

## Chapter 9

# The International SOLE™ of Finnish Higher Education: A Virtual Vanishing Act

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### ABSTRACT

*This participative inquiry critiques recent management trends in the Finnish higher education system. The six authors, presently working in three Finnish universities, focus on strategic internationalization policy to highlight the argument. Global trends in internationalization are introduced, followed by an experienced-based meta-analysis, drawing on several recent studies by the authors. This analysis points to significant challenges and blind spots that exist- well hidden- alongside the Finnish higher education system's best features. The increasing use of ICT-based management routines are called into question with respect to higher education practices, capacity and linked societal challenges. The analysis indicates these challenges remain unengaged- even obscured by- the rapidly proliferating number of ICT-based university management systems. Although none of the authors are specialists in Philosophy or ethics, the interpretive-level findings presented by this interdisciplinary group of scholars illuminates ways forward for the emerging field of specialists focused on ICT-based network-related ethics.*

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## THE INTERNATIONAL SOLE™ OF FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION

The purpose of this article is to consider recent criticisms of management trends in higher education (Rhoades, 2008; Marginson, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Finland is an interesting case because formerly key ethically-based strengths, based on vigorous, university-led societal debate, may be vanishing. This is clear when looking at strategic internationalization policy- the focal point of both our play on words in the title and our analysis (Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008).

In Finnish Higher Education (FHE), internationalization issues are currently comprehended and approached monolithically, despite analysis which reveals that policy issues related to internationalization are intertwined with areas often regarded as discrete from internationalization (Saarinen, 2007). Specifically, Ministerial internationalization policies and university strategic internationalization plans are related to other policies and practices, like ongoing *structural change within and between universities*, new *pay-for-performance salary systems*, *quality assurance schemes*, and *total-cost-management systems*, tracked by the Sole™ time management software used by all but one of the authors. These changes have a profound effect on the formation and implementation of internationalization policies. However, these changes are caused, in part, by reactions to internationalization trends. If these different policies are viewed as “obstacles” to the implementation of internationalization policies- as is the currently case in many universities in FHE- the efforts of faculty and staff easily run at cross-purposes. If, on the other hand, these relationships are understood, both policy and practice can be approached more holistically (Saarinen, 2007).

Optimal, but complex, choices exist in every national higher education system with regard to internationalization (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; de Wit, 2002). Despite the variety of choices available, the authors assert the central actors in

FHE are mainly *following* international trends, at a juncture when a far better course of action would be *setting* them (Hoffman & Välimaa, 2008).

## Methodological Approach

In this article, we engage in *participative inquiry* (Reason, 1998) a qualitative tradition allowing us to address a set of concerns we have been communicating about for the past several years. In participative inquiry, people in similar situations attempt constructive change using the tools available to them. It is our hope to “write through” (Richardson, 1998) a meta-analysis, by utilizing firstly the international literature of our colleagues focused on “big picture” issues in higher education in general and internationalization in particular. In doing this, several theories of the middle range (Merton, 1968), often used in higher education research are used, to put for FHE in context. Most importantly, our concerns are based on our collective university experience and professional efforts. The result is a set of nationally (Finnish) and regionally (EU) based concerns in a global context (Välimaa & Hoffman, 2007). We are active in all mission areas of three different universities. Our assumptions and practices are rooted in five different disciplines, as well as being viewed from different points, in terms of career stage: full professor to doctoral student. Because of our differences and long track record of working together on different types of efforts, we link issues that are easily missed when internationalization policy and management practices are narrowly considered.

## Significance

Finland has a robust policy debate on an emerging European knowledge society, innovation and an admirable track record with regard to social equity, particularly regarding gender (Välimaa, 2001). However, the achievements of FHE in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly regarding massification

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