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# Making Distinctions on Autonomous Cultural Field: the Case of Small-scale Alternative Music Festival Organisers in Estonia

Rene Mäe\* & Airi-Alina Allaste

## Abstract

This article aims to give a sense of the activities of small-scale cultural practitioners in Estonia. Whereas Western societies experienced the powerful emergence of youth (sub)cultures and DIY ideology, as well as self-organised low scale cultural production in the 1960s, in Estonia all of these practices are relatively new and born over the last decades. This article discusses the Eastern European specifics of (sub)cultural production. The main concepts of this study are fields in cultural production and symbolic capital according to Pierre Bourdieu, with consideration of the recent elaborations in the field of (sub) cultural studies. Interpreting the interests, motives and attitudes that are the basis for the activities of the promoters, this paper addresses the subjects of mainstream/underground, independent/commercial and high culture/subculture, thereby contributing to the relevant discussion in subculture studies.

The empirical part of the paper relies mainly on in-depth interviews conducted by the first author (2009), while the interviews conducted by the second author (2010) are supported by fieldwork on club cultures 2002-2003. The data have been analysed and systematised by qualitative data analysis methods, with the help of NVivo research software.

While subcultures usually create symbolic boundaries using their distinctive style, music and ideological practices, according to this study, promoters tend to create 'independent brands' for the purposes of participation in the small-scale cultural field. These independent brands involve a mix of the promoters' taste in music, which is communicated through the 'brand' to significant others (music critics, lay audience and friends), and constitute an important means for creating symbolic capital.

**Keywords:** Cultural Production, DIY Culture, subcultures, taste.

## Introduction

This article aims to give a sense of the endeavours of small-scale cultural practitioners in Estonia. While the Western societies experienced a powerful emergence of youth (sub)cultures and DIY<sup>1</sup> ideology (self-organised small-scale cultural production) in the 1960s, such practices are relatively new in the Estonian context, having manifested themselves over the last few decades. In Estonia, global subcultures (most notably punk and metal) emerged during the weakening of the Soviet regime in the 1980s and flourished after the restoration of independence (for example, club culture and hip-hop culture, followed by many others). Numerous youth cultural studies focusing on (sub) cultural production and the interrelation between the music industry, subcultures and small-scale production have been conducted in Western countries (mainly in the United States and the United

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1 Do-It-Yourself – in the context of subcultures, a term originally introduced by the punk subculture. It refers to various practices of cultural production, for example, independent music making, recording and distributing. The term emerged from the anti-consumerist/anti-capitalist ideology of punk (and other subcultures that followed).

Kingdom). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural fields has been a fruitful element for several studies investigating and theorising cultural production in the current century (see e.g. Strachan 2007, Moore 2007, Hibbett 2005, O'Connor 2008, Kruse 2003). The following analysis positions itself in a dialogue with the concepts of symbolic capital, cultural fields and their recent elaborations, while addressing specific trends in Eastern Europe in general and in Estonia in particular.

The history of Do-It-Yourself practices in Estonia differs from that of the Western world, where it was connected to the rebellion against commercialised music and leisure industry. In Estonia, Do-It-Yourself practices in the context of subcultures developed in parallel with the mainstream music industry. While in the 1990s the two types of cultural fields – commercial and alternative – developed apart and were clearly distinguishable, in recent years they have started to mingle again, mainly due to the opportunities offered by Web 2.0<sup>2</sup>. Micro-communication media have been identified as comprising the crucial elements decades ago, for example, forming punk as an autonomous cultural field in the United States in the 1980s (O'Connor 2008: 5). Today, Web 2.0 renders alternative music production in the autonomous cultural field easily accessible and, thus, competitive with respect to the mainstream music industry.

