

Universities as Special Organisations: An Overview of Their Role in Value and Cultural Transmission in Today's Context

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Abstract

In their multidisciplinary manner and in adherence to their mission statements, universities make it possible for people to be open to change with regard to their initial cultural orientation and be more in touch with other values of life in teamwork. Co-operation with others other than faculty members and openness to the environment are considered ways in which universities can impact the society and enhance prioritization of values. The paper brings two different concepts together: universities as special organizations (special agencies); and the notion of value/cultural transmission. These two are linked together, in the work, through the hypothetical postulation that universities perform strategic functions in the development and consolidation of societies by making it possible for people, especially the young ones, to escape the confines of their initial cultural environment and refine their value orientations. The method of the paper which is literature analysis and report analysis of a pilot study done by some scholars on Schwartz's measurement of values among university students support the assertion that universities act as agents for the transmission of culture and values, especially among the younger generation. That forms the basis of our theory in this paper.

Key words: cultures, organisations, socializing agents, universities, values,

Introduction

The Latin origin of the word "university" considers the term specifically in terms of "*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*" which refers to it as a community of teachers and scholars. It is common to read in the mission statements of various universities today that they are committed more centrally to the development of society. The society today, as ever, is in need of people with

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knowledge to tackle the situation and problems of the society through investigations and finding adequate solutions. Universities have it as part of their responsibilities to engage in civil and community services through the instrumentality of quality academic exercises, for example, researches, teaching, conferences, seminars, workshops and publications. Universities serve their purpose truly when they give back to the society that sustains them qualitative experts in all fields. When universities are socially responsible, their sustainability becomes easier through funding. In this way it could be argued that it is also the responsibility of universities to make education accessible to students of all backgrounds since its funding is basically for the purpose of inspiring and equipping sharp minds for the benefit of the society.

Universities develop ideas and impact knowledge to scholars to have impact in the world (Freire, 1969). Universities help people find their place and role in the community, and offer impulses for development in the society. A well organised university worthy of the name should inspire people to design new approach to societal issues and encourage integral human development for the betterment of the future. It is the function of universities as social institutions or as an organisation to provide the strategies and analytical tools for social change.

It is part of the function of universities to encourage social/community engagement and to partner with organisations (locally and internationally) so as to improve their impacts on the society. But the pursuit of such goals should not distract or make universities lose focus of their foundational mission. It is the responsibility of universities to educate the society while providing opportunities for developments through networking and partnerships at all levels in the world. Many universities are well under way in this regard because many of them have signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) with partner universities. Without science, technology, arts and humanities, which are the major focuses of universities with their other branches, the economic growth in the society will be in jeopardy. Universities exist to prevent such and to provide development and growth in such a manner and fashion that is ethical, intellectual, affective and moral (Morin, 1999). While pursuing the welfare of the society, people should be helped to develop their potential to the fullest. The community life should be such that allows the individual lives to align with collective interest. In this way the society needs to attain the idea of sustainability which should be a guiding principle in developing ways to help solve problems we have helped to create. If they live true to their aim, universities should serve to develop systems that are fair for all.

But while performing those functions or attempting to perform them, to what extent shall we hold universities as organizations?

Organisational Theory

In its basic definition and understanding, organisation refers to a group of people or "an assemblage" of people acting and working together for a common purpose. Such an assemblage is often characterized by division of labour. What the group achieves by using individual strength and talents within the organisation is more than what the members can achieve if they work individually on their own. Social analysts and academic researchers have persevered in their deliberations on the several theories that explain the dynamics of organisations. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer (1997), studies on organisational theories will provide the researcher with "an interdisciplinary focus on a) the effect of social organizations on the behaviour and attitudes of individuals within them, b) the effects of individual characteristics and action on organization, c) the performance, success, and survival of organizations, d) the mutual effects of environments, including resource and task, political, and cultural environments on organizations and vice versa, and e) concerns within both the epistemology and methodology that undergird research on each of these topics. As such, the study of organizations is broad in both its theoretical scope and empirical focus." (p.3).

