "according to whose *principles* are the activities in the field carried out?" As principles are considered the "ways of working, practices, aims, and measures of achievement" (Maton 2005, p. 697). As such, investigating principles which guide action and shape social practice, has to do with researching the form of capital which is the medium of exchanges between actors (Grenfell and James 2004). This capital which stands as a symbol of social exchange, and is thus termed as *symbolic* by Bourdieu, has either economic, social or cultural character (Bourdieu 2006). Different authors interpret the concept of capital quite generally, and apply it directly to the specific fields (Ladwig 1994). One can distinguish between different modalities of capital with reference to relational autonomy. For example, in the field of higher education, one can recognize both the 'scholastic' (scientific prestige) and the 'academic' (institutional control over funds) capital as a value (Maton 2005). While the former is oriented towards internal measures of achievement, the latter has much more relevance outside of the field. Every field has its own specific set of capitals related to the principles of organization within the field.

2.3 Principles of legitimation in cultural production

In his study on the field of cultural production Bourdieu offers a perspective on how the field is being organized along the *principles of legitimation*. Ideas about what is legitimate are informed by the perceptions about *the 'thinkable, unthinkable, expressible, inexpressible, valued or not'* (Ladwig 1994). According to Bourdieu, art relies on the symbolic production of value which is naturally external to its own field. This means that in the field of art, the creation of a painting out of crude materials is not sufficient for it to be regarded as a complete product. It is the wider community who attaches value to the piece through channels such as journals, museums, educational systems etc.:

"The sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work." (Bourdieu 1993, p. 37)

At the same time, Bourdieu observes the reversing of the economic logic in the *avant-garde art field* because "the agents receiving the most prestige are the avant-garde artists who recognize only the specific principle of legitimacy that is the essence of the field" (Rhodes 1994; p. 218). As such, the avant-garde field of art can be regarded as highly autonomous because it relies solely on internal measures of achievement and ways of working, condemning the relevance of financial revenues and acknowledgment of audiences other than internal to its own environment. It is exactly the refusal of external capital which causes the accumulation of symbolic capital within the field bestowing legitimacy to the artist (Rhodes 1994).

2.4 Principles of labour organization in agriculture

Benton (1996) introduces the study of labour processes in agriculture as distinct from other areas of human material production. While traditionally the labour process is seen as a "human need meeting activity by employing instruments in order to bring about a change in some material object" (Marx 2008), Benton points to a different character of agriculture. Most importantly he highlights agriculture as a regulatory, rather than productive and transformative, practice. As such, the labour process is tightly entrained with organic rhythms and processes occurring in nature, which are largely non-manipulable. In terms of labour organization this means that:

“The spatial and temporal distribution of labouring activity is shaped by the contextual conditions of the labour process and by the rhythms of organic development processes.” (Benton 1996; 172)

Hereby, Benton suggests to look at natural limits and conditions as a contextual whole including not only constraints, but also enabling factors which give rise to a “range of social practices and human purposes that would otherwise not occur”. A specific form of labour organization is thus a result of the mutually reinforcing relationship between nature and social organization (Benton 1996).

The economic rationale behind labour organization is strongly related to the embeddedness of the economic system within social life (Polanyi 1944). Polanyi builds on a dichotomous conception of economic systems, distinguishing between pre-modern and modern (capitalist) societies. In the former exchanges follow agreements based on trust and reciprocity vested in people’s relationships. In the latter, labour power is detached from such a social context and made mobile by means of commodification (Marx 2008). In other words, while the former relies on the use of social capital to mobilize labour, the latter is market-based involving the use of financial capital.

2.5 The use of concepts

The organizing principles described above are used in the analysis of the case studies to shed light on the underlying mechanisms giving shape to a particular practice. They help to explain the process through which practice acquires a certain form based on its inherent characteristics, such as its materiality and economic embeddedness (agriculture), or symbolic production (art). In both case studies, the focus on principles helps to understand the collective/group arrangement which emerged between individual actors. Moreover, it helps to illuminate changes the practice has undergone as a result of transformations taking place in interaction with other fields of economic and political influence. While the logic of the principle is assumed to be constant, the modes through which it translates and eventually manifests in a particular way of doing things, vary according to contextual factors.

Avant-garde is a concept which supports the understanding of the organization of artists. In this study, the concept of *avant-garde*, originally used for the analysis of the cultural field by Bourdieu, is abstracted and understood *also* as a new/different *modus operandi* according to which practice is re-organized.

Analysing mechanisms which give rise to a specific form of practice is a crucial step towards understanding the making of *relational autonomy* of the practice vis-a-vis other fields of influence. Consequently, a specific degree of relational autonomy is regarded as an outcome of these mechanisms.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Field study

3.1.1 Introduction technographic case studies

The research design is based on the tenets of technography, which is an interdisciplinary approach to study people's practices: "the use of skills, tools, knowledge and techniques to accomplish certain ends" (Jansen and Vellema 2011; p.169). It investigates how technology is produced and reproduced in a particular social and material setting, and how people organize themselves to accomplish a specific task. Moreover, it sheds light on how they participate as individuals and what role it plays in the larger context of group performance. McFeat (1974) suggests to concentrate on the study of task groups established in order to achieve concrete goals and to solve problems. The structure of such groups is emergent from the nature of the performance they are engaged in. When groups get involved in collective activities and problem-solving, they capitalize on knowledge and skills dispersed among various members, a phenomena described as distributed cognition (Hutchins 2000). The focus should thus shift from investigating the role of individuals to seeing the larger picture of relationships which emerge in a network of people and how it informs the practice they are engaged in.

According Jansen and Vellema (2011), technography helps to strategize evidence about group performance by an interest in (a) the process of making, (b) concentration of knowledge and skills within a network, and (c) rules and routines developed in the course of action, or those imposed by external actors. This research aimed at documenting the internal logic of the practice, meaning the labour process as a "[...] human need-meeting activity by employing instruments to bring about change [...]" (Marx cited in Benton 1996; p.158-159). First of all, this meant looking into what the group does, and what natural or other material elements are shaping the practice. Moreover, it investigated how particular activities are distributed in time and space. Secondly, the research explored the network as a source of capital which can be mobilized according to the needs of the practice. This implied investigating when the group acts as a group and when practices acquire individual form. Moreover, the research looked into how the network gets mobilized and how people pool resources (labour, capital) in order to accomplish a task. And thirdly, the research looked into according to what norms, rules and guidelines people make decisions regarding their practice and mutual cooperation.

As task groups do not operate in isolation on the external environment, investigations about the internal workings of a group need to go hand in hand with investigations about the selection and regulatory environment which directly shapes the performance. This includes both the biophysical environment (e.g. organic rhythms and cycles) in which the practice is embedded, as well as the large context of social, political and economic forces. The interdisciplinary nature of the technography approach allows to include a wide spectrum of these influences – not only as a background scenery, but as an active field of power and influence which effect the field of practice under investigation. Benvenuti (1975) distinguishes various factors in the technological-administrative task environment (TATE) which might be relevant for agriculture activities (but might be applied also to other fields): (1) suppliers of labour inputs, (2) customers of the farms product, (3) suppliers of technical capacity and capital, (4) institutions or authorities with regulatory power over land and its use, (5) competitors in the supply and the final markets, (6) regulatory and advisory bodies (government, local government units, trade unions and associations) and (7) institutions of information and scientific research. Following these examples, the research documented

interactions with the outer environment and ways in which external decisions and changes influenced decisions concerning the group's practice.

Methods used to collect this evidence were mostly based on observations of the group's practice and its interactions with the biophysical and technological environment. Both formal and informal interviews were conducted with the members to triangulate the observed information, to ask about people's opinion and to reconstruct various historical events and developments. Moreover, interviews were also conducted with members of the external environment.

3.1.2 Case study I. Collective harvesting arrangements

The study of the collective harvesting arrangements was conducted in a community of farmers, in the Alusha kebele, East Gojjam, Ethiopia. The data collection was carried out in the time span of 3 months from September till December 2013, with 3 rounds of (10day) field visits spent mostly in the community, while being hosted in a house of a farmer family.

