

Worker-Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina



- A Comparative Case Study of Two Print Shops in Buenos Aires

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Region og Regionalisering, Spring 2011
University of Bergen
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Front page: Logos from respectively Artes Graficas El Sol (AGS) and Cooperativa Chilavert Imprenta.

Abstract

This thesis is about the recuperated enterprises in Argentina, referred to as ERTs¹ throughout the thesis, which has been seen as one out of many forms of social protests/ways of coping which grew out of Argentina's spectacular economic collapse in late 2001. These are enterprises that went bankrupt and consequently were taken over by the former employees who continue to run the businesses as workers' cooperatives. The ERTs have proved to be more long-lived than many of the other social protests they originated alongside with: almost a decade later they still persist and are actually increasing in number. Can they really serve as feasible alternatives to conventional ways of running businesses? In the thesis I aim at approaching an answer to this question using the protagonists', the workers', perspective.

I have conducted interviews and participant observation at two different ERTs: two print shops in Buenos Aires. With bases in my empirical findings I argue that political identities are being constructed inside these workplaces and that these identities are important as to how viable the workers are considering their job situation to be. Before starting the field-work I had a hypothesis about the two print shops dealing very differently with the fact that they were recuperated enterprises; it seemed to me that one of them were actively using this fact as a strategy when communicating with clients and other actors. In other words: they were continuously constructing a very strong identity as an ERT. The other enterprise I visited seemingly had an entirely different approach; their goal was to be taken seriously as an enterprise, not stressing the part about being recuperated. I argue that these very different cases represent two extremities within the named "universe" of the ERTs (Palomino et al 2010). With the two cases representing extremities within the phenomenon in question, I argue that some of the conclusions that I draw can be valid to the ERT phenomenon as a whole. It is however important to keep in mind that the ERTs are subjective experiences, and although I argue that the ERTs could be viable alternatives to conventional enterprises, the degree of viability would depend on the strategies chosen by each and every ERT.

¹ *Empresas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores*, this term derives from Vieta (2008).

Acknowledgements

Firstly, thank you to Håvard Haarstad for accepting the challenge of supervising my master's thesis and for sticking with me even though I have not been an average master's student. Your patience with me has been admirable. Thank you also to Arnt Fløysand for accepting the role as a 'senior supervisor'. Thank you for your encouragement, inputs and also for providing financial support. Stina Ellevseth Oseland deserves a standing ovation for voluntarily proofreading and commenting on basically the whole thesis. Thank you!

Also thank you to the master's programme of *Region og Regionalisering* for financial support and for a couple of interesting years.

I could clearly not have pulled this one through without Ebbe. I am thankful to you in so many ways I don't even know where to begin: thank you for making me coffee, thank you for staying up with me all night, for being my tech-support, for proofreading and commenting, for taking far more than your fair share of baby-sitting, for sending me off to Argentina for six weeks with only words of encouragement even though it meant twice as much work for you around the house. I guess what I am trying to say is: thank you for your everlasting support and loyalty. You are the greatest.

Thank you to my children Vetle and Frej who inspire me and teach me important lessons about life every day. Thank you to Elisabeth and Hanne for always having a bed ready for me in Bergen, and for food and good company. I feel fortunate to count on the presence of friends and a big family and family in-law in my life who are always supportive.

In Buenos Aires: thank you to my interviewees and all the people I talked to informally. The workers of the ERT movement are a true inspiration! Thank you to Andrés Ruggeri for his willingness to take time out of a busy schedule to answer all my stupid questions. Thank you to Natalia Polti at the Documentation Centre of The Recuperated Enterprises for doing the same thing. Thank you to Anna Sødal for putting me in contact with María

Inéz. Thank you to María Inéz for providing accommodation. Thank you to Sebastián for doing the same thing. Sebastián Maciel and Luna Williams were my social life in Buenos Aires: without you my stay would have been very different. Thank you for all the good times and the cheap wine. And lastly, thank you to Claire for making sure I got to see the inside of *La Bombonera* from the midst of *la barra brava*. As you would have put it: I will never be able to look at a one-eyed man again without thinking of you!

Astrid Karlstad Larsen

Granvin, May 29th 2011

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List of Abbreviations

ERT: Empresa Recuperada por sus Trabajadores, Enterprise Recovered by its Workers

WRC: Worker Recovered Factory

MNER: Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas, National Movement of Recovered Enterprises

MNFRT: Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores, Nacional Movement of Factories Recovered by its workers

FEECOTRA: Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina, Federation of Workers' Cooperatives of the Republic of Argentina.

CTA: Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos, Central of the Argentinean Workers

PJ: Partido Justicialista, the Peronist Party

URC: Unión Radical Cívica, The Radical Civic Union

IMPA: Industria Metalúrgica y Plástica de la Argentina, Metalurgic and Plastic Industry of Argentina

AGS: Artes Graficas El Sol, The Sun Graphic Arts

INAES: Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y economía social, National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy.

CNCT: la Confederación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo, The National Confederation of Workers' Cooperatives

CTG: Confederación General del Trabajo, General Confederation of Labour

Clarification of Concepts and Formalities

I use the abbreviation *ERT* when I write about the research object of this thesis. *ERT* stands for *Empresas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores*, which literary translates to Enterprises Recuperated by their Workers. I am fond of the word recuperated, and sometimes I will use the term ‘recuperated enterprises’ for the sake of variation. However, I found that in most of the literature that is either written in or translated into English, the word *recuperada* is translated into ‘recovered’. If another term besides ERTs or recuperated enterprises appears in the text, this is when it has been natural to repeat the original formulation expressed in the literature. For instance, Palomino et al (2010) uses the term *Worker-Recovered Companies*, *WRC*. Consequently, when referring to Palomino et al (2010) I will also use this term.

Throughout this paper the term ‘occupied enterprise’ is used. I will therefore point out the differentiation between an occupied and a recuperated factory. The term occupied enterprise describes the first stage in the process towards constituting a recuperated enterprise. It refers to the physical act of the workers occupying the enterprise. An occupied factory has not yet undergone any legal procedures to claim the workers’ rights to the means of productions or legalise the factory’s functioning under workers control. Obviously this is a very vulnerable situation for the workers. At this initial stage of the recuperation process, in many cases they are constantly facing the threat of getting physically evicted by the police.

Throughout this paper I use the word ‘worker’ when I write about the people who make their daily living within an ERT. Some of the people I talked to referred to themselves and their co-workers as *trabajadores* (workers), others preferred the term *socios* (associates), while others again used the term *compañeros* (which I find a bit problematic to use because it could translate as both the quite neutral descriptive term ‘colleges’ and the more ideological coloured ‘comrades’). Although I realise that ‘workers’ is not neutral either (I think this is even less so for the Spanish *trabajadores*) my purpose of using it is descriptive.

When I talked to the workers in the recuperated enterprises, I was often in doubt how I should refer to non-recuperated enterprises. This came up a lot since central elements in my talks with them was often if they preferred working in a recuperated enterprise over a non-recuperated enterprise, and there was also a lot of talk about what was different before and

after the occupation and consequent recuperation. Sometimes the term ‘private enterprise’ came up, but in my head the opposite of a ‘private enterprise’ is a state-owned enterprise, which does not fit to describe the ERTs. I used the term ‘normal enterprise’ for a while, but one of my informants, Daniel at AGS, arrested me on this. “*Now* we are a normal enterprise”, he said. In the end I ended up using the term ‘conventional enterprise’ to describe enterprises that are not recuperated as workers’ cooperatives.

All translations are mine if nothing else is stated. In case of official translations it will be remarked upon if necessary. It has been my aim to write this thesis in British English.

1.0 Introduction

“Que se vayan todos!”²

-Slogan aimed at the government, chanted by the Argentine people during the popular uprisings of the 19th and 20th of December 2001.

In December 2001, right before Christmas and the Argentine summer vacations, all of a sudden the banks shut down and regular Argentines could not get their own money withdrawn from their bank accounts. Needless to say, this caused great discontent among the population. On the 19th of December, the streets of Buenos Aires exploded with people of all ages and from all kind of social backgrounds marching towards the presidential palace, demanding that the government had to go.

On the evening of December 19th, President Fernando de la Rúa came on national television and declared a state of siege. The finance minister, Domingo Cavallo, announced that he would resign at 1 a.m. on December 20th, as the uprising went into its second day. After two whole days of popular uprisings, the President too was forced to resign. The last thing the Argentine people saw of him was a helicopter taking off from the roof of La Casa Rosada – the presidential palace. As de la Rúa fled, he left behind a vacuum of power. Within the next ten days, Argentina saw four new presidents coming and going, until Eduardo Duhalde from the Peronist Party, looser of the elections in 1999, assumed the presidency New Year’s Day of 2002.

I remember the TV-pictures of people banging pots and pans in the streets of Buenos Aires; obviously; this is the kind of situation that would have all the components that are required to move, provoke and engage. This was even a situation we fortunate people in Norway could relate to: the crisis of Argentina also hit the middle class who had bank accounts and debit cards to access those accounts. Then all of a sudden all ATMs were just out of cash; the whole country was out of cash and there was nothing anyone could do to fix it; and then came the massive shut down of workplaces.

² “Get lost, all of you!”



FIGURE 1 – PROTESTERS IN THE STREET, DECEMBER 2001 (MIDRÉ 2006:170, PHOTO: DENNIS ROGERS CRISIS STATES RESEARCH CENTRE)

Nymark (2008) argues that if the masses had been more organized, a revolution could actually have taken place within the power vacuum on the 20th of December. There was no revolution by common standard, but maybe it did happen in a sense anyway. As the protesters took over the streets those December days, in a suit factory in central Buenos Aires, a number of seamstresses had locked themselves in inside their workplace. They were protesting in silence against not being paid what their bosses owed them in wages. Their silent protest coincidentally happened simultaneously with the demonstrations outside. The ladies of the Brukman suit factory had watched their salaries diminish little by little over the past few months, until it was not even enough to pay for the bus ride home. So they did not go home, but stayed with the demand of getting paid for their work (Lavaca 2007). At the time, the workers of Brukman had no idea that they later on would become symbolic; they would form

part of a national phenomenon, a phenomenon that would also gain a fair amount of international attention in the years to come: the recuperated enterprises, from now on referred to as *Empresas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores*³ (ERTs).

I started to take an active interest in the ERTs in Argentina, a few years ago. The subject was first introduced to me when I read an article about a recuperated shoe-factory in the province of Buenos Aires in the Norwegian magazine *Verdensmagasinet X*, and later the Swedish translation of Esteban Magnani's *El cambio silencioso*⁴ which is a thorough introduction to the subject. I have discovered that whenever I talk or write about the ERTs I am nearly always confronted with the question: *does it work?* To think that the practical problems of worker-management could actually be resolved and work on an everyday basis in our time and within the capitalistic societal model is a provocative and/or exciting thought: it challenges a few so called truths about how the world as of today works, and that is why, in my opinion, it is interesting. These truths include “the predominance of private property as embedded in constitutional and legislative law” virtually everywhere (Rains 2005: 94) and the normative division between manual and intellectual labour. The idea of workers being in charge of the means of production and running a business with an egalitarian and democratic organization- and ownership-structure certainly has the capacity to invoke sympathy. In the ERTs, the workers well-being is seemingly prioritized over the right to private property and claims of efficiency to any cost. This is a very *desirable* thought and therefore, I argue, is it also vulnerable to being romanticized in analyses.

1.1 A real alternative?

Nearly a decade has passed since Argentina's economic collapse. All though there had been cases of companies taken over and run by the workers prior to December 2001, it was in the wake of the crisis they grew more numerous, and visible; alongside other social movements that emerged as a response to the economic and social situation the country found itself in. Klein writes that the enterprises have been both praised by radical socialist activists all over the world as the beginning of a new socialist utopia, as well as condemned in rightwing publications like *The Economist* as a direct threat to the principle of private property. As Klein points out; “the truth is somewhere in between these two positions” (Klein 2003: 14).

³ Worker-Recovered Enterprises (translation: Vieta and Ruggeri 2009)

⁴ Swedish title: *Okkuper, Gjør motstand, produser!*

Are the ERTs something more than ‘just another social movement’? Are we looking at a viable alternative; contrasting the world-wide neoliberal doctrine? As Ruggeri (2009b) writes; this is certainly what many radical intellectuals, activists and politicians worldwide have wanted to believe. The ERTs were quickly seen as a hope of radical social change. Then, a few years went by, and the political development calmed down a bit in Argentina. The vast majority of the middle class more or less managed to re-establish their lives and gradually lost interest in the social movements. However, the ERTs have proven to be more persistent than other social movements that emerged as a response to the 2001 collapse (Magnani 2003, Ruggeri 2009b). During the years the ERTs have existed, they have also been generally well looked upon in the Argentine society, including in the mass medias. This becomes especially clear when you contrast this to the decline in support the *piqueteros* (movements of unemployed which originated in the mid-1990s and famously uses roadblocks as their mode to protest) has experienced (Ruggeri 2009b).

The ERTs have also actually increased in number. In 2003, Argentine labour expert Héctor Palomino wrote that: “the social impact of the movement of occupied enterprises is more closely related to its symbolic dimension than to its real strengths” (Palomino 2003: 72; referred to in Palomino et al 2010). The number of recuperated enterprises in Argentina was then 138. In October 2010 the number of recuperated enterprises had, according to the Documentation Centre on recuperated enterprises affiliated with UBA⁵, increased to 205 (Vales 2010). The same year, Palomino, Bleyntat, Garro and Giacomuzzi writes an article where they address the expansion of what they name the universe of worker-recovered companies in Argentina. In this article, they write that “the movement has now reached a stage where it is large enough to begin to have considerable economic impact in terms of the number of companies and workers involved” (Palomino et al 2010: 261-262). They have showed the capacity of the workers to run businesses; businesses that were even considered non-viable from the capitalists’ point of view. In theory, the possibilities seem unlimited; the practical problems, however, are decisive in their quotidian lives and therefore should not be ignored (Ruggeri 2009b).

⁵ *Universidad de Buenos Aires*, The University of Buenos Aires

1.2 Research questions

I embarked on this project looking for explanations to the ERT phenomenon. Even though the Argentine labour market is considered to have stabilised in 2005, we are looking at an expansion of the universe of the ERTs (Palomino et al 2010). Apparently the ERTs have something to offer to the people working there. Why else would new ERTs see the light of day? Why else would the workers of the already existing ones stay? This has been central in my research. The overlying research question of this thesis is therefore:

Q1: How can the ERTs serve as viable economic survival strategies?

As my project evolved I realised that there obviously are many explanatory factors as to why this phenomenon persists and also expands. The main research question needs to be narrowed down, and accordingly I pose three sub-research questions:

SQ1: How can the ERT phenomenon be explained within its Argentinean context of origin?

SQ2: What are the political identities being created within the ERT phenomenon?

SQ3: What survival strategies do the ERTs make use of and how viable are these?

In answering these questions I want to focus on the practical problems the associates of ERTs face in their everyday lives, what solutions they offer to these problems and how these encounters with everyday challenges makes up their identities as workers in a recuperated enterprise.

The solutions offered to the practical problems of everyday life are what I refer to as survival strategies. This is an interpretation of Ruggeri (2009b) who writes about how the ERTs are confronted with a new reality in post-crisis Argentina, where the “fight for survival now [...] primarily expresses itself as consolidation of the ERTs as productive units and the search for strategies which will secure economic success” (Ruggeri 2009b: 23). I am following Ruggeri’s thoughts on how recuperating an enterprise is a process; a continuous one which is still an everyday struggle for the workers involved; with other types of challenges, not as spectacular as in the initial phase of the process, but arguably more profound. How the ERTs are facing these challenges are decisive for the ERTs to be able to continue to exist (Ruggeri 2009b).

In my conversations with workers in the ERTs, I have always tried to make them say something about why they work there. Is it a choice, or do they feel obligated to be there, and if so: why? The reasons the workers gave me as to why they were there varied a great deal, but through it all, I find that there are ‘political identities’ (also see section 2.5, p.15) being constructed and deconstructed inside these workplaces. I encountered with people who said they would never leave no matter what, people who were reluctant and told me they would leave tomorrow if offered a better job elsewhere, and people who felt pressured in one way or another, who told me that they would probably leave for a better job-offer but it would cost them some kind of personal sacrifice. Either way, they all deal with their own version concerning the political identity of the ERTs they are working for, and how they can relate to this identity.

As I will return to in chapter 3, the empirical basis for approaching answers to the research questions is in debt-interviews and participant observation at two ERTs; two print shops in the city of Buenos Aires: *Chilavert Artes Gráficas*⁶ (Chilavert) and *Artes Gráficas El Sol*⁷ (AGS). My focus during the interviews and chats with my informants has been whether or not the work situation in question is viable for this individual, for his or her family, for his or her colleagues and ultimately; for the enterprise. Because my case studies are two different ERTs that I will argue are, precisely, very different; I argue that my conclusions about the viability of the ERTs can be generalised to some extent.

I argue that there is a need for research that takes the diversity of the ERTs as a point of departure; showing how there are different types of ERTs with different survival strategies and how the everyday lives of the workers in the different types of ERTs are affected by the strategies their enterprise make use of.

However, as diverse as the Argentine ERTs might be, one thing they do have in common is the Argentinean context they originated within. This has also been emphasised in some of the already existing literature on the subject. Before I begin to explore the diversity of the phenomenon, I am therefore going to theoretically examine the historical context of the ERTs

⁶ Chilavert Graphic Arts (Chilavert is the name of the street they are on. The street is named after the colonel who fought at the *Vuelta de Obligado*- a naval battle against an Anglo-French fleet in 1845. The name is also made famous by the Paraguayan goalkeeper José Luis Chilavert.)

⁷ The Sun Graphic Arts

a bit further, as I think this will contribute to a more thoroughly understanding of the phenomenon.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical approach to the research questions. I am starting out with a definition of the ERTs, which I move on to problematize. I then present and discuss what other authors have considered defining about the ERTs. Lastly I define and explain more thoroughly the content of the key concepts of the research questions as they are applied in this thesis. These concepts are: survival strategies, viability and political identity, as well as subjectivity.

In Chapter 3 I present the methodology used and explain the methodological choices made along the whole way of the process: before fieldwork, during fieldwork and after.

In chapter 4 I aim to answer sub-research question number 1 of how the ERT phenomenon can be explained within its Argentinean context of origin. I will point at some aspects of Argentine historical development I consider important and interesting in order to understand what the ERTs are. I will give an outlining of Argentine anarchism, Peronism and the impacts of neo-liberalism the way it was implemented in Argentina. Lastly I will give an account of the new social structure that emerged following the uprisings of 2001; the immediate context of the ERTs' origin.

Chapter 5 aims at answering sub-research question number 2 concerning what political identities are being constructed within the ERT phenomenon.

In Chapter 6, I focus on an outlining of the survival strategies of the two ERTs studied and a subsequent discussion of the viability of these strategies.

Chapter 7 concludes on the research questions. The main focus will be on concluding on the main research question: *How can the ERTs serve as viable alternatives to conventional enterprises?* I will also propose further research on the ERTs.

2.0 Theoretical framework

I will begin this chapter by defining the ERTs from a theoretical point of view. Then I will present and discuss existing literature on the ERTs. How has the ERT phenomena been understood and interpreted by different authors? I end the chapter with a discussion of the key concepts of my research questions: survival strategies, viability and political identity.

2.1 Defining the recuperated enterprises

According to Magnani (2004), there are three fundamental criteria that have to be met for an enterprise to be defined as recuperated. First, the workers have to be in absolute control over the enterprise. This means that all the workers must have equal rights when it comes to participation in decision-making concerning the enterprise. Second, a recuperated enterprise has undergone or is currently undergoing a legal process to obtain a verdict that legalises its functioning. The third defining criterion of a recuperated enterprise is that the overtaking of the means of production by the workers happens in the aftermath of a partial or total abandonment by the owners (Magnani 2004: 42-43). Most of the recuperated enterprises have chosen the cooperative as their legal form.

The way I see it, Magnani's criteria number two and three are of a merely descriptive character. Criteria number 1 has more layers to it. One thing is that the workers' right to participation in decision-making is formalised; another question is to which degree it is carried out in practice. When forming a worker's cooperative you need to have a board (*consejo*) which is made up of a leader, a secretary and a trustee. Anyone in the cooperative can put themselves up to be elected to any of these positions and there are new elections every second year. In a worker's cooperative there should also be held monthly assemblies which serves the purpose of informing everyone of how the business is going, to discuss concerns and vote over any decisions that are to be taken. But still, there could be a leap between having these formalities of decision-making participation in order, and the workers experiencing actual ownership of the enterprise.

2.2 Existing literature on the ERTs

In the following I will present some aspects of the ERTs which have been considered defining in some of the existing literature.

2.2.1 The ERTs as subjective experiences

Palomino et al (2010) concludes that there is a lack of consistency among the ERT protagonists considering what defines an ERT. This could be explained by the particular subjective experiences of becoming an ERT. This concurs with Vieta and Ruggeri's (2009) hypothetical explanation as to why forming ERT-specific organisations have proved difficult: because there is a perception among ERT workers that their struggles are indeed *their* struggles. There is seemingly a tendency amongst ERTs that they isolate themselves once they become productive again, even though they might have received lots of support from other ERTs during the early phases of the process (occupation and resistance), it seems that each ERT will end up "living out its own experience of self-management within a capitalist sea [...]" (Fajn 2003: 76, Ruggeri 2006, referred to in Vieta and Ruggeri 2009:15). In their work with constructing a database with data of all the ERTs in Argentina, Palomino et al have discovered how updating this database is a constant challenge, because the identifying criterion of the "unit of analysis" –the ERTs– is in "continuous transformation" (Palomino et al 2010: 256).

2.2.2 The origin

A large part of the literature elevates aspects of the ERTs that have to do with their origin. The literature seems to agree that the crisis years of 2000-2002 is to be considered the starting point of the ERT phenomenon (Palomino et al 2010), even though there were a few examples of workers taking over bankrupt or near-bankrupt companies prior to this point in time. The literature also underlines the collective component of the origin of the ERTs (García Allegre et al 2004, referred to in Palomino et al 2010, Faulk 2008) or it links the ERT phenomenon to the recent development in cooperativism in general in Argentina (Fontenela 2007, Vigliarolo 2008, referred to in Palomino et al 2010).