Max Weber's theories of organisation are based on reflected attitude towards the individuals in the organisation. With his belief that bureaucracies with mainly bureaucrats as key players represented the organisational pattern, Weber's organisational structure is defined by a tightly controlled policies and procedures.

Universities as Organisations

Some scholars have, while detailing their analysis about universities being seen as organisations, attempted to answer the question why policy reforms in Europe are changing the structure of universities from being "just" institutions to becoming organisations. Meier (2009) and Pellert (1999) argue that there are lots of challenges that led to this change. These arguments are succinctly put by Kehm (2013) thus: "The call for distinctive institutional profiles and more competition was supposed to trigger a process of institutional differentiation which at the same time had to be managed by the institutions themselves (vision and mission statements, branding,

marketing, ranking positions, etc.), ...Growing expectation regarding the role of universities in the emerging knowledge societies in terms of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination or transfer required a further opening of higher education to new stakeholder groups." (Kehm, 2013: 2). With the autonomy of universities as organisations with more professional leadership, the opportunities to solve some of these problems emerged. Funding is a problem and it "became intertwined with a crisis of trust in the quality and efficiency of institutions' performance." (Kehm, 2013:2).

Seen from economic perspective, organisations pursue a common goal and members in them follow rules, know their limits, cooperate with each other and establish links between themselves, other actors and the environment. Because organisations are more dynamic than institutions, universities can be categorised as organisations. However, universities bear the basic characteristics of both organisations and institutions. As institutions they transmit knowledge; as organisation they are seen as cooperations comprising teachers, students, and administrative staff all working under hierarchical coordinations. In this sense universities are seen as agents of socialization in the society with primary purposes of which transmission of values is one.

Universities as Special Organisations

In explaining universities are organisation one may encounter a problem. This is because the managerial activities as we have them in the organisational theory in commercial administration may not be applicable in the ethics of academic tradition and practices. Against this back drop universities are characterised as "specific organisations" (Musselin, 2007: 63). Furthermore, we can argue that universities are seen as special organisation in the sense that in contrast to other (business) organisations, the workers in the universities (e.g. staff teaching/administrative) and different departments are more or less independent and have more identity towards their departments than towards the universities they belong to.

In an attempt to find a suitable theoretical model for the idea of universities (or educational institutes) as organisations Meier (2009) takes recourse to the system theory. "General systems theory is the skeleton of science in the sense that it aims to provide a framework or structure of systems on which to hang the flesh and blood of particular disciplines and particular subject matters in an orderly and coherent corpus of knowledge" (Boulding, 1956: 208). System theory sees organisations as open social systems which, in order to survive, must interact with their

environment. In other words, for the organisation to survive, the actors within it must cooperate with outside actors and environments.

There is the possibility of hybrid models of universities as organisations. Kehm (2013) opines that "It can be assumed that in the meantime hybrid models have emerged which are better to analyse with an interdisciplinary approach than with an approach based solely on organisational theory." (no.5). However, any theory developed in favour of universities turning into organisation will be met with many difficulties if it does not take the resultant effect on the academic profession into consideration. However, the administrative model of universities as organisations shows that policies do not always have the expected effects. So far from some of the surveys the outcome is that most of the actors (academics for example) prefer to identify with their disciplines rather than with their university as such.

Responsibilities of Universities

Basically and historically educational institutions have been responsible for socializing groups of people in specific skills and values deemed important by society. Based on this assertion, universities are to be considered as agents of socialization. Socialization is "the processes by which human beings are induced to adopt the standards of behaviour, norms, rules and values of their social world." (Outhwaite, 2006: 638). It begins at childhood and lasts throughout the lifetime. As a learning process which begins at infancy, it is latent, and as a life long process, it relies on explicit teaching. People are exposed to socializing influences in the society in this process and they learn and absorb the culture and values of relating with each other in several ways. (Outhwaite, 2006).