Whereas subcultures often provide alternative legitimate frameworks with norms differing from (or opposing to) those of the mainstream society, the question arises – can similar features be found among alternative music event organisers? The latter do not see themselves as belonging to a specific subculture, although they distance themselves from the mainstream culture. In this article, we will focus on the meanings that the promoters attribute to their activity of regularly organising alternative music festivals and series of concerts. First, we will discuss the wider context of independent small-scale events and their organisers in Estonia, followed by a description of the organisers' strategies for working in the autonomous cultural field and analysis of the negotiations between different actors in the field. A promoter is required to communicate with the audience, the critics and the performers; to find a balance between their and his/her own interests, taste and motives.

## Theoretical background: fields in cultural production, symbolic capital and subcultural capital

The main concepts of this study are fields in cultural production and symbolic capital according to Pierre Bourdieu. The 'field' refers to social arenas "within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources and access to them" (Jenkins 2007: 84). A field is like a game played by certain 'rules', whereas the rules are defined by the social, cultural and symbolic capital, which are the instruments of power in the field. The fields of cultural production could be divided in two, so as to form a field with 'heteronomous' logic of the market where success is measured based on commercial sales and the extent of economic capital. In opposition to the former is the field of 'autonomous' principle, where success is measured by autonomy from the field of power and where actors disdain the pursuit for economic capital. Bourdieu called the latter 'economic world reversed', since the logic in this field reverses the market logic. The two logics endlessly compete with each other in every field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993).

Similar structures in the relations between the music industry and small-scale cultural practitioners have been recognised by several researchers (e.g., Strachan 2007, Hibbett 2005, Kruse 2003, O'Connor 2008, Moore 2007; Hollands 2002), who have elaborated on Bourdieu's theory and compared

2 There is no one clear definition of Web 2.0. It could be minimally said that Web 2.0 refers to a transformation from a more or less one-directional Web solutions to a model, where users can participate through sharing, contributing and transforming information (including visual and audiovisual) instead of just retrieving it (see O'Reilly 2005). Examples of the most popular Web 2.0 solutions are social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, etc.

the 'heteronomous' logic of the music industry to the 'autonomous' principle followed by small-scale cultural practitioners, whose success is measured based on autonomy from the field of power. Strachan (2007) points out that the owners of micro-independent record labels in the UK apply distinctive discursive strategies for explaining and justifying their practices. They consider the music industry exploitative and homogenising, while seeing themselves as creative and artistic. This allows attributing importance to their activity, which is achieved through opposing the context in which popular music is being produced.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital is connected to the way the tension between the 'heteronomous' logic and 'autonomous' principle is negotiated. Instead of financial compensation, 'anti-economic' (underground) art production provides the actors with symbolic capital, as compared to wide-scale production with more commercial relevance, but no symbolic capital. In the 'autonomous' field of cultural production, recognition and prestige mainly originate from the actors of the field; sometimes the only target audience is other producers (Bourdieu 1993). Regulation of audience size and type is a relevant factor in the contemporary nightlife as well, since it works as a way of building symbolic capital via the right type of audience (Hollands 2002). In the context of subcultures, a relevant concept is 'subcultural capital' – a term that Sarah Thornton has derived from Bourdieu's work and has used for describing the specific cultural knowledge acquired by members of a subculture, raising their status and helping to differentiate themselves from members of other groups. In her opinion, the subcultural capital operates mainly through the values that its holders do not like and through their opposition to the mainstream. She describes how some subcultures that are 'hip' in the beginning become mainstream, and the subcultural capital loses its primary value (Thornton 1995). Subcultural production (promoting, making labels) could be "the key source of subcultural capital" in a subculture, as stated by Paul Hodkinson in his analysis of the Goth subculture (Hodkinson 2002: 124); it helps the actors improve their status and gain new friends. Although some of the promoters operating in the Goth scene manage to make a living out of it, the financial factors are usually seen as secondary. Promoting could be seen as an example of "insider enthusiasm, creativity and initiative in the cultural production of the subcultural scene and the level of commitment many Goths had to their subculture", since the status and friendship within the subculture provide few rewards outside of it (Hodkinson 2002: 122-126).