The literature suggests that the ERT phenomena did not start out as ideological, nor was it a working class-revolt (Palomino et al 2010, Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). In the years 2000-2002 in Argentina workers ran a very real risk of becoming structurally unemployed. The ERT phenomenon originated because workers was facing this risk (Olmedo and Murray 2002, Ruggeri 2006, referred to in Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). The decision to occupy, resist and starting to produce again under worker-control was a decision made out of fear and anger. Those are the primary forces behind it (Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). As such, ERTs can be

considered “new forms of collective social practices or the re-collectivization of older labour practices within a context of deep social and institutional fragmentation” (Palomino et al 2010:262).

The literature also concludes that an important element of the origins of the ERTs is that at this point in time the workers had lost all their faith in getting help from the state. The context in which the majority of the ERTs emerged, following the uprisings of December 19th and 20th 2001, was a context where a whole country’s population seemed to have lost faith in politicians all together. The state and the politicians had become the enemy who no longer provided jobs but made them disappear through deregulation (Palomino et al 2010). Many of the protagonists of recuperated enterprises felt betrayed by unions and/or political parties they were affiliated with.

However, even though it had been exposed and severely shaken, the state machinery and the Argentine economy had not ceased to function (Schaumberg 2008). The Argentine working class has, much because of Peronism, a history of strong dependency towards the state. Faulk (2008) writes that the idea of the state as responsible for assuring access to stable, salaried labour seemed to persist even as the actual conditions of labour increasingly came under pressure both from the state and union bureaucracies during the country’s experience with neo-liberalism. Work is also considered to be a universal right, to be claimed from the state. In this aspect, holding a job is also strongly interconnected with the idea of dignity. In her fieldwork amongst workers at the recuperated hotel B.A.U.E.N, Faulk discovered that the workers insisted that they did not want to simply receive their means of subsistence from the state; they hold that the state have to take responsibility for creating jobs, not just providing hand-outs. Consequently, the workers assert their own legitimacy; they have freed the state from one of its duties while creating their own source of jobs (Faulk 2008).

The problem of how a reaction that is seemingly very anti-political can promote political change seems very apt to the ERT phenomena. Charles Tilly has addressed this problem when he questions whether social movements that are formed to pursue particular interests can improve democratic practices (Tilly 2004, referred to in Rains 2005: 94).

2.2.3 Re-interpretations of the ERTs

Palomino et al (2010) writes that in the years following the crisis, the actors of newer experiences of work-place recoveries have reinterpreted the practices and concepts of the earlier experiences. This has also happened the other way around: IMPA⁸ was the first company to be called 'recuperated'. The recuperation itself had happened already in 1998, but the term was not born until 2001. With the crisis of 2001 the notion was reinterpreted and gained momentum much due to work of the MNER⁹ which in the beginning consisted mostly of IMPA-workers. Consequently, researchers have begun to focus on the different aspects of the reinterpretations. Palomino et al (2010) focuses on the reinterpretation of earlier cases made by newer cases of work-place recovery, what they call the two-way expansion of the universe of the worker-recovered companies (expansion into the future *and* into the past). They are especially interested in looking at cases from 2005 and newer, since 2005 is considered the year of the consolidation of the Argentine labour market, hence the work-place recoveries which have taken place since 2005 cannot be considered desperate actions of workers facing structural unemployment anymore.

For my analysis, it would be more relevant to look at how new workers taken on board after the crisis-period reinterprets the experience of the cooperative they are working for. One way or another, I think the fact that authors identify reinterpretations of the experiences of ERTs is interesting when searching for an ERT identity. What aspects of these reinterpretations have authors focused on?

Some have put emphasise on how the ERTs represent a new alternative for workers when faced with a micro-economic crisis: a new way of approaching work security (Fajn and Rebón 2005, referred to in Palomino et al 2010). Others again have focused on how these experiences are ways in which the workers are able to demonstrate their capacity of self-organising every aspect of the running of a business (Santamarino 2005, referred to in Palomino et al 2010). There has been focus on the re-interpretation of the collective component of the ERTs (Echaide 2003, referred to in Palomino et al 2010). According to Vieta and Ruggeri (2009) the decision of becoming a cooperative is not so much a decision as it is a lack of other feasible options, as mentioned in sub-chapter 2.2.2. Nevertheless, to me it seems that the organisational form of a cooperative has become a defining aspect of the ERTs,

⁸ *Industria Metalúrgica y Plástica de la Argentina*

⁹ *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* – National Movement of Worker-recovered Companies

for better or worse. This organisational form brings emphasis to the aspect of solidarity which we have seen was important in the origin of the phenomena. I find the question of whether the solidarity can still keep the ERT workers together when there is no longer a crisis but rather everyday routines to live out very apt in order to look at the future of the ERTs.

There are both tangible benefits and problematic aspects of the organisational form of a cooperative. A clear benefit is that cooperatives do not need to pay taxes due to their status being organisations with “social ends” (Rains 2005: 110). On the other hand, cooperatives tend to have a bad reputation in Argentina; accordingly, being a cooperative could be a problem when facing clients (Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). The lack of social security is also a problem that comes with the organisational form of a cooperative. Today’s cooperative law does not provide adequate social security for the ERT workers; they are not employed and therefore considered independent workers by the state. It is up to each and every ERT to provide the sufficient amount of social security, but not all the ERTs have the resources necessary to deal with this in a satisfying manner. Palomino et al (2010) points out that the lack of strong security policies in the ERTs is pushing many of the workers to look for other solutions. The ERTs have gone from operating outside all laws and institutions to operating within a “quasi-institutional framework” (Palomino et al 2010: 255). Help might be on its way, but for many of the ERT workers who are rapidly approaching the retirement-age (60 for males, 65 for women); it might be coming too late.

Some of the literature focus on the changes that occur in the subjectivity of the workers; changes in these workers’ identities as labourers and social individuals because they have taken part in and still are taking part in the experience of an ERT (Godio 2004, Fernández 2006, referred to in Palomino et al 2010, Fernández et al 2008). Fernández et al (2008) claims the strength of the recuperated enterprises is that they are able to live with differences of opinion within the enterprise. Herein lays originality and the potential of the recuperated enterprises, they argue.

2.3 Exit Neo-liberalism

The emergence of the ERTs is very much connected to the toll the neo-liberal economic policies took on the productive sector and hence the working conditions in Argentina. During the 1990s there was a massive privatisation of public enterprises in Argentina which in turn lead to substantial growth in foreign control over the economy (Rains 2005, Deux 2006).

Argentina was held up by Washington as a prime example of how successful neo-liberalism economic policy could be (Nymark 2008). Then the neo-liberal illusion came crashing down hard and fast in 2001. The workers were forced to develop strategies of survival surpassing the traditional means of the unions; the unions could no longer be strong claim-makers; because, as Tilly (1995) points out: in order to make claims you need authorities to make claims to. Also, jobs had turned into an extremely scarce good (Ruggeri 2009b).

While workers had seemingly been absent from the resistance against neo-liberalism the entire decade of the 1990s despite being the principal victims of its policies, the fight of the ERTs yet again put the workers in the centre of the social upwelling, even if this was not a conscious choice of the workers involved (Ruggeri 2009b). For some of the ERTs though, political awareness of what they are doing seems to have become increasingly important. Ruggeri (2009b) writes that the ERTs are consequences of neo-liberalism in the sense that when the workers refused to leave their posts it was as a response to the lack of alternatives; the ERTs were making use of the political vacuum left behind by neo-liberalism to develop new strategies for survival after the traditional tactics used by workers' unions were no longer effective. Schaumberg (2008) writes that the uprisings gave room for new arenas for struggle.

I see the ERTs as innovations for a new time: What could be termed 'post-neo-liberalism' or 'post strong unionism'. In the aftermath of the clash of the economy, after having overturned four presidents, there was a notion amongst regular Argentines that anything was possible (Sitrin 2005). I will argue that such notion persisted in the minds of the people for a long time and maybe also changed something in the 'Argentine mentality' forever. The Argentineans wanted to take matters in their own hands. Hence, the political vacuum left for them after December 19th and 20th was an opening, not to make claims, because there was not really anyone left to make claims to, but to take action. From this arose strategies to survive and consequently a political awareness.

In the following sub-chapters I will elaborate upon the concepts of viable survival strategies and political identity. I argue that the ERTs that emerged before 2005, all had more or less the same point of departure: they were desperate actions carried out by workers who were overwhelmed by anger and the fear of becoming structurally unemployed. There was no room for ideology and politics; in fact, the origin of the ERTs can be described as an anti-political reaction, and this reaction was enabled by the vacuum left behind by neo-liberalism.

However, with time the ERTs have proved to develop differently; they have arguably adopted different political identities, but why? I think the explanation very well lies within the very subjective experience of becoming an ERT (Palomino et al 2010, Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). There does not really seem to be an identity that is common for the ERTs, rather every ERT is different, and one has to examine the particularities of every ERT to grasp the different identities they have developed.

2.4 Viable survival strategies

With the government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) a new period of re-industrialisation in Argentina began. The abandonment of capital from the industrial plants and import of manufactured goods was no longer convenient for the Argentine bourgeoisie. Many businesses, amongst them some ERTs, benefited from the new economic conditions while augmenting their capability (and willingness) of assistance from the State. The strong US Dollar/weak Peso favoured exports and slowed down imports: national production was once again business and the ERTs were facing a new panorama: the occupations became fewer and the fight for survival was now expressing itself primarily through the consolidation of the ERTs as productive units and the search for strategies which would reassure economic success (Ruggeri 2009b).

Rains (2005) upholds that the litmus test for the recuperated enterprises would be whether or not they could actually become economically viable on a macro-level, as a “meaningful alternative to capitalist and managerial-dominated larger corporations in Argentina” (Rains 2005: 94). As we have already seen in the introduction chapter, newer literature suggests that this could actually be happening (Palomino et al 2010) as the ERTs keep increasing in number, even though the Argentinean labour market was considered consolidated in 2005. This suggests that the consolidation of an ERT is considered a feasible alternative among other alternatives workers would have when facing the shutdown of a working place within the context of a stable economy; such as looking for employment elsewhere. What is the reason for this development? What is it that the ERTs have to offer that keeps them from ceasing to exist even though the storm has passed?

I have chosen to look closer into how the ERTs face the continuous problems that appear in the course of running a business as a workers’ cooperative. This is what I refer to as the

survival strategies of the ERTs. In accordance with Ruggeri, I define survival strategies as the means put into action to reassure economic success (Ruggeri 2009b). The ERTs are making a product that they put out on the market. In this aspect I find it interesting to look at how they work with the fact that they are a recuperated enterprise.

If survival strategies are means put into action to reassure economic success, and viability equals economic success, there is also a need to clarify what is understood by economic success. I attempt to analyse the viability of survival strategies of the ERTs from the workers point of view. For this purpose, my point of departure will be that economic success at a minimum involves reassurance for the workers that they will be able to take home the foreseen amount of money¹⁰ on payday. Furthermore I argue that the term economic success seen from the workers point of view should also include reassurance about future stability and/ or prosperity of the enterprise and hence reassurance about the stability of their future job and income-situation. This also includes benefits such as pension and social benefits. However, I also argue for a widening of the term viability to include other aspects than economic success, and I suggest that maybe an ERT identity is to be found within a widened concept of success. Maybe the success of the ERT phenomenon (the expansion and the low mortality rate) can be explained by the fact that they offer something more to their protagonists; for instance a political identity?

2.5 Subjectivity and political identity

The way, in which I apply the concept of subjectivity throughout this thesis, I assert a descriptive character to it. My understanding of the concept derives mainly from Fernández et al (2008), and it refers to the experiences and subsequent changes that occur within the consciousness of individuals, for instance by forming part of the experience of an ERT. In this thesis, I use the concept ‘subjectivity’ as referring to the individuals that make up the units of an ERT, while I use the concept of ‘political identity’ with reference to the two ERTs in question as entities. The concept of ‘political identity’ is enormously complex, but for the purpose of this thesis I consider it sufficient to operationalize it into meaning the image ERTs are constructing of themselves in their interactions with the outside world, which includes given preferences to certain values over others. This operationalization also mainly derives from Fernández et al (2008).

¹⁰ The ERTs avoid using the word salary. The money the workers take home is called shares (*retiros*).

What constitutes the identities of the ERTs? For me, a way to look at it, is using Magnani's simple three-step definition as a basis for understanding what an ERT is: a worker-recovered company, an ERT, is a company that used to have an owner, but following an abandonment by the owner (partial or wholly) was taken over by the former employees who subsequently went to legal procedures in order to formalise their ownership of the production facilities and re-open it under a different ownership-structure. This is what they all have in common. Interestingly, and I would say, naturally, apart from this there are variations. Every ERT-experience is different. The takeovers happen in different circumstances: some cases involve a lot of drama and even violence; in other cases the takeover proceeds more quietly. The legal situations of different ERTs vary, and so does the kind of support and degree of mutual involvement with their immediate surroundings: the neighbourhood and organizations they might or might not be involved in, including trade unions. Their degree of economic success varies, and of course there are the factual differences: size of the company, geographical- and sector-placement. How the companies choose to organise themselves internally also seems to vary quite a bit, even though practically all of them have taken on the organisational form as a workers' cooperative.

As already mentioned (see p. 10) I argue that different ERTs have different identities. In my research I have focused mostly on the individuals that make up the unit of an ERT. I have tried to grasp the political subjectivities of these individuals; meaning how they relate to the fact that they are part of an ERT. What does this mean to them, if anything at all? Of course, there are in essence as many different subjective experiences as there are different individuals, but I will still argue that it is possible to draw some general conclusions about the political identity of the ERT as a whole based on the subjectivities of the individuals that it consists of. The subjectivities of the protagonists – the workers – in sum make up the identity of an ERT. The workers are continuously constructing the identity of the enterprise they work for, by valuing certain aspects of it and defining others as less important and/ or non-desirable.

The following sub-chapters propose elements that I consider defining of the subjectivities of the ERT workers and accordingly would like to examine further in the analysis:

2.5.1 The notion of work

It has been argued that the primary sense of work among ERT workers is as a means of social reproduction. The experience of having something to go to on a daily basis is elevated, and a job is seen as a fundamental criterion in life that enables their families to eat (Álvarez 2004, referred to in Faulk 2008). Also, as mentioned above, work is seen as a universal right and is highly interconnected with dignity, and by holding this perspective the workers insist on the legitimacy of what they are doing: they are providing jobs where the state has failed its obligation to do so (Faulk 2008).

2.5.2 Cooperativism

Faulk (2008) argues that cooperativism can be seen as a counter logical response to capitalism and neoliberalism as they were implemented in Argentina. As already mentioned, there are problematic issues yet to be resolved concerning the ERTs taking on the organisational form as a workers' cooperative. However, while taking on the identity as cooperativists has its challenges, it can also lead to a great sense of empowerment; by undertaking the effort of forming a workers' cooperative, the workers pose a rhetorical challenge to the individualistic concept of citizenship upheld within neo-liberalistic philosophy. Additionally, they demonstrate their capability to run a business and ultimately challenge the premises of how work should be organised.

Cooperativism in various forms has a history that goes back to the turn of the 20th century in Argentina, however, as Faulk (2008) points out, the relation of the ERTs with these former experiences of cooperativism in Argentina is not direct. Rather, the source of inspiration of the ERTs is a blend of various political ideologies; Peronism, militant unionism in addition to different leftist political organisations. Faulk (2008) distinguishes three different yet interrelated aspects of cooperativism among ERT workers, namely formal cooperativism, affective cooperativism or *compañerismo* and community outreach and support.

As far as affective cooperativism is concerned, solidarity and sacrifice are key words; the focus is on the value of working together for what is best for the group. While this seemingly was easy in the period of crisis, it potentially becomes very problematic in the aftermath. In the first stage of recuperating an enterprise, the occupation, solidarity is an absolute necessity, and is often manifested through street marches and similar ways of protesting, as well as the workers working together to simply keep a 24 hour guard on the production localities. Later

on, when the production is up and running and the struggle is not so much about persisting rather than it is about succeeding, affective cooperativism will typically express itself by the workers referring to each other as family. In many of the ERTs the associates very often are related as well. When there is a need to take on new cooperative associates, family members of the existing ones are often prioritised.

Formal cooperativism refers to the mode of organisation for the majority of the ERTs. Since the year 2000, the law concerning cooperative in Argentina has been centralised and all new cooperatives in the country has to register at the INAES¹¹ (Faulk 2008). The cooperative has proven to be the best choice for workers recuperating an enterprise to organise within, although as we have already seen, it is far from perfect. The standing cooperative law is not adequate and does not provide necessary social security to the workers (Palomino et al 2010). Formal cooperativism and affective cooperativism could easily clash with one another when it's time to take on board new associates. One could argue that it would be wiser (and also more ethical?) to offer available jobs to the most qualified people rather than prioritising family members.

Finally there is the aspect of community outreach and support. This is being referred to as “the nature and the extent of the collaboration among recuperated enterprises, and the relationship of these enterprises with the broader community” (Faulk 2008: 605).

Collaboration between the different recuperated enterprises has been important, especially during the first years of the phenomenon. Already established ERTs have assisted enterprises who were just initiating their struggle, umbrella organisations have been formed and there are trade collaboration between the ERTs, among other things. In addition to this, a lot of recuperated enterprises collaborate with other actors outside the ERT movement, most commonly the immediate neighbourhood, often represented by the neighbourhood assemblies – which is another type of social movement that grew numerous in the aftermath of the crisis of 2001. Many ERTs lend their localities to house activities such as cultural centres, medical clinics, tutoring etc. Faulk (2008) found that for the workers at the hotel B.A.U.E.N, the notion of this community outreach included not only giving and receiving support, but had also changed their concept of work; they now understood it in a wider sense with emphasis on the solidarity aspect.

¹¹ *Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social* - National Institute of Associations and Social Economics

2.5.3 Self-management

As mentioned in 2.2.3 (p.13) Fernández et al (2008) argues that the originality of the ERTs lies within their capacities to accept differences of opinion within the enterprise. I suggest that ability is crucial to the further existence of ERTs. Ruggeri (2009b) points out that the recuperated enterprises have been seen as a new chapter in the history of self-management worldwide. The idea of self-management is a very powerful one, and this has brought much attention to the ERTs: the attempt by workers to run productive units that have been considered non-viable by the capitalists who had their hands on them before. The workers, however, do not seem to identify themselves much with the concept of self-management (*autogestión*), according to Ruggeri (2009b). He states that most of the members of the ERTs prefer to define themselves as workers (*trabajadores*) rather than cooperativists (*cooperativistas*) or self-managers (*autogestionados*) (Ruggeri 2009b: 27-28).

By asking how the protagonists experience working for an ERT, I think we can get closer to an understanding of what the identities of the ERTs are. Therefore, I argue that this ‘bottom-up’ perspective can contribute with some fruitful insights to the theoretical understanding of the ERTs. The bottom-up perspective is also embraced by Palomino et al (2010) who identify “three processes of identity construction linked broadly to three related groups” (Palomino et al 2010: 263): the workers who self-identify with the broader ‘movement’ of worker-recovered companies, outside actors working with recovered companies and lastly the protagonists of more recent experiences of workplace recoveries who connects their experiences to the “collective memory of older experiences from the ‘initial’ period” (Palomino et al 2010: 263). As previously mentioned (see 2.2.3), given that my two case – studies embarked on their recovery process during this initial period, it will be more fruitful for me to look at how workers taken on board after the recuperation self-identify with the earlier experiences of their colleagues. The path of examining more closely the outside actors working with the ERTs and mapping out the structural context the ERTs are operating within would have been interesting, but due to limitations of space and particularly the limited time of my fieldwork, I have decided to leave this thematic unexplored in this thesis (see also sub-chapter 3.7).

Ultimately, it is the ERT workers themselves who decide where the ERTs are going, and if they are going anywhere at all. With the consolidation of the Argentinean labour market other

options are now open to them; most of them have other choices available to them than to stay and work for the ERTs. Apparently, the symbolic dimension of the ERTs seems to stand strong.

3.0 Methodology

What is methodology? Methodology is a tool, or rather a set of tools used to bring the researcher closer to the ultimate goal: answering the research questions. Along the way, numerous choices are made, some of which you are conscious about from the start and some of which you do not realise were choices until later on. The methodology chapter is where you should explain and defend all of these choices. The purpose of this chapter should be to give the reader the best possible insight in how you came up with the findings you present and give the best possible foundation for yourself and others to evaluate your work (Kvale 1997). Accordingly, this is what I attempt to do.

Different academic disciplines have different methodological traditions. This thesis is an interdisciplinary project and this should also be reflected in the methodology. Given the interdisciplinary starting point, I have even more methodological choices available to me. While this means greater freedom of choice, it also means more thorough work explaining why I have done things the way I have. My basis throughout the research process has been in human geography, but there are elements in the methods I use that are more commonly featured in anthropological research. While an awareness of the different backgrounds the applied research methodologies comes from is certainly necessary, I am more interested in using what I find fruitful within each discipline and less interested in maintaining strict divisions between them.

3.1 Qualitative and Quantitative

After defining methodology, we move on to another introductory problem. There are two main types of conducting research in social science: using qualitative or quantitative research methods. After establishing the research questions, finding out as specifically as possible *what it is that you want to find out*, the time has come to decide on qualitative or quantitative research methods, before the data collection starts. What is qualitative and quantitative methodology and which one is more suitable for the research project in question?

Harboe writes that “the difference between the two methods is primarily defined by the characters of the data produced” (Harboe 2006: 31). Quantitative research produces countable data. Examples of countable, quantitative data related to the topic of this thesis would be for instance how many recuperated enterprises exist in Argentina, how many of them have equal

pay-schemes, how many people work in the recuperated enterprises and how many of them are in a union. This could be useful information also for my project, and lucky for me, data answering at least three of these questions is available due to someone else's effort conducting a big quantitative research project on the ERTs in Argentina (Palomino et al 2010, Vales 2010). While I will relate my research project to quantitative findings like these, my own research is of the qualitative sort. Qualitative research methods produce non-countable data. When you as a researcher aim at capturing someone's subjective opinion about something, discussing the "meaning behind social phenomena" (Aase og Fossåskaret 2007: 13) you use qualitative research methods.

