



# **Promoting empowerment through the Farm Experience Internship-FEI**

**Cutting Edge Issues in Development and Rural Innovation (YSS-60806)**

**Commissioner: Elske Hageraats, Msc - Coordinator of Boerengroep**

**Team members:**

**Joao Lotufo  
850122529100**

**Jean-Eudes Fournial  
920306243090**

**Andrei Emil Toma  
841129838120**

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Problem statement.....	2
3. Justification.....	2
4. Research question(s) .....	3
5. FEI .....	3
5.1 Overview.....	3
5.2 Organization and development.....	4
6. Theory/Framework.....	5
7. Methodology .....	9
8. Discussion .....	9
8.1 Power over .....	9
8.2 Power to .....	10
8.3 Power with .....	11
8.4 Power within .....	12
9. Conclusion .....	13

## 1. Introduction

In this essay we elaborate about how the overall empowerment goal of the course Agricultural and Rural Innovation Process, RSO-51303 (also known as the Farm Experience Internship - FEI), is developed. For this, we first briefly present the course's history, its structure and main characteristics as well as how the course is linked to a broader agro ecological movement. Then, following San Pedro (2006) and VeneKlasen (2002), the concept of empowerment is developed from four distinct definitions of power ("power over", "power to", "power with" and "power within"). Next, we apply this framework to the collected data, including information from content analysis on the previous FEI's documents and evaluations and semi-structured interviews with previous FEI's participants. Also, we followed through participant observation the formerly group that is planning and developing this year's course (2016). Finally, we finish with some suggestions of what would be the core aspects of the course, that are intrinsically allowing/developing empowerment and therefore should be preserved as fundamental aspects of this socio/technical venture in a possible transition of the course to a mandatory course of Organic Agriculture's Master program.

## 2. Problem statement

One of the fundamental characteristics that constitutes humanity is the possibility of creation. Reality is not given but is continuously created. It is a social process that, through history, enables the upcoming. By that, praxis became one of the core principles of human existence. It is the dialectical relation between reflection and action that will provide the intellectual elements for the social creation of the world. Therefore, it is of extreme importance that the feedback of action takes part in the interferences of reality. Included in any social process should exist a time of problem-notice, questioning and reflection for a continuous re-building of the being in the world. For those who engage on an academic formation, university is a central stage where specific knowledge is built on the continuous process of a critic and scientific thinking. As central ingredients of this episteme, experience in the academia should, among others, promote empowerment and reflexivity.

A peculiar course of Wageningen University-WUR is the Farmers Experience Internship-FEI. Based on an agro ecological socio-technological venture, the FEI has some unique characteristics as bottom-up approach and promotion of a pluri-actor-exchange in multiple arenas that enable an intermingle of realities, experiences where new knowledge is build intrinsic to its praxis. As a participatory onrush for a better understanding of reality that enables the synthesis of expectations and facts for a new future possibility, this essay proposes to dissert about how empowerment is developed through students social learning experience in the Farm Experience Internship - FEI.

## 3. Justification

Although rural development is commonly linked with notions of green revolution and new technologies (Brown, 1969), another approach is done by groups of scientists, social movements and local people (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013). Framed as a socio-technology, agroecology is a mosaic of principles and techniques that aims to produce food in an organic and more sustainable way. The FEI is an initiative that invites for a deeply reflection of the whys and hows of the organic farming through a critic approach not just to its theories but also in practice. Combining social and technology, the course is presented as a stage where multiples actors meet for co-create knowledge. Thus, the FEI can be an interesting example for the university of a course that is also designed to enable empowerment as well as, in a way, break through the monoculture of the academic view towards an ecology of knowledge (Santos, 2003). Therefore, the course itself has some core principles and multiple possibilities of social technologies as well as a practical field learning period that has been developed for several years, spread and adapted according to each new period or locality. A dynamic socio-technical-enterprise that lays in the edge of social and practical (technological) approaches aiming the being and doing on the planet in a systemic (sustainable-harmonic) way, through a deep dialogue between agro ecological farmers, university students and society, brought in practice (nature-farm) and theory (culture-academy).

