

CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SOCIAL LIFE

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How the University Organizational Culture Is Being Experienced? Phenomenological Studies of Experiencing the *Here* and *Now* of the Organization

Abstract: This paper undertakes the issue of how the organizational culture of a certain institution is being experienced by reconstructing the leading themes coming from auto-observation and descriptions of it. Still, instead of investigating how it is perceived or how its values are verbalized, the study referring to the actual experiencing of certain spaces, social relations, as well as how these are being conceptually embraced therein has been undertaken. To do so, phenomenological methodology and the analysis of qualitative data—adjusted to the research framework at hand—have been employed. Throughout the observation of bodily and mind responses, the lived experience under scrutiny has been given a leading role in regards to determining whether and how the research preconceptualizations should be superseded by the perceptions of the organizational reality under study, as seen and experienced by those who actively partake in the institution at hand.

This research refers to how the University is being experienced by the students of one of its degree courses.

Keywords: organizational culture, experiencing, phenomenological studies, University, emotions.

Introduction

Our study was phenomenological in nature. The research goal was the “reconstruction of themes from students’ accounts of their own impressions in regard to how students experience the University.” The research question was as open as possible to avoid preconceptions and distortions of the experience and perception of daily life in an organization.

Phenomenological study concerns analyzing phenomena as they manifest themselves in the consciousness. Therefore, it is a turn to things-in-themselves (Husserl 1970). Consciousness has an intentional nature—we are always aware of something (Groenewald 2004: 4)—and investigating such consciousness will thus constitute the main goal of the research. Phenomenological research is about describing a phenomenon as accurately as possible, without being influenced by any *a priori* assumptions, as it should transparently reflect the facts. It is associated with the description of everyday life experiences people have (Groenewald 2004: 5). The point here is thus to gain the most in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon not in light of some previously build theories, but as it appears in the participants’ experience (Hycner 1985: 299–300). “Phenomenology is used to obtain knowledge about how we think and feel in the most direct ways. Its focus is what goes on within the person in an attempt to get to and describe lived experience in a language as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible” (Bentz and Shapiro 1998: 96).

Any object, event, situation or experience that a person can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, feel, intuit, know, understand, or live through is a legitimate topic for phenomenological investigation. There can be a phenomenology of light, of color, of architecture, of landscape, of place, of home, of travel, of seeing, of learning, of blindness, of jealousy, of change, of relationship, of friendship, of power, of economy, of sociability, and so forth. (Seamon 2000: 159)

Therefore, a phenomenology of organizations and management, where one studies substantial characteristics of organizing, power, leadership, organizational communication, control, surveillance, bureaucracy, organizational culture, et cetera, can also be imagined. This last phenomenon will be subject to study described in this paper.

The so-called phenomenological reduction (*epoché*), that is, bracketing our assumed conceptual frameworks that structure our perceptions and experiences, is essential in any phenomenological study (Rehorick & Bentz 2008: 11–12; Englander 2016). It is crucial to elicit essential characteristics of the phenomenon without using our epistemic and socialized filters. This method was proposed by Edmund Husserl ([1954] 1970). Evidently, bracketing our knowledge and assumptions does not mean denying the world, or even to doubt its existence. Study of a certain phenomenon (object) begins with describing its experience. There are two aspects of bracketing our knowledge. The first level of bracketing is to suspend what we have learned about the phenomenon from scientific studies, accepted theories, and other legitimated sources of knowledge. Next, one must bracket the notions about the phenomenon stemming from one's cultural milieu (Rehorick & Bentz 2008: 12). This knowledge is embedded in the language by typifications and cognitive constructs, which have been internalized and used by ourselves in naming people and objects (Schütz [1932] 1967; 1970). In this paper, these two aspects will be of utmost interest. We may observe some parallels between the *epoché* and the meditation on emptiness in Buddhism (Bentz and Shapiro 1998: 52; Depraz 2002; Simpson 2008: 61–62). Pragmatic approach to *epoché* can be characterized in three successive phases:

- a. A phase of *suspension* of the habitual thought and judgment, the basic possibility of any change in the attention which the subject gives to his own experience and which represents a break with a “natural” or unexamined attitude;
- b. A phase of reflective *conversion* of attention from “the exterior” to “the interior”;
- c. A phase of *letting-go* or of reception of the experience. (Depraz 2002: 122)

Another technique of phenomenological analysis is using imaginative variations while scrutinizing the data. Here, we seek different meanings by using imagination, various reference frameworks, different perspectives, positions, roles, and functions to fully and in all-encompassing manner describe the structures of our experience, as well as its significance attributes. Owing to the fact of using imaginative variations, we are able to tell apart which attributes are random and which are necessary to the phenomenon (Rehorick & Bentz 2008: 14–15; see also Bentz & Shapiro 1998: 99).

The third technique applicable in phenomenological reduction is horizontalization. We can tell that what is essential here is the context of realizing a phenomenon within certain experience *here and now*.

Horizontalization gives each element equal value, opening up possibilities for seeing things differently and changing one's perspective. Let us say, for example, that in a given hour you tie your shoe laces, pet your dog, write

a poem, and watch capsule news on CNN. If someone asked what you had done in that past hour, you might say, "I wrote a poem and watched the news." If your best friend, also a poet, telephoned, you might say, "I wrote a poem." If your spouse called, you might say that you played with the dog. (Rehorick & Bentz 2008: 16; see also Bentz & Shapiro 1998: 99)

There may be a number of horizons of experiencing, and each time, as the time goes by, a new horizon may be brought to light.

The phenomenological research method is distinctive. Certain phenomenon "chooses," as it were, the method of analysis. Many phenomenological researchers have objections to the very terms—method and analysis. (Hycner 1985: 280). However, we need to adopt some way of proceeding to be able to interpret and explicate "empirical data." What is important here is the word *explicitation* (explain) (Giorgi 1970; Hycner 1985: 300), unlike the word analyzing, since it is not about dividing the phenomenon apart, but finding what is essential and common for that phenomenon in its experiential perception. Here, we attempt to directly reveal and pass meanings included in what we call empirical data.