When I had decided that I wanted to find out something about the viability of the ERTs, and that I wanted to pose the question of viability on an individual level, finding out whether or not the individual workers experienced their working situation as feasible, the decision to use qualitative research came quite easily. I was interested in their opinions on what a feasible working situation means, and this is not something you want to measure quantitatively. Drawing on the examples I presented above you could for instance say that counting all the ERTs in Argentina and observing that the number has increased over the last few years means they are viable. While this might be correct, it will only serve as my point of departure. Furthermore, quantitative research will tell us that a certain percentage of the ERTs practice equal pay schemes. However, to find out how equal pay schemes, or the absence of such, influence the way the workers think about their working situation, you need to use qualitative research. I want to go behind the social phenomenon that is the ERTs in Argentina, and see what thoughts the protagonists have about their quotidian lives as part of such a unit.

3.2 Preparing for fieldwork

Following Harboe (2006), preparing the data-collection is the second of in total six stages of a research project. The first one is formulating a research question. I will get back to this in sub-chapter 3.3. The other phases are thirdly collecting data, fourthly interpreting and analysing the collected data, fifthly drawing a conclusion and sixthly conveying and evaluating the project. This is, however, not necessarily a strict linear process as it tends to repeat itself during a research project (Harboe 2006: 13-15). Knowledge you get along the way may cause you to re-evaluate your research-question(s) and your methodological choices.

This research project brought me to Argentina on two occasions. I use the word fieldwork to describe what I did there because, in my personal opinion the word ‘fieldwork’ has a little bit more appeal than ‘data-collection’; it sounds a little more adventurous. Indeed, it felt like embarking on an adventure as I took off to Argentina, a country formerly unknown to me, in July 2009. My goal for this first trip to Argentina with the duration of two and a half weeks was to find a case study and begin establishing a network. Thankfully, I got what I wanted out of it and decided on not only one but two case-studies. Before arrival I had e-mailed a few persons I thought might be able to help me getting started in the field. I got the contact information of these people from the book by the Lavaca collective about the ERTs in Argentina (Lavaca 2007) which has a listing in the back with contacts, and from searching online for information about recuperated enterprises. Shortly after my arrival in Buenos Aires I met with academic Andrés Ruggeri from the Documentation Centre on the Recuperated Enterprises affiliated with the University of Buenos Aires. Ruggeri has himself done extensive work on the recuperated enterprises in Argentina. While I was in Buenos Aires, he was holding seminars targeting students who wanted to volunteer at the Documentation Centre. I attended two such seminars, and then Ruggeri sent me to the Documentation Centre, which holds office in the localities of Chilavert.

In my outline of the research project which I had written prior to departing for Argentina I stated that I would try to avoid using an emblematic case-study that had already been visited by many researchers. Chilavert was definitely of the sort, and I thought they would be fed up with academics and journalists and just plain curious people invading their workspace at all hours. So I went to Chilavert with the intention of getting some information there and then to move on. When I arrived at Chilavert however, I was surprised to find not only a lot of useful information at The Documentation Centre; I also found that the associates were more than willing to invite me in to their workspace, give me tours and generous portions of their time chatting with me, and invite me to have lunch with them. I asked one of the associates whether he found it disturbing having people coming in asking questions while they were working, but he denied that. He told me that in the occasion of an anniversary of the print-shop as a recuperated enterprise, they had printed postcards with the text: *Fábrica Abierta* – Open Factory. It started to occur to me that it seemed like being an “open factory” was a part of their identity as a (emblematic) recuperated enterprise.

During this first trip to Argentina, I also visited the hotel B.A.U.E.N, which is another emblematic ERT located in the centre of Buenos Aires and *Universidad Nacional del General Sarmiento*¹², an interesting small university in the Province of Buenos Aires who offers a degree in *economia social* and talked to researchers there who are doing work on the ERTs. This was refreshing and contributed to give me some further perspective on the ERTs in Argentina; however, I wanted to use Chilavert as a case study. The first impression I got from Chilavert left me wanting to learn more about Chilavert, but I felt that my research project would be more interesting if I also included another enterprise, preferably one with a different point of departure. The associates at Chilavert told me about other recuperated enterprises, and from the way they talked about AGS it seemed very different from Chilavert. I decided to use the two apparently very different print shops as comparative case studies. I find it worth mentioning here that there are many recuperated print-shops; this can be seen in connection with the graphic sector historically being one of the most militant industrial sectors of Peronist syndicalism (Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). The Buenos Aires graphic union is the oldest in the country (Ferrer 2008), and together with the equally traditionally militant metallurgic and meat-packing sectors, the graphics make up 40,1 percent of all of Argentina's ERTs (Vieta and Ruggeri 2009).

3.3 Formulating the research questions

As previously mentioned Harboe (2006) underlines that the presented six stage of a research process is not a linear process. I found this to be true also in my case. I fluctuated between the first stage: preparing for fieldwork and the second: formulating research questions. Choosing a topic for your thesis depends largely on personal interests and I consider my personal entrance to the ERTs explained in the introduction chapter. I started off with seeking an answer to the question: *does it work?* Do the recuperated enterprises work? This question obviously needed some reshaping. It was both too vague and at the same time formulated as a closed question which is not a good point of departure for a research project. A good research question needs to leave room for analysing, discussing and interpreting (Harboe 2006: 25).

Before I went to Argentina for the first time I had made a list of basically all the questions that came to mind about the ERTs. These questions served as a means to get to the research questions I ended up with eventually. It was obvious from the beginning that the number of

¹² The General Sarmiento National University

questions had to be narrowed down in order to be able to discuss them properly in the thesis, but it was not until I got a bit further along the way in the whole process I was able to see which of the questions I should drop.

The decisive thing for me when I decided to concentrate the fieldwork in two places was my increasing interest in the protagonists' point of view. It was clear to me from the beginning that I wanted to say something about the viability/feasibility of the recuperated enterprises, and one possible angle to this could have been mapping out the structural context that surround the ERTs more thoroughly. In the initial stages of the research process I thought about this option, and consequently weighed the possibilities of interviewing people from various places that in one way or another had to do with the ERTs. *labase*¹³, *Lavaca*¹⁴, *INAES*¹⁵ and other governmental agencies were contacted, but there was not much of a response, if any, and I made the decision that trying to get an appointment with someone at all in these places would simply take up too much of my limited time. When I came to this cognition it became clear to me that I should spend my limited time where the protagonists, that is, the workers, are. For a further outlining of limitations, see sub chapter 3.7.

3.4 Collecting data

February 2010 I was back in Buenos Aires, this time for a period of almost six weeks to do fieldwork. Before I travelled I e-mailed both print shops stating my request of using them as case-studies for my thesis; explaining that I wanted to form part of their daily routines for approximately two weeks and also conduct interviews with the workers. Both places responded positively and immediately, which was very encouraging.

My sources to procure empirical data include interviews, observations and written sources. In the following three sub-chapters I will lead you through the advantages and the disadvantages of these different means of acquiring information.

¹³ An NGO that works with fundraising for the recuperated factories

¹⁴ A journalists' collective which has done work on the ERTs.

¹⁵ Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social, National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy.

3.4.1 Interviews

I consider the criteria for an interview to be formal as fulfilled when an appointment is made with the interviewee that an interview is going to take place. However, the concept of an ‘interview’ should be dwelled upon for a moment as a scientific interview meets different criteria from that of a conversation and also from the journalistic interview.

In the nature of being interviewed lies the presumption that the information you give away serves a useful purpose for the person you give the information to, and often (as in this case) parts of the information is going to be published. Accordingly, for the person who conducts the interview, ethical considerations are important: the interviewee needs to be fully aware of what he or she is agreeing to. This goes both for the journalistic and the scientific interview. However, a researcher doing a scientific interview has to be very careful not to claim that he or she has gained access to the only truth, or that they have “distilled *the* public opinion” (Goss and Leinbach 1996: 116; Kong 1998: 80, referred to in Hay 2002: 52). Quite on the contrary, when using interviews for scientific purposes you should be looking at getting insight into *different* opinions. Interviews can also be important tools in order to gain information that counter claims of presumed ‘truths’ and an assumption about what the public opinion is. This is typically done by voicing marginalised groups whose opinions are often let out of public debate (Hay 2002). The cause of the ERTs has been spoken wide and by many, they have gotten media-coverage and while it by no means has been an easy experience for the workers involved, claims have been carried through. Accordingly I would not exactly call the workers at the Argentine ERTs a marginal group, but it seems to me that there is a tendency to presume that it is a shared opinion *amongst* the ERT workers: that once you start working for a worker-recovered cooperative, you never go back. In a lot of the reading I have done on ERTs, accounts of the recuperated enterprises typically include statements from one or maybe two people from a particular cooperative, and his or her statements are made representative for the whole cooperative. A typical statement would be: “none of the people who work here would ever consider working under a boss again”. I oppose this way of generalising people’s opinions, and would like to take the possibility my research project offer to, in accordance with Hay, get an insight into different opinions – amongst the population in question: the ERT workers. Hay writes that “one of the major strengths of interviewing is that it allows you to discover what is relevant to the informant” (Hay 2002: 53), and that is exactly what I intend to do. I seek to find out what is relevant to the workers I have talked to in order for them to find the situation viable.

In total I conducted 17 formal interviews with 15 different people which I tape-recorded and later transcribed. Three of these were conducted on the first trip, and the rest on the second trip. Different interviews have served different purposes to the thesis. Three of the interviews were with two different academics which had an overview of the topic rather than first-hand experience with how everyday life is affected by working in an ERT. When I interviewed the workers I used an interview guide. With the academics I did not; consequently these interviews can be said to be unstructured.

All interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one and a half hour. They were conducted individually and face-to-face. Hay (2002) defines three main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. I consider my interviews to be semi-structured (except for the interviews with the two academics, as stated in the previous paragraph). The semi-structured interview is characterised by ordered but flexible questioning (Hay 2002: 41). I used an interview-guide where I had written down a list of questions beforehand, but I did not always follow it. I asked other questions to the academics than the workers. I did however always start out with an introduction about myself and my research project, and some of the interviewees would pick up the conversation right there. Mostly though, they waited on me to ask them the first question. With all my informants I had some information on them before we got down to the actual interview. For instance, I knew on beforehand whether or not they had been present during the occupation of the production localities. If this was the case, I started by asking them to tell me about that. And if they had come to work for the cooperative later on, I asked them to tell the story of how they had come to work there. From there, most of the interviewees would carry the conversation with me intervening to make sure I understood what was said or if I felt the conversation had moved too far off the track. It is a cliché how the Argentines are extraordinarily talkative people, but in my experience this is a cliché for a reason. But in fact, I consider the talkativeness demonstrated by most of my interviewees to have served my purposes: my aim with the interviews was always to get the informants to *talk* about what *they* thought was crucial elements of their working situations. The collected interview material came to be rather extensive, and while the positive thing about this is that I got insight into several peoples' opinions on several topics, the downside of it is that I cannot possibly fit the voices of all of my informants within this thesis. I would have loved to write a chapter (or a book!) narrating the personal story of each and every one of my informants; but that would have been another type of project. For the purpose of *this* project, I have chosen to

identify and categorise my informants' expressed opinions on the selection of topics which is analysed in the analysis chapters. For a more thoroughly outlining of the process of categorising, see sub-chapter 3.6.1.

I participated in many of the daily routines at the print-shops for two weeks at each place, so the interview-appointments were made while chatting with the workers while they were working. I did not experience much difficulty convincing people to give me an interview. I think this was partly because I had built up confidence with them on beforehand and also because most of them, well, like to talk and also felt they had important things to say. There was a couple who reacted with hesitation when I first posed my request for an interview, their given reason for this hesitation being that they did not think they had anything interesting to tell me. I countered this and told them that I wanted to collect as many different points of views on the cooperative as possible and that I wanted their opinions. That seemed to do the trick and in the end no one opposed giving me an interview. Even so, not all of the appointments I made for an interview came through. The biggest challenge was finding the time for it. Most people I talked to worked in a production-line, meaning while they were absent from their post someone else would need to put in an even greater effort to keep the production going. With a 12 hour working day, at least at AGS, for many people it was not really an option doing the interview after working hours - although for someone it was and I am honoured by this dedication the informants showed to my project.

Naturally there were also challenges in the actual interview situations. Of course, there were communication challenges due to the fact that the interviewees and I speak different languages and come from different cultural backgrounds. All of the interviews were conducted in Spanish which is the mother tongue of all of my informants and as for me it is my third language which I learned while living in Ecuador and Peru after I became an adult. I do consider my Spanish to be fluent, but it is of course far from perfect and I had little experience with the particularities of the Argentine socio-linguistics prior to this research project. Accordingly, there were surely points made by my informants during the interviews that went over my head. However, I was quite insistent in trying to grasp what was actually said, and often asked again three or four times until I was sure I had understood. This was true both inside and outside of the interview situation. While I am guessing this must have been somewhat annoying to the people I was talking to, on the other hand I felt that a lot of times my struggling with the language brought me closer to the informants and might have helped

me gain access and balance the power-dynamics between me and them. Their awareness of my language-difficulties made them take on the role as my teachers. One of the guys I was working with at Chilavert started to write down words I did not understand on a piece of paper for me to learn – sometimes with an illustration of the meaning of the word. Another of the associates at one point went through an e-mail I had sent him correcting my grammar.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the workplace during working hours. This posed two challenges: lack of privacy and background-noise. Concerning the former; especially at AGS there was a lack of a place where we – the interviewee and me – could talk in private without being interrupted by people walking into the room. All the interviews at AGS except for one, were conducted in the kitchen, which was a small room where all the workers kept any food and drink in the refrigerator. Every single interview was interrupted various times by people walking in to get something from the refrigerator. This might or might not have made the interviewees feel they had to watch their words – in the case of someone bursting in and hearing what they were saying. On the other hand, none of the interviews at AGS accepted my offering of anonymity in the paper. Several of them even refused this rather bluntly, and emphasised that one have to be responsible for the things one says, if not, there is no point. Hence, with this attitude seemingly being the norm, there is no reason in particular to believe that the interviewees were restrained by the absence of absolute privacy in the interview-situation. At Chilavert there was more privacy, although someone walking in on us while talking and hearing what was said was still a possibility.

One of the interviews at AGS was conducted inside an office. Lack of privacy might have been a concern also here, since there was one other person present during most of the interview. However, considering that this person was sitting right next to us talking in the telephone during parts of the interview, challenge number two, background-noise, was more of an issue. Background-noise was a weakness with a lot of the interviews I conducted. Neither at Chilavert nor at AGS was it possible to get completely out of the way from the noise of the machines. The issue of background-noise getting in the way for the communication goes even more for the informal conversations with the workers, as these mostly took place in the factory hall; right next to the machines. In a lot of the recorded interviews there is also a lot of noise from traffic outside (it was impossible to shut out even if one closed the windows). The workers seemed however to be used to traffic- and machine noise getting in the way of communication, and a lot of them clearly took this into

consideration, talked clearly and slowly and asked me from time to time if I had understood what they said.

3.4.2 Participant observation

In addition to the formal interviews, I also did participant observation at Chilavert and at AGS in order to gather as much information as possible.

What is participant observation? “Participant observation is concerned with developing understanding through being part of the spontaneity of everyday interactions” (Hay 2002: 108). It has been argued that there is no observation without participation. This point of view is underlined by Hay (2002) when he writes that “[...] in one sense, a solitary researcher observing images of place is an active participant inasmuch as they are co-creating meaning through bringing their own perspectives and life experiences to analysis and interpretation” (Hay 2002: 107). To me this is an important point that I would like to stress: there is no observation where the observer does not participate in some sense; the conclusions we draw from observing will always be coloured by the pre-understandings we all possess and which will always vary according to our different life experiences. The more the pre-understandings and the perspectives of the researcher varies from that of the informants/research subjects, the more carefulness has to be exercised when interpreting the collected data. When you are collecting data in a different culture like I did, chances of miscommunications are of course even greater, but on the other side; the fact that you are in a different culture and speaking a different language with your informants makes it impossible not to be aware of the possibility of misunderstandings the whole time: it adds a certain humility to the research process which, the way I see it, can be a good thing.

While observation without any sense of participation seems to be impossible, there are different degrees of participation, according to which role the observer takes on and level of engagement from the researcher (Hay 2002). For instance, one could imagine a researcher observing people’s movement in a street while sitting on a bench without the people knowing they are being observed. In this case the researcher would take on the role as a complete observer: not engaging with the research objects at any level. Obviously this is not the kind of observation I did. I found that I was very much engaged in the data-collection phase of this project, as I am present in the text. This thesis is a personal story in many aspects. Or rather I should say it is many different personal stories that all relate to the recuperated enterprises in

Argentina. It is my personal story about my experience of pursuing an academic but also personal interest about the recuperated enterprise movement in Argentina. This story involves me heading for Argentina all by myself and struggling to overcome difficulties about being alone and in a foreign setting. This part cannot be excluded; my personal point of departure has a lot to do with how this work turned out and it is me who will be drawing the conclusions. However; it is also the personal stories of the people I met in Buenos Aires; those I interviewed formally and those I talked to in a more informal setting. The stories I am about to tell was created in the meetings between me and them. The meeting with people of the recuperated enterprises that I had formerly only formed acquaintance with through academic and journalistic articles and books affected me on many levels and were also decisive for the angle I have decided to take when writing this thesis. I will not get into the discussion about whether or not there exists such a thing as an objective research here; all I can say is that this thesis is subjective; it is my story and stories of others; some of whom I bonded with, interpreted by me.

Why participant observation? I found it tremendously helpful in order to build up confidence with the interviewees beforehand and it helped me gain access. Additionally, I found the three purposes of observation defined by Hay (2002), counting; complementing and contextualising, all to be valid for me in some way of another.

Considering counting, I found that during the process of writing this methodology chapter I kept realising many things I have done, thought, assumed, seen or heard obviously contributed to my conclusions although I did not consciously think about this when they happened. Sometimes it is vice versa. There are things I have underlined three times in my field notes, and when I look at them now I cannot understand why I thought they would be important. Counting is of the first category. When I first skimmed through the chapter about participating observation in Hay's book I thought: counting, no way. There is not going to be counting in my field work. But in the somewhat chaotic process of trying to sort out all my impressions upon returning to Norway and then writing out this chapter; I realised I had actually done some counting. Not the kind of structured counting I could present in a diagram, but there was actually some roughly preformed counting that was "useful for establishing trends" (Hay 2002: 105). For instance, at Chilavert I used to count roughly the number of people who came to the print-shop during a day; I considered the number to be high and my impression came to be that having many visitors was an important aspect of everyday life and

possibly also for the identity of this particular workshop. At AGS, one of the first days I was there I noticed there were very few people who were eating lunch in the factory kitchen compared to how many people who were working that day. Because I found the number to be low, I asked about this, and the answer I got: that all the people with money ate in restaurants, turned out to be an important testimony of the social divisions within the print shop. I felt participant observation served to both complement and contextualise the information I got through the interviews, and evidently I found that I actually counted a bit also.

3.4.3 Reflections on my role in the field

There are two basically different rationales to consider when reflecting upon my role in the field: For one, I need to reflect upon my own perspectives and the way they affect my thoughts and actions when interacting with my informants: this would be the role I *took*, or gave myself. Another thing is the role *I was given* by the people I interacted with, their pre-assumptions and expectations about me. It is very possible that a researcher could alter the behaviour of his or her research subjects just by his or hers mere presence (Hay 2002). Aase and Fossåskaret (2007) write about the challenges one could face trying to find a suitable status while on field work. I did not feel like this was a problem for me, as I consider the status as a visiting student doing fieldwork was already a part of the status-set both at Chilavert and AGS, although more extensively at Chilavert.

As already mentioned, before travelling to Argentina I had sent a request per e-mail to both print-shops requesting to be allowed to take part in their daily routines for approximately two weeks at each place. When I got to Buenos Aires the second time I went straight to Chilavert. The Documentation Centre on the Recuperated Enterprises localized at Chilavert is open two days a week and this attracts visitors from all over the world: when I got there the first day there was already a French journalist in place talking to the volunteer at the Documentation Centre, and later that day two more foreign students – one from the US and one from Italy also arrived, in addition to various students from the University of Buenos Aires and we all ended up sitting in the lunch room discussing for hours, while the workers were, well, working. This is quite representative of how the days when the Documentation Centre was open easily looked like. While talking to the volunteers at the Documentation Centre and other students and journalists was undoubtedly very inspiring, it made it easy losing the focus I had decided on: the workers. How to get to them?

As you would probably figure, no one lifted an eyebrow because of a student with a foreign accent wandering around the workshop at Chilavert. Although they were polite and very friendly, everyone kept on with their business when I came into the room. It seems that 2 or 3 persons have taken on the roles as the ones who usually talk to the foreigners. This seems only natural considering the amount of researchers and other visitors that pass through their print-shop. After spending a lot of time chatting with the guy who mostly worked in the office, Ernesto, I finally approached one of the guys who seemed to be performing a task I would potentially be able to carry out – stacking books – and asked him if I could help. After that, I slowly began to talk more with the whole group of workers.

At AGS however, I was told that they had students coming there before, but I was the first one who requested participating in the daily tasks in the print-shop. It was a very different situation from Chilavert; everyone was extremely curious about me. I would be standing on the production line working, and people would walk up to me from across the production hall and start to ask me about who I was and why I was there, and then sweep me off to introduce me to someone else and so it would go on.

3.4.4 Written/ printed sources

My main written sources are of course the transcription of the interviews and my field notes. But there are also other written and printed sources that I have made use of. Doing fieldwork in two print shops it is obvious that I also got information from a range of printed sources. In a print shop you are surrounded by them. I found the products they were making to be useful sources of information about the different survival strategies adapted by the two enterprises. The products included magazines, pamphlets, brochures and books. The character of the products they made at Chilavert and at AGS were very different, as was the sizes of the circulations of the products. This told me that they dealt with entirely different clients. For a further outlining of the differences of the clientele at AGS and Chilavert, see sub-chapter 6.3. Newspaper articles constitute another type of empirical source. For instance, I obtained quantitative data about the number of recuperated enterprises in Argentina from Vales (2010).