The observations were focused on the actual collecting of crops in the fields by groups of farmers taking into account several factors. First, it included the distribution of harvesting activities in time and space within the landscape (sequencing of harvesting events) taking into account mainly the type of crops and soils. Second, the observations aimed at the harvesting task per se. These included different crops: haricot beans, wheat, barley and teff, depending on the specific period. In total, 3 large (>6 participants) and 5 small (2-6 participants) group-harvesting events were included in the study, with varying amount of participants. Third, there was a focus on participants in the observations which provided an overview of the distribution of the tasks carried out on the field, and the way the process is being managed. Moreover, it provided opportunities to observe social norms of trust and reciprocity in action: how exactly is labour being reciprocated? Observations of participants extended also beyond the field and included their free time and one communal gathering of the local (*iddir*) saving association.

Observation were complemented with semi-structured interviews about the planning of the event and about obligations that emerge(d) out of the arrangements.

3 group interviews and 8 individual interviews were conducted with the farmers from the area about their livelihoods, collective labour (and collective harvesting in particular), their relationship to the market and the governmental programmes. Moreover, 2 interviews with the elderly of the community were carried out. Various informal interviews were conducted during observations in the field.

One interview was conducted with the local governmental representative for agricultural development about small-scale farming in the area, and about the extension system - especially about the governmental programme 'Development units' and 'Model farmer'. Further information about the same topics was discussed in an interview with a field extension worker. Additionally, one interview was conducted with a teff expert from the (national) DebreZeit Agricultural Research Centre.

3.1.3 Case study II. Collective art space

The case of the collective art space is based on a study of the Netsa Art Village, which is a collective of Ethiopian artists located in Addis Ababa. The data collection was carried between September and December 2013, with various visits to the Netsa space, which is a part of a park located at the outskirts of Addis Ababa, and serves the purpose of both a gallery and a

studio. Moreover, much data was collected through informal interviews while following the artists during their daily life activities outside of the space, and during (group) interviews made by appointment.

Observations were made during 8 field visits to the Netsa Art Village. The focus of the observations was, first of all, on the arrangement of the space, its material characteristics and physical relationship to its immediate environment. Secondly, attention was given to the individual artists themselves and their presence in the space. Thirdly, observations were made about the activities they engaged in as a group, mainly common gatherings and informal exchanges.

In total, 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual members of the Netsa Art Village, and one group interviews with 4 participants. Furthermore, 3 interviews were conducted with key informants in the art scene (2 local curators, and the owner of the prominent Asni gallery). 2 additional interviews were carried out with representatives of other art collectives (Habesha Art Studio and Nubia Arts).

3.2 Analysis

3.2.1 CMO configuration

There exist various approaches to studying collective action. Unlike institutionalism, which takes a structural lens to analyse the interplay between rules and human behaviour, this paper uses the realist approach based on context-mechanism-outcome analyses. This approach, put forward by Pawson and Tilly, looks further than the internal structure of an organization as defining the outcome patterns, and instead traces down different mechanisms which arise under different circumstances (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

The context-mechanism-outcome approach stems from the desire to evaluate complex development programmes, while testing the underlying assumptions of their planning and implementation. This is made possible by researching "what works for whom, in what context, and in what respect" (Pawson and Tilley 1997). By focusing on how mechanism are activated and under what circumstances, oversimplified causal relationships between factors and outcomes are avoided. Moreover, the approach allows to explain both intended, as well as unintended (emergent) outcomes. This research is reconstructing the logic of collective action from the point of view of an observed outcome – autonomy emerging from collective action. For the purpose of understanding how this autonomy comes about, mechanisms which participate in the rise of this outcome are searched for and analysed. At the same time, contextual factors which surround, catalyse, enable or constrain these mechanisms are put into question. These contextual factors include both the particular way of organization of the collective action, as well as endogenous variables mainly from the material, economic and political environment. Autonomy is then observed and analysed within the interaction between these "internal" and "external" contextual factors.

4 Case study I. (Collective) harvesting arrangements

The case study is aiming to reconstruct the field of harvesting of crops in the community of mostly subsistence farmers in rural Ethiopia. It presents data documenting the practice of harvesting and its interaction with the environment it is situated in. Specifically, it illustrates how farmers make decisions about labour organization for harvesting, and how this is influenced by local agro-ecology, governmental interventions and the presence of the labour market.

4.1 The field of harvesting in Alusha

The case study was situated in the East Gojjam (Amhara region), Alusha Kebele, which was of 3-5 km distance from the regional capital Mertulemariam. Local livelihoods depended mainly on mixed farming systems, with regular size of the land owned per farmer about 1-1.5 hectares. The cultivation of teff, wheat, barley and legumes for the daily consumption needs was complemented with livestock keeping of oxen and sheep. Most of the produce got consumed by the household, and only a small fraction (usually teff) was sold to the market.

The harvesting activities extended from October to January, with fluctuating labour demands during the season and depending on the maturing rhythms of the crops. Various collective harvesting arrangements were used in this period to cope with these demands and to help farmers harvest in time. A commonly known arrangement called the 'debo' was often used in the case of teff cutting, which was, as a major grain, covering the largest surface in the area (observation). Debo was described as a way of working together and supporting each other. In literature, debo is often referred to as a collective harvesting event accompanied by a celebration and feasting provided by the host (Dercon 2002; Debebe 2010).

In case of wheat, barley and beans, harvesting was said to be carried out by household members because the fields were smaller than for teff. Yet, cases of cooperation between relatives or/and neighbours were documented, although the term 'debo' was not commonly used, and there was usually no celebratory aspect to it.

4.2 Agro-ecology and social norms as labour organizing principles

The local agro-ecological zone is described as one of the dry midlands, which is characteristic of having two rainy seasons, 'Kiremt' (main, June-August to September) and 'Belg' (February) (interview local head of the agricultural office, extension officer). However, the belg rains were reported as failing for the last seven years in the area (interview Farmer 1, 4, 5, group interview 3). Planting of the main crops happens in synchronization with these rains, as cultivation during the dry season is only possible with irrigation devices (observation, interview teff expert, interview Farmer 1).

The local soils were observed to be of two main types – the black and the red soils – and varying combinations between them. According to the interviewed Ethiopian teff expert, teff is a well-adapted crop for the black soils, which tend to lodge water, and thus supply enough moisture for the crop even long after the phase-out of the rains. Red soils dry out very quickly and are therefore more suitable for early maturing crops, such as beans (group interview farmers). Another solution is to plant early maturing variety of teff ('Abesh Lemene'). Other varieties of teff in the area include 'Minjar' (most common high-yielding variety supplied by the governmental cooperatives) and dark teff (sometimes said to be suitable for less quality soils).

The main harvesting season in the area occurs between October and January after the phase-out of the main 'Kiremt' rains. This period, especially December to January (teff harvest), was

considered one of the peaks as for labour demand during the year (teff expert). The maturing of crops in different fields was, however, distributed in time. Indeed, partial harvesting tasks often occurred at different points in time for different farmers (observations). Farmers assigned this variation to the different sowing times, crop types/varieties and soil types (interview Farmer 1, 8, 9).

According to the teff expert, in case of teff, harvesting in time, meaning as soon as the grains reach maturity is very important to prevent harvest losses due to unfavourable climatic conditions. Both rain and sun can decrease the harvest and/or its quality dramatically:

Teff expert (m) 1(1): "When there is too much sun, it [the crop] dries too much and the shattering increases. You lose something but it's not as bad as the rain."

Teff expert (m) 1(2): "Due to rain shattering increases. Also, at this time, all the teff is lodged [lying on the ground with the panicles due to their weight]. So when it rains at this time there is moisture, the grains start germination and particularly when they get soil contact they germinate very much. When it rains these will get moisture, even if not touching the ground and the seeds can germinate because there is no dormancy period in teff. If some of the heads touch the ground they stick together and start germinating. And that is disastrous for the quality."

For an individual farmer, to accomplish harvesting of teff might take several days (observation). Collecting teff in a group was also often regarded as motivational by farmers:

Farmer (m) 1(1): "It creates happiness for people because they come together and they harvest together and so they may finish in short time because there are many people. The owner of the land prepares food for the farmers. And women participate in food preparation. It seems like a wedding. Many people become happy. They work collaboratively."