### Independent music events

The Do-It-Yourself ideology as a cultural practice was introduced in the punk subculture and insisted that people produce cultural objects (records, fanzines; form bands) without the help of commercial media and capitalist music industry (O'Connor 2008, Moore 2007). Since the 1970s, independent record companies have served as good examples of DIY cultural production. They constitute "small-scale operations usually run from private addresses by one or two individuals who undertake all the tasks necessary for the commercial release of a recording themselves (from making contractual arrangements with musicians to organising finances, from designing and packaging to promotional activities and the organization of distribution)" (Strachan 2007: 243).

To our knowledge, the Do-It-Yourself ideology<sup>3</sup> in the Western sense was unknown to the authorities during the Soviet period and would never have been accepted by them. Although some activities associated with making and distributing alternative music and organising underground events existed before the collapse of the Soviet Union, they became common in the underground subcultures after the restoration of independence. However, the purpose of such independent activities (e.g. distributing music, organising parties) at the time was not confrontation against the mainstream popular culture,

<sup>3</sup> Here we mean DIY as a counter-cultural ideology, since doing everything yourself in the everyday sense was common at every level of society in the Soviet Union because nothing was available.

but rather lack of it in the Western sense. In the beginning of the 1990s, the commercial music industry was only emerging in Estonia, and the choice of events and music in the commercial cultural field was very limited. Small groups of devotees who followed the new trends had to do everything by themselves and the subcultural scenes were characterised by limited access to music, a lack of means for arranging parties, and a meagre audience.

The indie bands that gained popularity in the beginning of the 1990s had a different meaning for the wider society in the Estonian context, compared to the rest of the world. According to a popular singer and DJ, the indie bands and events were associated with the independence movement in the society (Allaste 2001). In the beginning of the 1990s, punk and other alternative events also attracted an older audience for whom the events were meaningful not from the viewpoint of the subculture or taste in music, but as a sign of the victory over the Soviet Union.

Since the second half of the 1990s, trends in the society changed. The commercial popular culture that had been relatively insignificant in the beginning of the decade rapidly gained popularity on all levels in Estonia, becoming an easily recognisable phenomenon. Since that time, it is easier to distinguish between the two types of cultural fields – the field involving the ‘heteronomous’ logic of the market (organising commercial events for wider audience) flourished, but a small cultural field based on the ‘autonomous’ principle started to develop as well.

The notion of independent and non-commercial music festivals has been problematised by the “ongoing commercialization of indie music festivals in recent times” (Cummings 2008: 675). While the term ‘indie’ originally signified a do-it-yourself approach to music making, production and distributing (Cummings 2008), in the 1990s the term was incorporated by the Western music industry, which used it as a marketing tool for producing creative and autonomous images for many successful bands (for example, Nirvana) (Hesmondhalgh 1999). The two largest independent music festivals in Australia started to use the label ‘indie’ in order to give a “more autonomous and creative edge that mainstream festivals do not have” (Cummings 2008: 676), while still concluding sponsorship deals with corporations that made use of the ‘independent’ festival space for the marketing of their products. Thus, in order to maintain the perceived authenticity and independence, festival organisers struggle with balancing the paradoxical relationship between creativity and commerce, making careful decisions about the selection of music, types of sponsors, etc. (Cummings 2008).

Similar trends are also recognisable in Estonia – the notions of ‘indie’, ‘alternative’ and ‘underground’ have changed, and in many cases ‘underground’ is used for advertising purposes. In the recent years, distinguishing ‘underground’ from ‘mainstream’ has become more complicated, and the two types of cultural fields have started to mingle. The lifestyle young creative people in Estonia have adopted over the last decade suggests that although there are connections with the official structures (for example, business enterprises) and creative associations or music-centred subcultures alike, dividing one’s life between commerce and art is not seen as a problem. For example, photographers, designers and musicians can earn a living utilising their (creative) skills, but they do this only in order to be able to devote their time to ‘true’ creation. In a way, they alternate between the fields of large-scale and small-scale cultural production/field of economy.