Pictures, logos and illustrations are other types of printed sources. I have tried to present a small selection of these during the course of this thesis while simultaneously explaining the

kind of message I get from them. Concerning field notes; I took a lot of them. I always brought with me a notebook to ‘work’; whether at Chilavert or at AGS and always kept it close. Of course I was not able to take notes in every situation. When I was making conversation with the workers it surely would have been disturbing and quite possibly made the conversation awkward if I was to be taking notes at the same time as I was talking to them. I tried however to take notes as soon as possible after a conversation had taken place which I felt contained useful information. While in Buenos Aires I spent a lot of time on buses, and this was where a lot of the note-taking was carried out (with a questionable esthetical result). Later, while in the apartment where I lived and with access to a computer, I would re-write the field notes on my computer, preferably together with some kind of reflection about the things I had been told that day. Concerning transcriptions of the formal interviews; see sub-chapter 3.6.1.

3.5 Ethical considerations

3.5.1 Informed consent/ Anonymity

When making someone a part of your research project, you must obtain their consent. This means they must give you their permission to include them in the project (Hay 2002). As already mentioned, before I went to Argentina I had sent an e-mail to the two different print-shops stating my purpose of wanting to visit them and conduct interviews. I had gotten the ok from the associates handling the e-mail correspondence: Ernesto at Chilavert and Carlos at AGS, but of course they really could not answer on behalf of every one of the associates. Therefore, when talking to the workers, it was important to me to explain thoroughly why I was there. At Chilavert, being an emblematic recuperated enterprise they were extremely used to researchers and being interviewed. At AGS it was not quite the same situation; however, they were familiar with researchers/ students taking an interest in their situation. Because of my informants being quite used to being informants to research projects, it was not difficult for me to explain to them what I was doing. Regardless, it was important to me that I always introduced myself and my project properly. It was especially important to me to discuss the issue of anonymity with my informants. I will elaborate upon this in the following.

I have decided that whenever I use information acquired through informal conversations I will keep the informant anonymous. People I have interviewed will be presented with their forename, unless they accepted my offer of anonymity, which is true for one of my

interviewees. I realise that revealing the names of my interviewees might seem a bit radical, especially since they are not public figures but rather ‘ordinary people’ not used to being exposed. I would like to emphasise that this is something I have given a lot of consideration and also discussed with both the informants and third parties. I have come to realise that the discussion concerning anonymity in research projects is a topic that awakes strong opinions. In one way I consider this to be a good thing, because I do not think the decision concerning anonymity is something that should be taken lightly, as it concerns privacy. However, I do not agree with the position held by some academics that the interviewees should be kept anonymous no matter what. Many of my informants said straight out that they did *not* want to be anonymous. Several of them further reasoned around this, stating that “one have to be responsible for what one says”. When an informant has expressed this, I would have felt like I was not respecting his or her personal integrity if I made him or her anonymous anyhow; I would feel like I was patronising them; assuming they did not know their own good. Furthermore I feel that revealing my informants identity makes me take my responsibility to convey the information they have given me accurately even more seriously. This has to do with the validity of my research. A litmus test to a research project’s validity would be if the subjects of the study would recognise themselves and their reality in the presentation made by the researcher. I will elaborate on the concepts of validity and reliability in sub chapter 3.6.4.

Concerning information obtained through informal conversation, I think that having informal conversation with someone you are working side by side with is not at all the same as interviewing someone. When you interview someone, the premises are different. During the participant observation, when the informal field conversations took place, I was standing side by side with a person, doing the same task as her or him, while we were small-talking and getting to know each other little by little. I never hid the reason I was there, I was telling this person about my master project, but we also touched on a wide range of other topics. I also talked about Norway and my private life, for instance. In one moment, we could be talking about the marital problems of a person and in the next we would be talking about how she felt about working in a recuperated enterprise. It is not that clear what our positions are or what my role is. Consequently I chose to keep information obtained through informal conversations anonymous.

3.6 Producing data

3.6.1 Transcription, Interpreting and Categorising

Upon returning to Norway I started the process of transcribing the recorded interviews. As previously mentioned, the interview material had come to be rather extensive. As the work proceeded, I changed strategies; instead of transcribing everything word by word I listened, took notes and categorized the information. For a complete list of categories, see appendix 3. I began by making a few basic categories and sorted the information accordingly. Obviously, there were the two main categories of workers from AGS and workers from Chilavert. Then, there were the categories of workers who had been present during the takeovers and workers who had come on board later on. A sub-category to the category of workers who had been taken on board later was the ones who had family members already working in the cooperative in question and those who did not. In addition, I worked with tangible categories, such as personal facts, to be able to get an overview over whom I had interviewed and to secure a reasonable representation of for instance age and sex. Following from 3.1 and to be elaborated on in 3.6.2, it is of course an impossibility to generalise statistically with such a small sample. However, interpreting I felt that my pool of interviews had reached a satisfactory level of heterogeneity (Kvale 1997). From here, I started to interpret the information into categories such as ‘degree of ownership-feeling to the enterprise’ (elaborated upon in sub-chapter 5.2) and ‘self-identification as workers or as entrepreneurs’ (elaborated upon in sub-chapter 5.4). The content of 5.3 partly came about because I formed a category termed ‘relation to colleagues and hierarchy’, which highlighted an array of different understandings of the identities of the ERTs. To sort by a category named ‘The theatre and the factory’ (elaborated upon in sub-chapter 6.1-2), was tempting since AGS and Chilavert in many aspects were so different. However, on the individual level I became aware that the division, or double-identity, could be transferred to the notion of work. A category named ‘Routines in the daily work’, made it possible for me to see that eating lunch was an important marker in the understanding of how an ERT should and could work (elaborated upon in sub-chapter 6.2.3). Finally, sorting out the informants ‘Relation to client’, seemed a meaningful way to understand their relation to conventional enterprises. This was elaborated upon in sub-chapter 6.3 and is a topic which points to the future of the ERTs. In fact, by the time I had written a majority of the analysis-chapter, I went back and re-used the categories to extract new information. It turned out that both the interviews had been ‘changed’, however using the categories I became assured of their relevance. I interpreted the data *ad hoc*, in line with

Kvale (1997). The means that while most of the categories were constructed prior to the analysis of data, others seemed relevant and I went backwards to update earlier interpretations. The limits to interpretations are of course many. In 3.4.3, I reflected upon many of these. Still, I would argue that as the researcher is touched and changed by the data, the thesis is strengthened by a continuous evaluation as part of the process.

3.6.2 Validity and Reliability

To strengthen the quality of the previous presentations and discussions in this thesis, it is time to evaluate what has been done, and ask *why*? Reflecting upon the texts as it comes about is a desirable ability of academic works – and just as important, it should enable the reader to judge the analysis, arguments and conclusion.

Reliability and *validity* are important in all the different phases of research projects (Kvale 1997, Harboe 2005). It concerns the previously mentioned possibility that should be given to the reader to understand how the researcher have reached the conclusions. Roughly put, one can say that it has to do with internal relations – how is the thesis held together – and external relations – the thesis and the world around it. Whereas reliability is a measure of the collection of data, validity points to the way data has been handled after the collection has taken place. According to Kvale (1997), while there is not only one right way of securing these aspects, every researcher should be aware of the potential challenges related to his or her way of doing research – and carry this on to the reader. Following I will look back at the previous sub-chapters of the methodology chapter and thereby relate those to the evaluation provided by reliability, validity and related terms.

Concerning reliability, I presented the way I collected data in 3.4 and related sub-chapters. It was an important part of my collection to place myself in a profoundly engaged position, which I have explained to the reader. Briggs (1986) state “Reliability refers to the probability that the repetition of the same procedures either by the same researcher or by another investigator will produce the same results” (Briggs 1986: 23). The statement calls for further details. In qualitative research it is not possible to test the reliability in exact terms, as much of the research process relies on interpretation, also from the reader. However, references and quotations can give the reader the tools he or she will need to form his or her own opinion regarding the accuracy of the analysis (Kvale 1997). What Briggs is aiming at, therefore,

might be considered *external reliability*, that is how the collection of data can be aligned to the environment around it: other academic works other sources. External reliability is therefore closely linked to the concept of *generalisability* – the ability to generalise. Since my qualitative approach more or less excludes the quantitative aspects of external reliability and generalisability, could there be another way of securing these aspects? I would argue that an *analytical generalisability* is feasible, since the reader could be able to use and compare my conclusion from the print shops in Buenos Aires, with analyses of other ERTs, or perhaps even other social movements in Argentina. Through a my theoretical approach to the concepts underlying the ERTs (see chapter 2) it has been an aim to equip the reader with enough tools to facilitate such and analytical generalisation/reliability. Possible biases to limit my data collection in relation of other data has been touched upon especially in 3.4.3, but also in previous sub-chapters. The other main aspect of reliability, then, is related to the thesis itself, *internal reliability* (Thagaard 1998). Has the collection in itself, the act of collecting, been biased? In 3.4.1-4, I describe how I was affected personally when collecting. Doing interviews, participant observation and how even collection the written empirical sources meant a strong involvement with other areas and person. There is therefore no doubt that my questions for instance, became formed by the social setting in which they were part of. However, trying to strengthen the internal reliability I have included the original question, if it makes sense, along with quotations in the analysis chapter.

Turning to validity has to do with the relevance of the analysis of the data. The subjects studied should be able to recognise themselves in the analysis. They should perceive the analytical arguments as relevant to their point of view. This does not mean they should agree, but what is said should make sense. If not, the interpretation could overlook crucial insights and the analysis would rest on a weak basis. As with reliability, validity can be divided into *external* and *internal validity* (Harboe 2005, Thagaard 1998). The external validity is the relation to other analyses, statements and arguments in which the thesis navigates. It is not specifically stated that it does not, the thesis should at least share some basic feature with other comparable works. This is not to argue that my analysis should not be able to bring forward new and previously unknown knowledge about the ERTs, but it means that I can not invent my own mind-enterprise. I tried to secure this aspect not only in chapter two and three, but also by including viewpoint of other authors in the analysis, and discuss those thoroughly (Kvale 1997). Internal validity is secured that the composition and the structure of the thesis reflects this relevance. In other words, it is not only my analytical arguments, but also the

content, that should provide a relevance. In 3.1-3, I focused on how my research perspective was chosen in related to my methodology. By doing this, the use and presentation of data should reflect the content (Thagaard 1998). Had I for instance used an advanced econometrical model to analyse my data, it would perhaps have been interesting, by it would break with the fundamentals underlying the use of the rest of the data. In turn, this could have weakened the conclusion severely. My aim has been to structure the thesis in a way that would answer Q1 and SQ1-3, but at the same time reflect the kind of data I worked with. On a more detailed level sub-chapters follow a need to get the best possible information of of the data.

3.7 Limitations

Finalising the methodological chapter I will shortly mention some aspects of the ERT phenomenon that come up during the course of the thesis but are not further elaborated upon due to the limitations of space, time and the consequent need to prioritise the range of thematic to be explored more thoroughly. I realise that these are thematically grounded limitations and therefore there could be argued that this outlining do not belong in the methodological chapter but rather in the respective places where they come up. Most of these limitations are mentioned whenever they come up during the course of the thesis, but regardless I found it helpful to also mention them all in one place. I think this concurs with the purpose of the methodological chapter 3.0: to give the best possible foundation for yourself and others to evaluate your work (Kvale 1997). In the nature of being stated here, these ‘traces not followed’ are put to a rest as far as this thesis is concerned, and the reader will know more accurately what to expect, and also what to not expect.

This thesis does not elaborate upon the formal organisational structures of the ERTs and the inherent problems of for instance providing social security in the ERTs or obtaining credits. Neither do I go down the line of exploring the somewhat chaotic universe of all the organisations, often named movements, which are working with or in connection to the ERTs, like the MNER¹⁶ and the MNFRT¹⁷. I remember than when I was in Buenos Aires for the first

¹⁶ Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores, National Movement of Enterprises Recuperated by its Workers.

time in July 2009, a volunteer at the Documentation Centre on the Recuperated Enterprises said to me that “the movements is a thematic of its own, I myself have tried to draw a map of them many times but I always get lost. If you can do it, I admire you”. While mapping out the structural context of the ERTs, including the movements, the unions which are in one way or another working with the ERTs and governmental agencies (different academic institutions and alternative press organisations might also have been included) certainly would represent an interesting challenge and might very well constitute the basis for a future research project, it has not been prioritised in this one. I have not written about workers’ cooperatives/alternative modes of organization of work in different historical times or in other places of the world. To look at alternative forms of organizing of work in other Latin American countries in comparison to the Argentinean ERTs seems logical and this angle is already present in the work of for instance Ruggeri (2009b), Ruggeri (2009a) and Vieta and Ruggeri (2009). This is also something I suggest would make an interesting point of departure for future research (see also Conclusion).

¹⁷ Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores, National Movement of Factories Recuperated by its Workers.

4.0 An Intellectual Laboratory

In this chapter I will look at some of the lines in the history of this country, which of course are interrelated with global events and tendencies, and ask how the ERT phenomenon could happen in Argentina and at that particular moment in time. This inquiry is particularly related to SQ1: *How can the ERT phenomenon be explained within its Argentinean context of origin?*



FIGURE 2: MAP OF ARGENTINA (FBMI 2011)

Nymark (2008) holds that looking at the history of Argentina it becomes obvious that the country has had more rebellions than most other countries. He further argues that the country has been a laboratory for political, ideological and economical experiments. I find that most studies of the ERTs deal with neo-liberalism to some extent. The ERTs are commonly seen as

one out of many forms of social protest that emerged, when the country's economy melted down in 2001– a meltdown that is commonly understood to have been caused by the effects the neo-liberalistic policies implemented in Argentina had on the country's economy. However, I also think it is worthwhile to go back to before the era of neo-liberalism when trying to understand the ERT phenomenon. Inspired by Nymark (2008) I have chosen to elevate anarchism, Peronism and neo-liberalism to shed light on both the historical and the immediate context the ERTs appeared within. Nymark does not write about the ERT, rather about the country as a whole. I also consider it important in order to understand the origin of the ERTs to take into account the extraordinary situation in Argentina in the time following the crisis. One can get the impression that in the time from the culmination of the crisis, in December 2001, and more or less a year ahead there was a notion amongst Argentineans that something fundamental was changed, that anything was possible (Sitrin 2005). I argue that a new Argentine mentality was created, in accordance with claims that Argentina since 2001 has seen “a more vigilant civil society” (Rains 2005:99).

Based on the wish to look further into the creation of such a notion of change, I argue that especially three –isms influence the Argentinian reality: Anarchism, Peronism as well as the newly vitalised civil society post neo-liberalism. While I am aware that using –isms as explanatory factors to societal phenomena is generalising and therefore potentially problematic, I still consider the benefits of considering them as part of the context greater than avoiding mentioning them. Also, during the interviews and fieldwork in Buenos Aires I found these three –isms mentioned, maybe particularly Peronism and neo-liberalism, as references habiting within the Argentine everyday language. Thus, being intellectual products of the past they seemingly still play important roles in understanding the changes in the contemporary Argentinian society.

4.1 Anarchism

A large majority of the immigrants to Argentina during the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th came from Italy and Spain (Nymark 2008). Some of these immigrants carried with them anarchistic ideas as ideological luggage. What was the content of this luggage? What is anarchism? Or, what was the content put in to the notion of “anarchism” by Spanish and Italian working-class people in the last half of the 19th century?

Spanish and Italian anarchists drew on the thoughts of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin's philosophy mainly consisted of three elements: firstly, it was a critique of capitalism, secondly a vision about ideal anarchistic, collectivistic societies and lastly ideas on how the ideal collectivistic societies should be organised. The idea of absolute and complete freedom as a universal human right is essential in Bakunin's philosophy. While the philosophy of Karl Marx describes how the proletariat strives for and ultimately take the power, Bakunin thought the proletariat should crush the power and that ultimately there should be no power. It was arguably easier for Spaniards and Italians to adopt Bakunin's thesis than Marx': the idea of a society without politicians probably seemed like a tempting thought to the people in these countries who already in the 19th century had had many negative experiences with and were maybe to some extent already fed up with politicians (Nymark 2008). One way or another, at the very least we can conclude that anarchistic thought was influential in Spain and Italy in the last half of the 19th century, and consequently this also came to be the case in Argentina, given the high percentage of immigrants to Argentina from these countries.

One side of the story is that the immigrants who came were influenced by anarchistic thoughts from their home countries, but obviously the conditions in the new country were also right in order for the anarchistic thoughts to bloom. In order to understand why, a little recap of some of the lines in Argentina's modern history could be useful.

In the midst of the 19th century, two of the great political thinkers of this country, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi, took it upon themselves to stand out as representatives for what they called "civilisation" and start their war against "the barbarism" (Sarmiento 2004). Argentina has been a country of great social contrasts ever since the 19th century. The oligarchy that ran the country in those days was dependent on obedient peons who were expected to work under very poor conditions on their enormous ranches out on the *pampas*¹⁸. The indigenous inhabitants of Argentina generally refused to subsume to this regime – and therefore were virtually exterminated from the face of the earth. The fathers of the nation saw the killing of the indigenous unwilling to convert from barbarism to civilisation as a necessity in order to create the Argentina they wanted. With the indigenous gone, there was more room for immigrants. Immigration was what Argentina needed to get

¹⁸ The characteristic highlands in the interior of Argentina.

rolling, according to the great political minds of the time. Their dream was to create a new kind of Argentinean: someone who was not lazy but appreciated the value of hard work (Nymark 2008, Sarmiento 2004).

The war between the named civilisation and barbarism was also a war between centralistic and federalist forces within Argentina. Argentina was freed from Spain in 1816 after six years of war. Following the independence there were multiple civil wars, which finally ended around 1880 leaving a very centralist state behind, or rather the fundament for a centralist state. The on-going wars had efficiently slowed down the development of a state-apparatus and it has been claimed that the only strong state institution in the country in the late 19th century was the Military. The absence of a functioning state-apparatus could be an explanatory factor as to why the anarchists with their repulse of the state and power became so popular in Argentina (Nymark 2008).

In the last half of the 19th century the Argentinean workers started to organise, at first in organisations called *sociedades mutualistas*¹⁹ which were groups of workers who came together in solidarity, helped each other and even sometimes carried out protests against employers. But carrying out demands proved to be difficult (Nymark 2008).



FIGUR 3 CGT DE LOS ARGETINOS: THE GRAFIC UNION PLAYED IMPORTANT ROLES IN ARGENTINIAN ANARCHICM (FGB 2007:61)

¹⁹ Literally translated as "societies of reciprocity"

The first union in the country was *la Unión Tipográfica Bonaerense*²⁰ which was founded in 1877 and organised the first strike in Argentina the following year, in 1878 (Ferrer 2008). The founding of the first union and the following strike was probably very influenced by immigrants from Spain and Italy, who were inspired by the on-going organisation of labourers and the nascent anarchistic movements in Europe. The next two decades Argentina underwent a great development concerning the creation of new trade unions and unionising of workers. 1890 was the first year of 1st of May celebrations in Argentina, with the participation of 27 unions (Nymark 2008).

In 1898 several ‘worker societies’ in Argentina made a joint effort to found the first anarchistic movement in Argentina: *Federación Obrera Argentina*²¹ (FOA), which soon became *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina* (FORA). Nymark (2008) argues that because of the impotence they felt before the powerful state-apparatus and because they did not see much point in participating in the named electoral circus, taking direct action was the agenda of the anarchists. To me, it seems logical to draw a historical line from the cognition of these early Argentinean anarchists of direct action as the only mean of influence left open to them, to December 19th and 20th 2001.

In 1901 the anarchists joined the socialist *Unión General de Trabajo*²² to form a common union, and a general strike was carried through. The general strike actually proved to have such an impact on the export-based economy of Argentina that even the conservative government of the time was forced to look the social problems of the country in the eyes. Firstly the governmental reaction was to impose curfew and to sharpen immigration control – in order to keep anarchists from gathering and to keep them from entering the country (Nymark 2008).

The corporation between anarchists and socialists did not last long. There was too much disagreement between the two groups. Marxism and socialism came to Argentina with Germans fleeing from the Bismarck – regime. Their discussions tended to be more academic and mostly in German. It seems the anarchists were the best communicators: seeking out the

²⁰ The Typographic Union of Buenos Aires

²¹ The Argentinean Labour Federation

²² General Union of Workers

working class people were they were – at the workplaces or in the *barrio*²³s, and spoke directly to them - in Spanish. Besides it seems that the Argentine state at this point in time simply was not developed enough to function as a negotiating partner the way the Marxists and socialists wanted (Nymark 2008).

Anarcho-syndicalism is a branch of anarchism which came to have a significant impact on the anarchistic movement in Argentina. Followers of this ideology were less preoccupied with the idea of collective agriculture. Instead, they paid more attention to industrial workers and union organising. The anarchists were very involved in the countryside. The dirt-poor land workers were ideal recipients of the anarchistic message, besides they had nothing to lose. Direct actions and protests against the landlords were carried out, but the anarchists also engaged in a great deal of societal involvement: literacy campaigns, founding and running press organs, organising cultural events etc. Some events that would later stand out as landmarks in the history of the fight for workers' right in Argentina was played out in the countryside. Like the general strike in the area known as Patagonia in southern Argentina in 1921. The strike was so successful and threatened the interests of the establishment so much that extra military forces were sent for, and in the end 1500 workers were literally massacred (Nymark 2008).

Nevertheless, it was hard to gather people in the countryside. The land workers hardly ever stayed in one place for long, they had to travel to find new work. Consequently it was in the cities anarchism really grew influential. The workplace became the natural point of departure for political work, preferably through the unions. The three cities of Buenos Aires, Bahía Blanca and Rosario became the centres of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in Argentina. The Italians Pietro Gori and Errico Malatesta, who both stayed in Argentina for a few years in the 1880s, are said to have deeply influenced the anarchistic movement in Argentina to focus more on organising and collectivistic action²⁴, and up until the 1920s the anarchistic thoughts played an important role in workers' movements in Argentina, which also accomplished a lot during this period of time. For instance, in 1912 universal suffrage for males was enacted. This led to a shift of government in 1916: the conservatives had to give up the power to the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR), which can be described as a social liberalistic party (Nymark

²³ Neighbourhoods

²⁴ As opposed to the anti-organizational and individualistic anarchism inspired by Kropotkin, Nietzsche and Sorel.