The general reasons for which local farmers said they engaged in collective labour often referred to the possibility of harvesting "in time" or "as quickly as possible" to protect crops against rain, too much sun, and potentially also against being eaten by free-ranging cattle (especially at the end of the season when cattle is left loose to browse freely in the area) (interviews Farmers 1, 2, 3, 8, 9). The concrete agro-ecological and practical reasons for which people cooperated differ per crop and are documented in the list of activities below.

Collective labour arrangements in the area were observed to be applied to various harvesting activities:

1. First harvesting activity observed in the area was haricot bean cutting in the early October, during the ceasing Kiremt rains in the area. Apart from the owner of the field, his wife and daughter, another two people were participating in the cutting, one man and one woman. The main reason to cooperate was according to the owner the need "to finish early, before the rain stops, and to sow field pea afterwards, because the new crops needs rain to grow". The owner of the field had an agreement with the participating woman to take care of the field during the whole season because his homestead was too far to be able to manage it properly. In return for the favour, the woman could keep half of the harvest. The male participant was expecting a similar favour from the owner of the field once his crops reach maturity.
2. Second observed collective harvesting activity was harvesting of barley and weeds early October. In this situation a farmer asked another three adult men to support him in barley harvesting and cutting off weeds growing in between the crops. Timely harvest was said to be important for the farmer to prevent the weeds from flowering and reproduction in the field. In exchange, the participating men were offered to keep the weeds for their cattle. The agreement between the farmers was made spontaneously

when the three men were walking passed the barley field in search for wild grass to bring back home to their animals.

3. Third observed activity was carrying of wheat bundles from the field to the trashing ground mid-November. After the male owner of the field cut the ripened wheat plants, they were gathered and tied together by his wife and one female neighbour into large and heavy bundles which were carried by these two women on their backs to the trashing ground and piled up into a big stack. The arrangement was agreed upon between the two women, implying an obligation for the owner's wife to reciprocate the favour of carrying bundles to the other woman when her crops had matured. This would be counted in the number of times of walking from the field to the trashing ground. Cooperating on the carrying activity among the women was regarded as more pleasant because of the heaviness of load. The agreement was made one day in advance.
4. Fourth activity was cutting of a field of matured teff together with piling it up in stacks by a group of 11 men. The cutting of teff was performed by men and proceeded manually by sickle kneeling on the ground. There were several breaks during the day during which tella (local beer) and food (lunch and snacks) was offered to the workers, prepared by the female members. After work, by dusk, workers were invited to the house of the field owner for a little festival during which people kept together and feasted on food and tella. The farmers who participated in the harvesting said that they expected the host to return the same amount of labour (in days) on their teff harvesting, and that in return they will also provide a little festival for the workers. They also said that their crop had not yet matured and therefore they can afford to invest time on harvesting on their neighbours field. According to the expected maturing times of the crops, the farmers laid out an informal programme for each other to know when who is harvesting and when they could organize their own.

In case of teff cutting, farmers visited their fields to investigate the ripeness of the grain. They tested by observation and by crashing some spikes in their hands. If the crop was ready to be harvested they discussed with other community members as to arrange their harvesting day in the nearest future. Interviewed farmers indicated that they invited potential participants 3-5 days in advance. However, they also noted that sometimes in the peak harvesting season it might be difficult to arrange harvesting soon enough because everyone was busy working on their own fields.

Besides agro-ecological determinants of cooperation, the local collective labour arrangements were said to have a long history in the community and no one could explain the origins of the practice since they were believed to be "inherited from our brothers and sisters" (interview elderly). Farming in general was regarded as a cooperative practice - as one of the farmers highlighted: "We only go to the market alone" (group interview 1). Collective harvesting was seen as part of the local culture and as a support mechanism for the community members:

Farmer (m) 2(1): "Debo has many advantages. It is a community participation thing so it will strengthen the connection between you and the neighbour. It is a poor community that cannot survive alone, we need each other. The debo will tie the attachments together and we will grow together. If the rain comes, all the harvest will be spoilt. If you call people for debo they will come and harvest in a day. That is the same for everybody."

Acts of solidarity were observed in the community among relatives, when a farmer got ill and could not work during the harvesting period, the relatives from the relatively distant highland area were called upon to come and help collect teff which had reached maturity (observation). Another situation was recorded in the case of a female-headed household, when male relatives took care of the teff harvest, since a woman is not expected to engage in teff cutting (observation).

As illustrated in the different harvesting events, neighbours and friends regularly provided support to each other in harvesting activities based on informal agreements (no written contracts) about how their favour will be “paid back”. One farmer mentioned that it was not socially accepted to refuse to reciprocate a favour and such a situation might have caused the failing farmer to be excluded from further agreements (interview Farmer 1). On the other hand, the farmers asserted that they do not belong to any stable group arrangement:

Farmer (m) 4(1): “It is not stable. It varies. One person might help me on the one day and another on the second day. It is not stable, not constant. It varies according to the interest of the people to help other people.”

Farmer (m) 1(2): “There is no constant arrangement. If my crop reach maturity now and the other not, the farmer may come here and we harvest together. It depends on the season the crop reaches maturity.”

4.3 Market forces and governmental interventions

Interviews about changes that people had perceived in their community revealed various developments in the community.

Some farmers indicated that their harvest had increased considerably in recent years (interview Farmer 1, 5, 10). Thanks to this increase and thanks to the emergence of a market for grains, they could sell part of their harvest, rather than consuming everything themselves. Moreover, some of them started cultivating garlic and onion on irrigated lands which they sold on the market (interview Farmer 1 and 6). For the cash they earned, they could buy other products from the market. One of the women mentioned that nowadays she can afford to have more than only one dress like when she was young (interview Farmer 7).

One of the most distinct topic regarding change in the farming practice was the use of fertilizers (diamonium phosphate and urea). The fertilizer is used by the farmers mainly for teff cultivation. The farmers acquired the fertilizers from the governmental cooperatives on a yearly basis, whereas 50% of the price had to be paid immediately and 50% after the harvest (from the profit made of selling part of it) (interviews Farmer 5 and head of agriculture office). On the other hand, many of the farmers complained about the price of the fertilizers which created a burden and dependence for them:

Farmer (m) 3(2): “Production without fertilizer is impossible because the land is addicted to it. Without fertilizer we can only produce chickpeas, peas and beans, for the rest we need fertilizers. The soil will give no yield.”

Farmer (m) 3(3): “The main difficulty currently in agriculture is the price of the fertilizer. If the price goes down, this will give me much more fertilized land. The fertilizer is very expensive. I can only buy two quintals but I would need eight.”

Farmer (m) 5(1): “Farmers started to live with credit because the costs of fertilizer is increasing and the interest is huge. ‘We have to sell our clothes’ [proverb] because the debt is accumulating.”

Farmer (m) 5(2): “Now, every year the government comes and advertises the fertilizer. The soil is addicted to fertilizers and you cannot plant without it – it’s a must. We made a mistake.”

Besides fertilizers, improved seeds were also supplied by the governmental cooperatives. Both teff (‘Minjar’) and wheat (‘Kenya’) seeds were sold to the farmers. Some farmers indicated that the seeds are performing very well at times, but can fail as well. They also said that they can

reproduce the seed for about four years, after that they have to renew the supply (by buying from the cooperative or acquiring it from the neighbour) (group interview 2).

Both improved seeds and fertilizers are promoted by the local governmental extension system through local extension workers (3 in each kebele) and through the Farming Training Centres where farmers are invited for trainings and lectures. Moreover, there is a new organization at the local levels referred to as "development units" or the "model farmer". The head of the local agricultural office describes it:

Agri-officer 1(1): "Organization of the government is new. Through the working groups there is constant evaluation of the families, which family has changed? By applying new technologies, using fertilizers. There is evaluation from their team. That initiates people, there is competition among teams in different areas. Experience from one team to another team. One team is 5 members with one leader. Larger team is 30 people with 5 leaders [5 small groups together]. In the small group they evaluate their tasks and in the large team they share experience. They develop their experience and knowledge. Then there is competition. The other teams are performing, so I can perform. To develop working culture. The competition: some people use the full recommendation of fertilizers. They accept and use it. They also agronomic practices, scientifically. So others will follow them. They use all the agronomic practices according to what they learn. Farmers imitate each other. Competition between teams. Other teams win. We also win. Main enemy is poverty. How can we win over poverty. The teams that accept scientific practices win poverty."