Due to contemporary technological opportunities, mainstream popular culture rapidly adopts the ideas from underground. Any alternative work or production is available and can be introduced and exchanged through social networks – fresh and exciting ideas readily find their audiences. New music and styles spread rapidly among interested people regardless of their location. In the local context, social networks on the Internet allow newcomers (party promoters and DJs) to attract audiences and organise events more easily. Micro-independent labels (in different geographical spaces) can cater a very small and highly knowledgeable audience (Kruse 2003) through the micro-communication mediated by different subcultural media such as fanzines. Today, new communication technologies (Web 2.0) support creative forms of work, participatory social networks and self-expression (Moore

2007: 469), and people use cultural objects “to communicate, network, learn, persuade, influence, and celebrate their sociability” (Griswold 2008: 154). In this process, culture “becomes less a matter of objects and more a matter of practices” (ibid: 155), and promoting music events can be interpreted as a culture in and of itself.

## Methods and data

The empirical part of this article is based mainly on five in-depth interviews (2009) conducted by the first author between January and April 2009, and supported by 3 interviews in 2010 collected by the second author. The selection process of the five main informants was based on the following criteria: (1) existence of the name/concept of a series of events or a festival; (2) regularity of music events – once a year, four times a year, etc.; (3) participation by foreign artists; (4) the audience does not exceed 1,000; (5) use of free advertising channels; (6) use of the same venues among informants; (7) non-profit association as the form of organisation. These 7 criteria were constructed to include more experienced and engaged promoters to the sample and also filter out the promoters who do not explicitly (for example neither on their websites, mailing lists, nor in internet forums) articulate the specificities of their endeavour(s).

The three interviews with DJ-s and promoters conducted in 2010 focused on the topic of the changes in the club scene and only subjects associated with promotion were selected for analysis within the framework this article. Analysis is based mostly on open-ended interviews described above, but it is also supported by participant observation – attending parties in order to create a broader context for the interpretation of the interviews.

All interviews have been transcribed and systematised with the help of NVivo research software. The analysis was conducted using open coding – in accordance with the subjects that emerged from the material. The coding was performed with the aim of identifying central topics and forming relevant categories. For the purposes of this article, only selected topics were used from the 3 interviews conducted in 2010. All statements are based on analysis of all materials, and quotations are used to illustrate the arguments.

## Empirical study: creating (sub)cultural boundaries and gaining symbolic capital

### Who organises small-scale events and how?

Web 2.0 and the new media have opened up new opportunities for DIY organisational and promotional strategies. Although independent music events usually attract only a few hundred people, international artists from all over the world frequently perform at underground clubs, bars and open-air festivals. Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook provide opportunities for establishing direct contacts with independent bands, releasing information about the events and receiving feedback from the audience after the event. Social networks also allow new promoters or DJs to become known quickly – although sometimes for a short time only. It is becoming common for many people to be involved in DJing and promotion for a while, only to be rapidly replaced by newcomers.

*Everybody wants to have parties! It's so popular to be a promoter. To bring an artist from abroad, that's cool! Some kind of new 'doers', 'one-night stars,' as everybody calls them. They do it a couple of times, a couple of months and then they disappear. (Male, 26, 2010)*

Here, it is possible to discuss the competition in the autonomous cultural field according to Bourdieu's terminology (Bourdieu 1993). New styles mainly attract younger, 'new' people, who have not had the opportunity or the subcultural capital necessary for competing with older promoters. They have to define a 'new culture' (music and style) in order to differentiate themselves. Since Web 2.0 has enormously facilitated active participation, a lot of people can easily be involved in promoting, regardless of their subcultural capital. Newcomers are sometimes considered to be tasteless wannabes lacking devotion from the experienced promoters' perspective. Further analysis focuses on the viewpoints and activities of promoters who have been involved for a longer time.