2008). It is commonly understood that a lot of changes for the better of the working class was implemented during their first period of power.

In 1930 there was a military coup in Argentina. The allegation has been made that the period between 1916 and 1930 was a time when the institutional democracy in Argentina functioned perfectly. Following this interpretation the military coup was totally unexpected (Luna 1994, referred to in Nymark 2008). Nymark (2008) aims to nuance the picture, and points to the fact that there were cases of severe repression of workers – maybe the most famous examples being the killing of hundreds of workers during *la Semana Trágica*²⁵ in 1919 (Ferrer 2008) and the previous mentioned killings in Patagonia in 1921. Nymark (2008) argues that if you look at the whole picture, the military coup can be seen as a logical consequence of agitation and unrest within the workers' movements, amongst other things, and consequently the need of the power-elite to control this. Taking this into consideration it could look as if, despite 14 years of an arguably perfectly functioning democracy in Argentina, the Military was still the strongest state institution.

The period leading up to 1930 was also a time of great change many places in the world – as a consequence of the Russian Revolution in 1917 ideological differences became clearer within the anarchist workers' organisations, and at the same time, fear among the power-elite that Argentina too would see a revolution lead to increased use of violence from the State. Since Mussolini appeared on the scene in Italy in 1922 Argentinean (and Italian) anarchists consequently began to define themselves as anti-fascists. A few anarchists carried through extremely violent actions against places where the power-elite would gather, for instance the Italian consulate in Buenos Aires. These few souls gave the anarchist movement as a whole a reputation as very violent. The violence on both sides (from the States and the anarchists) contributed to the degeneration of the anarchist movement in Argentina, which can said to be finalised in the middle of the 1930s (Nymark 2008).

Looking at the story about the rise and fall of anarchism in Argentina, one find similarities with the new forms of social protests that emerged in 2001. They both started out as protests from below; fighting for dignity and against injustice with the means of direct action and in both cases there was the presence of a strong dichotomy between us and them: 'the people'

²⁵ The Tragic Week

and 'the power-elite'. Nymark (2008) points out that today it would be useful to try to look at what can be learned from the defeat of the anarchist movement. He thinks sociologist James Petras is on to something when he upholds in an interview that a lesson should be that it is childish and foolish not to want power. This concurs with Schaumberg (2008) who aims to counter interpretations of the social protests emerging in Argentina in 2001 within John Holloway's framework of "anti-power". In her article, *In Search of Alternatives: The making of Grassroots Politics and Power in Argentina*, she argues that these interpretations have "denied the importance of the state as a focus for contention" (Zibechi 2003, referred to in Schaumberg 2008).

Nymark (2008) stresses that one should keep in mind that only a minority of the European immigrants to Argentina at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th had actually studied ideology. Most of the immigrants were more likely to act in accordance with the reality that immediately surrounded them: they were very vulnerable to manipulation and would easily change ideological affiliation according to varying socio-political and economic conditions. This would explain why the same workers who, up until the 1930s swore alliance to anarchism, in the 1940s would join the ranks of Peronism; an ideology which in many ways represent the complete opposite of anarchism.

4.2 Peronism

I was repeatedly surprised by how the notion of Peronism prevails within the language and the culture of the Argentineans in an almost mythical way; at least so it would seem to me. People would refer to Peronism while explaining their points of view on a number of topics. They would say something along the lines of: "I am not a Peronist, but I still sympathise with Peronism because of this and that". Even though Peronism with time arguably has developed a shady rumour, and it is seemingly no longer considered politically correct in many layers of the Argentine society to call oneself a Peronist without reservation, it still seems to exist as a strong reference in the Argentine culture, and let us not forget that the ruling party as of this date is the Peronist Party - the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ). Even Carlos Menem, the very president who fronted neo-liberalism in Argentina and was in charge of the privatisations en masse during the 1990s was from the Peronist party.

Peronism derives its name from Juan Domingo Perón. One way of explaining Peronism would be to assert that it is built on the political thoughts of this man who is considered to be a founding father of modern Argentina (Larsen 2003). Perón was a military officer who formed part of the military junta who took the power in 1943 (one military regime succeeded another one). As a minister in this military government he quickly gained popularity and was elected president in 1946. The only person who possibly was even more popular than him was his young wife Eva Duarte – best known as Evita – who was a struggling actress with background from the countryside belonging to the lower social class until she married Perón. She was passionately concerned with helping the poor who she nicknamed as “her shirtless”. Together they made for quite a ‘super-couple’, but as the well-known story goes; Evita died of cancer at the age of 33 in 1952..

As we can see, an important element of Peronism seemed to be the cultivation of the strong personalities of Perón and Evita. Cultivation of strong leader figures is central in the “caudillismo” phenomenon. The Spanish word “caudillo” translates as chief or leader; he is the strong man the people depend upon. The caudillo concept derives from the Spanish independence war against the Mauritians in the 15th and 16th century where the caudillo was the leader who fought for his Country and the Church. This traditional cultivation of the strong leader was something the Spaniards brought with them as they immigrated to Latin America; and the phenomenon of caudillismo has been influential in many of the Latin American states. As Larsen (2003) points out, the caudillismo phenomenon is central in order to understand Peronism. The strong leadership figure was especially important in the workers’ unions, which was a very central element in the Peronist movement.

Besides caudillismo and the fight for workers’ rights, other important elements in Peronism are the values of the Catholic Church, and the formation of a national identity. In other words; Peronism found its basis of popularity amongst the poor, religious immigrants and second-generation immigrants in search for salaried labour and a national identity. Perón was ousted from power by military colleagues in 1955 and spent the following 18 years in exile – mostly in Spain. He came back in 1973; a month after the Peronist party had won the elections, and was quickly reinserted as president. At this point in time the Peronist movement had seen the creation of a left-wing orientated fragmentation consisting mainly of younger people inspired by Fidel Castro (Cuba) and Salvadore Allende (Chile) (Larsen 2003).

Perón died the following year, in 1974, leaving the presidency to his new wife Maria Estela Martínez Perón. She was overthrown by a coup in 1976, and consequently the arguably most brutal military regime Argentina has seen was installed. The military dictatorship lasted until 1983 and estimations are that 30 000 people ‘disappeared’ (meaning they were most likely tortured and/ -or killed) in this period – many of them were unionists. The military dictatorship of 1976-1983, with three different presidents: Jorge Rafael Videla, Roberto Viola and Leopoldo Galtieri, has arguably installed a culture of fear among the Argentine people. The fact that many of the most militant and outspoken union activists had been eliminated during the years of the military dictatorship and the fear installed among those remaining can possibly explain why the Argentinean workers seemed to be absent from the resistance against the worsening of working conditions, understood to have been caused by the implementing of neo-liberal policies during the 1990s.

What does Peronism and the ERTs have to do with one another? While the concept of a strong leader is very alien to the idea of workers’ cooperativism, it is clear that Peronism is an important factor underlying the understanding of what is referred to as “the notion of the right to work” (Faulk 2008: 590), which is something the ERT workers uses to legitimise their actions:

“Built in a weak sense into classical liberalism, the notion of the right to work in Argentina has roots in the socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist movements at the turn of the 20th century, but derives its main force and flavour from classical Peronism and the union structures that emerged in that era” (Faulk 2008: 590).

The right to “genuine work” has also been the principal demand of the *piquetero* movement (Schaumberg 2008: 368). By genuine work in this context, I understand the meaning to be employment with stable working conditions rather than having to make their own jobs within the informal sector where there is a total absence of social security and mostly also instability of income.

Nymark (2008) points at the French thinker Jacques Maritain as one of Perón’s greatest sources of inspiration. Maritain was very concerned with the rights of the working class. He pointed out that the social aspect was virtually absent in the liberal rule of law. The social liberalistic parties that had been holding the power in many states for decades already,

Argentina included, had failed to include the social element. From Maritain came the idea that an organised workers' movement could, and should, outweigh the power held by the employers. This came to be the very core of Perón's political philosophy. With the idea of the social element as an important factor in society Perón also managed to get himself a very powerful ally – the Catholic Church – that made it clear Perón had its support prior to the elections in 1946. As we have already seen, Perón's background was from the Military, which he managed to keep good relations with up until 1954-55. From the Military, Perón brought values such as order, discipline and hierarchy into the Peronist movement.

So Perón had the support of arguably the two most powerful institutions in Argentina: the Catholic Church and the Military. The preoccupation with the question of justice from the Peronists was clearly inspired from the Catholic Church, and in 1948 Perón named the party *Partido Justicialista*²⁶, which it bears to this day.

In the first years of Perón's presidency Argentina saw the creation of a welfare state which meant a great improvement in the conditions for the working class. In 1949 the right to strike, the right to health, education and work were all included in the new Constitution. A whole new set of workers' rights were implemented in laws, including for instance pensions, paid vacations and compensation in the case of a work related accident. Additionally, an extensive social welfare system was organised through the worker's unions; the named *Obras Sociales*²⁷ sought to provide cheap health care and other benefits, such as vacations to elected places for the unionised workers. This system remains more or less the same until this day (Nymark 2008). However, as mentioned previously, the proponents of Peronism also participated in some of the first waves of privatisation of state enterprises. While the link between Anarchism and Peronism is somehow graspable as the latter being a popular heir of the former, the link between Peronism and neo-liberalism has been more puzzling to me. In the next sub-chapter I seek to analyse how neo-liberalism in Argentina developed and how such a relation could be.

4.3 Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is a term used to describe certain economic and political policies which had “widespread adherence among economic elites and the major Washington-based international

²⁶ Literally translated as The Justice Party

²⁷ I cannot really seem to find a good translation of this term. *Sociales* translates as Socials and *Obras* as Works or Efforts.

economic regulatory agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank” (Faulk 2008: 587). The golden age of neo-liberalism can be said to have lasted for approximately two decades; from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. Key elements are minimised state intervention in the regulation of economic activity, deregulation of state costs, privatisation, free trade and free flow of capital. Additionally; cultural implications comes with the neo-liberal package (Faulk 2008). Individual freedom is a central value within the neo-liberal conceptual apparatus. As Harvey (2005) points out; it is crucial within the neo-liberalistic way of thought that individual entrepreneurship should be given the best conditions possible. This is done within a framework that priorities private property, free markets and free trade.

What did the appliance of neo-liberal economic policies and culture mean for Argentina? The United States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been given a lot of the blame for the state Argentina found itself in at the end of 2001, with their implementation of a neo-liberal economic model in Argentina (Nymark 2008; Klein and Lewis 2007; Rains 2005, Lavaca 2007). The privatisation *en masse* of Argentine public enterprises led to a substantial growth of foreign control over the national economy (Rains 2005) Klein and Lewis call the Argentine crisis in 2001 an “armed robbery” (Klein and Lewis 2007:10).

From the late 1970s on, the industrial power was gradually concentrated in fewer hands – mostly foreign. The patterns of deindustrialisation deepened in the 1990s under the presidency of Menem. Much due to the overvalued dollar/peso parity foreign investment increased in this period, but very little of this new capital found its way to the industrial sectors; it was much concentrated in the utilities, services and extractive economy. As a matter of fact, during this period Argentina saw an increase of foreign import of all kind of industrial products. Together with labour ‘flexibilisation’, financial speculation and capital flight this took its toll on the domestic industry’s place in national production. By the end of the 1990s, industry’s share of GNP was 15 percent, 300,000 jobs were lost and 100 firms controlled 50 percent of Argentina’s production (Rains 2005: 100-101).

4.3.1 Consequences of neo-liberalism on the working class

It has been argued that one of the consequences of the neo-liberal policies has been a dramatic shift in the structure of the working class (Rains 2005). Harvey (2005) calls the neo-liberal

state's approach to labour markets a "problematic issue" (Harvey 2005:75). He further argues that

"Internally, the neoliberal state is necessarily hostile to all forms of social solidarity that puts restraints on capital accumulation. Independent trade unions or other social movements which acquired considerable power under embedded liberalism have to be disciplined, if not destroyed in the sacrosanct individual liberty of the isolated labourer" (Harvey 2005: 75).

As Rains (2005) also points out, the fact that the situation of the Argentine industrial workers worsened from the beginning of the 1990s can also be proven by looking at the laws that were passed during this period. A new Employment Law from 1991 opened up for the ministry of labour to allow firms to take certain actions towards their workers as part of a crisis prevention procedure. For one, firms could be allowed to use some of their workers outside the collective bargaining agreements or outside full-time employment. Furthermore the ministry could give them the permission to lay off workers and cut severance pay by 50 per cent. It could also be opened up for firms to subcontract workers outside of the collective bargaining agreement.

In addition to this new employment law a decree was passed which allowed for increases in pay only if there were productivity increases. In practice this meant that pay increase could be given to only one part of a workforce of a particular industry. When before unions had negotiated pay increases for all of their members, now they would negotiate pay increases for only certain branches. Also, in March of 1995 a new Flexibilisation Law was passed. This law was directed towards businesses with 40 or less employees; meaning it would have an impact on the situation for approximately four out of five of the Argentine workers. The purpose of the law was to open up for the owners to be able to "reconfigure the workplace procedures" in order to increase productivity and "restructure their workforce based on technological, organisational or market rationales" (Rains 1999, quoted in Rains 2005: 102).

It seems reasonable that the culminating economic crisis and the industrial recession at the end of the 1990s led to a number of bankruptcies in Argentina. However, Rains claims that in most of the cases of worker-occupations there was "overriding evidence" of the owners committing fraud. The industrial recession was used as an excuse and in reality the owners

received governmental credits for financial speculation and, ultimately, deprivation of the workers' salaries (Rains 2005: 102-103).

Fernando de la Rúa assumed the presidency in 1999 and it is probably not very controversial to say that his administration did not make things better for the national industry. Their focus was upon repaying the foreign debt and maintaining a good investment climate for foreign investors. The collapse of the peso-convertibility made sure a lot of small-scale Argentine firms had to shut the gates. "It was in this difficult climate many industrial firms began to collapse and workers attempted to recuperate these firms by occupying them." (Rains 2005: 101). In many ways this climate marks the end of Peronisms converting to neo-liberalism (although Peronism managed to re-establish itself with a once again renewed rhetoric following the assuming of the presidency by Néstor Kirchner in 2003). In years to come, confusion became absolute and Argentina experienced a situation of political, economic and ideological vacuum which paved the way for the ERTs among others.

4.4 "A more vigilant civil society"

The political vacuum after the ousting of the government in December 2001 was to be filled with something. The Argentinian political reality moved on, but how? As mentioned in the introduction chapter (see p.2), it has been argued that if the masses had been better organised in December 2001 an actual revolution could have taken place. Why did it not happen? Midré (2006) argues that taking the power was not a demand within the social movements that arose from the crisis. Rather than wanting a revolution, the people wanted change from within; they wanted the change to take place within the already existing political structures.

Rains (2005) points out that by early 2003 the societal vitality one saw in December 2001 and immediately after had been too politically diffused to represent an actual electoral challenge to the most powerful establishment party, which was still the Peronist party. However, he further argues that "the experiences of 2001-2003 have left a significant residue with the Argentine body politic that has shifted the terms of engagement and created a more vigilant civil society" (Rains 2005: 99).



FIGURE 4 AN EXAMPLE OF CIVIL VIGILANCE? (MIDRÉ 2006:170, PHOTO: DENNIS ROGERS CRISIS STATES RESEARCH CENTRE)

There was seemingly a notion among the Argentinians in the wake of the crisis that anything was possible. The people had ousted the government; demonstrating what has been named “collective power” (Schaumberg 2008:372). Schaumberg (2008) further argues that people overcame social divisions, fear and cynicism installed by the military regime and the sense of powerlessness that had been ever-growing through the subsequent decades of neo-liberal policies with high levels of un- and underemployment. I argue that a new or at least a renewed ‘Argentine mentality’ was created. This is the context in which the ERTs were initiated.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The analyses of the three –isms showed that while several aspects create a red thread through the Argentinian political history, some features stand out as a mark of change. While anarchism and Peronism share an ambition of improving the conditions of working as a crucial part of life, neo-liberalism seems to have a hostile, or at least underdeveloped, notion of the importance of work to people. Looking further at this divergence the word ‘work’ might have widely different meanings as well. I argue the while anarchism and Peronism see work at concept of life; neo-liberalism converts work into a monetary value. I previously argued that the protests in 2001 had resemblances to the anarchist protest in the beginning of

the 20th century. While Anarchism played a crucial role in the formation of workers' unions, it almost disappeared during the 1930s. That Peronism carried the notion of work into the political elite was probably by scepticism, but not public protest. Continuing chronologically then, the shift from the uncertain contours of Peronism into country-wide privatisation and a neo-liberalistic policy is of another kind. When the industrialisation of the Peronist era lost its pace the understanding of work was turned against the worker. From being "a notion of the right to work" (Faulk 2008) work turned into a matter of economics and thus questioning who had that 'right'. In privatising public enterprises, the former Peronist politicians challenged to traditional Peronism. However, from the historical analyses, one feature stands out uniting Peronism and neo-liberalism: The desire for political power. While anarchism was not concerned with becoming a popular political force, with all the compromises this would include, Peronists turned into neo-liberalists mostly to remain in power. But something was lost the way, and ERTs picked up part of that. On the other hand, the struggle and compromises towards a legitimate existence is something that matured when the ERTs no longer were mere protesters. Along with Nymark (2008) I argue that the ERTs are a product with parts of all three –isms. However, since this is not the purpose of this thesis the argument is turned into an analytical approach which will be carried out in the next chapter. What parts do the ERTs consists of and how does the 'machinery' work?

the theories presented in chapter 2 of ERTs as subjective experiences (Palomino et al 2010, Vieta and Ruggeri 2009). Chilavert experienced a much higher degree of drama during the initial phase of the recuperating process and saw the support of a huge group of people who would continue to show up and show their support, bringing them food etc. It seems the theatrical element was present already at this point.



FIGURE 6 DWARFS AT THE KINGS TABLE NEGOTIATING (NAROTSKY & PFLÜGER 2007: 28-29). ILLUSTRATION OF HOW THE TAKEOVER OF THE HOTEL B.A.U.E.N HAPPENED FROM THE CHILDRENS BOOK *DUENDES POR LA DIGNIDAD*, DWARFS TOWARDS DIGNITY

The focus seemingly became the fight itself. At AGS, they did not have to put up this intense fight; the overtaking preceded in a quieter manner, nobody from the outside was bringing them food and so the focus was always: how they were going to make some money:

“Here, it didn’t happen like in the other cooperatives, with fights, having to put up with everything. For us everything resolved itself very quickly without any incidents... without any type of problems. This difference us from the others in a way; even in the way we think”.

José Luis, AGS

During those first months, the associates had to come up with creative solutions to be able to eat. In the words of José Luis:

“In the beginning everything was turned off. We didn’t have light. I always remember that in order to be able to proceed with the first job we got, we had to sell the paper-

carts... we had to sell them.. and cables. You know, electric cables, we would peel them in order to sell the copper inside... and from this moment on... pah, pah, pah... everything came into place.”

In the following I will shortly narrate the stories of how the overtaking of the means of productions by the workers happened at the two enterprises.

5.1.1 Chilavert – Never surrender!

Chilavert is one out of ten enterprises whose story is told in the book *Sin Patrón; Fábricas y empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores. Una historia, una guía* by the Lavaca collective, originally published in 2004 (printed at AGS!). The book was published in English in 2007 with the title *Sin Patrón; Stories from Argentina’s worker-run factories*. In these books, the story of the recuperation of Chilavert is told along these lines:

The name of the former enterprise was Gaglianone; founded in 1923, it had become a prestigious print shop that specialized in the printing of high quality art books. Then, in the year 2000; problems began. There was a decline in the work quantity. Finally, the enterprise ended up in a creditors’ meeting; it was going towards a bankruptcy. One day, the owner showed up with a mechanic who was supposed to disarm the machines. The eight workers became suspicious; they placed themselves in front of the machines, not allowing this to happen. When Cándido, one of the workers, confronted the owner with how much he owed him in wages; the mechanic was shocked and left. From that day on the workers decided to stay inside the print shop; to sleep there; live there; to not let the machines out of sight for a second. This was in April 2002. On May 10th; bankruptcy was enacted. The workers stayed inside the prints shop; they were ready to even set fire to the machines in order to prevent the police from taking them. There were two intents of dislodging; however, between the determination of the workers and the presence of an ever growing supporting crowd in the street out front (workers from other recuperated enterprises, people from popular assemblies, neighbours, friends and family etc.) the police had to give it up. Instead; they left a permanent guard in front of Chilavert to make sure nothing suspicious was going on. But behind closed doors the workers were indeed engaging in suspicious activities; they were working. They had secretly gotten a job to print the covers of a book called *Qué son las asambleas populares* (What are the popular assemblies). They got the book covers out through a peep hole in the wall facing a neighbour’s house. The neighbour was in on the deal; he even drove them

around in his car to deliver the books. At the time, the workers camouflaged the peep hole by hanging a painting over it. These days, however, the peep hole itself has a frame around it and is proudly exhibited to all visitors. Even though it has been filled with bricks, it is still very visible and a proud testimony of the past (Lavaca 2004, 2007).

5.1.2 AGS – Slowly building themselves up

In June 2002, the owner of Gráfica Valero, which was the name of the former enterprise, presented a bankruptcy. The workers had already known for a while that things were not going well: the situation of the national economy was hitting it hard and there were few sales.

Supported by the graphic syndicate, *la Federación Gráfica Bonaerense*, The Buenos Aires Graphic Federation, the workers formed a cooperative looking at trying to recuperate their workplace. Differently from a lot of other recuperated enterprises AGS did not need to go through a very intense fight, because of the fact that the owner left and never came back. They did however decide that it was necessary to stay inside the production hall 24 hours a day, seven days a week for six months straight. They took two shifts – 12 hours each – watching over the machines. Because, as Alejandra puts it: “if we all left, then we would never be able to come back in”. They were afraid that if they left, the police would enter and empty out the place, like had happened with other occupied enterprises.