According to one of the local extension officers, the new organization into development units was based on competition through which 'best performers' were evaluated among the farmers by appointed governmental agents. The check-list was told to be specific to the location and also introduced by the local governmental agent. Among others, it also included criteria about the input purchasing formulated as "who achieved the purchasing of a certain amount of fertilizers and improved seeds fastest, because it is good for food security and to increase productivity".

Despite governmental efforts to establish the development units, their existence was not quite obvious in the community. The farmers were aware of the programme, however, they did not seem to be able to share any experience with this arrangement. Instead, traditional social arrangements such as iddir (traditional funeral/saving institution) remained very vivid for them, as was documented during a visit to one of the iddir gatherings (observation).

Collective labour arrangements were also said to have retained their traditional function as well as their original way of organization. The elders in the community pointed out only two changes in the practice. First, the amount of participants during teff harvesting decreased (it used to be as high as 30 participants per harvesting event) due to rising population and thereby land fragmentation, resulting in smaller plots per farmer, and less need for additional labour. Second, the type of foods which are served during teff harvesting had upgraded from tella and snacks (roasted grains) to a full meal with enjarra and different types of sauces (interview elderly).

4.4 Labour market as an organizing principle of teff harvesting

In some instances, collective cutting of teff (debo) is being substituted by hired labour. According to one of the farmers, the development of the labour market was enabled by the change of the local mindset about selling and hiring labour:

Farmer (m) 1(3): "In the past working for payment was considered as shame. If you work on someone else's field it was assumed that you were below that guy. As slavery. Nobody was

interested, nobody dared to even ask to hire someone else. But now times are changing. Working extra time and earning extra money is sign of hard work. Everybody is accepting that. If you can earn extra income for your family, it means you are being wise. The community respects that. Everybody can earn some extra money. Now it is a custom. Everybody is developing this.”

Two harvesting events were documented during which the owner of the field hired labourers for teff collection.

1. Farmer 8 (m) planted teff on a rented field of about 1.5 ha for which he needed extra labour to be able to harvest quickly and not affect the high-quality of the white teff being grown to be sold on the market. Thus, one day in advance, he went to Mertolemariam (closest town and regional capital) to acquire about 24 harvesters. He paid them 35 birr per day (1.76 USD) and provided them with lunch, tella and local spirit (areke). The farmer thinks that because of the large size of the field, hiring labour is the only option since he does not have time to reciprocate labour to 24 neighbours in case of collective arrangement. He also thinks that collective labour is a ‘harmful practice’ because you need to provide lots of food and drinks to the participants.
2. The female farmer was living alone, her husband left 17 years ago. She took care of the farm by herself with the help of her brothers who helped her with ploughing as well as harvesting. On the observed occasion, two of her brothers were cutting the teff together with three hired labourers. All received lunch and tella from the woman. On the question of why she does not ask her neighbours to help her harvest, she said that none is interested to help harvest a woman since she herself would not be able to reciprocate the favour on their fields.

Some of the farmers in the community expressed their preference for hired labour to organizing a harvesting event with neighbours (interviews Farmer 1 and 8). For female-headed households, as illustrated above, hiring labourers was the only possibility to harvest teff. Another woman expressed her opinion that hiring labour was less worrisome especially with regard to food preparation, because unlike in debo, they did not need to provide an evening feast for the labourers (interview Farmer 7). Generally, hosting debo was perceived as costly, because they needed to offer variety of foods and drinks in great abundance. She also noted that with debo you could never be sure how many people would turn up, because not all invited farmers eventually attended. It was thus hard for them to estimate the amount of food that needed to be prepared which, according to the woman, might have resulted in the wastage of food. Moreover, hiring workers for the teff harvest was sometimes preferred by farmers because they felt more independent in determining the timing. They said that there was always labour available in the town to be hired, which gave farmers the possibility to choose the harvest date quite spontaneously. In harvest peak times, when labour bottlenecks occurred, this became an important mechanism to ensure enough manpower to harvest crops quickly and whenever necessary (interview Farmer 1, 8, group interview 3). Additionally, and unlike in debo, farmers did not need to synchronize their activities with others in the area, which gave them more space to set their own agenda:

Farmer (m) 3(1): “We use debo [collective arrangement] and not hired labour because we could not afford the hired labourers. If we could afford hired labourers, we would do it. It is better. If it is debo, you have to wait your turn, till people have time to work on your field. But sometimes you don’t have time. When the rain is coming or the cattle is feeding on your teff, so you are in hurry. The hired labourers, they come and finish within one day.”

However, although preferred by some farmers, many could not afford hiring labour at all, and if so, only for a limited amount of time. Cash was still a very limited resource while investments into the purchase of fertilizers remained of higher priority. Hiring labour was thus more exquisite to richer farmers, and for others remained complemented by collective labour

arrangements. In the following statement, a female member of the household explained the cash situation in her household:

Farmer (f) 7(1): "In two months, January and February there will be lots of weddings and ceremonies and festivities and we are expected to give a lot of money. Since Degu [husband] did not sell his crop yet he does not have means to pay for the hired guys. When he gets the money, he will spend the money on different celebrations, like there is a wedding of a relative that he will contribute to like everybody. Also we have to buy fertilizer. They have to pay taxes to the government. After paying all that, there will be no money in the bank to pay for the hired guys.

Farmer (f) 7(2): This is the mark between the rich and the poor: The rich has some money in the safe, so whenever he needs people he goes and hires them. It's not a big problem. But the poor does not have so much money, so he does not have any means to pay for the hired guys. Therefore we invite people for debo and pay with what we have."

In practice, the lack of cash and at the same time preference for hired labour for teff harvesting often resulted in combinations of collective labour and hired labour; the ratio of both determined mainly by the availability of cash. One of the farmers describes his decision-making:

Farmer (m) 1(3): "Sometimes it is hard to afford the hired guys, even if I like to. Since I cannot afford for two days, I only hire for one day and the other day I organize debo. Because I don't have enough cash to pay. We have food in kind so we can offer for the debo."

At the same time, debo practice was not seen as a disappearing or marginal practice - a fact being confirmed by the high amount of cooperating groups observable in the area during the harvest time. Some of the farmers did recognize the importance of the collective practice in the future in times when, due to unpredictable circumstances, cash became scarce, or when the price of hired labour rose and became unaffordable:

Farmer (m) 6(1): "Debo is part of our culture. It is very hard to stop debo but the hired labor is tempting. The price of hired people is escalating. It will be difficult for people to hire them but still the hired people will continue, they follow the market. In the future, the hired labour will dominate but at the same time debo will also continue, it's part of the culture."

On the other hand, one of the richer farmers (observation 1 in this sub-section) planting teff mainly for the market expressed his resistance to the practice because it was expensive and unpractical for his big fields. Other farmers expressed their appreciation of the community-building character of debo, as compared to hiring labour and in a group interview agreed on the statement of one of them:

Farmer (m) 3(4): "The advantage of debo is that the hired people just come and leave. The debo will strengthen the community system, brotherhood of the community. We will be strong enough to deal with a lot of issues, since community means a lot around here. But the hired people come from somewhere else, so it's very hard to connect with them, whereas here we work like brothers and sisters."

Hiring labour was so far exquisite to teff cutting, while other harvesting activities presented earlier remain managed by the household labour or collective arrangements with neighbours and relatives. Working together remained seen as something that people just naturally do in the area (observation).

5 Case study II. Collective art space

The *field* presented in this case study is the field of contemporary art in Ethiopia. The data documents the development of an art collective in interaction with its wider social and institutional environment. In particular, it illustrates the process of formation of the art space, both in virtual and physical sense, and how its members relate, transform and make use of it. Moreover, it also shows how external forces, in this case governmental policies, participate in shaping this space.

5.1 The field of contemporary art in Addis Ababa

Ethiopia is a country with a rich cultural tradition, including arts and crafts that is very present in the society to date. The most common traditional works are still to be found in the Ethiopian churches including icon paintings on wood, metal processional crosses, and illuminated manuscripts (Heldman et al. 1993). Furthermore, the rich craft works are being used by people in their daily lives. The traditional hand-woven white clothing is being worn and many modern households still use traditional pottery pieces with original carvings to prepare coffee and dishes. The situation is similar with baskets, carpets and various forms of home decoration. Moreover, many people reported that in oral expression, the ancient principle of 'Wax and Gold' ('Qinie' in Amharic), originating also from the Ethiopian church, is understood and used by people.