As stated above, at least to some extent, small-scale promoting has existed in Estonia for several decades and the promoters interviewed had been on the scene for a while and had developed different working methods. Some promoters work completely alone and do everything by themselves: book the venue for the event, communicate with artists, design posters and flyers, spread the information over Internet forums, use mailing-lists and social networking sites, and apply for funding from external sources established for supporting non-profit cultural activities. Even though the complete responsibility and enormous workload can be stressful and frustrating, it offers maximum control over all conceptual and artistic decisions that need to be made in the process. The alternative approach is putting together an organising team. Members of such teams often have their day jobs in the commercial field related to their tasks in the organising process. For example, people working in printing offices or stage-lighting companies, professional sound engineers, etc. – the skills and contacts from professional work are used for arranging independent events without economic benefit.

### Framing (sub)cultural boundaries

The promoters interviewed are former (or currently) active musicians, record label owners, sound engineers, music journalists, etc. Thus, the idea to start promoting music events has been influenced by their participation in different subfields of the cultural field. Therefore, the meanings attributed by the promoters to their activity should primarily manifest in the way the promoters explain why and how they arrived at the decision to start organising small-scale alternative music festivals.

The organisers see promoting as a creative process, since they involve their own taste in music, invest a lot of their time and make organisational, conceptual and artistic decisions in the process. In their opinion, promoting provides them with an opportunity for enriching the local cultural field with alternative music and, thus, offering people something new and different. They emphasise that the events organised are aimed at a 'curious' audience. According to one of the promoters, the people attending his festival:

*[they] have better taste in music compared to an average Estonian. (Male, 34, 2009)*

It could be seen as an elitist judgement, since the promoter sees the audience of his event being in this aspect better than the rest of the society. Expressing similar elitist attitudes and boundaries that "situate some people 'inside' and others on the 'outside'" (Williams 2006: 179) is intrinsic to most subcultures. However, promoters today mostly avoid positioning themselves inside any subculture; instead of placing importance on a specific musical style, the organisers emphasise that their uniqueness is derived from presenting a variety of styles and genres. Since so many styles are available and new ones are emerging, 'cool' is constantly being redefined and the most important criterion is to keep up with the changes. The promoters perceive that rigid stylistic boundaries leave them constrained and the rapid evolvement of their personal taste in music makes it difficult to define participation. New styles quickly adopted by the mainstream lose their value as basis for subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) for the promoters.



*Dubstep became mainstream very quickly. On the Internet, everything spreads so quickly, that's why. When too many are listening, then you don't want to be part of it, you feel embarrassed! The people who listen to it, they're not the cool people.* (Male, 26, 2010).

In order to maintain their position on the autonomous field, the promoters are required to prove their exclusiveness. They create names for the series of events they are organising that could be treated as 'independent brands'. These brands indicate the promoter's taste, the vibe of the events, and a limited, sophisticated audience, but also resemble to some extent the commercial marketing strategies.

### Brands based on atmosphere, relationship with audience

According to the interviews, the purpose of creating an independent brand and engaging in small-scale events organisation was to provide authentic events characterised by a unique and friendly atmosphere and a choice of music that follows the organisers' taste. The promoters interviewed in our study found that their own specific taste in music was not represented in the field and considered it necessary to fill this gap. The decision can be interpreted as being related to the belief that their taste as the basis for the events is worth it. This could be explained through the fact that these promoters had been involved in the cultural field before starting to promote events and already possessed specific knowledge and symbolic capital among the potential audience. In times when styles tend to commercialise quickly, a specific music style could lose its value very fast, and more attention is paid to the aura and atmosphere, as well as to the limited audience. According to Bourdieu's terminology, the hierarchy of genres (here: music styles) is replaced by the relationship with the audience as the basis for evaluating the producers and their products (Bourdieu 1993: 46). As noted by one of the promoters, his aim was to offer a space where 'metacommunication takes place,' with him as the social space creator.