Research, Methods, and Data

In this study, we quite systematically followed a scheme presented by Richard H. Hycner (1985), in order to explicate phenomena revealed during interviews. These phenomena are the experiences described by the study participants, who were present in a certain environment (the University). We did not make use of all of Hycner's guidelines. In adapting his proposals in regard to experiencing an organizational culture, we established the research and analysis scheme below.

1. The first stage after conducting the interviews (in this case, recordings of individuals' observations on their experiences after entering the University) involves transcription.
2. Then, we engage in phenomenological reduction and bracket the knowledge we have about our object of study, approaching the data with openness and letting it reveal itself completely. One good practice of bracketing is to create a list of our own assumptions and knowledge, and to discuss it with other researchers (Hycner 1985: 280–281).
3. Afterwards, we examine the recorded interviews repeatedly (by reading our observation notes a number of times) in order to gain a sense of the whole (see also Churchill & Wertz 1985). We pay attention to non- and para-verbal elements accompanying the utterances. Researchers ought to record their general impressions in an observation log to make themselves aware of the difference between an observation and an interpretation.
4. Reconstructing the units of general meaning. At this stage, the researcher aims to determine the meanings conveyed by the research participants. We do not refer to researcher's questions for the time being. Here, we are dealing with the crystallization and solidification of what has been done/said by the participant, while using as many *in vivo* terms as possible. Units of general meaning have to be enumerated in our transcription, and on the right-hand side of the text we need to write down important locutions and words for each unit of general meaning. "I define a unit of general meaning as those words, phrases, non-verbal, or para-linguistic communications which express a unique

- and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows” (Hycner 1985: 282).
5. Describing units of meaning relevant to the research question. The researcher strives here to find units of general meaning that are related to the research question.
 6. Eliminating redundancies. This involves eliminating repetitive units of general meaning.
 7. Clustering units of meaning relevant to the research question. The researcher attempts to cluster units of meaning relevant to the research question based on some common theme or essence that unite them (Hycner 1985: 287; see also Groenewald 2004: 19–20).
 8. Determining themes for clusters of meaning. The researcher goes through clusters of meaning in order to find a common theme for all the clusters. One or more themes might be found.
 9. Writing a summary for each interview/observation notes. The summary is based on the common themes that are found (see point 8). This is about reconstructing the inner world of experience of a given person (Hycner 1985: 291).
 10. Return to the participant with the summary and themes—conducting a second interview. The researcher checks if the participant agrees that the essential characteristics of the interview/observation record have been captured. At this moment, a process of verifying research accuracy begins. In the case of incompatibility, the researchers and participants jointly determine the common characteristics that are essential for a certain interview/observation record.
 11. Summarizing all the interviews. Such summary describes the world in which a phenomenon took place and was experienced in a certain way by the participants. It is important to place themes within the horizons where participants experience reality, as well as to highlight individual differences if such manifest themselves among the research participants (Hycner 1985: 294).

Phenomenological research according to the abovementioned (also modified) method was conducted by Groenewald (2004: 11), who was interested in cooperative education aimed at growing talents in South Africa. The mentors and their presence turned up to be crucial for such education, as well as the commitment of employees and their ability to sacrifice a maximum dose of managerial energy in the task at hand and in reactivating educational institutions to meet the demand of enterprises (Groenewald 2004: 22). Michalak and Ristino (2013) performed a similar type of research, where they have been studying perceptions of organizational culture as it manifests itself in managers’ behaviors, and they described the phenomenon studied as an individual enactment of such culture by research participants. The research participants were compiling auto-reports related to the issues mentioned above. Cluster units of meaning referring to the perception of management behaviors, described as management style, communication style, and decision-making process, were highlighted as impacting upon the organizational environment (Michalak & Ristino 2013: 69). Positive perception of management behaviors eventuated in a positive perception of organizational environment, and vice versa. A positive language used in describing management behaviors (e.g., charismatic) was related to a positive description of managers’ personality (enthusiastic, caring, confident; Michalak & Ristino 2013: 70).

Those investigations show, for example, that values and beliefs, which are regarded as essential characteristics of organizational culture, were rarely mentioned by people under study. Therefore, this aspect of organizational culture was not reflected in participants' experience. We may assume that accepting the *a priori* definition of organizational culture frequently might lead the researcher to constructing the studied subject (Hatch 1993).

The recording and explication of experiences of the University environment were done according to the scheme mentioned above. The goal of the research was to point out the main themes related to organizational culture that emerged from a detailed examination of the empirical materials.

The method used in the paper is inspired by Giorgi (1970) who was in actuality conducting psychological research, although he was inspired by phenomenology; the same was done by Hycner (1985), whose research was in the psychological style. We used phenomenology to research a sociological topic: the organizational culture of the University. Therefore, we can say that phenomenological research could be an inspiration for the sociology of organization.

We agree here with the statement by Kociatkiewicz and Kostera (2015: 64) that: "we should look at the campus primarily as a site of experience. It is a space encompassing many destinations, where different wanderers traverse the passages in search of their own specific goals." Observation of experiences and its records were performed by 24 third-year students of Social Analytics. (The participants were 18 women and 6 men; 13 reports were selected for clarification because they were longer and could be analyzed in more detail). The project was done by students during the course "Multiculturalism in Management" (at the University of X, in a city of 660,000 inhabitants). Students wrote down and attempted to analyze their feelings according to the scheme at hand. However, ultimately, the author of this paper has himself made necessary explicitations. Afterwards, he contacted each student individually in order to get their points of view in regards to the explicitations made, and in the case of ambiguity—to obtain additional information (see point 10). After getting feedback, the interpretation was partially changed, however, such situation took place only twice. Students gave their consent to use their records in the research and its possible publication.

At the beginning, the students were taught what is organizational culture. The following was agreed upon as to the understanding of organizational culture:

Organizational culture would thus embrace the systems of values collectively shared and proclaimed in a given organization, common and often unrealized assumptions deriving from the latter, binding the ones partaking to the organization at hand, the rules of procedure, as well as the whole symbolical sphere of how the organization operates. Symbolical sphere consists of organizational language, ideologies, myths, beliefs, knowledge systems, rituals, which manifest themselves in a given organization. (Konecki 1994: 6–7)

Still, students discussed also other definitions and conceptualizations in order to obtain a wider observational perspective of phenomena related to the organizational culture.