The interviewed artists (from NAV and other collectives) asserted that the majority of the Ethiopian society still perceives art in the traditional sense and does not understand the role and purpose of contemporary art. Some of the contemporary artists believed, that the main reason is the missing art education at primary and secondary schools, as well as the strong material preferences of the rising middle class (group interview artists).

The 60s and 70s until the revolution in 1974, Ethiopian art scene was reported as very vibrant and innovative. There was an opening and inspiration flow created as a result of Addis Ababa becoming the centre for the African Union which brought a lot of people and influences from different parts of the world. The revolution in 1974 and the rule of the Derg regime, stopped this development and created a long-lasting interruption in the arts, which was seen as resurrected only by the current generation of artists (interview Elisabeth Wolde Giorgis, director Modern Art Museum).

Currently Ethiopia, and especially Addis Ababa, is undergoing intense transformation, questioning the role of the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. Contemporary art was believed to be able to respond to these changes, helping people understand what is going on around them. Especially, art was seen as a way to express critique about certain developments more easily thanks to its inherent quality of wrapping critical messages in an esthetical code. As one of the artists stated: "Time is moving on and art has to keep updating to what is happening around. That is its true value" (interview Artist 1).

According to various actors involved in the contemporary art scene in Addis Ababa, the main challenge for artists was to establish a connection to the society through their work. The usual channels through which artists reach out to their audiences were not yet present. As one of the local curators stated:

Curator (m) 1(1): "In Europe there are art magazines, curators, art writers, art critique, art archives, it's very much established. There is not such system here. Because of the lack of support, general public does not really understand what contemporary art is."

Also renting an atelier or a studio independently was perceived as financially difficult, especially in the non-commercial art environment, in which the selling of art pieces was rather sporadic and unpredictable due to the unstable demand for experimental art. Moreover, there was also only a very limited number of places where artists can exhibit their work. In the whole of Addis Ababa, there were only three non-commercially oriented galleries, and a few opportunities provided by the foreign cultural centres (e.g. Goethe Institute). Some artists also found opportunities to exhibit in private spaces such as restaurants. Nevertheless, the chances to be exhibited were very low for beginning artists. Konjit is one of the most prominent figures in the Addis Ababa art scene with her private gallery called Asni. She explains her motivation to open the gallery:

Owner Asni (f) 1(1): "The idea was to create a private space which is owned by a local person which means continuity and sustainability. Because in those days we were still dependent on foreign institutes like Alliance, Goethe, and the Italian institute, especially for exhibitions. And the art that was being produced was mainly directed to the expat community or the Ethiopian diaspora. So it was a certain genre that was being produced. And my idea was to create space which is open for free expression, experiments and see what really the art is that is interested in. [...] And then to attract local audience – that was a big challenge."

5.2 New Art Space – informal art group

Owner Asni (f) 1(2): "The idea of contemporary art as 'being able to do what you want' started to catch inspiration by other people and new galleries have been opening and closing again. And artists started their own initiatives together, for example the Habesha studio and some others."

In the past two decades various art collectives emerged in Addis Ababa, some of which became very robust and renowned. Among the community of artists, pooling of efforts and resources was thus seen as a good solution to this situation, in order to have enough resources to rent a space for working, displaying and exhibiting the art works, as well as providing feedback and support to each other (interview with Habesha studio artists, and Nubia Arts).

The *New Art Space*, as the predecessor of Netsa Art Village, was reported to have started off in 2005 as an informal formation of 4 (later 5) freshly graduated artists-friends who decided to rent a modest studio together in the city:

For several years this space provided the opportunity for the members to work and exhibit. The artists recall this period as very experimental in respect to their work, and also as financially challenging because there were almost no customers for their products (interview Artist 1 and 2). Nevertheless, the artists rejected engagement in commercial arts:

Artist (m) 1(1): "We were just playing, experimenting, not like business."

Artist (m) 2(1): "We wanted to do something else than just selling our art."

Although the initial studio turned into a private residence of one of the artists now, the rest of the artists of the original formation were observed to return there from time to time. When they talk about the early years of establishment, there is a sense of nostalgia present in their accounts:

Artist (m) 2(2): The art space is the continuity. Even being here [nowadays Netsa Art Village], I still go to Ras Mekonen [the former studio]. It's my house, it's a habit. Long time I'm processing this one. [...] I still have my paintings and material in Ras Mekonnen. [...]

The figure which the artists mention a lot in their accounts is Konjit. They consider her as someone who supported their initiative from the beginning by supporting them financially, sending them to different residencies and helping to organize exhibitions.

5.3 Netsa Art Village – formalizing the group

When Konjit later opened her Asni gallery in the (public) Ferensay park, the group got the opportunity to re-locate its art activities to the same location. This move intensified the cooperation between the group and Konjit, moreover, it attracted various other artists into cooperation. Besides exhibitions and local projects, international workshops were organized in the space aiming to enhancing the work of the artists, as well as their network (interviews Konjit and Netsa artists).

Through this process, a community of about forty artists was mobilized. Eleven of them, including most of the initial members of the New Art Space, formed a new collective of contemporary artists first with the name Asni Art Village (taking over the name of the gallery which had to close) and later renamed to Netsa Art Village. The group had to register officially as a 'Private Limited Company', to be able to rent a piece of land in the park from the government and to perform further activities. The initial goal of the group was to create space for artists to work, exhibit and organize workshops. This goal later grew into a vision of creating a living museum and promoting contemporary art in Ethiopia in large (interviews members).

In the time of the research, Netsa Art Village consisted of 17 visual artists with various art directions including painting, sculpting, photography, multi-media installations and performance. Being a member of the group implied commitment to the vision of the group and the way of working together, and willingness to contribute both in terms of time and finances (percentage-wise from each sold piece) to the running of the collective. In practice, it took several steps before an artist could become accepted as a full member, preceded by a 'trial' period to get to know each other. Being accepted as a member meant having the right to officially present oneself as a member, having access to the Netsa space including the possibility to display one's work there, being mentioned on the official website, participating in group exhibitions, and being able to use money from a common fund (mainly for art materials), in case the artist was urgently in need (interview with Netsa director).

The collective had no particular requirement for a theme or style, leaving space for each artist to develop his own original expression. However, there is a shared attitude in the group against making 'commercial art', regarded as limiting own creativity merely towards what is being preferred and demanded by potential customers. Instead, experimentation was a common method to arrive at new art works. Sharing of ideas in the group, and sourcing inspiration from each other was a backbone of the artists' work (group interview 1).

Depending on opportunities, the artists worked on individual projects but engaged also in collective events, such as group exhibitions, cultural events, workshops, events for children, activities at governmental events, etc. As a group, the artists were also applying for funds, for example at the German cultural centre – the Goethe Institute, who had been supporting the group for various years. Together, the group also absolved several workshops, e.g. on how to manage an art collective, and one called 'Wax and Gold', exploring the connection between art and activism. As individual artists, yet members of the collective, some of the members regularly participate in art residencies abroad. The marketing of their art works runs both through personal channels as well as through the collective (interviews members).

Out of the 17 members of the group there was a core group of around 5 members who were more active and involved in the planning and implementation of collective activities, as well as the general management of the group. Generally, the management roles in the group were distributed according to artists' skills and talents (interview Artist 1, Artist 3). For example, an extrovert person proficient in English and generally skilled in verbal expression assumed the role of the director; a photographer assumed a role of the documentation officer; a person, who spends most of his time working in the space of the Netsa gallery, would become the gallery manager, etc:

Curator (m) 2(1): "With Tamrat and Tesfahun, their artistic tendency dominates in being engaged in responsibilities – they may approach issues from that perspective. And Mehret is more realistic. Their cooperation is helping the village to progress and develop."

Several actors in the Addis Ababa art world were interviewed about what differentiates the Netsa Art Village from other art groups in the city:

Artist (f) 3(1): The art village has become known. We have nice connections internationally. The artists are going around and have exhibitions. There is this connection the artists, the community and the government and we are trying to create that link.