Psychologists and Anthropologists focus on interaction processes in mother-child relationship on one hand, and on the transmission of cultural values on the other (Outhwaite, 2006). But sociologists, while borrowing these concepts and approaches, concentrate more on "institution and subcultures in complex societies as agents of socialization." (Outhwaite, 2006: 638). Universities have exercised strategic power influencing peoples' value priorities. This assertion has been tested in a pilot study conducted on Schwartz's Theory of Values and his measurement of values by a group of four social scientists from University of Cape Town (UCT) South Africa, Godfrey Okoye University (GOU) Enugu Nigeria, Johannes Kepler University (JKU) Linz - Austria and University of Applied Sciences (FH) Linz - Austria. The pilot study investigates and

analyses the extent to which universities influence the value priorities of people e.g. students. The project is about values transmission and the university as a key socializing institution in society.

Transmission of Culture

It is to be stated that the primary aim of educational institutions is the transmission of culture including values. The word 'education' coming from the Latin word 'educere' means to lead out of ignorance and to bring up to another plain - a higher one. This is for the sole aim of getting one balanced in the society. When this is done, the widely accepted idea in the social sciences that people learn their culture, i.e. they acquire knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms is then justified.

Agents of socialization that are significant in the lives of the youth help to pass on cultures and values to them. By socialization we mean the process by which an individual develops into a functioning member of the group (or society) according to its standards, conforming to its modes, observing its traditions and responding to social situations as a member the group (Parsons, 1958). People, groups or institutions that influence value priorities of others and their emotions, self concepts, behaviours and attitudes are considered as agents of socialization.

There is general agreement among social scientists that most societies have seen the development of some key social institutions that assist in the transmission of culture and these include family, formal education, religion, mass media, and peer group. Giddens and Sutton (2017) distinguish between “primary socialization” by the family during childhood and “secondary socialization” that happens later on in educational institutions, for example. We are interested in the socializing function of universities. Educational institutions are responsible for socializing groups of young people in specific skills and values deemed important by society. Universities have exercised strategic power influencing students’ value priorities.

The extent to which universities influence students’ values is the subject of debate within literature on what has become known as the “hidden curriculum”. “values, dispositions, and social and behavioural expectations of educational institutions brought rewards for students and that learning what was expected along these lines was a feature of the hidden curriculum” (Nami et al, 2014: 798). The hidden curriculum could be defined as the values, beliefs, and expectations of an institutional culture that shape the students' learning. The hidden curriculum can be acknowledged as part of socialization process of higher institution in that students learn lessons

that may or may not be part of their formal course of study. These lessons include, for example, what ideas and behaviours are considered acceptable or unacceptable, how they should interact with peers and lecturers and which values and cultures are most important. This process is regarded as “hidden” because it is often unwritten, and unofficial. The universities, as agent of socialization help in transmitting these onto the students and by extension to the society.

Transmission of Values

Education and other biographical characteristics influence values' priorities (Schwartz, 2006). If, for example, the life circumstances associated with receiving a university education create the opportunity for and promote freedom of choice then students are likely to increase the importance of self-direction in value priorities and downgrade the importance of conformity. Schwartz (2006) argues, for example, that empirical research shows that values such as universalism, stimulation and self-direction, which are promoted by universities, “are substantially higher among those who attend university” and values such as conformity and tradition are considered less important. This could also be the case because those who prioritize these values seek higher education. To identify the extent to which values could be measured among students with the Schwartz's PVQ a pilot study was conducted by four scholars

Pilot Study

(The study was conducted by Daniela Wetzelhütter, Chigozie Nnebedum, Jacques De Wet and Johann Bacher. The pilot study is under review for publication.)