The project was a part of the course. The goal of the course was to learn about many different approaches of studying organizations and organizational culture. So the students should have studied also the concepts, definitions, theories of the organizational culture. I wanted to show them that *a priori* concepts to study some phenomena did not always fit the

phenomenon. Although, I was open to the results of the research. I used phenomenological style of research and explicitation to show the complexity of relation of a priori concepts to the research results and discoveries. So it was also the didactic goal that was included in the research.

Furthermore, the students had classes about Hycner's (1985) and Rehorick and Bentz's (2008) phenomenological research schemes. They were thus asked to bracket their previous experiences and knowledge about studying (also on organizational culture), and focus on their impressions while being at the University. Also, they received instructions how to keep track of their experiences in the University environment:

I would like to ask you to write down and to hand over at least ONE OR TWO PAGES describing your experiences after entering the University area to the person responsible for collecting your work. Instruction is as follows: What do I feel when entering the University area? Write down what do you experience when entering the University area, run this experiment after entering the University, stop, concentrate and observe your insights (describe your emotions, the way you perceive other people and objects, thoughts, and your bodily experiences, etc.). Everything that comes to your mind. Be frank. Write straight from your heart. Do not weigh up yourself, do not write according to some thesis, just simply describe your feelings without self-censure. Also, observe what happens next, when the classes start. Note down everything that you experienced directly and consciously.

I trained the students how to concentrate on here and now using two methods: cognitive and "meditative" one. The cognitive approach was connected with identifying assumptions and reflection on them (scientific and cultural) that should be written down and discussed in the group to be aware of their possible influence on their perception and to separate what they known from what they experience.

The "meditative" method is a pragmatic approach to *epoche* outlined by Depraz (2002). This approach to *epoché* can be characterized in three successive phases:

- a. A phase of *suspension* of the habitual thought and judgment, the basic possibility of any change in the attention which the subject gives to his own experience and which represents a break with a "natural" or unexamined attitude;
- b. A phase of reflective *conversion* of attention from "the exterior" to "the interior";
- c. A phase of *letting-go* or of reception of the experience. (Depraz 2002: 122)

Thus, first of all, we decide to suspend our everyday knowledge (phase A). Thereafter, in phase B, we redirect our attention from perception content to the perception act itself. This way, we can find out how the mind works, and this will allow us to cleanse it by "letting go" all impressions and thoughts which may emerge in it. Phase B can be comprehended similarly to Zen Buddhism meditative practices, when concentrating on the breath or on the mantra, while phase C is about alienating ourselves from perceived things, and not binding ourselves to those things. Students were trained in this activity.

Everything that comes around goes around. Such self-consciousness is pre-reflective, pre-discoursed, pre-verbal, and non-conceptual. So, we open up our mind to everything that is created in it. Practically, we do not refuse a thing, since we are not tied up to anything, including our own concepts or assumptions. Hence, we can take in that Zen meditation is an *epoché* praxis, as well as preparation to a direct observing the experiences and writing about them. It is also a preparation to meditational contemplation on concepts, and experiences of phenomena and their relations.

Therefore, students had to pay attention to the environment they have found themselves in, and to which they were "thrown" with their bodies (see Seamon 2000: 162).

They avoided to use the filter of their knowledge of organizational culture concept that they learned before. Being in a certain place is associated with embodying of this very being—the body at hand exists and moves within a certain place in a certain way. The body thus defines our relation to place and phenomena appearing therein (see Toombs 1995; Merleau-Ponty 2005). The body precedes the conceptual knowing of the world.

In the explicitations, we paid attention to units of relevant meanings which were related to the widely-defined organizational culture mentioned above.

Research Results: Experiencing the University Organizational Culture

Here, we introduce the summary of all self-reports regarding experiencing the University organizational culture.

While experiencing organizational culture, students are mainly aware of the following:

1. Emotions felt while being at the University,
2. Infrastructure of the University and its administrative and other services,
3. Routine activities,
4. Social relations with other students.

These four aspects (themes) comprise the essence of experiencing the University organizational culture among research participants. The reconstructing themes was the main goal of the research and explicitation of auto-description. However, these experiences are distinctly complicated as to their meaning and thus it is not always possible to extract them unequivocally on the logical level. Such experiences have an all-encompassing character for each person, and the units of relevant meaning are usually clustered in such way that their explicitation requires unveiling this meaning texture.

Apart from the main four themes, we recognize a couple of unique topics, which will be described, as well. Some of them will be introduced in combination with the previously mentioned four themes, if they create a relations of meaning on a verbal level, and some separately.

Experiencing Emotional States While Being at the University

In the University area, the students mainly feel and observe emotions. It is a major theme acknowledged in the majority of explicitated self-reports (out of 13 explicitated reports, in 7 auto-reports its appearance is explicit and in 3 implicit). Nevertheless, these emotions are not unambiguous. In the coverage below, these range from curiosity and anxiety, through agitation and calming down, till the author gets up to the feeling of pride.

Therefore, emotions are diverse and of a changing nature. In the auto-report below, a rotation and dynamism of experienced emotions can be noticed.

After I've entered the University area, I feel curiosity, I wonder what will happen. Sometimes also anxiety and impatience, if I sense that these impressions might be negative. Usually, I also feel the urge of lighting up a cigarette. I get upset when I see cars parked in a wrong way or some clumsy attempts to get out from one's parking space in a visibly mindless manner. At the same time, I feel pity for those who have to break through a crowd of students. I am trying to calm down my thoughts and concentrate on today's classes, wondering if we didn't forget something today. I smile once I see my mates. Sometimes I feel kinda proud that I can be part of all this, especially when I see groups of students and manifold student research groups exhibited next to the entry. [D.B.]