Curator (m) 2(2): "[In Netsa Art Village] Commercial interest is trying to be avoided. When a commercial interest come, they really try to avoid it, that really comes with the spirit of the Netsa Art Village. Once, I wanted the artists to benefit from an auction. I wanted to mediate between the artists and the commercial interest. But most of the artists didn't show up. They are more interested in taking care of their art. This is really something that differentiates Netsa from other groups of artists. When they get a fund, if they win a proposal they shift it to the benefit of the group. Netsa is free of commercial interest."

Habesha AS artist (m) 1(1): "Netsa is special for its diversity of artists and positivity, for how they face the challenges related to the government. They take, involve broader environment and promote art and involve also children. Their space in the park is very special."

Nubia AS artist (m) 1(1): "Netsa is special because of the diversity of approaches that it unites in people. It faces challenges in a creative way - it communicates intensely with different offices and tries to solve issues. It is good in inviting foreign artists, organizing workshops, it has a good management and people on board who can write good proposals."

5.4 The space

The Ferensay park, where the Netsa Art Village was currently located, was a public park situated at the outskirts of Addis Ababa and administered by the local government. The place was very green, quiet and with very little people around, all three characteristics contrasting largely with the loud and crowded situation in the rest of the city. The artists were renting a small part of it, which was mostly an outdoor space with monumental trees, equipped with just a few small structures for the office, working, storing and exhibiting. Apart from the structures the space also accommodated many sculptures of different sizes which added a strong ambience to the place. These sculptures were mostly made by the artist named Tesfahun who was engaged in making sculptures from pieces of materials and objects that he had found in the street (observation and informal interview).

Several visits to the park revealed different artists and their activities. Following observations were made in the park:

1. Artist 4 engaged in his work in one of the secluded places of the Netsa space, with his stand and materials placed under a big tree
2. Artist 1 working on one of his paintings inside of one of the structures

3. Artist 5 together with several non-member artists sitting on the ground all engaged in their own drawings and paintings
4. Three artists (1, 4 and 6) sharing lunch served in the space in an improvised cafeteria operated by the wife of one of the artists
5. Artist 6 being present in the space looking after his little daughter

Besides the observation, some of the artists were also interviewed about their relationship to the place. For some artists it is a place they come to only occasionally because their work is bound to a specific electronic equipment (interview Artist 8 (f)) or they do not always find time to come there (Artist 9 (f)). Others expressed their appreciation of the space as an inspiring and peaceful area to create. Moreover, they found it important that they can meet, interact with other artists and create a focus on their work:

Artist (m) 2(3): "I don't like the city and suffocation. For me it's a nice space for art. It is more inspiring, because there are other people around doing art. Every day we see, we talk."

Artist (m) 1(2): "It is a centre, because you are in your centre. You are experimenting in your centre. Like NASA – scientists inside. Attention inside. There is talking each other inside. Project and progress. Living in your dream."

Artist 5 (m) who was also interviewed about his relationship to the space. He was one to latest members of the group, and one who did not go through any formal art education but started visiting Netsa and learning from the artists who were around. He believed that throughout time he developed his own talent thanks to the interaction with other artists.

Beyond working, Netsa also served as a place to which guests were invited to watch the display and where public events were organized such as concerts, workshops, activities for school children, etc (interview Artist 1). In conversations, the artists often stressed the openness of the space to everybody who wanted to come, to both artists and non-artists as a place of encounters of people and art. None of the public activities were observed during the research time, however, there is evidence of them through the photo-documentation available at the Netsa website.

5.5 Governmental pressures

Artist (m) 1(3): "We pay for the village because we need to create some kind contemporary art village with the dream of creating a contemporary modern art museum. The art centre, the vision we have. For this vision, you need to link yourself with the government too and you need to link yourself with cultural and tourism offices."

Once the collective was formed and the park rented from the government, the group had to register itself as an official entity. One of the major problems was that according to the bureaucratic categories, the art collective fell into the general category of Private Limited Company, which obliged artists to follow various rules and guidelines specific to a commercial activity, including having a start-up capital and paying taxes. This was perceived as a big burden by the artists:

Artist (m) 1(4): [...] we organize like PLC – private limited company. Asking the government, it is difficult to communicate. PLC is commercial, like a factory. There is no system, which makes us art studio, community. We are still asking, it is not comfortable for us. It is difficult to work with these things. We are saying we are cultural things. Slowly slowly we are coming to understand each other.

Artist (m) 7(1): "There was no kind of title [more appropriate choice for registration], so the only choice was to stay with PLC [Private Limited Company]. But we want to escape it. This cannot be the gallery standard, because this is the art living, like we do the artists, performing. When the guests come they will buy, yes or no or maybe. We could not deal with the situation like a business does."

Recently, the government passed a law which obliged each artist to obtain a professional licence for all artists that want to create in their studios. This law practically made any unannounced art production illegal. Moreover, the collective was obliged to purchase a cash machine and to report their daily transactions at the end of each day as in case of shops, restaurants etc., under the threat of being banned as a collective otherwise.

Artist/Netsa director (f) 3(2): "They wanted us to buy a cash register machine. So we told them we are not a cafeteria, so we don't sell every day. Sometimes we sell once a month, or so. It's very difficult. They didn't listen, we wrote twice. But they didn't listen. Eventually, they warned us if we don't buy the machine they will come and close us. So finally we decided to buy the machine for 8000 birr."

Artist/Netsa director (f) 3(3): "We met one guy from the policy makers, when we told him about the machine he was laughing. It was the one who drafted the policy, but he said 'it was not for you guys'. So I think the problem is about how the policy is being implemented at other offices, the hierarchy. The people in the higher position seems to understand but sometimes nothing comes out of them. If the policy is there, the others will obey. If you start from down, nothing will happen."

The director of the Netsa Art Village (Artist 3) on the behalf of the collective became a representative in an advocacy team for better art related policies, further comprising of the former director of the art school, president of the Ethiopian art association and several studio artists. They succeeded in convincing the government to abolish the law on having to have a professional licence for everyone who wanted to paint in his studio. Furthermore, the team collected benchmarks from all over the world about policies related to art and artists, and presented it to the policy makers with the request to reconsider local policies and use those of other countries as inspiration (interview Netsa director).

Besides these struggles with the regulations, the recent plans of the government were to transform the park where Netsa Art Village is situated, and give it a new purpose (mostly for commercial activities). The designer/architect assigned by the government came to Netsa to meet the artists and discuss the plans. After that, artists were invited to an official meeting with the officials to be consulted about the developments and to express their image of the park in the future. They expressed their wish to carry on with their activities and even to extend them by including a library, and later create a museum of contemporary art. Although the artists strongly believed that at this point Netsa Art Village is relatively well-known and respected, the government did send an eviction letter to them. The artists consulted the lawyer and aimed to appeal to this decision (interviews Artist 1 and Artist 2).

6 Analysis Case Study I.

The case study presents particular configurations of the labour organizing *principle* (Benton 1996) combining collective and hired labour arrangements. It illustrates how, in interaction of the practice with the environment, these specific configurations come about within the *field* of crop harvesting of small-holder farmers in Ethiopia.

The mobilization of collective labour in the community is emergent from principles of local agro-ecology and social norms of reciprocity. The diversity of sowing times, soil types and crop varieties were responsible for the varying rhythms of natural processes in the landscape, including the maturation period. As a consequence, the workload for farmers in the area got distributed in time, which opened windows of opportunity for the exchange of labour: to offer help to each other when their crops have not yet matured or have already been harvested. These windows of opportunity arisen from the local agro-ecology were embraced by the local social context in which mutual trust and reciprocity constituted the backbone of local relationships and institutions, making the exchange of labour a common practice. The different maturing periods also informed the sequencing of activities in the farmer networks, and as such became one of the key organizing principles for the organization of labour in the community. Depending on necessity, while flexibly responding to the agro-ecological situation at hand, different parts of the farmer network got activated to mobilize enough labour in order to accomplish different harvesting tasks. This mechanism constitutes, what Bourdieu calls "the internal structure of the field" informed by the logic of the practice itself (dependence on local agro-ecology), as well as by the nature of social relationships in the community.

Collective labour was observed to acquire different modalities, depending on the nature of the practice. Besides the more rule-based *debo* practice used for the teff cutting, which was clearly delineated and accompanied by festive activities and planned ahead of time, other collective practices had a less clearly defined *modus operandi*. In practice, this meant the possibility of organizing and negotiating the agreement of the practice spontaneously depending on the needs of involved parties (e.g. labour for weeds, beans for taking care of the field). Farmers approached mutual cooperation as something that is simply "being done", and as something that is intrinsically linked to being a member of the family/community.