#### 4. Research question(s)

##### Objective and General Research Question (GRQ)

The objective of this research is contribute to the increase of empowerment inside Wageningen University-WUR by exploring How empowerment is developed through students social learning experience in the Farm Experience Internship - FEI?

##### Specific Research Questions (SRQs)

- What is the FEI?
- What are some central characteristics of empowerment?
- Does the FEI have some of those characteristics promoted through its structure-conception?

#### 5. FEI

##### 5.1 Overview

The Farm Experience Internship - FEI is a summer course of the University of Wageningen, currently with the name of Agricultural and Rural Innovation Process, RSO-51303. It started in 2013 and it is currently on its fourth edition<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In previous years the FEI was offered as a capita selecta course of 3 ECTs. In this edition (2016) there were no teachers available to engage pro-bono with the course, evaluating the final reports to officialize the ECTs, what made not possible to validate formally the experience through the ECTs.

The FEI is part of a worldwide initiative that aim to bridge theory and practice as well as help to promote critical thinking and build a student-university-farmers network (FEI, 2013a). FEI's format was developed based on a 27 years' Brazilian initiative called Estagio Interdisciplinar de Vivência and adapted to Netherlands reality.

The course is sustained on three main concepts: Interdisciplinary, participatory approach and agroecology and have as expected outcomes to enhance connections between farmers and university, to empower students and to promote innovative learning processes. Also, as broader and long term achievements, the course vision aim to build bridges between science and practice, to change the actual food system paradigm and to create a network among farmers, university, NGO's and companies towards an Agroecological movement.

Structured on three pillars, the course has a first moment of theoretical approach - Preparation, followed by a practical experience - Let's go farming (Farm experience), and ended with the Evaluation. For WUR students that want to validate the ECTS, an extra individual report is required.

The Preparation is the first week of the course has officially 15 hours, but participants are invited to be available for the full 5 days. Theory is approached through multiple strategies such as lectures, workshops, debates and games and will target diverse topics relate to agriculture such as agroecology, politics, food sovereignty, seed patents and others.

As second part of the course, Let's go farming is the practical step. Each student or group of students are sent to a different farm that has organic practices or that is in transition to it. For the next two weeks (75 hours according to the study guide), the students will fully engage in the local activities, working with the host farmers, learning practical skills and local knowledge.

The third part of the course is the Evaluation, in which students will gather back together to share their experiences, discuss it and evaluate the program. In the end, a collective book gathering all personal narratives of the internship experience is done. This takes place in the last three days (12 hours). Until last year (2015), for those that request the 3 ECTS, an extra essay was required (around 3000 words). The grade of the course was composed 30% by peer evaluation of a presentation of the local farm and personal experience and 70% by the Rural Sociology group on the reflective essay. In total is expect that each student officially dedicates 127 hours on the course.

## 5.2 Organization and development

Although the course is structured in advance, attending all the formal requirement of the university, its final format, content and dynamic are collectively developed by all participants. In this year of 2016, Boerengroep called a meeting to start develop the FEI where the general idea of the course was presented and a big event (agroecological forum) was schedule as the start point of the course construction. The methodology of this meeting was based on John Croft's Dragon Dreaming. Several committees were created and responsibility was divided among all participants. During the month of May, a poster of the course, announcing its online subscription was distributed on the main buildings of the university. The main responsibility of this process was attributed as part of the Boerengroep internship, supervised by the group's coordinator. A group interested in the FEI, mainly participants of the Boerengroep, are also connected to this first step process of formal preparation and

partnerships. Among the organizers and sponsors of the initiative are OtherWise, Wageningen's University fund, the Hoe born, the Ulijt, Capuchinha catering, Veld and beek, lleia, De Ommuurde tuin, Lazur, De Boelster and Boerengroep.

## 6. Theory/Framework

The concept of empowerment can be defined as “a transformation process by which the individual gains power and control in order to make decisions and meet his or her own objectives” (San Pedro, 2006). To discuss this concept, we need to prior discuss the idea of power. We can distinguish four kind of expression of power: “power over”, “power to”, “power with” and “power within”. For each of them, empowerment means something slightly different.