The group is interested in measuring to which extent universities could be seen as agents of socialization. Central to this process is how university values (both hidden and visible) influence the value priorities of students. In order to measure this, the group developed Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire - University (PVQ -U) based on the PVQ -21 for measuring university values perceived by students. Data were collected from two universities - from Austria (n=133) and from Nigeria (n=156). The reliability, i.e. Internal consistency and homogeneity, and validity, i.e. construct/content validity of the measurement instrument were tested. The results show that the PVQ -U works well based on the data for both universities with some needs for improvement in its usage in the Nigerian setting.

The pilot study is structured in three phases thus: First, they describe Schwartz value theory and provide an overview of debates in the literature about applying his theory of basic values to measure organizational values. Second, they describe the design of the pilot study including the methods used. Third, they report their findings and discuss the results in relation to their research's objective.

In Schwartz's theory of basic values and its application, values are defined as beliefs and goals that are desirable, which are guiding principles in the lives of people. There are ten motivational value orientations which are related to each other either harmoniously or in a dissenting structure. The “structure” of these values reflects relations of discrepancy and correspondence among values and not to their relative importance (Schwartz, 2009). The structure is a two dimensional model which embeds the values into four value domains thus: Self-Transcendence, Conservation, Self-Enhancement, and Openness to Change.

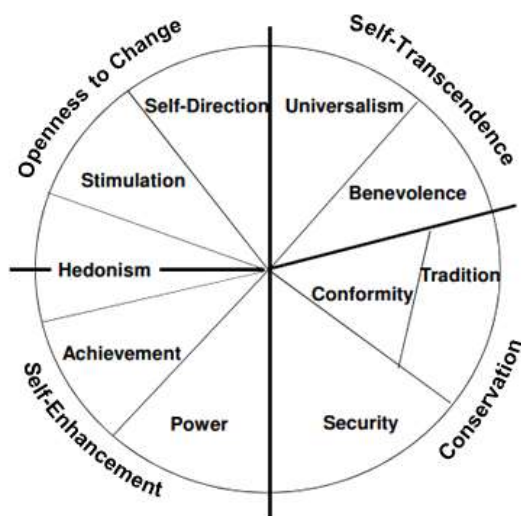


Fig. 1 Schwartz's motivational value types and higher order value domains. Source:

By means of the circular diagram, Schwartz underlines “The closer any two values in either direction around the circle, the more similar their underlying motivations; the more distant, the more antagonistic their motivations” (Schwartz, 2009). Thus, when one tries to pursue two values and they come in conflict, these values are represented in the opposing direction in the circular structure below, while symmetrical values are adjacent to one another. The circular structure portrays the total set of relations and it is very interesting to observe how universities help in the pursuance of the desired values in their order of priority.

Table 1 below summarises the ten value orientations, their definitions and exemplary values, (see De Wet, Wetzelhütter, Bacher, 2018). For a more detailed discussion, see also Schwartz (2009).

Table 1 Schwartz's Motivational Values

Value Type	Definition	Exemplary values
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people & resources	Social power, authority, wealth
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Success, ability, ambition
Hedonism	Pleasure and personal gratification	Pleasure, fun, fulfilment
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty & challenge in life	Excitement, variety
Self-direction	Independent of thought and action, creating, exploring	Creativity, curiosity, freedom
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, & protection for all people and nature	Social justice, equality, awareness
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one has frequent personal contact	Kindness, support, honesty, forgiveness
Tradition	Respect, commitment towards and acceptance of the customs and ideas that culture or religion provide	Deference, devotion, tolerance
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others & violate social expectations or norms	Courtesy, obedience, honour
Security	Safety, harmony & stability of society, of relationships and of self	Social order, organisation

The survey was carried out at JKU and GOU between October and December 2018. The group interviewed “entrants” and “advanced” students in order to be able to examine possible differences based on the duration of study. The reason for this decision was the assumption that, in contrast to “entrants”, advanced students should know the universities values (values which the university wants to transmit) better and therefore should be able to provide more reliable and valid data.