“[...] our road to self-management differs a little from other recuperated enterprises that have had the necessity to fight in the street, which needed to have the support of the whole neighbourhood et cetera to be able to persist. In this case we just stayed and well, commenced to work slowly, first *a façon*²⁸ ... until slowly... We were building up our own capital and we obtained independence from this mode of working. Evidently, in the beginning we had absolutely nothing. This... we didn't even have clients because everybody left, except Greenpeace Argentina, which is the only one who stayed from the former enterprise and to this day is still a client of ours. The rest disappeared. This way, very slowly we were getting our own clientele.”

Carlos, AGS

²⁸ A mode of production where the clients provide the raw materials

The workers at AGS were never legally prevented from working, as the tribunal allowed them to continue their activity, but they did experience a six months delay in their tasks. (Lavaca 2004: 144). In December of 2002 AGS got a temporal expropriation from the City of Buenos Aires (City of Buenos Aires webpage).

On the 25th of November 2004, the legislature of the city of Buenos Aires allowed the permanent expropriation of thirteen recuperated enterprises to the workers; including both AGS and Chilavert (Lavaca 2004).

5.2 Ownership

“Would you consider leaving this place if offered a better paid job elsewhere? - Probably not, because this place feels like it’s mine. When I tell you about these things, how I had to sleep on this floor, the hair on my arms rise. The memories awake such strong emotions. This place really does feel like it’s mine”.

Man in his thirties, AGS

The term ownership is how I choose to translate the Spanish word *pertenencia*, which derives from the same man who is quoted above, who elevates this concept when talking about how he wants the enterprise to function. I also mention the Spanish word because I think a reflection of the meaning applied to the word in this context is important. *Pertenencia* could also mean belonging. What the man refers to when he talks about *pertenencia* is a feeling rather than a formality; which is underlined in the last sentence of the quote: “this place really does feel like it’s mine”. I do consider this to be an important acknowledgement, and consequently choose to examine the concept of ownership a bit further.

Both at AGS and at Chilavert I was able to identify three main points of view among the associates concerning their sense of ownership of the enterprise. There was the group of people who felt an absolute loyalty towards the enterprise. I would place the ‘man in his thirties’ quoted above in this group. The people feeling this sense of extreme loyalty towards the cooperative were mostly people who had participated in the occupation and lived through those emotionally intense first months. At the same time, I also talked to associates both places who said they would leave without thinking twice if offered a better-paid job

elsewhere. There is also a third group, encountered both places as well: the people who said they would *probably* leave for a better job elsewhere (a job that would either pay better or were they would work less hours) but that the decision would be difficult for them to make.

I find Walter at Chilavert to be a good representative for the latter, battled group. Walter is in his late 20s, and being the son of one of the founders of Chilavert, Manuel, but at the same time with family responsibility of his own, he has a young daughter, he feels thorn between the loyalty towards the cooperative, his father and the colleagues on one hand, and his financial obligations towards his young family on the other.

“This is not a private enterprise which is obligated to pay you your salary each month. If you are in a private enterprise, if you have a boss, you will know that regardless to if there actually is any work or not, the guy has to pay you. If you were there the eight hours, ten hours, twelve hours, he has to pay you.... on the contrary, here, we can stay in the eight hours, ten hours but if there aren't any work... if we can't generate any money, well.. We don't have a boss who will say: here is your money....this is the big con about being here, you understand? [...] we don't have a fond, we don't have any capital which we can live off if there is a bad month. This would be a very good thing for us, but as of this day, this is not something we have. Here, we take each day as it comes, you understand? We have bills to pay, we have to get our shares, and so... and it's like you have to work and produce a whole week only to be able to generate your own salary which you get on Friday. It's not so good. But then, on the other hand, when there is work; this is a good place to work. We work comfortably, calmly, you must have noticed while you have been here, right? [...] It's very neat, but... when there is no money, you see? So, you relaxed all week and then comes Friday and you are going crazy because there isn't any money for you to take home. –*Would you prefer to work for a private enterprise, then?* –Look, I have a reality that is my home. I have my wife and my daughter. I am not alone, so for me it's not ok to say 'well, I didn't get any money today so I will just drink a cup of tea and that's it'. No, I have to bring the money to my home to pay the electricity bill, to pay for this and that... for my daughter's school, and the food. So, I would prefer to work for a private enterprise or a state-owned or whatever... where at the end of the month, you worked and there is your money.”

Walter does indeed feel ownership to Chilavert and what it represents, the *compañerismo*, but at the same time he has “his reality” to consider, which in the end will weigh more.

In his article on Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE)²⁹ in Finland, Pekka Pättiniemi aims to analyse the social and economic performance of the enterprises in question. He concludes that working in this type of an enterprise “had multiple positive effects” on the workers, including “improvement in professional skills, in the capacity to fulfil engagements, in the capacity to work with autonomy, in the knowledge of different job tasks and in the collaboration with colleagues” (Pättiniemi 2004: 14), rising their actual employability. In addition, the sociocultural capabilities of the workers had also improved.

I argue that the results referred to by Pättiniemi are pretty transferable to the ERTs in Argentina. Several people I talked to expressed that within the frames of the workers’ cooperative they were able to grow more, both personally and professionally. This is true for Alejandra, who prior to the takeover had worked as cleaning personnel, a very typical job for working-class women in Argentina (and all over the world!). These days, she was operating a machine, something she took great pride in.

“You don’t need to pay much attention or use much intelligence when you are cleaning, but in order to do what I am doing these days, you need to have your head with you. It’s a responsibility, because if I do something wrong, if I cut a stack of magazines the wrong way, we will not be able to sell them and it will be an economic loss to the whole enterprise.”

Alejandra, AGS

Alejandra had obviously grown due to the fact that she was able to carry out other tasks in the cooperative than before. Participating in meetings and getting information was also something that seemingly boosted the confidence of many of the workers. A middle-aged woman whom I talked to informally at AGS stated that “here, you are freer. You can do whatever you want

²⁹ WISE is a project carried out in 15 European counties. Its main goal is to lower structural unemployment. Before the 1990s the project mainly targeted handicapped people. But as a result of the mass unemployment of the early 1990s, a new type of social enterprise emerged in the mid-1990s: labour co-operatives.

to. And you feel like you are a part of something. In a private enterprise you have no idea what's going on”.

This woman has experience from working in a conventional factory. She seems very conscious about what she sees as the advantages of working in a cooperative over a conventional factory. In her former workplace, she explained, you always had to maintain exactly at your post, in other words you were banned from moving around freely. You were only allowed to go to the bathroom once or twice a day, and the lunch-break was only half an hour. The length of the shift was the same as AGS: 12 hours. She said she would stay even if they offer her a higher payment somewhere else, but she recognises that her position is fortunate; because she has a husband who also brings home money, she could afford to refuse such an offer. She says that she is not sure her position on this would be the same if she was a single parent.

This statement made me want to ask one of my interviewees at AGS who actually is a single parent about this. Zulema is a single mom of two girls who came on board at AGS after the recuperation. She says that she would not leave the cooperative if offered a better-paid job elsewhere. Her reason why is that she thinks the cooperative is a better place to work when you have family responsibility: “if one of my girls has to go to the dentist, I can get off from work to take her there. That would have been difficult somewhere else”.

Informally, I chatted with a man at AGS who was 20 years old and had family responsibility. Obviously, he is too young to have been on board since before the takeover, but have recently come to work for AGS through a close family member. He said that he would leave without thinking twice if offered a better job. He adds, however, that if he was to leave, the job he would be leaving for would have to be as secure as his current job, which he describes as “very secure”. He expresses hope that he will be able to get a job where he earns the same or even more than he does at AGS, but with shorter working hours. This hope is obviously consolidated by the fact that he has a friend who also works in another print-shop in Buenos Aires, who works 8 hour shifts, but at the same time “earns more than me”.

Quite a few of the associates I talked to both places stress the importance of working for one self, for each other and the cooperative. This is described as better than working for the enrichment of an owner. However, this feeling is hardly enough if it is not combined with having a secure income. I argue that providing a secure income for the workers needs to be

the basic concern of the ERTs; if this is not in place I have difficulties picturing the future of the recuperated enterprises.

5.3 The Problematic Managerialism



FIGURE 7: RECENTLY RECUPERATED FACTORY:³⁰ THIS ILLUSTRATION IS TAKEN FROM THE MAGAZINE *AUTOGESTIÓN ARGENTINO*, WHICH IS A MEMBERS' MAGAZINE FOR THE *CONFEDERACIÓN NACIONAL DE COOPERATIVAS DE TRABAJO*, THE NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF WORKERS' COOPERATIVES (CNCT 2009).

“They call him *patrón*³¹”, a worker at Chilavert told me, referring to Carlos at AGS, clearly meaning for the word *patrón* to be an epithet. At AGS they have chosen to organise themselves as a hierarchy; Carlos’ formal title is head of administration and he makes no excuses; he is the boss, though he himself uses the word *jefe*, which might be a little less

³⁰ The witch is thinking: “There is so much negative energy in here!” The workers are saying: -whose idea was this? -Well, nobody wanted to use the boss’ old office.

³¹ Boss

ideologically loaded than *patrón*. The fact that AGS explicitly have adopted a hierarchical administrative structure and also from the beginning practiced unequal payment schemes have made them gained the reputation as “the black sheep among the recuperated enterprises” (expression used by José Luis at AGS). While I will outline in more detail how the associates at both Chilavert and AGS chose to organise their work in Chapter 6, in this sub-chapter I will aim at describing and problematizing the concept of *autogestión* – self-management, which is often outlined as an important feature of the ERT experiences, and the named social innovations of the ERTs are seen to have originated within the frame of self-management (Vieta 2008, Vieta 2009b, Vieta and Ruggeri 2009, Ruggeri 2009b). I am also interested in exploring the concept of managerialism. Schaumberg (2008) writes about “the resurfacing of managerialism” as a danger the ERTs must avoid (Schaumberg 2008: 382). Firstly, I find the lack of a definition of the concept of managerialism to be problematic, and secondly I aim to counter the description of this concept as something that is unilaterally negative.

The ability to host differences of opinion within the enterprise has been named the strength of the recuperated enterprises (Fernández et al 2008). This is acknowledged in the formal ownership structure of the workers’ cooperatives; all the workers or associates owns an equal share of the business and therefore they also have an equal say in all decisions concerning the economy of the business. According to my experience, this is something the protagonists are very concerned with: something they both value and curse. It is seen as enrichment, but also as something exhausting. For some of the protagonists, this could actually be a reason to leave the firm and go look for a job somewhere else: somewhere they can go back to just being employed, without the hassle of having to have an opinion on everything. For others, on the other hand, it is one of the most cherished features of the ERTs. The formal arena for discussion in an ERT is the *Asambleas*³², which are supposed to be held with a regular frequency; the norm being once a month. At AGS, they strictly stick to this protocol and have an assembly once a month. At Chilavert they have assemblies but the frequency is more semi-regular. I see the formal ownership structure as strongly linked to the emotional ownership described in the previous subchapter. Where there is a formal ownership structure of a worker’s cooperative with assemblies where everyone is entitled to an opinion, and if this mechanism is relatively well functioning, then the emotional ownership will also be present

³² Assembly

for the workers, they will feel like they are working for something that is theirs, and this adds a new meaningfulness to the concept of work.

Schaumberg (2008) writes about “the dangers of managerialism” (Ibid: 382), but it is unclear to me what she means by this. What is managerialism exactly, how is it defined, and what constitutes its dangers? I find no answers to this in Schaumberg’s article or in other literature on the ERTs. However there has been written quite extensively about the concept of self-management and what I understand is seen to be its inherent social innovations (Vieta 2008, Vieta 2009b, Vieta and Ruggeri 2009, Ruggeri 2009b). The social innovations attributed to the ERTs include:

“1. The commitment to democratise and cooperativize the labour process and the division of labour amongst the ERT’s worker-members; 2. Creative responses to intensifying market competition and financial and production challenges; 3. Redefining notions of social production by reclaiming substantial degrees of workers’ surpluses and, ultimately, contesting notions of surplus-value and surplus-labour, even as they produce in part for capitalist markets; and 4. Rediscovering notions of social wealth by opening up workplaces to the community, thus strengthening the social value of the new worker self-managed workspaces.”

(Vieta 2008: 15)

It seems one could draw the conclusion that managerialism is given the meaning of being the opposite of self-management. This is understandable: as illustrated by figure 7, the previous management; *el patrón (trompa in lunfardo – the porteño slang)* has served as one of the target groups, alongside politicians, the country’s power-elite, multinational companies and capitalists in general, of the anger and fear the workers felt faced with potentially structural unemployment. As mentioned in chapter 4, in most of the cases of worker-occupations there was “overriding evidence” of the owners committing fraud (Rains 2005: 102). Consequently, the anger of the workers towards the former management is well placed and deserved. However, I argue that maybe one should not jump to the conclusion that having a management is an evil per se. I argue that the concept of self-management and managerialism does not necessarily mutually exclude one another. The key word for me is ‘choose’. At AGS, they have chosen a hierarchical organisational form. Self-management can be defined as “the management of an enterprise, conducted by workers who are detaching from capitalists and

managers and developing their own organisation of the work under non-hierarchical organisational modes” (Ruggeri 2009b: 29). According to this definition, it seems a hierarchical organisational mode and self-management does indeed mutually exclude each other. However, Ruggeri proceeds to immediately operationalise the definition in the following manner: “In other words, self-management means that the workers collectively apply the norms that regulate the production, the organisation of the working process, the use of surpluses and the relationship with the rest of the economy and the society” (Ruggeri 2009b: 29). What if the workers’ preferred mode of organising the working process includes having a manager? This was what happened at AGS. When a group of 25 workers (at the time of the bankruptcy, the company had 40 employees, out of which 25 stayed behind), made the decision that they would try to put the place back in business, they quickly realised that among the ones who had stayed, there were none from the former administration; as Alejandra puts it: “there was nobody who knew about office-work, and we needed somebody who could do the numbers”. So they decided to call Carlos Marinelli. He had been working for the former boss, but had not stayed behind when the owner left:

“He knew that we were here, that we didn’t have anything. So... we asked him, we called him up and we asked him if he wanted to come back to be with us. And he said yes. And so he came back to be with us, and he started together with all of us, from zero. [...] we all agreed that we trusted him to be our person to do the numbers. And well, since he came back... from there we started to rise very slowly.”

Alejandra, AGS

“I have the most difficult job here”, says Carlos, not referring to the level of skills needed to perform the professional tasks he is expected to conduct, but rather the challenges he faces trying to make other associates, “especially the new ones” understand that “this is a cooperative, that they are associates, not regular workers”. He expresses concerns about the fact that despite seven years of existence, there are “unfortunately associates who are still working as if this was a private enterprise”. He states that he wishes they could liberate themselves more and step up as associates of a workers’ cooperative.

Nymark (2008) refers to an interview with sociologist James Petras where he has pointed out that it is childish and potentially dangerous for social movements not to want power; meaning state power. I agree with this, and I would like to add that it is childish and potentially

dangerous to avoid what is named managerialism out of principle. The way I see it, the focus has to be on what works. Whatever works, needs to be the survival strategies of an ERT. At AGS, they have seemingly understood this. They are also free to do what they want, because they have since the beginning done what they thought worked, and consequently they have had to live with the fact that they were considered by some as the black sheep amongst the ERTs. At Chilavert they might also have come to the cognition that they really should be doing whatever works for them, but they are seemingly trapped within a lot of expectations which they feel they need to live up to as an emblematic ERT.

While AGS have chosen a hierarchical mode of organising the work process with a management on top, they stay true to the formal ownership structure of the cooperative. One of the differences between AGS as a workers' cooperative and the former conventional enterprise of Gráfica Valero is that at AGS the manager is not the owner of the enterprise. He remains in his position at the grace of the cooperative council – which is constituted by all of the associates. If they decide they no longer want him on top, he will have to leave that position. As I see it, an important innovation of the ERTs lies in the change of capital-labour relations, not necessarily in the management-production floor relations. The ERT protagonists have shown “stubborn resistance against [...] owner repression” (Fajn, 2003; Ruggeri et al 2005, referred to in Vieta 2008), which is something I consider to be excellent, as long as the resistance actually is a resistance against something, not just a sport played out for the sake of the resistance itself.

5.4 Workers versus entrepreneurs?

Seemingly, at Chilavert they have maintained a worker's mentality; they identify themselves mainly as workers (*trabajadores*), this is in accordance with what Ruggeri (2009b) writes, but at AGS I find that this is not so much the case. The AGS workers seem to define themselves mainly as cooperativists (*cooperativistas*). I find that there is more of an entrepreneur mentality at AGS. At AGS, they do their own thing without thinking about what anyone will say. At Chilavert, they feel much more connected, and in a certain sense obligated to the traditional fight of the working class. This could of course be a good thing, but it might have outplayed its role a little. To stay within the dichotomy of 'us' (the suppressed) versus 'them' (the suppressers) when 'they' really do not exist anymore, at least not in the character of a mean boss, do not seem to be very fruitful.

Schaumberg (2008) writes that the ERTs need the backing of an active Argentine labour movement in order to survive in the long run. At AGS, almost everyone is unionised, but as they themselves express it, it does not really matter much. Vieta (2008) describes the ERTs as “union aligned” (Vieta 2008: 1). This might be true in theory, but I argue that this alliance is of little importance. The union structure seemingly does not fit very well with the concept of an ERT. The unions’ field of expertise is to negotiate between the employers and the employees. In an ERT, these are the same persons. Everyone is a boss and everyone is an employee. Maybe other organisation structures could be more valid for the ERTs? AGS seems to benefit from being in FEECOTRA, which is an organisation for cooperatives much older than the ERT phenomenon. Perhaps it’s because of its many years of existence that it’s seemingly more well-functioning than the many (attempts) of ERT specific organisations. However, these organisations will not be the concerns of this thesis, as I have explained in sub-chapter 3.7.

At AGS they generally seem to identify themselves more as a cooperative and less as an ERT. Of course, their origin makes them an ERT per definition. Maybe one could say that they are historically consolidated as an ERT, but their future is as a cooperative? Their focus is solely on producing, earning money, which is no little thing, as I was told: “because this place feeds more than 40 families”. Not a little thing at all.

5.5 The initiation of the “quasi-institutional framework” of the ERTs

As written in chapter 2, Palomino et al (2010) suggests that the situation for the ERT workers has moved from operating outside all laws and institutions to operating within a “quasi-institutional framework” (Palomino et al 2010: 255). In addition to a large support system of civil society organisations, laws have been changed and continue to be changed in order to adapt to the particularities of the situation of the recuperated enterprises. This of course contributes to the legitimacy of the ERTs and to strengthen their political identities. In the following I will outline the initial steps of the changes in the juridical situation concerning the situation of the ERTs. The fight for adaption of the legislative framework that fits the ERTs’ situation is an on-going battle. Recently, progress has been made in this aspect, which I will get back to in chapter 6.

The situation of the enterprises that were to be occupied by their workers usually had gone beyond the “crisis prevention stage” and, accordingly, the factories were in one out of two stages of an “ownership crisis management”. The two stages are, according to the Bankruptcy Law of 1995; preventive bankruptcy (*concurso preventivo*) and then declared bankruptcy (*quiebra*) (Rains 2005: 103). According to this law, when enterprises find themselves in the first stage of this process; there is the possibility of the formation of a cooperative. This alternative is open to any interested part, but it has to involve national, provincial or local government. In the case of a proposal being made, the bankruptcy court will take the final decision (Rains 2005).

The Argentine Bankruptcy Law underwent a reform in February of 2002. The background of this reform was the economic crisis, and the following production and credit emergency. The reformation of the Bankruptcy Law meant that the pre- bankruptcy stage was extended to 180 days. In May 2002 an additional reform of the law was passed which explicitly allowed for the bankruptcy court to rule that the workers could continue with the production if a majority of the workers agreed with this. As this seems to be an improvement of the possibilities for the workers, it is important to keep in mind that this also caused a lot of uncertainty. It did not give the workers who were willing to form a workers’ cooperative and continue production any guarantees. It simply secured that the enterprises remained an integral whole until a new buyer would come along (Rains 2005). Although it might be considered a step in the right direction, the reformation of the Argentine Bankruptcy Law that took place in 2002 was hardly enough to create a greater sense of security for the Argentine workers facing threats of unemployment. But at this point in time, worker-occupied enterprises started gaining recognition in the wider society. Support came from other workers, certain lawyers and local legislators, amongst others. The alternative of workers occupying enterprises and creating workers’ cooperatives to continue producing seemed a reasonable alternative at a time when Argentina experienced extremely difficult economic and social conditions.

Progressive lawyers came up with a possible legal solution: temporary expropriation in favour of the worker cooperative, based on a 1977 law, allowing expropriation under the condition that it would be in favour of the “common good whether materially or spiritually” (Rains 2005:104). In the legal frameworks of the province of Buenos Aires and the city of Buenos Aires one could also find similar formulations concerning expropriation. However, in these local legislations, the expropriations had a time-limit of two years. According to the old laws,

after this time period was up, the expropriators (the local legislators) could make a decision to return the enterprise to its former owners (Briner and Cusmano 2003, referred to in Rains 2005).

However, in November of 2004 the municipal council of Buenos Aires passed a legislation that made the right to control the expropriated enterprises permanent for 13 ERTs within the city of Buenos Aires. The municipal council decided that the ERTs were given a three year period of grace before they were to start the down payment of the value of the enterprise at the time of its bankruptcy over a time period of 20 years (Rains 2005). Obviously this can be seen as a victory for the recuperated enterprises, as it gives the workers of recuperated enterprises a much greater sense of security.

5.6 Chapter Summary

As the associates at AGS are well aware of, their enterprise has been named the black sheep among the recuperated enterprises because of their similarities to a conventional enterprise in the aspect of their hierarchical organisation structure. AGS is arguably not seen as radical or rebellious enough; it is *too little of an ERT*. Paradoxically, they are an economic success which offers the workers the one thing they need before anything else: a secure source of income. My impression is that it seems like they really have something to offer. They offer stable working conditions – jobs that from the worker’s point of view are considered to be “very safe”. And in addition to this, the workers feel like they are participating more and have more freedom than in a conventional enterprise.