*I don't try to build a wall between different [musical] worlds. I just try to imagine a certain mood I want to achieve.* (Male, 40, 2009)

Distinctions between promoters more or less belonging to the same cultural field were not stated clearly (based on some recognisable features), but only in vague terms, which could be a sign that the brand itself is a way to acquire a specific '(sub)cultural identity' and a source of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995).

*I sort of know these other promoters you named. I don't know how things are between them, but I feel what I represent is different enough.* (Male, 40, 2009)

However, clear distinctions are made between those who have a real DIY attitude and non-commercial interests, as opposed to the events and festivals that have indulged in too many compromises and lost their subcultural capital.

*It was this old [one of the large-scale rock music festivals in Estonia] which they organised before they got financial support. At the time, it was motivated by fandom. Now, they can say this and that but now this [festival] is purely a commercial enterprise. For them, it's the income from tickets and the audience numbers that count. Of course, they can involve bands that they like and want to see, but their goal is to bring in as many people as possible and not the bands that they like.* (Male, 36, 2009)



In this context, the ‘independent brand’ of the event functions as a tool that helps to distinguish their enterprises from other festivals to which they attribute commercial interests. When distinguishing themselves from large-scale events, the promoters use a repertoire similar to the older indie discourse (Hesmondhalgh 1999), explicitly pointing out how creativity and commerce are tightly interrelated, the latter negatively affecting the former.

*In my opinion, it's the main contradiction between this mainstream [music events] and the so-called underground [music events] that on the one side we see a corporate atmosphere and on the other side a kind of creative, friend-centred atmosphere. (Male, 40, 2009)*

Even though independent event organisers prioritise creativity over economic interests, they still need resources for implementing their ideas. The pragmatic side of an independent brand is the hope that it would be useful when finding sponsors or supporters. Although irregular underground alternative music events are not supported by national institutions or foundations, the status of an NGO with a clear concept and a well-planned budget makes it possible for promoters of small-scale alternative music festivals to apply for financial support from various state-governed institutions.

As mentioned above, music festivals that nowadays claim to be ‘indie’ or ‘independent’ could still have contractual agreements with corporations (Cummings 2008) and fall to the ‘commercial’ category among promoters. In Estonia, many large-scale festivals that attract thousands of people and are established as NGOs strive to maintain their ‘underground’ image and are competing for financial support with small-scale independent event promoters. Large-scale festivals usually also focus on more specific music styles and are led by professional and experienced leaders who incorporate volunteers through campaigns and co-operate with commercial sponsors. In such situations, the new basis for symbolic capital – relationship with the audience over a hierarchy of genres (Bourdieu 1993) – could work against the independent promoters. Although they comply with preconditions established by the financing bodies, independent promoters are often rejected. The decision-makers, who are not always familiar with the recent trends in the alternative cultural field, tend to support style-specific events. The funds intended for supporting alternative youth cultures are used for financing such (half-commercial) events, instead of supporting events with blurring genres and styles that do not have a concept sufficiently clear for the decision-makers.

*Let's say that foundations like the Ministry of Culture and the City Government believed that my festival is important, but they didn't understand that it is...that this music could be as important [as the music presented by large-scale festivals], although the scope of my festival was magnificently wider. It was totally, like all the styles you can imagine. All the people had a positive attitude towards [my festival], but the officials treated the music I present as belonging to a no-man's-land and, therefore, marginal. (Male, 40, 2009)*

While the personnel of large-scale festivals includes dozens of people, including voluntary workers, independent music festivals could even be organised by a single person, as mentioned above. This allows for organising events with minimal resources; some promoters try to finance events by themselves instead of applying for funding and doing constant paper work. Naturally, such an approach requires sufficient resources earned through their day job. At the same time, some of the independent promoters receive frequent support from the funds, but this often requires additional efforts. One such informant also organised different cultural events for young people (such as seminars on alternative culture, recording, workshops, etc.) in order to gain credibility within the funding bodies.