In student's explicitation to my comment and question (Was anxiety a dominant emotion among the negative ones?), the student clearly points out that anxiety is a variable and fading emotion. Anxiety manifests itself when some unpredictable events are prone to occur (e.g., the course of some classes is unpredictable). However, once the student realizes that nothing can surprise her on this day at the University, she calms down. At the end of explicating my remarks, she ascertains that her feelings regarding the University are positive; she even emphasizes that by using capital letters in the word POSITIVE: "To sum up, in the majority of cases, I definitely feel POSITIVE curiosity about what will happen today during the classes."

Another student also feels *proud of being part of the University environment*. The expanse of the University offers a horizon and related references to the past, in which famous names from the world of science and culture appear. Pride is intertwined here with a reflection about the commercialization of the University, "Anyone can become a student these days." The uniqueness perdition of studying at the University is ultimately accepted by the narrator:

What do I feel entering the University of X? Pride above all else. Self-pride, the pride of my family and my loved ones. I am proud that I have the opportunity to move within the building which educated such outstanding personalities like Leszek Kołakowski, Marek Belka, Paweł Edelman, Antonina Kłoskowska, Jan Lutyński, or Władysław Pasikowski. I am proud that it's me now who strolls through the building corridors that experienced a lot during these seventy years of its existence, and, in addition to this, I am doing really well. Even its current commercialized form won't blot that out. So different than what it was some time ago. Commercialized, massed, commonly accessible. Anyone can become a student these days. Some uniqueness has been lost, which, I believe, was caused by specific requirements of our times. Perhaps it is how it should be? After all, its people who create organizations. [P.P.]

The knowledge about the past sets the horizon of perceiving the current University environment and of emerging emotions (pride).

In regards to realizing and delivering some values (value of learning), one of the students feels specific emotions. These, on the one hand, will be negative emotions, when she does not approve the state which she is undergoing (hanger-on time emotions) or when she is not sure about the quality of her project, which evokes anxiety. On the other hand, these will be positive emotions—in the days when she feels the joy of studying. She particularly enjoys some of the classes, like the ones about qualitative analysis. One of the students feels the joy of studying, but on certain days. Therefore, experiencing emotions is here related to the time frame; time, classes schedule are a bureaucratic context for experiencing certain emotions.

However, there is a generalized satisfaction of studying, which contains pride of qualifying to the University, as well as mother's pride of the fact that her daughter studies, pride of meeting experienced lecturers and of the possibility of using the University library.

One of the students feels happiness when she leaves the Faculty after finishing her classes. She is satisfied by the fact that she lives nearby and thus she can quickly move within the space around the University, especially when she sees people struggling at the car park to park their vehicles or get out from it.

The abovementioned emotional diversity is highlighted by another student. This is related to the length of time spend on studying. While end-of-term examinations, a number of emotions can be experienced, starting from being stressed after entering the University

building, to irritation caused by lack of empty coat hangers in the coatroom, and ending up on seeing the examiner. Positive emotions appear, as well. These are related to meeting classmates (joy), thus being emotions emerged by social relations, and passing the exam. Also, pride surfaces within the family relations context. Emotions are likewise reflected in this student's non-verbal communication (confident walk while leaving the University building):

I passed the exam with 4,5 grade. I feel self-satisfaction. After leaving the classroom, I give my friend a "high five" and we are in great moods. I call my mom to tell her how the exam went through. She congratulated me and I heard from her some appraisal words. I check what time is my return bus home. I confidently leave the building feeling relieved. [P.O.]

Additionally, emotions reveal in other perceptual areas of students' lifeworlds. For example, these manifest when meeting friends, and are then positive, like joy. Therefore, positive emotions are connected to social relations (see section 3 further in the text). They can also be reflected indirectly, what can be noticed in rating one's state of being and a day-to-day student's life while in the University area.

For one of the students, very important are sentiments experienced in the morning, when entering the University building. Here, we can see an indirect reference to emotions.

The quality of experienced emotions may differ, one might feel well or bad, what can be related to the weather or the assessed level of being prepared prior to classes. These two conditions cause one's willingness to back up or participate in the University activities (classes). Therefore, positive and/or negative meanings of these impressions rise:

When entering the Faculty... of the University, the first thought which comes to my mind is a wish for this day to finish. I think this is related to the weather as in such days the best thing to do is to curl up under a proverbial blanket with a cup of tea. Then I wonder whether I am well prepared for my classes, and if so, I feel confident and enter the classroom feeling no stress that in a moment I won't be able to answer to any of the lecturer's questions. While if I am not prepared, I keep on looking away and agitated keep clock watching till this one hour and thirty minutes of class finish.

Also, sometimes I have this thought that perhaps, on this very day, the class which I really don't like will be canceled, and then, for a moment, I feel such pleasant thrill of satisfaction, which passes away as I approach an already opened classroom. [K.K.]

The positive assessments also apply to general emotions related to the benefits of studying and being at the University. These are perceptions like experiencing the seriousness of authority, duties, and adulthood. Time, waking up in the morning, entering the world of responsibilities and daily adulthood, so to speak, are here clearly specified. These experiences were assessed positively ("pleasant experiences and feelings"). Furthermore, for one student, the University becomes her second/third home. The case here is about the acquaintanceship and awareness of the University area, buildings' location, as well as the time spent at the University:

I would even stick my neck out and say that after three years of attending the University, I could call it my third home, since there were some days when I would spend there plenty of time. When entering the building, I am under the impression that I know every corner, and a lot of University employees, I roughly know where all the buildings are located. Perhaps that's why I called the University a second home. [K.K.]

Experiencing the University Infrastructure and Its Services

Equally important in experiencing organizational culture was perceiving and solving encountered problems related to the University infrastructure—an environment which students were attending—and its employees behaviors. Four direct and five indirect references related to the issue at hand appeared. After reading students' statements, we could be under the impression that emotional sensations related to various aspects of how the organization functions, as well as experiencing its infrastructure were two most important kinds of experiencing the organizational culture. Oftentimes, these two themes join together, creating a certain whole, but here these will be described separately, for better experience explicitation.