With “power over”, there is the idea of an unequal distribution of power. If a person gains power, someone else loses. It is a “win-lose” situation. With this expression of power, empowerment implies integrating the powerless in the decision making processes (VeneKlasen, 2002). Therefore, the concept is related to the increasing of decision-making power (Suguna, 2006; San Pedro, 2006). Hence, in society this is present in the struggles of the oppressed for a more democratic society. The participation in organizational structures and a sense of control over circumstances relevant to the person (Fitzsimons & Fuller, 2002) is the related goal for this aspect on an empowerment process. As John Lennon sang/claimed in 1971, “power to the people!”. The period was the middle of the Vietnam war, with more and more protests in EUA homeland questioned the imposition of a cruel war with shady bureaucratic intentions from the government. In the same period in Latin America several countries were holding military dictatorships and the struggling of social and grass root movements and left parties were fighting for democratic governments and direct participation. In both cases, the struggle of the people were for the possibility of being able to participate in the decisions instead of just receive it from above. The work of Freire (1970) is an academic example that emerged from this struggles evoking the empowerment of the oppressed through education and participation.

It is also important to highlight that the term “empowerment over” can also have a slightly different approach than in the issues of power relation in society. For Fitzsimons & Fuller (2002), the concept relates to taking control over a non-human entity. As an example, taking control over a fear or a difficult situation. For this essay, we will approach the concept of “power over” from the power relations in society perspective.

The second expression of power is “power to”. On it, power refers to the ability of each individual to be in charge of their life and shape their own reality. It is obviously closely linked with the notion of individual agency – the fact of being “an active entity constantly intervening in the course of event around her” (Hill, 2010; 115). Hence, within this context, empowerment means increasing the agency of the individual. To allow that, it is essential that the individual recognizes his own individual needs and interests (San Pedro, 2006; Kumar & Paul, 2007). The needs can be divided in two categories: basic and strategic. The basic needs concern the requirement for everyday survival while the strategic ones are related to the needed changes within the social structure, in an oppressive society

for instance (Elliott, 2007). Then, the recognition of the self-interests is necessary in order to use the available resources in a way that helps the empowerment process (Narayan-Parker, 2005). For example, a bachelor student could recognize that following a master program would be in his interest (it could even be a strategic need), which would increase his own agency. After completing his basic needs and recognizing his interests, the individual wishes to have different choice alternatives in order to shape his life the way he desires. That is why choice opportunities are an essential component of such empowerment (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Dibley & Lim, 1999). Using the same example as before, the bachelor student will be empowered if several alternatives are available to him (for instance, if he has the possibility of choosing between different master programs). Among those alternatives, the individual has to be able to choose, otherwise the previous component would be pointless. Therefore, the personal affirmation of an individual to make decisions is another important constituent of empowerment (Lemire et al., 2008). The empowerment process would not be completed if the individual does not implement his decision. He has to act according to the choices he takes. Hence, "taking action" is another crucial element of empowerment (Shor & Freire, 1987). Following the same story, the bachelor student will increase his individual agency by deciding which master program to follow and by getting his degree. Each of these components are individual capabilities that every mature individual possesses to a certain extent. Improving any of those skills would lead to an increased individual agency. Empowerment within the context of "power to" can therefore be seen as a process increasing the capabilities of the individual to shape reality by gaining a higher control over his actions. In addition, future is not a fate but an up coming to be constructed, where each person becomes subjects of their own history (Freire & Macedo, 1996), therefore the empowerment process helps the individual to have a greater influence on the construction of his own future.