The ‘sin’ committed by AGS is reinstalling a management. However, if we stick to Magnani’s definition, it does not exclude them from being defined as an ERT. Avoiding division of manual and intellectual labour has become an ideal within the universe of the ERTs, but I argue that it might be unpractical and difficult to comply with in real life. Besides, what are the ERTs if not places where the workers make the decisions? And it was precisely the workers at AGS who decided to bring a member of the old management in and put him in charge, because they trusted him, because he knew about management.

On the other hand, Chilavert seems to evoke a lot more sympathy from the outside world. It is my impression that if it ever came to the situation that Chilavert was looking at having to shut

the gates, this would awake reactions from a seemingly enormous support apparatus which would without doubt come to their rescue. At Chilavert they have widened their concept of work with emphasis on the solidarity aspect. Their concept of work now includes community outreach; giving and receiving support, in accordance with Faulk's (2008) outlining of the 'affective cooperativism' part of the concept of cooperativism (see Chapter 2) and the 'social innovation' of "rediscovering notions of social wealth by opening up workplaces to the community, thus strengthening the social value of the new worker self-managed workspaces." (Vieta 2008: 15). Chilavert has opened up its workplace to serve a number of purposes: there is the Documentation Centre of the recuperated enterprises, affiliated with UBA, who has its office there. In the localities of the earlier boss' office there is now a *bachillerato popular*, a high school who functions at night. Many of the pupils have had to drop out of high school earlier, but are now given a second chance to obtain the formal qualifications to move on to study at the University. The *bachillerato* at Chilavert offers its special twist; teaching the range of ordinary subjects but with "an emphasis in cooperativism". Also, Chilavert houses a Cultural Centre, who hosts different events on an irregular basis.

Simultaneously, some of the workers at Chilavert do not seem to be equally content with their situation. They are feeling insecure about their job situation, about whether or not they will be able to bring home money on payday. That is arguably not a viable situation; it seems like they in a way are trapped within their image as an emblematic enterprise. Seemingly, at Chilavert they have maintained a worker's mentality; they identify themselves mainly as workers (*trabajadores*). This is what Ruggeri (2009b) suggests to be the case for ERT workers in general, as I have written about in chapter 2. At AGS however, I find that this is not so much the case. The AGS workers seem to define themselves mainly as cooperativists (*cooperativistas*). I argue that there is more of an entrepreneur mentality at AGS.

6.0 Survival strategies

In this chapter I will describe and analyse the survival strategies of the ERTs, in order to attempt to answer sub-research question number 3: *What survival strategies do the ERTs make use of and how viable are these?* As a point of departure I will use the basic definition of survival strategies given by Ruggeri (2009b), reproduced in chapter 2: survival strategies are the means put into action by the enterprises to reassure economic success. As I have also written in chapter 2, following this definition one could define viability as economic success. For the workers, this means getting their money on the day they expected, and also a sense of work security; the feeling that their jobs are relatively secure. I argue that this can be said to be the content of the narrow sense of the term viability, but maybe we are looking at a widening of the concept in the case of the ERTs. As we have seen in the theory chapter, Faulk (2008) argues that through participation in extensive community service and collaboration with other ERTs, the workers at the hotel B.A.U.E.N have come to understand the concept of work in a wider sense; with emphasis on solidarity. I would like to examine if this is also true for the concept of viability.

I understand survival strategies to be what the ERTs do on a day to day basis in order to maintain their places of work; how they organise the work; what motivations are created for the workers to do a good job. I would like to emphasise that the way I understand the concept, survival strategies are not necessarily active choices; it might as well be the outcome of circumstances. If it appears that there are circumstances the workers are feeling discontent about, then it would be interesting to try to understand what stops them from changing the things they would like to change.

6.1 The theatre and the factory

One of the workers at Chilavert said to me that “AGS is a factory where you work. Chilavert is a theatre”. I think this sentence can be a clue to begin to understand how different the survival strategies of Chilavert and AGS are. Chilavert markets itself as being a recuperated enterprise, proudly marking their products with “enterprise recuperated and run by its workers” and estimates that more than half of the clients choose to bring their business to their print-shop because they sympathise with Chilavert being a worker-managed enterprise. Quite on the contrary, at AGS they have felt, especially in the initial phase of the cooperative

that they needed to hide the fact that they were a recuperated, worker-run enterprise in order to draw clients. Accordingly, they also have entirely different clienteles: it could seem like AGS draw clients *despite* the fact that they are an ERT while Chilavert draw clients *because* of this fact.



FIGURE 7: PRODUCTION HALL AT AGS: PICTURE FROM THEIR WEBSITE (AGS 2011).

AGS and Chilavert derived from similar points of departure; both experiences started in 2002 with the workers realising their jobs were threatened and that they were facing a very insecure future as potentially structural unemployed given the mess the national economy was in. Fast forward eight years later they both continue to exist as workers' cooperatives but have taken on different directions. Why would a Chilavert-worker say that they are a theatre? And why is AGS seen as something opposite, as a factory where actual work is conducted? In this chapter I will try to outline the survival strategies adopted by both enterprises; I will try to say something about *how* they are different. I also think the two illustrations, figure 7 and 8, can tell us something of the different ways the two enterprises communicate their existence to the outside world. Both pictures are reproduced for promotional purposes; they are meant to be seen by many. As we can see, the picture from AGS' website shows us an organised production hall where work is being conducted. At least the message I get from looking at it

is 'efficiency'. On the other hand, the picture from Chilavert shows a group of workers hanging out and discussing with Che Guevarra overwieving them from his central place on the wall. The message one gets by looking at this picture is more in the lines of 'workers unite!' or some other slogan of the international working class movement.



FIGURE 8: POSTCARD FROM CHILAVERT: PRINTED IN THE OCCATION OF THEIR THREE YEAR ANNIVERSARY. (PHOTO: ANDRÉS LOFRIEGO)³³

6.2 Organisation of the work

In this subchapter I will outline of how some aspects of the work is organised on a day to day basis at the two enterprises and point out some resemblances and differences.

6.2.1 Division of labour

At AGS there was right from the beginning a division between the administration and the workers on the floor. This division between manual and intellectual labour is an important difference between Chilavert and AGS. At AGS, they state that the reason for the division is the need for highly skilled labour in the administration; “We need someone who knows about

³³ The picture shows a group of workers Discussing inside the office at Chilavert: the man pictured on the wall is a well-known figure. When I was at Chilavert, another picture had come up next to the one of Che Guevarra: a picture of Zapatist leader Subcomandante Marcos with a personal greeting to the workers at Chilavert, encouraging them to keep showing the world that if it is one thing the world could do without it is the bosses.

accounting”. At Chilavert, there is also a division of labour in the practical sense. Mostly, the workers at Chilavert are also doing their designated tasks. The administrative work mostly falls on one guy, the relations with the clients and other contacts (the sectorial network etc.) are seemingly mostly taken care of by another. However, this is not seen as division between intellectual and manual labour; it is not seen as a conscious choice. The reasons the workers at Chilavert give as to why things are organised this way, are vague: “It just happened that way”. I think the reason this is not recognised as a division between manual and intellectual labour, is partly because the associates who now take care of the administrative work, did not perform these tasks before the takeover. In that sense, they are seen as “one of us”, by the rest of the associates. Furthermore, it does not seem to be room for the thought of a division between manual and intellectual labour within the notion of self-management (*autogestión*), where the egalitarian thought is very strong and equally the resistance against social divisions, which is often interrelated with the division between manual and intellectual labour. The egalitarian thought; “the cooperative spirit” is something that is consciously emphasised at Chilavert. This is done for instance by eating together, as I will elaborate upon below.

On the production floor, both at AGS and Chilavert, there is the division as before mentioned between *los maquinistas* – the machinists who oversees the printing, and the *ayudantes* – the helpers, who do the rest of the work: the binding, pasting, cutting and stacking. The reason stated for the division between the machinists and the helpers is the same as they use for the division between manual and intellectual labour at AGS: to operate the printing machines requires specific skills. Apparently this is seemingly not seen as problematic at all. The division of labour is apparently only seen as problematic if the division is between manual and intellectual labour.

It has been written about how the lack of professional, technical and administrative staff makes for a potential problem at most ERTs, “...since these employees are normally among the first to leave when the decision of occupying the workplace is taken” (Palomino et al 2010: 267). This was also the case at AGS, but abnormally, the workers who stayed decided to call a person from the former management whom they all had decided they trusted and encourage him to come back to work with them.

“From the beginning, we have taken the decision to adapt the characteristics of an enterprise. Even if we are a recuperated enterprise, the reality we have to navigate

within is a capitalistic market like everywhere else. Therefore, necessarily we have to be organised in order to be able to compete. Anything else would be impossible.”

Carlos, AGS

6.2.2 Working hours and payment

At AGS, everyone clocks in and out of work. At Chilavert, they do not do this. At Chilavert, they tend to come when they come, and leave when they leave. They have their old cards from back when they used to be a conventional enterprise displayed as something from the past to look at for visitors. The norm at Chilavert seems to be eight hours work-day, and they rarely come in to work during the weekends, whereas at AGS the people who work in the production area have 12-hours shifts during the week, and often come in on Saturdays as well. Saturdays they work nine-hour shifts. The administrative crew works eight hours during the week, and normally not in the weekends.

The workers in the production line at AGS often mentioned the long hours as an element of frustration. Of course, they wanted shorter hours to be able to spend more time with their families and do the other things you do when not at work, but at the same time there was seemingly an acceptance of the long work hours; an acknowledgement that “that is the way it is”, and maybe sometime in the future they would be able to work shorter hours but not now. Some of the workers acknowledged that maybe they would consider another job offer if there was the possibility to work shorter hours. When I asked, I was given three reasons to why the work hours were long. Firstly, 12 hour shifts was the norm for graphic workers, secondly 12 hours shifts were necessary to keep the production running for 24 hours. The third reason was that the type of clientele they dealt with demanded it:

“We try for it to not be any work on Saturday and Sunday... it’s like... you want to rest..., but well, the graphic business, and the type of clients that we have... the guys at Sony, if it occurs to them on a Friday that they want to do a campaign and the material has to be ready by Monday, it has to be ready on Monday, do you understand? You can’t say no to Sony. You just can’t”.

Jose Luis, AGS

Concerning payment, there are income-differences both at AGS and at Chilavert, but they are bigger at AGS. Both places they deliberately avoid the word ‘wage’, instead they call the money they bring home every week (or month) *retiros*, shares. At AGS, the ones who work in the production are paid by the hour, while the ones who work in the administration have a monthly salary. At Chilavert, everyone gets their *retiros* every Friday (if there is enough money). Carlos at AGS asserts that there is a maximum limit to the income differences: the ones who earns the most can only take home three times as much money (300 percent) as the ones who earns less. “In a private enterprise the difference could be as much as 20 times”, he says. At Chilavert, you get a supplement if you are a founder, and also if you are a machinist (this is explained as being the norm within the graphic sector). When I asked the different workers at Chilavert how much the difference were, there were a little variation in the numbers I was told, but everyone assured that “it’s not much”, and I think it is safe to say that the ones who take home the most money at Chilavert gets no more than 25 percent more than the ones who get less.

6.2.3 Eating together and apart

There was clearly a division between manual and intellectual labour at AGS, and there also seemed to be a division as to how lunch-time was spent. The people who worked in the production-area ate in the kitchen, which was too small for everyone to fit in at once so they had to take turns. Quite a few of them also skipped lunch and took the opportunity to sleep through the one-hour lunch-break. (I think I also would have done that if I had to get up at four or five o’clock in the morning, spend two hours on transportation (one way!) and work twelve-hour shifts Monday to Friday and nine hours on Saturday). The people from the administration however, tended to head out to a restaurant for lunch. I spent all the lunch-breaks while at AGS in the kitchen with the people from the production area – something that came natural because these were also the people I worked together with. One of the first days I was there I asked the people who were sitting in the kitchen, there were maybe six, and at work that day there were at least 30 people, where all the rest were hiding during lunch. “Some are sleeping and some are eating at restaurants” was the answer I got. “Do you ever go to a restaurant to eat lunch?” I proceeded. “No, no”, several of them said, shaking their heads. “That is for people with money” one of them, and elderly man, ascertained. Later I talked to one of the guys who worked in the administration and I posed him the question in reverse; “Do you ever eat lunch in the kitchen here at the factory?” I asked him. “No, no, I go to a

restaurant” he answered, then proceeding immediately to invite me to join him for lunch the following day. I fell sick the next day, and I never got to go out to lunch with anyone from the administration. I am sort of glad I did not, since this whole lunch-business made me feel a little uncomfortable. In my point of view, the old man’s comment in the kitchen about how eating out in a restaurant was for the people with money, was one of the strongest testimonies I got at AGS that not only professional, but also social divisions persisted within the enterprise.

At Chilavert, lunch-time was a whole different story. They had food brought to the print shop from a community centre which, I was explained, was made up of volunteers, people who appeared in the statistics as unemployed, but who were still making their own lives meaningful and as an extra bonus also helping out others – for instance by cooking for them. Lunch-time was my favourite time of the day at Chilavert, it was everything a meal is supposed to be in my opinion; everyone pausing from everything else, everyone sitting together, good food on the table and funny anecdotes shared (though I also must admit that lunch-time was the time where I was least likely to understand what was said, effectively because lunch-time was the time where the Chilavert-associates were most likely to be talking everyone at the same time). Lunch-time at Chilavert was not a fixed hour. Lunch-time was whenever the associates decided to turn off the machines and go to have lunch together. Similarly, lunch-time ended whenever everyone was finished (with both eating and talking). If there was a guest or five visiting the print-shop, which there usually was, they were invited to join in around the table.

As Plácido, one of the Chilavert associates, explained to me, eating this way was a very conscious choice for them, “emphasising the cooperative-spirit”. All of them but one being men and, I suspect, not very used to executing domestic chores, they were particularly proud of the fact that they each cleaned their own plate after the meal.

When it comes to lunch-time then, I will suggest that AGS has something to learn from Chilavert. I would in fact recommend every work-place to eat together the way they do at Chilavert; with everyone sharing a common meal and emphasising on enjoying themselves. On the other hand though, I realise that this would probably be more complicated in the practical sense at AGS where they are over 40 associates, than at Chilavert where they are 11.

6.3 Clients

The ERTs are productive units which are making a product they need to sell in order to make money. That is their reality. How do they face this reality at Chilavert and AGS? What is their market strategy, how do they draw clients?

One thing both cooperatives have in common is that all the old clients disappeared at the same time as the old boss. As we have already seen, at AGS they had one client who stayed with them from the old enterprise.



FIGURE 9: AGS' WEBSITE (2011)

At Chilavert, they lost all their old clients, but were able to secretly start producing again while still kept under permanent guard thanks to a job printing a book about the popular assemblies – clearly an action of mutual solidarity. The popular assembly of Pompeya – the

neighbourhood where Chilavert is located – was one of the supportive groups outside the factory hall during the time there was a constant threat of eviction.

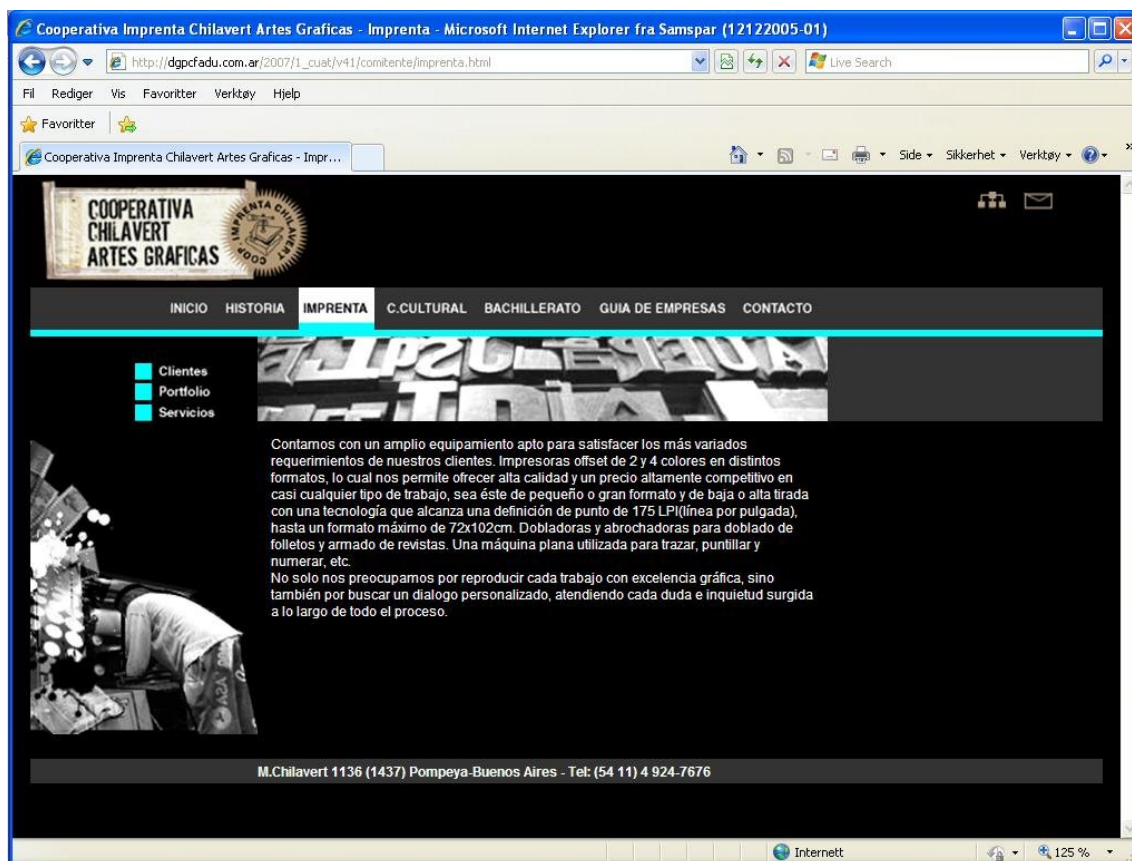


FIGURE 10: CHILAVERT'S WEBSITE (2011)

To this day, it seems Chilavert is an enterprise that needs/wants to keep focus on the fact that they are a recuperated, worker-run enterprise. This seems to be their niche. One of the workers, Ernesto, estimates that “a little more than half of the clients are clients of Chilavert because this is a recuperated enterprise”.

I would like to emphasise that sometimes Chilavert is able to compete economically. If you spend some time at Chilavert you will run into clients. While I was there, I had the opportunity to have rather extensive conversations with three clients. One of these clients said that he had chosen Chilavert because they offered the best price. He owned a small business selling gift-bags. The decorated paper for the gift-bags was printed at Chilavert. I asked him if the fact that this was a recuperated enterprise had anything to do with his choice, something he denied. “They gave me the best price, that’s why I am here”, he said repeatedly. He also added that he liked the fact that in Chilavert you were allowed to be more involved in the production process than in other print-shops he had been to. “In the other places, you’re just

allowed into the office – not further”, he said. At Chilavert, the clients could hang around beside the machines all day long if they wanted and inspect how the work was coming – something a lot of them did. Another of the clients whom I talked to owned a small publishing house in Spain. He said that he chose to have his books made at Chilavert because: 1. the cost of printing books is three times cheaper in Argentina than in Spain and 2. Because he sympathise with what Chilavert stands for. A third client was a folklorist musician who several years ago had gotten the idea that he wanted to publish books about Argentine folklorist music, but he did not have any money. He had heard talk about Chilavert and eventually found himself knocking at their door. This was in the initial phase of the cooperative, Chilavert did not have much, but “they somehow decided that they wanted to give me credit”, as he says. He got his books, sold them and then was able to pay Chilavert what he owed them, and in his own words: “here I am, many years later, still a client and a friend, as you can see....”.

The technology Chilavert make use of is apparently somewhat out-dated and therefore at times there are problems with the quality. This is something the workers themselves pointed out to me. “Look”, they would say, pointing at freshly printed pages of a book, “can you see these shades? This wouldn’t have been acceptable when we were working under a boss, we would have had to throw this out and start over again”. The inability to update the technology is obviously a question of money. They are not in the possession of means to update the technology sufficiently. This situation, sometimes will lead to clients taking their errand elsewhere. However, most of the times, the machine park available at Chilavert seemingly serves their purpose. Most of the jobs they do at Chilavert are printing of books in small quantities; they typically print circulations of 500, 1000 or 1500 copies.

Typically, the clients can be described as alternative, small publishing houses. For example, during the time I was at Chilavert, they were printing the book “Marxism and the Philosophy of Language” by Valentín Volóshinov. The client is a small publishing house in Buenos Aires called *Ediciones Godot* – Godot Editions – whose desire is to “promote the circulation of texts that shows us different manners of thinking the reality we see” (Godot Editions website).

Another aspect of the necessity to rely on out-dated technology at Chilavert is that it sometimes will hinder efficiency. When I was participating in the daily tasks at Chilavert, I was of course not let anywhere near the printing machines; “the heart of the print-shop”,

which you need special qualifications to operate and therefore I do not have the first-hand experience to evaluate to which degree these were working as they should. However I was often given the task of sewing books together, or rather I was helping the guy who sewed the books together. He would sit on a manual sewing machine that he had to empower by pumping his foot to a pedal. I once made a comment that this machine looked like it was a hundred years old, to which he replied “it probably is”. My job was to tighten the threads when he was finished sewing them. Chilavert was a lot of fun, but it did not seem to be very efficient, which I would say is also something that could lead to clients taking their business elsewhere.

With the lack of appropriate technology and capital, and hence the lack of ability to compete when it comes to quality and efficiency it seems obvious that Chilavert depends on relationships with clients based on something else. Instead, they offer a sense of meaningfulness to the clients; a relationship in which the clients feel they are contributing to something meaningful by taking their business there. In addition, Chilavert deals with the clients in an informal and friendly manner – something the clients seems to appreciate. The egalitarian thought seems to be extended beyond the walls of the cooperative – also with clients the egalitarian thought is emphasised. Clients are seen as friends who drop by, and they are also allowed to take active part in the process – given the possibility to opinion every step of the way.

AGS have specialised in printing brochures in great quantities, typically circulations of 40 – 50 000. An estimated 80 percent of the clientele are multinational companies. Clients include names such as Sony, Philips, Samson, Kia and MasterCard.