Experiencing external objects and phenomena related to the “University infrastructure and services” simultaneously is associated with evaluating these elements. It would seem that even a purely descriptive narration element related to entering the building and approaching the coatroom had an evaluative character, which was verified in case of this student's relation at the inquiring stage of the research, as presented below:

I enter E building. Immediately, I have a dilemma about passing by the coatroom without leaving a coat and make the lecturer upset that I enter the classroom with my coat on, or to stand in an endless queue to coatroom. All right, I decide to leave my coat. It's my turn now. I say, “Good morning” and hand my coat. I received my coatroom number, but didn't hear back a reply to my greeting. It's not the first time this happens, apparently, that lady is too tired. Or, perhaps she has a bad day? Week? Month? Doesn't matter. [J.G.]

At the end of the quoted student's statement, a general reflection being an interpretation/summary appears, which represents a positive assessment of the experiences she had that day at the University:

Some positive aspects about today? Yes—a good coffee (it's cool to have a buffet in D building). We can plug in a laptop to a socket—none of the lecturers ever reprimanded us (as a group) that we steal electricity ;) Also, we have an access to the Internet through Wi-Fi, which enables us to find precious data. [J.G.]

At the inquiring stage, it was determined that the winking emoticon was not used to express irony; instead, it was put upon in a good faith to highlight a positive opinion about the University infrastructure.

Therefore, assessing is one of experiencing the University processes. Hence, we are facing here a specific duality of experiencing the University (it is a unique unit of meaning, which emerges once only at this level): some parts of the University infrastructure are rated positively while other negatively. Thus, the experience does not have a changeless character within the structure of one person's assessment.

Let us employ the “imaginative variations” method to research on how organizational culture is being experienced. For example, let us imagine a survey questionnaire regarding the organizational culture with a conclusive question, and even a Likert scale, investigating the evaluation of infrastructure. This would be “forcing data,” since the rating process is related to so many various organizational aspects, contexts, as well as periods of time that such forcing generalization would remarkably distort the organizational reality. The evaluations might differ and be ambiguous at times (see the winking emoticon above).

Encountering physical infrastructure of the Faculty plays an important role in students' experiences. Its size, as well as the need to relocate due to finding the right classroom are explicitly noticed. Still, these impressions are not decisive in evaluating the University by the below-quoted student; her assessment is positive and it is immediately brought to light in the below-cited statement, after a description of a "maze," as she refers to the Faculty (see [Kociatkiewicz & Kostera 2015: 63–64](#)). The horizon elicited from the entire utterance has a positive character as to the assessment of the Faculty, through the prism of which the whole University is being perceived.

Once entering the University the first thought which comes to my mind is: "In which room I have my classes." After a brief thought, realizing the facts, or checking my notebook, I know where my classes are. It takes me another while to remember where this classroom is and how to get there as quickly as possible. At that moment I get stunned by the size of the Faculty. When I have my classes in D building, I don't have any problems, since it's where the majority of my classes are held. However, if I need to get to building A or C, I need to spend a while thinking where I have my classes and how to get there. While passing by the coatroom, I always wonder shall I leave my coat, but since my next classes are in a different part of the building and coatrooms are located pretty far from each other, I abandon the idea. Summing up, for me, the Faculty is like a small maze, however, this doesn't overwhelm me cause I always get to my destination. My feelings regarding the University are positive for the most part. By attending my classes, I gain knowledge and new skills, which might help me in the future. [D.R.]

The Faculty localization is of crucial importance for this student (it is the second time that the motif at hand has been brought to our attention, the first time being when the student highlighted the positive aspect of the Faculty location in regards to where she lives). Since she resides 60 kilometers from the city, and thus needs to commute every day to attend the classes, she seems pleased with the proximity of bus stops vis-à-vis the Faculty. Therefore, "external" environment, as part of the University infrastructure, is also important as to the impressions regarding the University:

Due to the fact that our Faculty is located in the downtown, I don't need to worry how I'll get there or back home. Since I live 60 kilometers from X and commute on daily basis to attend the classes, the Faculty location and the fact that there are a lot of bus or tram lines running near allow me not to worry that I won't catch a particular bus cause then I can always use an alternative one. [D.R.]

It is a unique unit of meaning (external area and the Faculty location), and an important one for the student who travels 60 kilometers to X. Therefore, her horizon of experiencing the University special localization is set by the distance at hand.

Another student has yet a different dilemma when entering the University building. There is a problem with the coatroom, which is always crowded and she has to stand in the queue, what causes her being late for her classes. Her concern is whether to leave her coat in the coatroom and get late for the classes, or to keep it and be reprimanded by the lecturer. It is an issue related to the University infrastructure faced by this student:

I enter the building of the Faculty, part of the University of X. A dilemma arises. Shall I go to the coatroom and listen to complaints about lack of a coat hanger, or risk irritating the lecturer... I choose the second option, why to mess up with the lady from the coatroom. I calm down. [I.O.]

However, looking through the prism of the whole statement (horizontalisation), we can see that this problem does not result in a negative assessment of the University (by the Faculty prism), which instead is generally positive. The student likes everything which is

encompassed by the University (“I like this degree course, I like this Faculty, and everything which is encompassed by the University of X enables me to progress”).

Very interesting and unique unit of meaning (which appears once only), related to the infrastructure, is about the color of the walls and the internal design of the Faculty buildings. Experiencing the environment through the color of the walls, buildings, and classrooms prism is essential here. The student precisely describes the colors at hand, as well as related experiences. Warm colors cause a good mood, while cold colors cause a bad one. According to her, this impacts upon the quality of class participation.

As to the locale, I definitely prefer buildings E, F, and T rather than D or A. This is caused by the colors of the walls, furniture, the whole design, in general. In buildings E, F, and T warm colors predominate, which makes me feel much better than in other buildings. There, I experience a warm and nice atmosphere, which positively affects my state of being, concentration, and makes me more keen to participate in my classes. In contrast, in buildings D and A, the atmosphere is pretty cold and this is caused by the cold color of the walls; this does not affect my mood in a positive way.

I have noticed that I participate more actively and more alert in classes which are held in buildings with walls painted in warm colors. I have never expected that internal design will have such a massive effect on my state of being and participating in classes. [W.M.]

