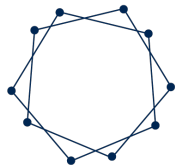


# Overview of the Professorship

## Jaan Valsiner

The making of an international centre of cultural psychology



NIELS BOHR  
PROFESSORSHIP CENTRE FOR  
**CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

# INTRODUCTION:

## **WHY AM I HERE? (as a Niels Bohr Professor)?**

Simple answer: out of curiosity of HOW DANISH INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO MY FIELD (cultural psychology) can be of such high quality (as I saw in editing *Culture & Psychology* since 1995), and with the personal goal of creating an international synthesis of ideas of natural and human sciences in the field of cultural psychology

**AND**

## **WHAT AM I DOING HERE?**

Simple answer: creating a research centre in the intellectual traditions of Niels Bohr quality (international connectedness, creative solving of key problems of science) in a new field that links psychology with other fields dealing with culture, widely conceived (communication, anthropology, education, cultural studies). The substantive goals in this field are built on the notion of unity of the

natural and human sciences that is well established in Denmark since the work of Hans Christian Ørsted and Harald Høffding

**This is leading to the STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE PROFESSORSHIP CENTRE as it was set up in 2013 and has developed since then. BUT FIRST- WHAT IS CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY?**

**CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY** is a new interdisciplinary branch growing rapidly (since 1990s) in psychology with the central axiom

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF EACH AND EVERY PERSON ARE ORGANIZED THROUGH TYPICALLY HUMAN INVENTIONS– TOOLS AND SIGNS – THAT ALLOW US TO REFLECT UPON OUR WORLD (AND PURPOSEFULLY TRANSFORM IT)**

**CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY** is a part of the **SCIENCE OF GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY**

It is NOT a practice of comparison of societies (“cultures”) as **CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY** does

It is closest to cognitive science, cultural anthropology, semiotics, and (theoretically) to contemporary epigenetics

## **FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROFESSORSHIP CENTRE:**

**-- built in 2013 bringing together the already established intellectual strengths at AAU in psychology (qualitative methodology, creativity research, communication, memory research) with the international new strength in cultural psychology**

**-- with the general goal of INTERNATIONALIZING THE DANISH RESEARCH at university level**

**-- the STRUCTURE was set to include 4 “cores”: EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY, CREATIVITY, GLOBALIZATION AND INTERVENTIONS, URBAN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**The 4 “cores”:**

**EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY**

**CREATIVITY**

**GLOBALIZATION AND INTERVENTIONS**

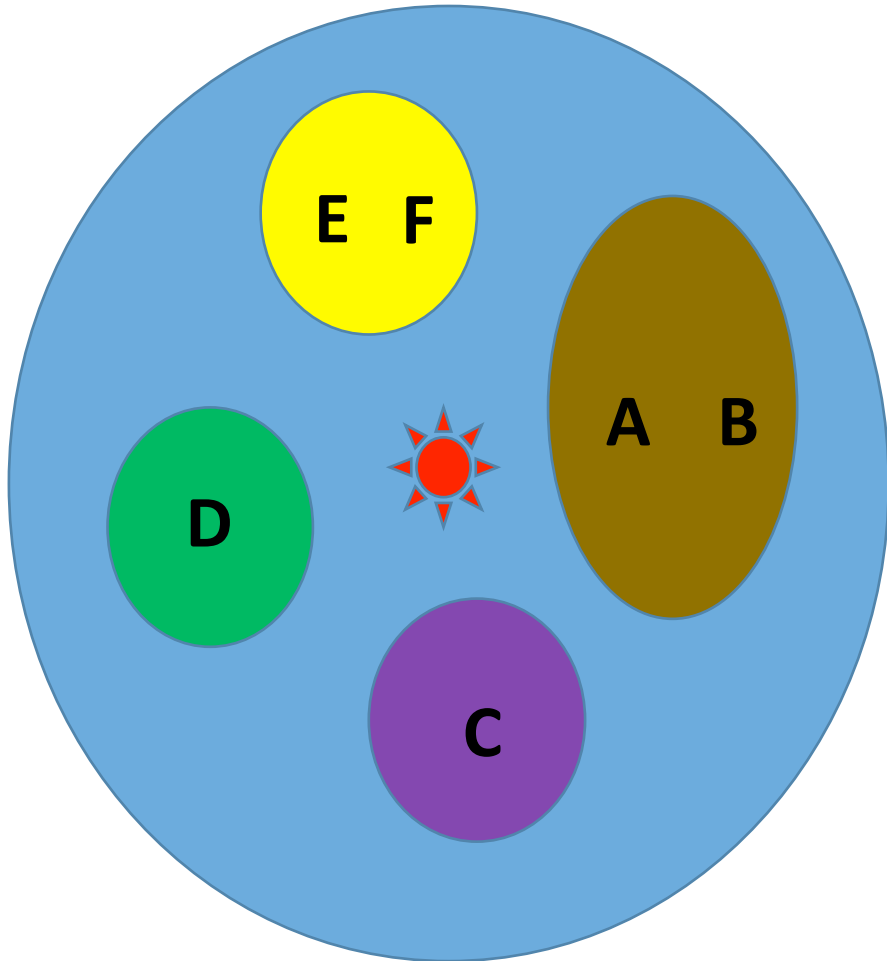
**URBAN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**What is a “core”?**