While more loosely defined forms of cooperation remained in the domain of farmer-to-farmer support, *debo* was observed to be replaced by hired labour in some instances. Indeed, some of the farmers were observed to opt for hired labour instead of the traditional form of labour mobilization based on reciprocal relations. The principles of hiring labour introduce new principles of labour organization into the *field* of harvesting as compared to the traditional *debo* practices. First of all, hiring labour implicated the utilization of financial, instead of social capital as in the case of *debo*. The availability of cash thus became one of the decision factors for farmers in organizing harvesting. Indirectly, it therefore defined who can and who cannot use hired labour, depending on the financial status of the household. Secondly, the new arrangement based on hiring labour brought about new actors into the field in the form of day labourers from other geographical areas. Their interests and aims (offering labour for cash) introduced a different way of negotiating and planning for harvesting steered by the situation on the local labour market. Thirdly, part of the value generated through labour (in form of cash earned by the day labourers) got relocated to other areas, rather than staying in the community as in the case of *debo* (building trust and good relationships).

Bourdieu's concept of *relational autonomy*, which is related to the origin of operating principles, is helpful to observe changes taking place in the field of harvesting as a consequence of the interaction of the field with the labour market. Specifically, it can help to illuminate how new/external principles of labour organization enter the field, and how they are taken up and

utilized by the farmers through their practice, in other words how the field serves as a “*mediating context*”. Farmers’ decision making about how to organize harvesting represents an entrance point to illuminate these mechanisms. What became clear is that hiring labour is very useful in case of larger fields because it allows farmers to acquire enough labour at once thanks to its abundance on the labour market. By entering a direct transaction (cash for labour), they become more flexible in determining their harvesting dates and they do not have an obligation to reciprocate the same amount of labour in the future. Another factor making some farmers decide for hired labour was the cancellation of the need to organize a festive activity which was perceived as relatively costly and labour demanding (mainly for the women).

The possibility to exercise the preference for hired labour was, however, conditioned by the availability of cash in the household. This was indicated as an important decision factor. Moreover, some farmers express their appreciation of the *debo* practice as an important part of the community life, making it an inherent practice although occasionally substituted by other arrangements. Cooperation is something that is simply ‘being done’ and thus taken for granted as a fall-back mechanism under various circumstances (e.g. sickness). These reasons might be explaining the persistence of the *debo* practice in the field of harvesting, despite the availability of the hired labour.

The practice of hiring labour remains in the domain of teff cutting and is virtually absent in other harvesting activities. This was explained by the need of large amount of labourers to harvest one field of teff as compared to other crops, and unlike other harvesting activities (e.g. carrying of the harvest to the trashing ground). This can be explained by the fact that teff, as the major staple (and commercialized) crop, often occupied the largest fields in the area and was described as a very tedious job by the farmers (possible explanations: high number of teff plants on 1 square meter as compared to other crops, and the necessity to squat down while cutting).

What becomes clear from the case study is that collective arrangements and hired labour coexist both in the larger context of harvesting, as well as in *debo* practice related to teff cutting. As such, also the principles of organizing labour for harvesting, either based on collective arrangements or hiring labour exist next to each other.

A field which adopts a new set of principles which emanate from other fields rather than from the internal logic of the practice would be by Bourdieu considered as oscillating towards heteronomy (Maton 2005). At the same time, the arrival of a new set of principles which contrast with the initial *modus operandi* of harvesting could be regarded as what Bourdieu calls the new *avant-garde* – a movement towards challenging the current status quo (Bourdieu 1993). However, rather than complete displacement of the old ways of organizing labour, what we observe in the field of harvesting is coexistence and sometimes even complementarity of both systems. Farmers can choose between both of them, depending on their current situation and needs. The availability of both of them, although maybe temporary, seemed to be enlarging their capacity to make choices that are proper to the situated practice of harvesting, since it helped them to adjust to the current labour demand and at the same time, retain the cultural and existential importance of cooperation and mutual support in the community.

Together with the concept of *avant-garde*, the case study is putting into question the concept of relational autonomy. It seems that the adoption of external principles does not necessarily cause a movement towards heteronomy if internal ways of labour organization are retained at the same time. Nevertheless, these developments do open a question about the sustainability of collective labour arrangements amidst other, potentially competing, ways of labour organization in the future.

7 Analysis Case Study II.

The case study presents different phases of the development of an art collective within the *field* of contemporary art making in Ethiopia. It illustrates how the group creates an own art space simultaneously with *principles* of legitimation of their work (Bourdieu 1993). Moreover, it shows how the group transforms in response to the external environment and principles of legitimation which are being imposed upon it.

Bourdieu suggests that by default, the field of art is strongly dependent on other fields for the generation of legitimacy of the art work, for the artists to be able to gain renown and potentially earn a living (Bourdieu 1993). This is caused by the fact that art making is a practice which is not merely one of material production (utilizing paint, canvas, etc.), but also symbolic because it relies on the creation of value of the art piece by its audience. This was visible in the field by the expression of uncertainty which was perceived by the artists. According to their experience, the essence of art being 'experimental' is the exploration into unknown and indefinite areas, which allows the artists to enter a process of constant re-invention of his work ("we're just playing"). With this characteristic also comes the uncertainty of the outcome, which places artists in a situation in which they cannot predict whether, or how much, they can produce and if their work will be at all valued by the audience and the market.

The generation of value of art is fulfilled through different social institutions, such as education, galleries and art critique by means of filtering and supporting the product (Bourdieu 1993). However, these support structures were still very limited or even absent in Ethiopia. Experimental contemporary art thus remained a peripheral practice directed to a very specific audience of insiders, expatriates and the Ethiopian diaspora.

The collective arrangement between artists emerged as a response to the situation of the contemporary art in Ethiopia. Artists were encountering difficulties to work and exhibit in an environment where the understanding of the nature and value of contemporary experimental art was not yet established. The formation of the informal art group New Art Space enabled the creation of an alternative support structure, one crucial to the practice of an artist including a place (renting a small studio in the city) to work, exhibit and to receive feedback from people within the field. Bourdieu applies the term *avant-garde* for collective art movements that challenge the status quo by bringing new ways of doing things into a field. The collective initiative New Art Space (and later Netsa Art Village), among other art groups, can thus be seen as an attempt to create an *avant-garde* to challenge the status quo of contemporary art in the Ethiopian society (Grenfell and James 2004).

Two mechanisms were crucial in the establishment of the group. *First*, by pooling financial resources, the artists could afford to rent a studio for both their work and art exhibitions. This provided them with more manoeuvre space to create independently on what their environment valued while not compromising on their visions and ideals. This was crucial for the artists to be able to stay focused on what they really wanted to do, and not what the environment demanded. *Second*, the artists created a space in which experimental art was well-received and valued. By being engaged in the same type of work, the artists enforced their common belief in experimental art and thereby collectively supported each other in carrying on with the work despite the challenging circumstances. The value of contemporary experimental art emerged from interactions between artists within the space, and created a clear stance against "the other": commercial arts, meaning art produced with the intention of financial profit.

These two mechanisms were complicit in creating a specific principle of legitimation of the art practice. As such, they illustrate how collective action served as a means to create space in which art could be both *produced* and *valued*. In this case, both material and symbolic

production of the work was internal to this field, which signifies an inward orientation of the capital, and thus strong relational autonomy (Maton 2005).

The later development of the group brought the artists to the Ferensay park. The physical properties of the space supported the practice of the group by offering enough space for large-scale experimentation (statues), and by being calm and inspiring for the work. Moreover, the space also offered the possibility to organize bigger public events (e.g. workshops, concerts), thereby inviting a larger audience. Although, different artists made use of the space to a different degree and in different manner, overall, the park was inhabited, shaped and to a large extent appropriated by the group which was observable from its appearance of the physical space, as well as oral accounts of the artists. This created a clear sense of identity attached to the location, which delineated the boundaries around the group and their practices, further strengthening the *avant-garde* notion of their existence.