Rushing and being in a hurry while relocating within the Faculty area might be related to the infrastructure unit (a unique unit of meaning, which appears once only), which can, in turn, lead to a certain way of experiencing the time. Below-quoted student is in a hurry while relocating between classes. This is related to how the infrastructure operates (crowded coatroom in the morning), too short brakes compared to the distance between the classrooms and the size of the Faculty. Furthermore, when the lecturers overrun the classes, it is reducing break time, and thus eventuates in students being in a hurry to get to next classes.

It's 07:55 AM, so there is a lot of students at the University. Everyone rushes to their classrooms. Me, too. In a moment, the classes start. I bypass the coatroom cause I don't want to stand in a long queue to leave my coat. It's a waste of time. [A.Ś.]

Taking a seat in the classroom is also time-consuming. The student would like to have a seat in the last desk. She does that on classes she is interested in, as well as those less interesting, were she struggles and waits for the class to finish. The student acknowledges that she experiences the passage of time differently, depending on whether the classes are boring, or interesting for her. The latter cause a feeling of time passing by quickly (perceived when these are over), while the non-interesting ones cause a feeling of time dragging on (see Flaherty 1987; 1991).

Class begins, not really interesting for me, therefore I already can't wait for it to finish. I'm not in a good mood since the morning. This hour and a half pass really slowly. Unlike the break which is not long enough to do anything at all... Even though I don't have a lot of classes, I feel tired and bored. During the break, I was able to get to a different classroom, to D building. I've quickly entered the room and, again, took a place in the last desk with my mates. This class went much quicker, and in a more entertaining way, than the previous one. Actually, I didn't even notice when this hour and a half passed by. I felt better immediately. While I was still in the classroom, I have quickly put on my coat and left. [A.Ś.]

After having inquired the student what she felt while leaving the building, she said that she felt relieved that this day has finished. However, she was not entirely pleased about her activities beyond the University (work):

After my classes finished, when I was heading to the bus stop, I felt some kind of relief that this day at the University passed rather quickly and I didn't have any problems during the classes. On the one hand, I was happy, since I had no more classes that day. But, on the other hand, I was a little bit upset cause after my classes I wasn't going straight home, but I had to go to work. [D.R.]

The student was in a constant hurry to get to work on time. Haste, as a way of managing the time passing by, alongside one's impression that it passes by slowly seem to be a cluster of two units of relevant meaning (time pressure and a conscious experiencing of passing time), which reflects how the student experiences the organization. Time (rush here) is her main experience while being at the University; it is the horizon which sets her perception of events at the University. Therefore, infrastructural issues (causing delays) were mentioned here. However, her experience is unique among the elicited utterances.

Organization Participants' Routine Activities

Experiencing the organization as a mechanism related to routine activities of its participants might indicate referring to the organizational culture on a basic-level assumptions, since experiences other than those related to daily repetitive acting, which is not subjected to reflection, appear rarely. Probably, the question from the instruction revealed this routine of activities within the organizational lifeworld, which we define here referring to the concept of organizational culture. Apart from anxiety, only routine exists for the below-quoted student:

Generally speaking, this place builds me up with positive emotions. However, sometimes I feel stress caused by the fact that my future depends on this place. I think this is because I might not meet the expectations of me, and while entering the University, I have this feeling of anxiety from failure and not graduating because of some reason. Apart from that, I feel nothing else cause attending the University became a daily routine for me. The feelings mentioned above manifest rarely, since I don't really think often about how I feel while being at the University cause I've got used to this place. I just simply go there to learn and to pass further stages of my education, as graduating is my main goal. [A.P.]

Thus, impressions different from the routine emerge seldom, which was highlighted by the student. It is an important indicator that routine is one of the fundamental theme of meaning organizing this student's life as to experiencing the University organization.

In this case, we can notice that physical structure of the organization, as well as its automatic and routine functioning within the system constitute an important experience of the University organization. Physical artifacts, like a spatial maze of the University, are experienced mainly at the very beginning, right after entering the organization. And sometimes routine actions and a system of reciprocally related elements are experienced:

Afterwards, this observation comes to my mind, that when entering there, everyone changes to a person who knows what to do, and at the same time, to a person who acts like others, but doesn't consider that as something weird. I have this very feeling after entering the University that I am one of many elements of the University structure, and I attend it cause I have a goal. I experience also some kind of dependence, as without the students, including me, the University wouldn't have anyone to operate for. [A.P.]

Another student feels only "dailiness" when entering the University. It appears that these are routine activities for her, although, within this context, she expresses a positive assessment of the Faculty atmosphere:

I feel nothing special when entering the University. It became dailiness to me. I feel nothing exceptional, it is nothing joyful nor depressing, but a noncompulsory everyday reality. I evaluate the University atmosphere as pleasant and knowledge and skills absorption exhorting. [W.M.]

These experiences, as well as the evaluation which follows are concluded with a positive assessment of the lecturers. The latter pins together the utterance at hand, which begins with experiencing routine and lack of emotions after entering the University, passing to the positive evaluation of the lecturers.

[After inquiring the student whether her positive evaluation was not due to the research context and lecturer-student relation, it turned out that, according to the student, her assessment was neither related to the fact that the research at hand was conducted as part of her classes, nor to the formal context of lecturer-student relation.]

One student's account is interesting here, as alongside the routine he mentions a feeling of mystical energy and hope. Apparently, such feelings also can arise within the organizational lifeworld, even if juxtaposed with routine. The student experiences **routine** after entering the University:

I enter the Faculty and what do I feel? Usually, I act routinely, schematically—I feel nothing; practically, no reflection. You act like a machine. I enter the Faculty (usually through E building)—alternatively, the coatroom—I head towards the classroom. [P.P.]

However, sometimes the student reflects upon studying. Furthermore, sometimes, as he points out, he feels mystical energy (unique unit of meaning, which occurs once only), which is hard for him to describe; still, it is provided by the locale at hand.

When entering the Faculty, I SOMETIMES [the purpose of at times writing a word in capital letters is to emphasize the frequency of this experience ¹] feel mystical energy, which is hard for me to describe; I experience that neither at work, nor in places I attend for amusement. I know that the University provides such moments full of magical "grace," and not always appraises its students fairly. [A.R.]