Concerning the "power with", it refers to the capacity to find mutual interests among the individual will in order to form a collective movement. In that case, empowerment is about taking notice of others interests and analyzing how they relate with one's own needs (San Pedro, 2006). This dimension of empowerment can be associated with the idea of "collective empowerment" developed by Jo Rowlands (1997): where individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone. Further than an individual or multiple empowerment, this concept relates to something more than the sum of units, it relates to a greater idea that connects the multiples, a diversity in unity. A power that comes from the possibility achieved by the group. A fundamental component for this process to occur is social cohesion (Peterson et al., 2005), the identity that "glue" the mosaic in one big picture. The Movimento dos Sem Terra (MST) is an interesting example where this empowerment can be identified (da Glória Gohn, 2004). People from all kinds of backgrounds, beliefs and regions formed together one movement with one flag of agrarian reform. Although there are several divergences inside its unity, it is exactly this over all union that allows the people to dare to dream and fight for the right of land, triggering a community engagement (Baillie et al., 2004). Such possibility, of dreaming to have a piece of land, wouldn't become reality if wasn't for this possibility of dreaming together towards a collective empowerment. Social cohesion and community engagement would not be possible if the individuals do not feel any kind of collective belonging (Boehm & Staples, 2004). Nationalism is a typical illustration of collective belonging, it is often embodied by national (and/or folkloric) figures as Uncle Sam in the USA or Bhārat Mātā in India. People rely on those symbols, and they are able to identify themselves with their peers who "worship" the same symbols. It is this ability of the individuals to identify themselves

with “similar others” that allow this feeling of collective belonging (Gutierrez, 1990). Therefore, it is an essential component of collective empowerment.

“Power within”, or “internal power” refers to the power that every individual has inside himself. It is related to notions as self-confidence and self-esteem. In this perspective, empowerment means increasing the confidence of the individual to make decisions. It is the pillar to recognize his “power to” and “power with” (Nikkhah et al., 2012). Moreover, “power within” can be associated with “emotional intelligence”, a concept developed by Daniel Goleman summing one’s capacity to recognize and manage his own emotions and the emotions of other people (Goleman, 1995). In this context, five components of empowerment can be found: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills. When we talk about the ability to be self-aware we have to think about the capacity to acknowledge our own emotions and the way they affect the others (Goleman, 1995). When we receive feedback for example, there might be several ways we can feel about it: happy, embarrassed, angry and so on. But the important aspect is how well do we know ourselves in terms of strengths and limitations.

In the case of self-regulation, being in control is the key concept. People able to do that prove to be more calm than others and rarely attack verbally or blame someone else for their mistakes (Goleman, 1995). They avoid as well to take decisions based on emotions, fact that may be seen as a good leadership characteristic. As an example from a real-life situation, a good manager or leader should always avoid letting his personal problems interfere with his professional duties. Behaviours like shouting or dismissing people around just because we got annoyed or had a bad day are a sign of losing control on our emotions.

