On Cultural Perspectives in Higher Education Studies

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high culture?
environment, material conditions & cultural artifacts?
Culture?

- **A Social phenomenon:** Cultures develop in *time (history, traditions)* *space & contexts:* geographical & climatic, economic, political

- **Cultures** based on socially constructed, shared & contested understandings. **Moral orders:** “what is considered to be good, right, desirable & valued as opposed to what is regarded as bad, wrong, avoidable & despised”

- **An Intellectual device:** 1) ”Network of meanings” (Geertz 1973) 2) ”webs of significance where people simultaneously create and exist within culture” (Tierney & Rhoads 1993)
Two Main Traditions of Cultural Studies in Higher Education

- **Institutional perspective** (1930s => )
  - how to understand differences of students
  - how to understand differences of academics
  - serve often institutional leadership

- **Disciplinary cultures** (1970s => )
  - related to sociology of science: Kuhn / ’paradigm’, Snow / ”Two cultures”
  - How the nature of problem is related with organisation of research & acad. Work?
Disciplinary Cultures (Becher 1989)

nature of knowledge:
”hard”

interest of knowledge:
”pure”    ”soft”    ”applied”
Other Cultural Contexts & Significant others

- **Identity is a process** (significant others)
- National culture & traditions, family relations
- Institutional memory & identity *(saga)*
- Professional traditions (& connections)
- Disciplinary culture *(traditions & colleagues)*
- Self, or individual, or habitus, cultural & social capital
The Interaction between different cultural environments (Välimaa 1995, Cai 2007)
Institutional identity

- Basic question: “Who are we as an organization?”
- within the parameters of a defined identity-claim conceptual domain -what?
- associated phenomenological markers of identity-referencing discourse: how, when, why?
- related concepts: organizational culture, image
Institutional culture: ”check list”

- **Mission**: how is it defined? Is it used as a basis for decisions?
- **Environment**: how is it defined? Relationships & attitudes?
- **Leadership**: what is expected from leaders? Formal and/or informal leaders?
- **Strategy**: who makes decisions? How to reach them? Consequences of bad decisions?
- **Information**: who has it? how does it spread?
- **Socialization**: what one has to know to succeed in an organization? How are new members socialized? *(Tierney 2008)*
Where to pay attention to?

- Environment - architecture, inside & outside
- Communication: verbal & non-verbal, written
- How to make academic knowledge from what you see & experience?
  - visual methods
  - ethnographic methods (field notes, participant observations, auto-biography)
- Field knowledge
References