Thus, the meanings related to energy (the moments of magical grace) appear alongside references to evaluating the students unfairly by the University. Therefore, some meanings, which the student does not separate but juxtapose, appear oftentimes, outlining a paradox of studying: mystical energy *versus* unfair (implicitly bureaucratic) student appraisal.

Another such denoting bridge is exemplified by collating the energy at hand with a hope that with some help from the lecturers the student will be able to discover and unblock the abilities to be used later in life:

With every successive term/class, I hope that it won't be an anguish and a torture, but a chance to learn "something" in an easy/pleasant way, which I will be able to use in future life. That it will be some kind of inspiration, that it will be conducted by someone who will expose oneself to our hopes and expectations, or will guide us towards such—someone from whom you can [learn] something—someone who won't be afraid of telling, explaining, teaching us, students, useful, important things. This energy consists of such hope, a precious opportunity to increase/unblock the potential of one's skills, talents, to be used in future life, with the lecturers or other students help. [A.R.]

¹ Answer to the question, second comment: "Words that begin with capital letters were written so to highlight/stress certain word. E.g., that 'sometimes' I feel something different when entering the Faculty. Not on daily basis, or every other day, but from time to time. Sometimes it just happens" (A.R.).

What is striking in the structure of this utterance is the very juxtaposition of routine and mystical energy at the same time. These two themes do not seem to be contradictory in the student's statement; they just emerge at different points in time, that is, the routine usually appears while entering the University, and mystical energy being present only *seldom*. All of these is interspersed with hope for effective education in the future (e.g., during the following term), but also refer to hope for making use of the knowledge acquired at the University in future professional life.²

Social Relations at the University

For some students, social relations are of crucial importance. 3 out of 13 students mention the issue at hand explicitly.

For one student, the importance of relations with others translates into her relation with one person, that is, her female friend. She cooperates with this friend very well—the student is pleased when she associates with such person, they understand each other wordlessly. In further statements (second interview), she mentions 3 other female friends with whom she likes to gossip, talk about the classes, and discuss required readings. When leaving the Faculty, she gets help from her friend to get to work; of special interest is here the word *survive*:

After surviving the day at the University, I definitely have too little time to get to work, therefore, I usually accept my colleague's courtesy, who gives me a ride there. On the way, we talk about the past day at the University, and very frequently we exchange ideas what to do for dinner. [D.R.]

Relations with several male and female friends from the group are important for another student. Some of them are popular and some are not. Those relations are equally vital for reducing stress related to the exam. Entering the exam with her friend has a positive impact on this student. Besides feelings associated with the University, another kind of social relations is mentioned—family relations. The student recalled above is proud of her exam outcome and she shares that with her parents, she also thinks about her grandparents' satisfaction from her achievements.

Positive emotions (happiness felt), as a unit of relevant meaning, are here associated with social relations (male and female friends, family) and educational achievements. Her horizon of perceiving the organizational world is related to social relations; she experiences the world through the prism of these.

Another student feels joy when seeing her mates. Emotions noticed here are associated with social relations:

² Second explication consequent to inquiring:

Question: Isn't a hope for better and more practical future learning a critique of the current teaching condition? Why this hope emerges? What is the basis? Please provide an honest answer... It is important for me to understand this statement.

Answer: "Hope is very important. A student without faith, hope that his studies 'will be of some use' loses motivation, by extension, his efficiency and level of commitment decrease, which may eventuate in quitting studies.

Therefore, my hope is based, above all else, on a will of learning something interesting, cool, useful, as well as on curiosity of what I will be able to do, how (after graduating) I will be using acquired knowledge and experience."

When looking at a group of my mates whom I'm heading to, I feel joy. Studying here gave me the opportunity to make new acquaintances. We enter the classroom, I choose my favorite seat—in the back. The ability to watch everyone and analyze their behaviors calms me down. I like doing that. [I.O.]

What emerges from students' auto-reports is that they do not maintain informal relations with the lecturers. There are no such relations; only formal relationships exist. Therefore, on the organizational culture level, informal social relations arise only between students, however, they do not intersect the organizational structure levels (lecturer–student).

Unique Themes of Meaning Not Related to the Foregoing Ones

Several unique themes, which occur alongside other abovementioned themes of meaning, were described in previous sections of this paper.

Out of 18 themes we have 2 unique units left untold: acquiring knowledge and personality-shaping.

One of the students claims that at the University he acquires knowledge and shapes his personality. Also, he is pleased that the knowledge at hand is received from the finest sources. According to him, it is a privilege to be in touch with those who are more knowledgeable than he is. The student seems really pleased with that: “It’s a beautiful thing” (“beautiful feeling”—explicitation of the second auto-report received from this research participant). Based on the context of the whole utterance, it is apparent that the student feels pride and satisfaction due to studying at the University. It is the horizon of his statement. Still, some sentences referring to a possible improvement of the quality of studying appear. The size of the University physical area brings this student’s special attention. However, his satisfaction appears in his utterance regarding the issue at hand, as well:

Hundreds of corridors, rooms, doors. Thousands of stairs and windows. At the beginning, I felt like Harry Potter in this enormous space. However, the most important thing is that I have this feeling that this is worth doing. It is worth doing cause the University makes me a better person. Sometimes it is done inefficiently. Not all of the hours spent at [that] street are effective and there is a lot to improve; however, even if I won't find my dream job after graduating, I won't regret the decision of undertaking studies. I acquire knowledge from the finest sources. [P.P.]

It is clear that the horizon of this utterance concerns the future, as well—even if the student will not get his dream job, he will not regret his decision of undertaking studies. In a sense, his satisfaction thus embraces the future. Not entirely positive phenomena from *modo futuri exacti* (getting a job in the future) do not impact upon assessments of studying enunciated from one’s position here and now. The evaluation at hand is positive.