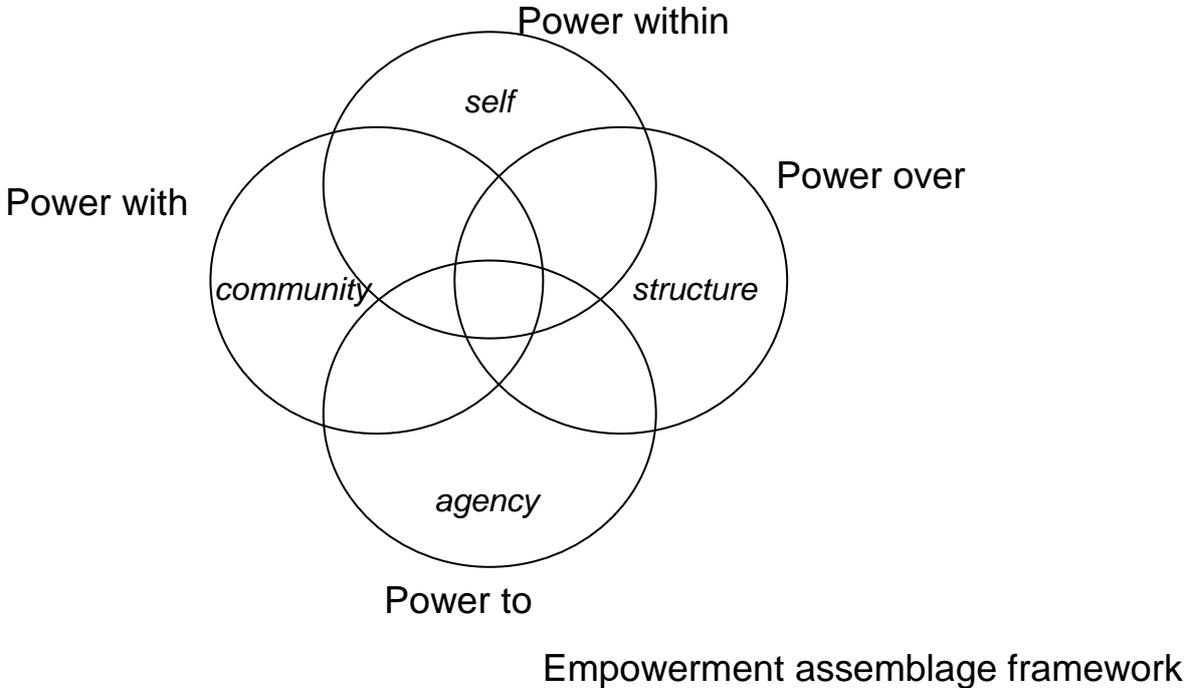
Being self-motivated implies having an optimistic attitude, always focusing on reaching the goals and setting high quality standards of our work (Goleman, 1995). We all have disappointments from time to time, but it is about having the power to see the good part of the facts and keep doing the good work. When we have a flat tire we fix it not giving away the vehicle.

It is not easy to put ourselves in others situation, but by showing empathy through listening, we gain one’s respect by caring about his feelings Scharmer (2007). We all failed a test or to accomplish something at certain moment, so it shouldn’t be that hard to understand how someone feels when things go wrong. Also, empathy is an important component of empowerment (Goleman, 1995) and is strongly connected with the concept of “real dialogue” as Scharmer (2007) argues. Having good social skills involves mastering communication (verbal and nonverbal), knowing how to resolve a conflict or even praise the others when they deserve it. Gaining social skills takes time and practice but the outcome worth the effort. It might seem easy to communicate. However, we should acknowledge the complexity of the communication process and the necessity of training our social skills in order build and strengthen relationships. Being able to facilitate reconciliation between the members of a team it is a good example of having this kind of skills. Another example could be the ability to express ourselves clearly in our speech and enable our receptor to fully understand the message.

Yet, it is possible to situate the process of empowerment in a greater context, represented by three components: structure, resources and agency. The structure refers to laws, social norms or any institutional (formal or informal) instruments that influence the ability to make decisions (San Pedro, 2006). Resources are instruments that are used to satisfy needs (Donenfeld, 1940), we can separate

them in three categories: economic, human and social. Economic resources refer to anything which can be inferred a monetary value. Human resources relates to the people belonging to the social structure and their relationship within it (Fottler et al., 2006). Social resources are defined as the “information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement embedded in social network relationships” (Elliott et al., 2013:240). Agency is defined in the Collins Dictionary of Sociology as “the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure” (Jary, 1995:10).

For this essay, the notion of empowerment will be approached through a four power notions approach that we called “Empowerment assemblage framework”. In this way, we will show that the FEI is a peculiar course in the university that due to certain characteristics, is able to promote the empowerment in multiple aspects of the students life, both related to an individual and collective reality, centered into the actors subjectivity, but also overflowing the individuality, challenging the structures that surround them.



## 7. Methodology

A bibliographical research as well as interviews with participants of the idealization of the course was done to understand the reasons for the peculiar structure of the course and its link to the agroecological movement. Also, following San Pedro (2006) and VeneKlasen (2002), the concept of empowerment was developed from four distinct definitions of power (“power over”, “power to”, “power with” and “power within”). Next, this framework was applied in the data collected by multiple methods and compared through triangulation. These Information was generated from the content analysis on the previous FEI's documents and evaluations, as well as semi-structured interviews with previous participants. Also, we followed through participant observation the formerly group that is planning and developing this year's course (2016).