On the other hand, the establishment of the group within the Ferensay park administered by the local municipality implicated the need to formalize the group into an official entity to be able to rent the space. According to the public legislation, the art collective fell into the category of private commercial businesses, although commercial activities were not at all the main focus of the group. This status brought the obligation of having to comply to various regulations such as paying taxes and having to use a cash machine to provide regular financial statements. These went against the internal logic of the experimental art practice, and rather created an additional burden. One can regard this process as a way of exercising bureaucratic power to pursue a specific way of *legitimation* of art-making as business. This is, however, in conflict with the values created within the group regarding art-making as experimentation.

The close interaction with official governmental structures and the conflicting perceptions about art-making brought the collective into a position of having to defend the space it created as an *avant-garde* movement. The negotiations with the governmental structures were based on an advocacy message aimed at altering the policies into a form more favourable to the actual practice of artists in the local art field.

From the analytical perspective, this signifies that the mode through which the group acquired legitimacy changed as a result of these pressures. There is a shift from a purely internal focus of the practice (art production) to an outward orientation in the form of negotiation and advocacy work. As such, legitimacy of the practice is no longer established through stressing the independency of the *avant-garde*. Rather, the practice is introduced and promoted as a space within existing structures, and thus appropriate policies should be created accordingly.

In terms of relational autonomy, Bourdieu would consider the shift towards closer interaction with dominant structures as a move towards heteronomy. From the case study, it was not yet clear whether and how the group will manage to influence the external bureaucratic structures, rather than having to adjust to them.

8 Discussion

The choice of theoretical concepts used for the analysis of findings in this research aimed to understand autonomy based on the empirical evidence documenting people's evolving practices. Bourdieu's concept of relational autonomy shaped the idea of autonomy into being of relative and fluctuating value, depending on the dialogue between internal principles of practice and its environment. Autonomy was regarded as a contingent outcome, depending both on the practice of the group, as well as specific social, material and political context. Zooming into the workings of context was supported at a more general level by Benton's and Polanyi's theoretical contributions in terms of material and social conditionings (respectively), and relevant literature on Ethiopian socio-political circumstances.

In order to study mechanisms unfolding on the interface between practice and its context, it proved useful to focus on a specific organizing principle. In the study of harvesting, the principle of *labour organization* (Benton) was crucial in order to understand how the execution of the task acquired a particular form. In the case of art-making, it was the means of *legitimation* (Bourdieu) which were key to the analysis. Observations in the field made clear that there are various *modi operandi* of a principle, i.e. various ways of fulfilling the same principle. The relationship of the underlying principle and the available options offered by the social and material environment present people with a specific range of constraints and opportunities from which they can choose their strategies to accomplish a task as individuals and as groups. As such, the main focus of the analysis was to investigate how principles of practice acquire a particular *modus operandi* under specific circumstances, and how this generates autonomy. This process is referred to as the 'making of autonomy'.

8.1 The making of (functional) autonomy

In case of harvesting, labour organization was done through collective arrangements based on reciprocity (which itself presents various sub-modalities), or through hiring labour which is a relationship based on the logic of the free market, or through combination of both. Collective harvesting was to some extent replaced by hired labour, which brought the group into a closer interaction with the market and its principles. The possibility of hiring labour extended the range of options for farmers with larger fields and greater harvest, who might otherwise fail to harvest on time if relying purely on collective arrangements. This thesis hypothesises that whether or not the exposure to the (external) market principles in consequence decreases autonomy depends on the sustainability of the collective arrangement alongside hiring labour. Collective arrangements are here seen as a certain 'fall-back' mechanism for times of unfavourable circumstances on the market, which might also be explaining their persistence alongside hired labour. Both *modi operandi* of harvesting (hired and collective) are thus seen as instrumental to functional autonomy. However, the question remains whether or not further movement towards the market implies an alienation from the community structures based on trust and reciprocity. So far, both systems coexist, suggesting mutual complementarity.

In case of art-making, legitimation was initially pursued through the formation of an independent avant-garde in which value for experimental art and art-making was produced internally by members themselves and by actors already active in the art field. This was achieved through the creation of an internal value system and forming of an opposition against commercial arts. Later, an opportunity to re-locate the art activities to a public space more suited for the activities of experimental artists brought the chance to expand and reach out to a wider audience. This, however, also brought the group into a closer interaction with the public administration, and thereby new challenges related to the legitimation of the art practice. Unfitting regulations (taxation etc.) and the threat of eviction from the location seemed to

conflict with the art practice. As a consequence, strategies for legitimation transformed into advocacy to promote policies more favourable to the practice of art collectives. The new situation presents a wider range of opportunities to gain legitimacy from the wider public, and at the same time the need to defend already existing values in front of the government. Whether or not this threatens the internal sustainability of the collective arrangement and the practice itself in the future, is like in the previous case, an open question. Certainly, the management (especially coordination) had to be changed as a consequence of the transformation of the group to a more structured format. Keeping up with management challenges internally while retaining an open dialogue with public authorities and audience seems decisive for the future development of the group.

In both cases, there is a clear movement towards the boundary of the collective arrangement facilitating a closer interaction with the external environment. The movement to the boundaries was motivated by functional (rather than ideological) drivers. This, on the one hand, presents the groups with a wider pallet of options and makes their practice possible within the current circumstances, and on the other hand, raises questions about the sustainability of the collective arrangement within a longer time span. To date, although different *modi operandi* enter the field from the external environment, collective arrangements persist and remain instrumental to the practice at hand. As such, the making of autonomy is situated in manoeuvring between the options provided by the collective arrangement and those coming from outside of it.

8.2 Integration of functional and political autonomy for further research

The presentation of findings about harvesting purposefully include observations regarding the governmental intervention of mobilizing farmers into pre-engineered development units. Although not included in the analysis because of lack of empirical evidence, the processes of establishing governmental control in the countryside are apparent and should thus be further investigated in relation to the practice of farmers. The question remains whether and how such an intervention affects the local social context in relation to labour organization. An additional topic, in the intersection of political autonomy and material conditioning of practice, is the influx of improved seeds which seem to be creating greater uniformity in the landscape, thereby altering the material conditions of crop production together with the patterns of harvesting. How agro-ecological uniformity affects collective harvesting practices (and indirectly also the norms of reciprocity) is another mechanisms which should be put into question.

In the case study of artists, an important point which should be highlighted is the fact that the artist collective managed to set up an advocacy campaign in a political environment in which any advocacy-related work is strictly monitored, and, in fact, officially banned for civil society organizations. Yet, their strategy to use the tenets of their practice to demand a legitimate space in the public domain, seems to be possible and accepted by the local authorities. Through functional (rather than ideological) arguments they already managed to make a change in the existing policies. Ideological choices thus seem rather implicit and secondary to the functional logic of the practice. This, I consider, is an interesting entry point for further research as a complementary stream of inquiry to the one which takes power and ideology as a starting point.

9 Conclusion

The analysis of both case studies reveal autonomy as a result of people's choice-making and constant re-negotiation of strategies related to the practice at hand, which could be termed the 'making of autonomy'. It appears that autonomy is not a desired or pre-planned state linked to a fixed organizational structure, and rather an emergent outcome of the interaction between practice and the environment it is situated in. By specifying human practices in terms of their underlying principles, and how they come into operation, this thesis suggests functionality as a key element of autonomy. This diverts attention from autonomy in a purely political sense and highlights the importance of further conditionings of human practice, such as the social and material context. Being autonomous thus means the possibility to make choices which are desirable, but also practically proper to the practice under specific circumstances. Thus, functional and political autonomy represent two sides of the same coin.

In this research, autonomy was operationalized as the degree to which practice is (in)dependent on principles emanating in contexts other, than the field in which the practice is situated in (Bourdieu in Maton 2005). The evidence, however, showed that autonomy does not necessarily decrease when external modalities are adopted. On the contrary, retaining the availability of various modalities can enlarge the range of options, while collective arrangements transform, yet remain instrumental to the practice. Their capacity to facilitate functional responses to particular situations seems to be the key to their sustainability. The question remains, whether they retain their function despite the pressure of various outer influences.

Technography was a useful approach in this study, as it allowed practice to become an arena where changes of the environment acquired a concrete shape and could be observed. At the same time, technography, as an interdisciplinary methodology, enabled the combination of case studies of very different kinds. This positively challenged the process of analysis along certain principles (labour organization and legitimation) which are inherent to the logic of a specific human practice.

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