## Restricted audiences and symbolic capital

The independent brand primarily works as an authentication tool for different audiences: culture consumers, other promoters, musicians and critics. Since the “autonomous principle of hierarchisation means that producers and products will be distinguished according to their degree of success with the audience” (Bourdieu 1993: 46), promoters tend to interpret the positive and negative feedback from these groups as a sign of either the success or failure of the event. This influences their decisions about the organisation process of future events. The recognition a promoter receives from the different ‘audiences’ through different channels (in face-to-face interactions, mediated by Internet forums, newspapers and blogs) possesses symbolic power in defining the artistic and cultural value of the event and, thus, exerts influence on the positive identity of the promoter.

The audience for whom the events are intended and who have a status that allows defining the symbolic value of events and the symbolic capital of the promoters is comprised of cultural consumers – the people who have purchased the ticket and participate in the event. In many cases, a restricted audience consists of the promoter’s friends who have a high status in the field and who recognise the promoter’s activities as ‘cool’ and relevant. At the same time, the promoters also control the composition of their audience by defining appropriate behaviour at the event. The strategy of building symbolic capital of the brand works through a restricted audience that is expected to respect the bands playing at the event and behave as if they were present at a concert – this is perceived as distinctive from the behaviour in an average club night.

*I would like to organise a music event that is as ascetical [...] as possible. If it develops into a wild party in a way that isn’t harmful for the music and the band and the people, this is OK. But such turmoil, if the feedback is like it was absolutely magnificent, but I didn’t see any of the performers, it’s not like a compliment for me. (Male, 34, 2009)*

The ‘economic world reversed’ sometimes works by avoiding larger audiences that might spoil the music, the events, etc. If the visitors appreciate the music by devoting their attention to it, the promoter interprets this as positive recognition for his choice of music. Indirect feedback from the audience is received after the event from Internet forums, where the visitors discuss the performance of the band and the sound, as well as express their gratitude to the promoter.

Another important group whose opinion is crucial comprises the bands who perform at the event and provide the promoter with feedback on the venue, crowd, atmosphere, and sound. A possible definition of a successful event follows:

*A successful event is where everyone is happy, there is enough people, maybe two times less than I expected, but not embarrassingly few, the band likes it, people like it and the feedback is good. (Male, 34, 2009)*

The last – but not the least – of the important groups among the audience comprises music critics, who build symbolic value by creating social meaning when writing about the events. Professional journalists and amateur bloggers alike have important (although different) positions here. The Web 2.0-based niche media helps create bonds with specific audiences and add symbolic value to the events. Publications in the official large-scale media can be connected to structural position taking that defines events (brands) in the larger cultural context. The critics interview the promoters regarding the (usually foreign) bands performing at upcoming events, write reviews or simply publish press releases that the promoters have published in Internet forums or on social networking sites. By doing so, the critics give credit to the promoters and validate their activities as important enough to spend time writing about them. Reviews (positive or negative) are sometimes written after the event.

*And about the media...some journalists are like friendly and publish articles about the event...and it's not like an advertisement...it's not a bought advertisement. (Male, 34, 2009)*

At the same time, these writings function as an important promotion channel – among the restricted audience, the critics' status might attach much more importance to the brand or specific event compared to paid advertisements. Thus, the promoter is not completely free in his artistic decisions and has to take into account several 'audiences' in order to receive symbolic capital in the form of recognition within the cultural field.

If the brand has managed to gain symbolic value, relating himself or herself to the brand can also help the promoter acquire social capital and form important relationships that boost the promoter's credibility on the underground scene (although their day jobs could be in an entirely different field) and are also useful for the brand. Thus, the motives for establishing independent events could be found in the effort made towards shaping a more creative image of oneself.

*But why I am doing this [organizing music events] at all? It's like... mainly I have personal reasons. It might sound stupid, but let's say that I really like the identity I have acquired. I don't feel like just a lawyer in a sense that it [being a promoter] gave me a new side that I like. And of course, I've made new contacts... with some bloggers... and recently I was asked to participate in an Internet radio show. (Male, 34 (2009)*

Thus, defining himself as a cultural practitioner enables the promoter of independent music events to distance himself from the economic field, while being active in both fields and having separate spheres of everyday life.