## 8. Discussion

### 8.1 Power over

Wageningen university is organized through a complex apparatus, including chair groups, program committees, internal and external evaluations, etc. Also its goals and organization must be integrated on a global scientific standard and aligned with National laws and frameworks to enable its existence and foundings. Thus, we could say that there is a structural influence on how things are done in the university. In other words, there is an unequal distribution of power among the mechanisms from which knowledge is build, may be shared and most often transmitted. Also, a bank education (Freire, 1970) in which the ones that have the knowledge pass it on for the aluminos (the ones without light) and most often clustered inside the academia walls, away from the oppressed but open for the market, feeding a homogeneous standard that Santos (2003) refers as a monoculture of knowledge is the ongoing normative.

Such apparatus, restrain the possibilities of a course through an unequal distribution of power in which students became passives receptors of previous formatted courses. The academic structure imposes its power over the students, leaving little room for a more participatory planning on the institutional sphere. In that sense, the FEI is in a clear divergence. With an explicit objective to promote empowerment, the course has necessary bureaucratic characteristics to be recognized as a capita selecta course at the same time that is organized in such a way that allows the participants of the course to be responsible for it. Thus, according to the notion of “power over”, the FEI is able to promote empowerment over the course/learning structure, that is, it is able to integrate the powerless in the decision making processes (VeneKlasen, 2002) of the course.

In a way, we could say that the course's format leave a creative emptiness as an structured opportunity for the enrolled students to become active subjects of their own formal curricula. Hence,

the uniqueness of each course is exponential enlarged. Learning and empowering start to happen even before the course itself, as its cooperative creation becomes a fundamental part of the upcoming course in being. Future is collective constructed from the empowerment over the present, and to dream becomes a pedagogical instrument in the possibilities during creation.

For this year course (2016) the status of *capita selecta* was lost. This is due to how this optional courses are acknowledged by the university, which doesn't include in the official agenda of the professors the possibility of work on *capita selecta* courses but still keeps obligatory all the academic support (reading, grading and giving feedback to all the formal essays) to validate the ECTS. This makes the course function through voluntary donation of time/money, challenging the guarantee of its continuity. Clearly this can be related to the power that the institution has over the formal possibilities of the course to happen, resulting in a scenario where the students have to organize themselves to overcome such challenge. Such process is a good example of how the reality in which the course happens as well as the course structure are intrinsically generating empowerment in this struggle between university bureaucracy and student's self-organization.

## 8.2 Power to

The accounts from the past participants of the internship indicate clear signs of "empowerment to". Elements from each component of such empowerment stand out in the FEI story books. First of all, concerning the recognition of needs and interests, we can read that some students experienced the FEI as a space to think about the way they desire to shape their life. For instance, Simon (FEI, 2013b) wrote: "It also gave me insights about my own preferences". Yue (FEI, 2015) is more specific about the interests she recognized thanks to the internship: "This experience has triggered my interests on bio-interaction and my passion to work with the nature!". Finally, the FEI had a more reflexive and inspiring effect on Eva (FEI, 2014): "the experience made me think about what I want with my life and encouraged me to pursue my dreams". Also, when interviewed about her experience in the course, Elseke said "I cannot imagine now a life without working on the land".

Most of the participants of the FEI were just looking for a farming experience, to get a better insight of the profession. Some students as Bowy (FEI, 2013b) who defines himself as a "city dude" participates to the internship to satisfy their curiosity. Indeed, the FEI is not (only) about directing the participants professionally, its primary objective is to raise awareness on agro-ecology and its viability. Therefore, the self-realization of some participants about the fact that they do not want to follow such professional path, as Oliver (FEI, 2013b) who draw the following conclusion: "professional farming is not what I would want to specialize in", should not be considered as a failure of the empowerment process. On the contrary, it is related anew to the recognition of the needs and interests of the participants. Judith (FEI, 2014) recognized the connection between her interests and her personal affirmation to make decision: she learned that "every new experience helps you to come closer to the point on which you can make new decisions on what you want in your life and into which direction you want to go". Thomas (FEI, 2014) also felt his personal affirmation to make decision increasing: "after this nearly four weeks, I feel encouraged to decide things". Adrian (FEI, 2013b) had an even more inspiring experience: "Spending two weeks with two of the most

