Chapter 1
Introduction to the Book and Its Contents

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The chapters in this book are based on presentations held in the Conference “Higher Education: The Cultural Dimension – Innovative Cultures, Norms, and Values”, organized by the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers in September 2005 at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The aim of the Conference was to support disseminating a complementary perspective to higher education studies which have been dominated by debates on the problems and benefits of globalization, marketization, managerialism, and academic capitalism during the last decade. Without trying to deny the importance of these large-scale structural changes shaping the definitions and functioning of higher education institutions and their objectives, we aimed at paying attention to another main organizing principle of higher education institutions: their cultural dimensions. What is actually happening in the internal life of the higher education institutions, and how can we study the topic from a cultural perspective?

One of the goals of this book is to take a critical look at what cultural perspective means, and how it works in higher education institutions. We are not only interested in gaining a better understanding of the cultural aspects of higher education, but also in analyzing the potential of cultural perspectives as intellectual devices. The chapters selected for this book consist of studies in which culture has been either the object, or the structuring principle of the study, or in which cultural studies have been used as intellectual devices in the analysis. The main aim of the book is to provide the readers with a good understanding of the variety of possible cultural perspectives to higher education, and to show how they can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research. The chapters open a wide and well-documented overview on the wide variety of intellectual devices developed by a number of academics for promoting the cultural understanding of organizations, academic disciplines, and students. In what follows, we will give a short introduction to the contents of this collection of articles and the main topics addressed by the authors.

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This collection of articles is divided into three thematic parts, each focusing on somewhat different uses of cultural approaches in higher education research. Part I discusses the relationship between higher education, culture, and society. Part II consists of studies examining special academic practices from the perspectives of students, academic work, and identities. Part III consists of chapters in which cultural approaches have been used as frameworks or intellectual devices in the analyses of reforms and institutional changes in higher education.

In Chapter 2, which opens the book, Jussi Välimaa discusses the traditions of cultural studies in higher education research. He also analyzes different uses of cultural perspectives in this particular field of research, and examines the state of the art of cultural studies in higher education.

In Chapter 3 William G. Tierney analyzes trust and culture in higher education. Tierney begins his chapter by first summarizing how organizational culture has been defined, and moves on to discuss its nature from the perspectives of mission, environment, leadership, strategy, information, and socialization. He then turns to a discussion of trust, and considers how trust has typically been cast as a rational choice amongst actors in an organization, and contrasts that with a cultural view of trust. Tierney suggests that trust is a cultural construct that plays a critical role in enabling or stymieing an innovative role in tertiary institutions.

In Chapter 4 Rajani Naidoo focuses on the relationship between higher education and society. Focusing on the transformation of students into consumers in the national contexts of the United Kingdom and Australia she asks, how can student consumerism be understood as a cultural force in higher education in the context of knowledge economy? This chapter takes a look at how the new forms of organizational culture involving new modes of rationality and value systems are promoted, contrasting this with the proponents of the marketization of higher education, who argue that such mechanisms merely enhance the functioning of higher education. According to the argument presented in this chapter these developments have the potential to change the culture, and thereby the terms, on which teaching and learning take place in higher education.

Part II of the book focuses attention on academic practices and identities. It is opened by Hanna Päiviö, whose study examines the culture of business students (in Chapter 5). Her academic interests focus on the process in which students become socialized into different disciplinary and work cultures. How does this process actually happen in business education, and what kind of cultures and work communities become meaningful in the everyday life of the business students? Hanna Päiviö pays attention to the aspects, elements, and logics of studying that have relevance in the business students’ everyday life, but are not directly visible to the students, their teachers, and other actors of the education. She approaches education and studying as cultural phenomena from a fresh perspective. The cultural approach described in this chapter can be considered “participatory”, because the purpose of the study is not merely to describe and interpret the social reality of the business students, but also to change it with the students.

Chapter 6, written by Oili-Helena Ylijoki, studies the clash of academic cultures in the rapidly changing societal and academic environments through the case of