## Conclusion

While in the 1960s it was possible to distinguish between mainstream culture, subcultures or countercultures, and the latter contradicting the former, today's multicultural society is characterised by a plurality of lifestyles and cultural practices. The DIY ideology was an important element in the countercultural movements of the 60's, but now it has departed from its grounds. Although the commercial leisure industry has not disappeared, the small small-scale cultural practitioners, instead of rebelling against mainstream popular culture as the 'evil other,' rather try to take a different position while creating their own cultural sphere. Since the opportunities of Web 2.0 offer more democratic access to various communication channels, the commercial leisure and music industry nowadays doesn't have the monopoly over the means of production and distribution of popular cultural products. Hence, DIY practices today might have rather different meanings depending on the background and context.

Small-scale cultural practices in Estonia are influenced by the Soviet past, when cultural production was regulated by state and both commercial and DIY practices were missing. As mentioned before, both the commercial and small-scale fields emerged in the 1990s and developed apart in the beginning, but started to mingle again in the 2000s. Small-scale cultural production did not grow out of rebellion against commercialised culture, but was rather born together with the capitalist society. Small-scale cultural practitioners quickly adopted the strategies similar to the commercial field and DIY practices were 'packaged' into 'independent brands'. The fact that brands as instruments in capitalistic strategies could be found from the independent cultural field is nothing specific to Estonia, but rather characteristic to (popular) cultural production in the contemporary era.

What makes the Estonian case a bit different is how the actors on the autonomous cultural field perceive their practices. First and foremost, the promoters refer to the economic and media strategies of large-scale promoters, somewhat naively defining their small-scale practices as non-capitalist and,

thus, more authentic. In the case of subcultures where subcultural styles usually work as tools for creating subcultural boundaries, promoters have replaced these with ‘independent brands’, which are used to define the ‘cool’.

On the personal level, these brands are tightly related to the promoters’ self-images. Since all of the promoters emphasise their specific taste in music and unique approach to organising music events, it is evident that the concept of subcultural capital is useful in determining how specific (sub)cultural knowledge allows differentiation from the *others* (i.e., large-scale and small-scale promoters and lay persons), while offering a possibility for identification with music critics and their friends who have a ‘good taste in music’. In many cases, this construction of the *others* is similar to the one encountered among other independent cultural practitioners, such as independent record label owners (Strachan 2007), in which case the context of production (large-scale/industrial vs. small-scale/DIY) is being used for justification of the promoters’ ‘independent’ production of culture. The DIY rhetoric occurs in practice as promoters avoid making deals with commercial sponsors and highlight the ‘independent brand’ of the event, resulting in being somewhat eligible to carry the original meaning of the term ‘indie’ (Hesmondhalgh 1999).

It might be argued that subcultural studies tend to approach youth (sub)cultures as a reaction to social circumstances. Especially in Estonia, a small country that has been through major social changes in the last decades, it is evident that youth cultural practices are connected to wider cultural and social hierarchies in various ways. There is a clear parallel between (sub)culture and more established (high) culture – actors from both fields oppose mainstream popular culture and build up their symbolic capital based on exclusiveness and good taste. The concept of a ‘restricted field’ developed by Bourdieu originally to describe high culture suits particularly well to analyse the ‘field of small-scale alternative music events’ in the Estonian context, while the latter partly overlaps with established culture. The audience has to be restricted, since the cultural products offered are constructed as understandable for a selected minority only and the average majority is not the target. Besides, actors and their cultural practices are related to the trends of a capitalistic, success-oriented society – they do not want to be in opposition to the society (even though making distinctions between themselves and commercial organisers), but rather use similar means (brands) and in many cases also participate in different fields. Investigated promoters neither produce cultural objects, nor do they act as passive consumers of these objects. They create social spaces, symbols and signs other people can relate to – at least in the Estonian context they can be seen as the vanguard of culture in the wider sense.

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