inspirational farmers I know has given to me the strength and the insight I needed in order to consider starting up a farm by my own". We can say that the FEI has expanded the choice opportunities of Adrian and Elske, because it enabled them to consider becoming a farmer in their options for their future career. The FEI also gives the necessary structure and the logistic for some students to accomplish their dreams, to "take action". That was the case for Thomas (FEI, 2014): "It gave me the chance to try something that I wanted to try for a long time already". Indeed, this internship gives room for the student who are "Looking for concrete action" as Mingue was (FEI, 2015). The quote that illustrate the best the empowerment resulting from the FEI might be from Sarah (FEI, 2014): "Yes, I did it, we did it and it was great!". It encompasses components of both individual and community empowerments.

### 8.3 Power with

The idea of "empowerment with" is often associated with community empowerment. But in the case of the FEI, the "community" is only temporary: the group is (partially) dissolved after the internship. Therefore, the results of the collective empowerment emanating from the FEI are volatile since the collective dimension itself is ephemeral. For that reason, collective empowerment as defined previously cannot be easily investigated subsequently since the collective power does not exist anymore. However, the accounts clearly manifest that the students became (more) aware of the existence of such collective power. Hence, we consider the students empowered (in the perspective of "power with") in the sense that the FEI raised their awareness of the significance of the "collective power" also called "power with" and allowed them to develop skills enabling such power to arise. As Heitor shared on a interview when talking about the option for a decentralized structure as a way to trigger such sense of collective power in which "everybody have the same power in the group". Also Elske mention that "is also one of the aims of the FEI to create link and somehow connect different people and organizations towards the same goal".

From the evaluation letters, we also identify that the participants are showing in their personal accounts a strong feeling of identification with their colleagues. First of all, they understand that there is no point in making distinction between people, as Lucie (FEI, 2013b) acknowledged: "I realized there was no point in making this distinction". This division is futile since in the end, we are all the same. The students became conscious of that by noticing that we always share something in common with our peers. In the case of Lucie, it was the realization that "until certain point we are all disturbed and we all have things to deal with". In many other cases, this "common ground" was centred around the idea of values. As Bharath (FEI, 2013b) experienced it, "the ideals of the group [...] drew him closer to the group". People were also brought together by the "passion for food, which is (at the farm) fresh, diverse, healthy and tasty" (FEI, 2013b). Those values and passions bind people together; it creates a special connection between them. That is what Luiza (FEI, 2014) felt: "Ok, worldwide food is an important social aspect; true. But in that house it was more, it was a passion – a beautiful one. And it was our connection. This "connection" that many participants felt can be seen as a form of social cohesion. As Sarah (FEI, 2014) wrote, "with connections circles are closing", which reflect the idea previously discussed of "connecting the multiples to form a unity" with the symbol of the circle representing the "unity". Some participants experienced the social

cohesion very intensively, as Bharath who wrote that “there was a strong emotional bonding creating a semblance of spiritual force drawing him there with energy”.

As we said before, the roots of the FEI are found in Brazil, within a context of a social movement advocating for a viable alternative to the agri-business. However, Wageningen university is well known for its strong links with companies such as Monsanto, Unilever, Nestlé and Pepsi-Co that embodied the Agribusiness trend. That is to say, the ideal promoted by the FEI, and some of the core values shared by the participants are conflicting the agribusiness orientation of the university. The simple fact that the FEI provides the participants with a different viewpoint is a source of empowerment, but here what interest us is the community engagement that it involves. The students, by taking part of the FEI, are “fighting” for a cause that is not legitimized by the prevalent structure. This idea is very well illustrated by one of the founders (and participants) of the FEI, Heitor (2013): “Organic and ecological farmers are the great minority and face difficulties as lack of access to credits from the government, and control of the agricultural sector by big companies”. The same big companies that are sponsoring the university. Elske (FEI, 2014) also insist on the gap between the motives of the participants and the policy of the university: “We – student – organized a course about agroecology on this agribusiness driven university. Together we share a vision that “feeding the world” is not just about more food”. Therefore, we can say that the FEI enhance a strong feeling of community engagement which is an essential component of collective empowerment.