“Do you find it necessary to avoid the word “recuperated”? – Commercially, sometimes, yes... because the buyers... I think, if you say to them “we are a recuperated enterprise”... then maybe they will ask themselves; what is this? Is this really somewhere I want to go with my business? So well, we have been using a modification in relation with clients. But with time, luckily we have come to draw this type of clients and well, now we have shown that we are able to hold on to them, so now I don’t think it would matter much whether or not we use the term recuperated. We have gained our reputation, so now it’s not a problem. But at one point in time we thought that maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to say it to parts of the clientele.”

José Luis, AGS

6.5 Recruitment strategies

“These days, I sometimes hurt a lot... and it’s not because I am an egoist or a bad person or anything like that but there are persons as of this day, today we are back to being more than 43 people here... this place gave a lot of people work... but they came after the meal was served, if you know what I am saying. And we had to live through... Our families had to live through a lot of things.”

Alejandra, AGS

Most of the new people taken on board since the recuperation both at Chilavert and AGS are family members of people who are already associates. To preferably take on family members of the associates whenever there is a job-opening is an explicit policy of both enterprises: seen as a strategy towards stability in the workforce. This concurs with Faulk’s (2008) discoveries at the hotel B.A.U.E.N and her consequent theory concerning the concept of affective cooperativism or *compañerismo* (see p. 18).

Walter, who is the son of one of the founders at Chilavert, explains the recruitment strategy of taking on board family members this way:

“Well, this is the idea, this is our policy. [...] It comes a day when they are not going to be here, the associates who founded this are not going to be here. So this is the idea: when they are no longer here, the ones who are taking over can’t be people who doesn’t understand, who doesn’t know the history of the cooperative. They wouldn’t value all of this.”

Walter, Chilavert

At Chilavert, they have also taken a woman onboard who is not a relative of any of the associates, but who is experiencing a difficult life-situation: she is a single mom with the responsibility for a handicapped daughter.

“The way we work here, caring for one another, we are able to do this, take her on board, even though she can’t always be here. If there is something going on with her daughter, if her daughter needs her, she just has to go. But because we are a cooperative, that’s ok. It wouldn’t be ok in another enterprise”

Daniel, Chilavert

The way I see it, taking onboard new people who would have difficulties finding a job elsewhere due to circumstances like these, is an expression of two out of the three aspects of cooperativism emphasised by Faulk (2008). Firstly, it can be seen as affective cooperativism; feeling solidarity and empathy for ones co-workers, but it can also be seen as community outreach/interacting with the community, as they are helping someone from the outside improving their conditions of life. In that sense it can be seen as a good recruitment ‘strategy’, as Chilavert is seemingly operating within a complete different context than that of AGS. At AGS they have been working very hard to prove that they are an enterprise as good as any, determent that they will not let the at times harsh demands of the multinationals they are working for down (as shown by the statement by José Luis about the need to comply with the wishes of Sony). Quite on the contrary, at Chilavert they rather depend on sympathy for what can be named their political project and friendship-like relationships with as well their clients as other actors they interact with.

I argue that one of the greatest challenges for the ERTs in the future will be to recruit new members who will feel the same kind of ownership to the enterprise as the ones who lived through the initial struggle. It seems that the workers who participated in the occupation of the enterprise, the ones who have been there from the beginning, often battle with the feeling that the newer associates do not value the possibilities the enterprises give them, as expressed in the statement above quoting Alejandra at AGS. On the other hand, the newer associates can struggle with lack of ownership feeling to the enterprise.

This person has come to work for Chilavert after the takeover:

“What does it mean to you that this is a recuperated enterprise? – I couldn’t care less.

[...] I respect all the political work they have done.... I respect the fight and all of that, but

I was not enlists in this fight... Me, the best I can do for them is to work all day, comply... and nothing else... give my opinion in the meetings. .. But that's it.”

Anonymous, Chilavert

I argue that it is crucial that the new associates taken onboard do not end up with the lack of ownership it is apperant that Anonymous at Chilavert is feeling. However, all though a certain feeling of ownership is necessary it is very difficult, arguably virtually impossible, to transmit the sense of absolute loyalty often felt by the founders who participated in the recuperation to new workers. The loyalty originates in the subjective sense of success after surviving the difficult initial phase of the recuperation of the enterprise which in most cases has included extreme experiences such as starvation and fear for ones safety. The way I see it the further survival of each and every ERT depends on the following: the first-generation of ERT protagonists need to do a sufficiently good job making their enterprise viable, then this kind of extreme sense of loyalty will not be necessary in order for the future generation to want to stay.

6.6 “A piece of the recent history of Argentina”

Recently, in April of 2011, a new Bankruptcy Law was passed in the National Congress with 196 votes in favour against only one negative and two absent. According to this Law, the workers of an enterprise that is heading for a bankruptcy can form a cooperative and start producing *before* the bankruptcy is declared. Other important elements are that the workers can be recognised as creditors and subsequently as buyers to the bankrupted enterprise. Also, the Law dictates that the workers have the right to be kept informed about how the bankruptcy process is proceeding.

The law still needs to go to the Senate in order to obtain validation, but still this is good news for ERTs in the whole country. The Argentine news agency *Ansol* writes that the recognition of the thematic [of the ERTs] is becoming a political priority and quotes deputy to the Congress Agustín Rossi saying that “today these factories represent a piece of the recent history of Argentina”. *Ansol* (2011) further concludes in their article that the passing of the new Bankruptcy Law is an opening to further improvement of the legislative framework that affects the ERTs. Another deputy to the Congress, Victoria Donda, affirms that “there is an

urgent need to discuss the Law of Workers' Cooperatives³⁴ in order for them to be recognised as an important sector of the economy” (Ansol 2011).

Surely this shows that the ERTs are here to stay? My answer to this would be: I hope so. The question would be if they can adapt to the new context, in which there is political will towards them and consequently a space for them to exist within the broader society, not merely as a countercultural phenomenon. Now, they do not only have symbolic value which was the case in 2003, shortly after the crisis (Palomino 2003, referred to in Palomino et al 2010, see also p 4), but can be said to have taken place within the conventional economy. Adapting to this new context would arguably mean for them to take on the political identity as an enterprise producing for the capitalistic market. This is something they have done at AGS. However, I argue that to hang on to some of the aspects from the identity as an alternative counterculture, such as solidarity and community outreach would also be valuable. I am not saying that these values are non-existent at AGS as of today, but maybe the real challenges the ERTs are facing in the future lies within finding the proper balance between different identities: enterprise producing for the capitalistic market or a theatre with social ends, acting out productive practices? It does not have to be a choice between these two extremes. I argue that a pragmatic solution is possible. Arguably, the new mentality after the collapse of 2001 paves ways for non-ideological entrances to how life should be led, seemingly in sharp contrast to the country's very ideological past, but then again maybe not. As we have seen, the most significant ideological identity in Argentina, *a Peronist*, can mean virtually anything you like. The *Peronist* identity has been used to deceive people (most famously by Carlos Menem), but maybe it is time to learn something from this and turn it into something good? Why not make 'whatever works' the identity of the ERTs?

6.7 Chapter Summary

The survival strategies made use of by AGS and Chilavert are, as we have seen, quite different. While Chilavert uses the fact that they are a recuperated enterprise as their market strategy, the contrary is true for AGS: they would rather hide it because they fear the identity connected to this concept will drive potentially good clients away. Consequently, AGS make use of strategies that are more connected to the organisational structure of conventional capitalistic enterprises; a hierarchical organisational structure with a management on top

³⁴ *La ley de las cooperativas de trabajo*

which works separated from the workers on the production floor. While this might seem wrong, it is in fact the workers who have decided that they want the enterprise to function this way. I argue that 'managerialism' (which I cannot find a good definition of in the literature which criticises it) is not an evil per se, and that managerialism and self-management do not necessarily mutually exclude each other. More importantly than the named innovation of the egalitarian work-scheme: the relationship between managerialism and production-floor is the relation between capital and labour. The power is arguably where the capital is, therefore it arguably of higher importance that the control of the capital stays on the hands of the workers than that they maintain a strict horizontal mode of organising the work.

An important survival strategy for the ERTs will be that they continue to secure recruitment to their enterprises. This is seen as such an important strategy for further existence that they preferably only recruit family members. I argue that in order to secure the further recruitment it is important, I think in fact crucial, that they make the new associates feel ownership towards the enterprise. However, the extreme loyalty felt by the workers participating in the takeovers are virtually impossible to attain for a person who did not live through such a subjective experience. Therefore, I argue, it is important that the ERTs concentrates on securing a viable economic foundation for the workers, that is a secure income. If this is not in place, little else is. Because as Walter at Chilavert clearly exemplifies, however much the workers appreciates the affective cooperativism experienced within an ERT, they also have their reality.

7.0 Conclusion

The overall aim throughout this thesis has been to answer Q1: *How can the ERTs serve as viable alternative survival strategies?* This overarching question has further been divided into three sub-questions:

SQ1: How can the ERTs be explained within its Argentinian context of origin?

SQ2: What are the political identities being created within the ERT phenomenon?

SQ3: What are the survival strategies of the ERTs and how viable are these?

The structure of the conclusion will be to answer SQ1-3 first and then conclude on Q1. In the very end, I have added some thoughts on possible further research on the ERT phenomenon.

Concerning SQ1, I conclude that the ERTs are more than a mere protest movement. They have adopted an ability to survive by accepting to be a uniting force. This is partly due to the intellectual inheritance. The ERTs have obviously some aspects in common with early 20th century Anarchism. They share the disbelief in authorities and, consequently, the force to form alternative types of organising. They also share the protests based on problems where ‘work’ and connected rights holds a key role. However, almost a decade later than the “Get lost, all of you”, the ERTs have come to understand that it is necessary to work with the power, at least to some extent, to get what they want. This pragmatic turn could be aligned to Peronism which also has had its intellectual influence on the ERTs. The will to focus on one topic – the right to work – and leave other areas of policy unmentioned has been a key to both the success of the ERTs and Peronism. Speaking of success, when Peronism dissolved itself into large scale privatisation and neo-liberalistic thought-processes, it was not a failure, but a consequence of its success. It had grown too powerful and was able to sell large chunks to foreign hands. As long as work was safe, it could be done without protests. As such, the ERTs share the feature of providing an alternative to the Peronist state. And as the ERT phenomenon can be understood as a consequence of neo-liberalism – and a reaction against it – the ERT can also be seen as product of neo-liberalistic thoughts of “flexibilisation”, entrepreneurship and non-state initiative. As such the many of the ERTs could be seen as prime examples of the development neo-liberalism proposed to create. I think this is something many of the protagonists would deny, but nevertheless I find it to be so.

Answering SQ2 about the identities created within the ERT phenomenon involves understanding how each of these ERTs understands themselves and is understood by others. Many of my informants expressed that they preferred working in an ERT over a conventional enterprise; the ERT gave them something more; they felt ownership to the enterprise, solidarity with their co-workers and generally a higher level of meaningfulness in conducting their everyday tasks. These can be named social innovations of the ERTs (Vieta 2008). Some of the workers also have felt that they were given more possibilities to undergo vocational training and grow in their profession in an ERT than they would have been in a conventional enterprise. It is however important for the ERTs not to get trapped within an identity of suppressed workers that will hardly bring them any benefits as there now are no owners to make claims to.

Concerning SQ3 then, about the survival strategies, I find that if the social innovations are not combined with a feeling of work security and most importantly a secure income; they are worth very little. Providing a secure income for the workers needs to be the basic concern of the ERTs; this needs to be in place before anything else, if not I have trouble picturing the future of the recuperated enterprises.

Now turning to Q1: *How can the ERTs serve as viable alternative survival strategies*, I will say that I see the ERTs as innovations of a new time; a time where it seems that social movements finally are getting over the idea of not wanting power. The ERTs need to want power or at least to be working with it. They have worked towards changing the laws, and are seemingly little by little succeeding. Consequently, in the case of the ERTs we can definitely answer a yes to the question posed by Tilly: can social movements that are formed to pursue particular interests improve democratic practices? (Tilly 2004, referred to in Rains 2005: 94). The ERT protagonists are exemplifying how to practice democracy when they work within the framework of the constitutional law in order to adapt the laws to their situation. The refreshing part is that they are succeeding, although things might be happening slowly. The fact that a member of the National Congress can describe the ERTs as an “important part of the recent history of Argentina” shows that there exist political will in favour of the ERTs.

Furthermore, in a globalised time where traditional unionism seemingly is experiencing decreasing power and influence everywhere, even in Argentina, despite all its history of

working class struggle, the ERTs represents a new alternative of taking the workers well-being into consideration, as opposed to the neo-liberal regime of “flexibilization” and individualisation. The scenery of the ERTs practicing self-management to any extent and living out the named social innovations of “a democratised labour-process, creativity in order to face challenges such as market competition, financial and production challenges, redefining notions of social production by reclaiming substantial degrees of workers’ surpluses and rediscovering notions of social wealth” (Vieta 2008: 15) and widening the notion of work by interacting with the community (Faulk 2008) is very desirable and, as I think I have shown throughout this thesis; the ERTs could be a viable alternative to conventional enterprises. The degree of viability would however depend on strategies chosen by each and every ERT. There is little doubt that the ERTs offer something to its participants.

Besides securing a stable income for its participants, I argue that an important challenge for the ERTs in the future is finding strategies on how to take on board new cooperative members and make them feel ownership to the cooperative. This is seemingly much more of an emotional challenge than a practical one. How can they make the future generation of workers entering the ERTs have as much loyalty and put as much effort into it as the first generation of ERT workers have done and continue to do? The ERTs have originated under very special circumstances; their protagonists having to live through seemingly inhumane conditions of resistance; including starvation, freezing and fear for their physical safety. These unique experiences have arguably caused the protagonists to feel a very strong sense of ownership to the cooperative and solidarity towards his or hers co-workers; it has created a feeling amongst the first-generation of ERT protagonists that they are never going to leave the enterprise no matter what. This feeling of absolute loyalty, originating in the subjective sense of success after surviving the difficult initial phase of the recuperation of the enterprise, is not easily transmitted to the next generation. The way I see it the further survival of each and every ERT depends on the following: the first-generation of ERT protagonists need to do a sufficiently good job making their enterprise viable, then this kind of extreme sense of loyalty will not be necessary in order for the future generation to want to stay.

Finally, though this thesis is close to an end, the topic definitely deserves further research. Here is a proposal. Several of the Latin American countries that Argentina influences and is

influenced by have experienced alternative forms of organisation. To look closer into these, perhaps diverging, forms of organisation, and especially their political relations would be an obvious path to enhance the understanding of phenomena as the ERTs.

“These are unpredictable times for the region [Latin America], but it is clear that a key facet of the contemporary struggles is that they counter the powerlessness and atomisation of neoliberal society and project the re-making of collective power and politics from below. With the persistent nature of subaltern struggles, the rise in labour militancy and the electoral move to the Left, Latin America today continues to constitute the “weakest link” in the global neoliberal chain, where subaltern movements condition their governments’ agendas, as the search for viable alternatives intensifies”

Schaumberg 2008: 384.

I have argued that there is a need for research that takes the diversity of the ERTs as a point of departure; showing how there are different types of ERTs with different survival strategies and how the everyday lives of the workers in the different types of ERTs are affected by the strategies their enterprise make use of. Surely, these differences would be much more varied across the borders of countries. I think to take into consideration the diversity of ERTs in different Latin American countries constitutes a truly existing future research proposal.

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Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven handler om de gjenopprettede bedriftene i Argentina, som har blitt sett på som en av de mange sosiale protestene som oppstod mer eller mindre som en konsekvens av den spektakulære økonomiske krisen i Argentina i 2001. Da eierne forsvant, gjerne til utlandet, og tok all kapitalen med seg og lot arbeiderne bli stående igjen på bar bakke, bestemte noen av dem seg for å ta saken i egne hender. De begynte på den lange prosessen med å gjenopprette bedriftene sine som arbeiderkooperativ med flat eierstruktur.

Nå, nesten ti år etter den storstilte argentinske krisen, eksisterer disse arbeiderkooperativene fortsatt. Og ikke nok med det: flere har kommet til etter hvert. Fra å bli sett på som et perifert fenomen med i beste fall en symbolsk betydning, snakkes det nå om hvordan disse bedriftene faktisk kan sees å være et reelt alternativ til konvensjonelle måter å drive bedrifter på, muligens med langt større grad av tilfredshet hos arbeiderne. Det høres unektelig litt for godt ut til å være sant.

I denne oppgaven forsøker jeg å gå inn bak det sosiale fenomenet som utgjør de argentinske gjenopprettede fabrikkene. Jeg går til individene, arbeiderne, som utgjør denne etter hvert ganske berømte bevegelsen og spør dem hva de mener om å jobbe i en gjenopprettet, arbeiderstyrt fabrikk. Svarene jeg har fått er omtrent like mange som arbeiderne jeg har spurt, men jeg argumenterer for at alle disse subjektive meningene utgjør politiske identiteter som konstrueres og dekonstrueres inne i produksjonslokalene. Fordi jeg har tatt for meg to case-studier som er veldig forskjellige, argumenterer jeg for at jeg har et grunnlag for å si noe om fenomenet generelt, og jeg prøver å formidle noe om hvordan de gjenopprettede fabrikkene må forholde seg for å møte framtidens utfordringer.

Appendix 1 - Contract with AGS



CABA, 9 de marzo de 2010.-

Srta. Astrid LARSEN:

S / D:

En atención a la solicitud por Ud. Presentada solicitando permiso a la COOPERATIVA DE TRABAJO ARTES GRAFICAS EL SOL LIMITADA para llevar adelante sus investigaciones y trabajos prácticos con la finalidad de completar las investigaciones fundantes de su TESIS sobre las Cooperativas que recuperan empresas, nos es grato comunicarle que vemos con agrado su presencia en la cooperativa ya que la educación y capacitación de la sociedad es uno de los pilares del cooperativismo y uno de sus principios fundantes y rectores y es por ello que siempre nos pronunciamos a favor de la capacitación y la educación y todo aquello que sirva para transmitir nuestra experiencia de lucha, solidaridad y unión lo pondremos siempre a disposición.

En atención a que en la fábrica siempre hay gente trabajando, y siempre están los riesgos comunes de la producción y la industrialización, comunicamos que contrataremos un seguro por accidentes personales para cubrir a su persona y a la cooperativa de cualquier imprevisto que pudiera suceder.-

Sin más saludamos a Ud. muy atentamente.-

COOPERATIVA DE TRABAJO
ARTES GRAFICAS EL SOL LTDA


Miguel A. Pereyra
Consejero Titular

Av. Amancio Alcorta 2190 - C1283AAU - Capital Federal
Tel.: 4301-5533 / 4302-1151 e-mail: graficasol@speedy.com.ar

C.A.B.A., 8 de marzo de 2010.-

Cooperativa de Trabajo Artes

Gráficas El Sol Limitada

Consejo de Administración:

De mi mayor consideración:

Me dirijo al Consejo de Administración en mi carácter de estudiante universitaria de la Maestría en Geografía Humana en la Universidad de Bergen de Noruega, con la finalidad de solicitarles lo siguiente:

He viajado al país con la finalidad de completar mi Tesis que se centra en las fábricas recuperadas o Cooperativas que recuperan empresas, este fenómeno es muy representativo en la República Argentina, situación por la cuál he elegido este país para completar mi investigación. El trabajo de campo ya lo he estado realizando en las Cooperativas de Trabajo BAUEN y CHILAVERT (pueden dirigirse a las mismas para constatar dicha situación) y siendo Uds. un claro ejemplo de la autogestión y recuperación de la empresa por sus trabajadores estoy sumamente interesada en poder realizar mis tareas e investigaciones en su cooperativa. Los trabajos se desarrollarían a partir de su aceptación hasta el día 21 de marzo inclusive ya que el día 22 de marzo del corriente año estoy regresando a mi país.-

Las prácticas que pretendo llevar adelante son totalmente Ad – Honorem, no significando costo alguno para la cooperativa.-

Una vez finalizada la Tesis y las conclusiones obtenidas en su cooperativa, con agrado haré llegar las mismas vía mail para que Uds. Tengan conocimiento de los resultados obtenidos.

Junto con la presente adjunto fotocopia de mi pasaporte que acredita mi identidad y procedencia.-

Esperando una respuesta favorable los saludo muy atentamente.-

Appendix 2 - List of Interviews

Workers:

AGS:

Carlos

José Luis

Jorge

Daniel

Zulema

Alejandra

Chilavert:

Manuel

Daniel

Fermín (x2)

Anonymous

Ernesto

Placido

Walter

Background information:

Andres Ruggeri (x2), anthropologist at the *Universidad de Buenos Aires*

Gonzalo Vásquez, economist at the *Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento*, province of Buenos Aires

Appendix 3 - Interview guide

Semi structured Interview Guide to workers

1. Si estaba presente durante la ocupación: Puede contar un poco sobre su experiencia de formar parte de la ocupación de la fábrica?
2. Si ha llegado a trabajar para la cooperativa más después: Cómo llegó a trabajar aquí?
3. Trabajando aquí ahora, se siente como un socio de la cooperativa?
- 4.Cuál es la razón más importante para usted para trabajar aquí ahora? Sueldo? El hecho de que esto es una empresa recuperada? Otra razón?
5. Sí a vos le ofrecieron mejor sueldo en otro lugar, se irá?
6. Los sueldos aquí, son iguales o no? Porqué?/ Porqué no? Cómo fue decidido esto?
7. Con qué frecuencia tienen las asambleas? Cómo son? Puede contar un poco?
8. Los movimientos? A qué movimientos pertenecen? Hay una conciencia acerca de esto?
9. Siente que ustedes, los protagonistas de las empresas recuperadas, tienen apoyo en el resto de la sociedad? De los políticos? De sus familias?

Appendix 4 – Categories of Interpretation

Main dividing categories

- Workers at AGS
- Workers at Chilavert

Sub-main categories

- Took part in take-over
- Work at the ERT before/after take-over

Tangible categories

- Size of salary
- Distance to place of work
- Age, sex and civil status in a general level
- Number of years at the ERT

Categories used Analytically

- Degree of ownership-feeling to the enterprise
- Self-identification as workers or as entrepreneurs
- Relation to colleagues and hierarchy
- The theatre and the factory
- Routines in the daily work
- Relation to clients