Altogether 180 students (62.3%) in their 1st year (entrants) and 109 advanced students (37.7%) took part in the survey. At the JKU advanced students participated to a proportional higher degree (43.6%) than those studying at GOU (32.7%). However, the difference is not significant (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sample Composition

Country, University	Entrants (%)	Advanced (%)	n
Austria, JKU	75 (56.4%)	58 (43.6%)	133
Nigeria, GOU	105 (67.3%)	51 (32.7%)	156
Total	180 (62.3%)	109 (37.7%)	289

Chi²=3.642; p=.056

Overall, the results are encouraging. The modified PVQ, more precisely the PVQ-U, allows measuring University values perceived by their students. Consequently, the PVQ-U enables to measure differences between personal values (measured by the PVQ) and University (PVQ-U) values. Nonetheless, further research is needed – e.g. additional tests in order to ensure a high quality measurement. From the result, it could be said that universities constitute the living repository of values and a heritage revitalized by the use the teachers, researchers and students make out of it in fostering values and transmitting them.

Evaluation and Discussion

Universities can be classified as agents that have the capacity to re-shape the society, thus the impacts of universities on society can be felt in the educational, social and economic aspects of the society.

As hotbeds of innovation and entrepreneurship, universities partner with government, research and technological establishments, and businesses to provide the students and scholars the skills to be able to assert themselves in the competitive workplaces in the society. Universities as special organisation are so placed that the economic advantage they impact are pronounced in the towns in which they are situated. Those living in those cities are reaping the benefits and are being influenced by them.

Universities, however, do more in the development of the society through their "all inclusive policy". In the all inclusive policy, universities foster international connection, provide the society and stakeholders with robust base principles to inform public policy in a well positioned, comprehensive and independent assessment of all issues. They do that as both consultants and critics.

The artistic appreciation of a society is being generated by the exciting intellectual, cultural and creative activities which the universities support. Arts, like culture, can help to insert a society on

the map through creative awareness. They are part of the mission of universities and integral part of their activities as transmitters of culture and values.

Most of the universities' engagement activities are to be identified in the societal development and services. There should be focus on stimulating the students to engage more in social actions, for example, health care provision, entrepreneurships for self reliance, environmental protection and general public awareness on basic factors that help in the smooth running of the society. These are some of the core values that universities stand for. This aspect of the universities' life should be well spelt in their mission statements. "Mission statements play an important role in the presentation of universities' understanding of their place in society." (Maassen, P. et al, 2019: 10). However, not all universities are very clear on what their mission statements with regard to their preferred position in the society are.

In the bid to contribute to the improvement of individual's wellbeing and strengthening social cohesion through betterment of national and regional economy, universities find themselves in tension and are sometimes criticised for this. "Nonetheless, from many sides there is critique on the universities for their lack of real progress in strengthening their relationship with society, and for the low level of institutionalization of their engagement activities." (Maassen, 2019: 15).

Conclusion

Education should inspire, provoke and motivate the free and active participation of individuals in their reality and equip them with tools that enable them to construct a new approach to problems in their physical and temporal environment. Universities play important role in the education of the society. Cultures and values of a society can be influenced by level of its educational setting.

Recovering the human capacity to evaluate, compare, choose, decide and act upon the world (Freire, 2001) is more crucial now than ever before. In their role as agents of socialization, transmitters of culture and values, universities continue to be the fountainhead for people who seek for ways of giving meaning to their lives. In order to foster culture and impact values to the young ones and the society at large, universities are usually multidisciplinary.

One of the key aims of higher education is to foster all-round personal development and educate citizens who are responsible, informed and committed to working for a better future. Achieving these objectives requires a profound transformation of higher education to create a system that is capable of anticipating the needs of society and individuals.

Universities and access to them enhance knowledge and promotes civic participation as agents of social mobility. Thus they are, to the society, more than institutions for lectures and researches. They are agents for fostering opportunities for knowledge, cultural enrichments, imbibing of positive values and social empowerment. And with these in place, the economic impact of universities in the society will be obvious.

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