#### 8.4 Power within

Besides the other forms of empowerment mentioned in the paragraphs above, by talking with the participants of the FEI or reading their annual booklets, one can easily notice how people involved gained courage to reflect, to decide, to act. Words like “inspiration”, “development”, “satisfaction”, “fulfillment” or “passion” keep appearing in their testimonials (FEI - history book 2013, 2014, 2015). The Power within has to do with a person’s sense of self-worth and self-knowledge; it includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others. Power within is the capacity to imagine and have hope; it affirms the common human search for dignity and fulfillment (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). In her story about the way she experienced, Luiza explained how she felt “totally recharged with new information, new perspectives, plenty of inspiration”. Few pages further in the same FEI Booklet (2014), Thomas shared his way of feeling “encouraged, deeply touched and inspired”. By participating in the FEI, students seem to get the chance to experience how life at the farm really is and “learn by doing”. Their written statements have always an optimistic note, show gratitude for being allowed to “feel” what it means to deal with farming and in most of the stories, at least one learnt lesson is mentioned. Nathalie (FEI, 2015) writes about “reaching happiness” while living at the farm, as FEI participant. We may see it as an expressed form of fulfillment, one of the key indicators for the presence of “power within”. As Elske said when interviewed, “You really change, you really feel something that I cannot describe in a rational way”. Also Heitor presented a similar idea when he said, “People that go through this project consider it a divisor of water in their lives”. Over all, participants are explicitly exposing the added value of the FEI experience to their study paths by sharing their stories with whoever will be interested in being part of the future sessions of the programme. VeneKlasen & Miller (2002) talk about “power within” as a way of gaining awareness

of one's situation and realizing the possibility of doing something about it. And as the shared stories in the booklets show, the students participating in the FEI, seem to become more aware about farming and its ups and downs.

## 9. Conclusion

The FEI is an initiative based on agroecology, holistic thinking and horizontal organization. The course promotes an opportunity inside the academia where multiple actors can gather to share and construct new knowledge focus on the possibility of an alternative way of thinking and doing that the one more frequently found in the university. On such venture, intrinsic to its process of actively constructing a course and participating on it, as well as its reflection-action-reflection structure, empowerment has been shown as one of the major characteristic present on the experience of the participants.

The assemblage empowerment framework enables the understanding of empowerment in four distinct fields through the notions of "power over", "power to", "power with" and "power within". The FEI developed empowerment in all four categories.

Some of the main characteristics of the course can be related to each classification of power. Related to the "power over" we could highlight the multiple actors interface that the course promotes as well as its horizontality, challenging the formal structures of the academic methodology of teaching.

Also, the possibility of practically engage in the agroecological movement, being with the farmers, re-thinking the theory from the ground perspective as well as becoming part of this social movement is something that the courses promotes and that is strongly related to the "power with".

The "power to" component was strongly related to the social learning experience combined to the possibility of experiencing theory in practice as well as the courses format of shared leadership, enabling the space-momentum for the development of personal agencies.

To be able to properly have moments of reflection and dialogue in the "official" schedule of the course is essential if the process of learning is valued as its results. As part of the course, the continuous evaluation is something that triggers the possibility of the "power within".

Although presented separately, the powers and their related course's characteristics intermingle in the ongoing reality of the FEI. Thus, the course should be understood as complex relation of multiple characteristics. Any change on the course's structure is a potential drastic re-assemblage of it, potentially affecting any of the distinct powers presented in the framework.

Therefore, a possible change on the FEI's status from a capita selecta course to a mandatory one for the agroecology movement track of the Organic Agriculture Master program, is a imprevisible new reality that should be analyzed through the assemblage power framework in order to have insights of how to guarantee the empowerment characteristic of the course in its whole complexity.

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