Discussion

The research has shown that not all of the organizational culture elements assumed by the researchers are actually experienced by those who partake in the organization. The examination of assumptions, values, and organizational norms, as well as symbols is most often pre-conceptualized by the researchers, and thus these elements are being studied, for

the most part, through the corresponding structure of research tools or methods applied (Danziger, Rachman-Moore, & Valency 2008; Schein 2010). Still, the elements which evidence of an organization countenance are precisely those that are experienced directly by the participants, for example, the University infrastructure, routine, and physical environment. Encountering these organizational elements, the participants may experience them directly while feeling certain emotions. The emotional layer of experiences appears to be an extremely important element of the organization everyday life (Fineman 2000; Chatman & O'Reilly 2016). The emphasis placed on investigating how emotions are being manipulated and dealt with in organizations (Fineman 2000: 73–74) often overlooks how these are being experienced individually and spontaneously due to partaking in organizations. Furthermore, measuring emotions is yet another factor causing its differentiation and analyzing these on varying levels (Ashkanasy 2003). Including in the research the interpretations and symbolization (Hatch 1993) also does not touch the experiencing the organization. The *a priori* models of organizational identity and its relation to the culture also does not relate to the real experiencing of the organization (see concepts of Hatch and Schultz 2002). The same relates to the quantitative research of national dimensions of culture that would supposedly influence the organizational culture (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005; Trompenaars, Turner 1993). Sometimes we see the arguments about the correlations between the dimensions that are proofs of necessity to use some dimensions and some not (Trompenaars, Turner 1997: 249–252). We do not know if the content of dimensions appeared factually in experiences of participants in the research. Statistics is distancing researcher from the individual lived experience what is difficult to accept in phenomenological approach. To see something behind “statistical curtain” we need phenomenological reduction.

Surprisingly, the same problems as in the quantitative research concern the grounded theory research of organization. There are abstract categories created basing on the different kind of data that do not relate often to the experiences of the participants (Martin & Turner 1986; Kenealy 2008; Pearse & Kanyangale 2009) and we do not see them how they are grounded in the unit of experience of participant and in the context of experiencing. Even if the paradigmatic base, researcher’s value position, and the researcher epistemological and ontological assumptions are referenced (*ibidem*) the goal of the investigators is to escape from representing the experiences of members of organization, because abstraction and distancing is the fetish for grounded theorists. The fetish is often connected with *forcing data* (sometimes descriptions of experiences) to adjust them to preconceived categories (Kelle 2005).

In our study, experiencing several elements as a whole is noticeable (e.g., infrastructure and emotions; maze-infrastructure and experiencing the value of studying, as well as having satisfaction from so doing); thus, distincting variables and categories at the beginning of the research and operating with these separately in statistical or casual relations and even in qualitative research eventuate in the loss of valuable data about organization culture as experienced by individuals. Reconstructing the themes of experiences give more reliable and direct access what is organization culture. After the analysis we could define, in our case, that it is the emotionally bounded infrastructure and administrative services of University with routine activities and social relations. This is the culture emerging from the

experiences of the territory of the University and people inhabiting it plus physical objects that are associated with it.

We tried to confront often assumed before the research a priori concept of organizational culture with experiencing the University without any concept. Student were trained to have access to their direct experience of the University and to do description of this. They were trained to bracket also their assumptions. So the knowing the concept by them did not affect the collected data. There were no abstract terms in describing of the University. They described their experiences of being in the space of the University, their feelings, thoughts that come to their mind, emotions and rarely the body sensations. It was illuminating for the students when they have seen finally the difference between the formal and a priori definition of organizational culture and their themes that appeared on the base of the descriptions of the experiences.

What was striking here was a lack of explicit references to the body whatsoever. The body, as it were, underpinned one's self, guided the individual through the University maze, facilitated perceiving here and now, relocating and perceiving all over again, seeing the color of the walls, experiencing emotions. However, in itself, it was not the subject of one's perception. Perhaps we are dealing here with the absent body phenomenon (Leder, 1990: 1). Therefore, we are facing a paradox here: the body is absent in one's being here and now, even though it is essential to this very being.³

Summarizing the conclusions we could reflect that benefits of the research are following:

- University authorities can see the system of relevancies of the students in their experiences. They could see that the infrastructure, social relations are of the most important feature of these experiences and moreover the factual organizational culture is connected with the arranging the space of the organization, infrastructure and services. The values and norms, symbols, ideologies or missions of the institution are rather not perceived or experienced but emotions and routines becomes significant part of experiencing the organization. More visible and perceived are mundane features of organization and authorities should give more attention to these traits of organizational culture if they want to mold it.
- Students could see how the description of experiencing of organization could reveal the features of the organizational culture that could not be predicted from theoretical analysis and abstract elaboration of institutional reality. The qualitative research and explicitation of the data are close to the real and factual experiencing of the organization than it could be achieved in quantitative research or deductive approach. They could feel the factuality of experience since the beginning of the research till the end of explicitation. The students' knowledge about organization becomes embodied. The perception is a part of the whole situation where they are immersed (Merleau-Ponty 2005: 4).

³ "When I gaze at a landscape I dwell most fully in my eyes. Yet this is only possible because... my neck muscles adjust my head into the proper position for viewing. My feet, my legs, my arms, all lend their support. My other perceptual senses flesh out the scene I witness with sound and warmth, even if my attention is centered on visual characteristics. My whole body provides the background that supports and enables the point of corporeal focus" (Leder 1990: 24).

Concerning the academic discourse we put some more arguments for research of organization without preconceptualization using the methods that try to avoid a priori concepts. The methodology of grounded theory also tries to avoid the *a priori* concepts. However it creates concepts that evolve far from the real experiences of the organizational reality by participants. Even, if we use the sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1969), they are far from content of experiences because they are used in the causal schemes of thinking and explanation. The concepts are tools for explaining and/or understanding the organization in grounded theory (Martin & Turner 1986; Kenealy 2008), not themes that are the effects of descriptions of direct experiencing of institutional life.

We could see that even in the case of having such concepts (as in our case was organizational culture) we could use some phenomenological methods (epoche) to neutralize them in the description of the phenomena and in the explicitation of them. So we have tried to develop further the phenomenological style of research in organizational studies and to give the rationale for such research.

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