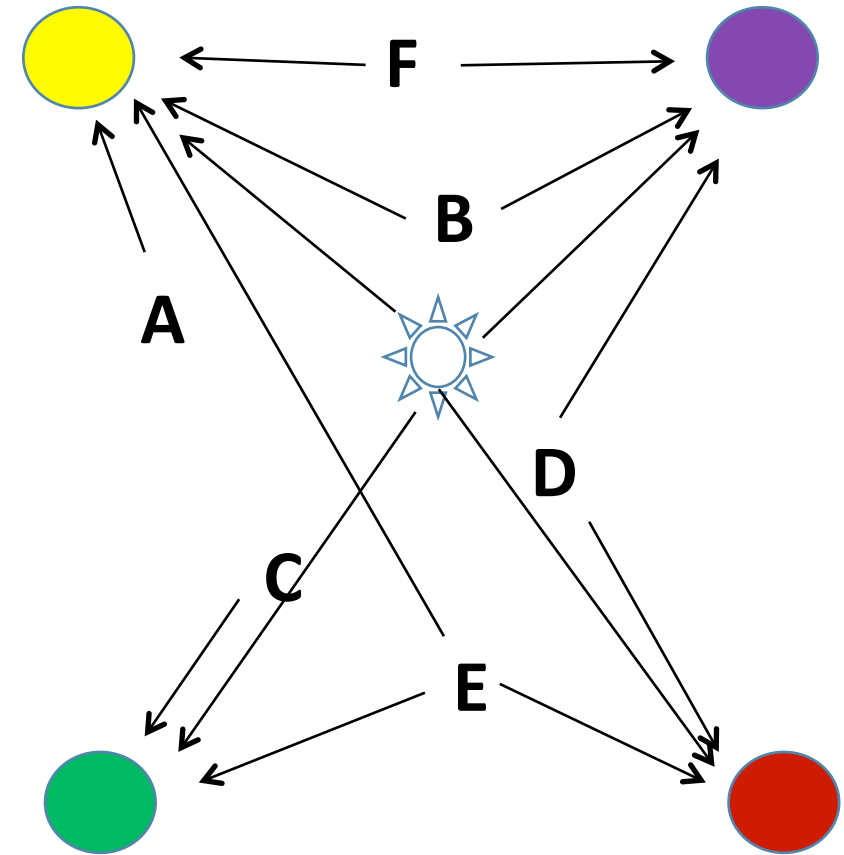
**Not a sub-group of people, but a set of central topics to which all individual researchers contribute, reach from their own vantage**

**point** (principle taken from the practices of Center for Developmental Science at University of North Carolina where I was a founding member of the Center)

**SO:** NOT THIS (A...F confined to groups):



**BUT THAT** (A..F contribute to “cores”):



**IF the Niels Bohr Professorship grants in general deal with INTERNATIONALIZATION OF DANISH ACADEMIA, then in the case of psychology as a discipline we have a secondary parallel task–**

## **INTERNATIONALIZATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE.**

Psychology has been (since 1950s) been a discipline of LIMITED INTERNATIONALIZATION (and of limited interdisciplinarity). What SEEMS to be “international psychology” is practically psychology made in the USA and IN ACCORDANCE WITH NORTH-AMERICAN CULTURAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS which do not easily transfer to other societies (**Dolby, 1977- comparison of import of psychology and physical chemistry to USA in 1870s**)

SO– creating an international “hub” for one (new) area of psychology in Denmark involves the insertion of Danish intellectual productivity into the international domain, while bringing international know-how from MANY COUNTRIES AND SOCIETIES to further internationalize THE IDEAS with which the Danish academics work

We work on **DOUBLE INTERNATIONALIZATION** <sup>7</sup>

This **DOUBLE INTERNATIONALIZATION**

**involves a truly World-wide focus**

(we work with: **Japan, China, India, Russia, Serbia**, Poland, Estonia, Sweden, **Norway, Germany, France, Italy**, Cyprus, Spain, Belgium, UK, Israel, **Austria, Switzerland, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Argentina**, USA, Canada) **GREEN= joint concrete projects ongoing**

**of collaborations at all levels**

(basic research, higher education, professional practices, policy making expertise)

**AND IN MUTUALLY SHARED WAYS**

(workshops and summer/winter schools, in Denmark and in other countries; joint conference presentations; collaborative research applications; students– al levels– mutual research stays)



## HOW WE ACCOMPLISH THAT (double internationalization):

1. Danish students and faculty **travel to collaborating institutions for research and teaching** (the obvious, but in our case links teaching and research goals– internships of Danish masters students all over the World).
2. Weekly (hmmm... excluding holidays) international videoconferencing discussions of **RESEARCH PROJECTS IN PROGRESS** (so-called “**K-seminars**” or “kitchen seminars”– a framework I had introduced at Clark University in 1997 and brought to Aalborg in 2013). The K-Seminars framework unites around 250 scholars all over the World who can participate in the discussions in Aalborg and who receive discussion materials every week.
3. (linked with 2)- a **very large number of international visitors now visits Aalborg** for discussing their ongoing research plans and to collaborate with Danish colleagues. Internship placements for Danish masters students often result from such visits.

## **WHAT WE HAVE (structurally) DONE:**

- established (in 2013) the Masters Program (KANDIDAT) in Psychology with a special focus on Cultural Psychology (Cultural Psychology and Social Practice). First graduates in Spring 2015. Increased interest among psychology students (2015 Fall start with 22 students). About half of the students interested in international exposure.**
- finally established (our delay was as a part of a faculty re-structuring of doctoral programs) our promised Doctoral Program in Cultural Psychology.**
- all planned transitions of Centre's post-docs to regular faculty positions have either successfully concluded (2) or are in progress (1)**

## SUPPORT CONDITIONS:

1. The **DG NBP CONTRACT**– very appropriately formulated and very skillfully (and flexibly) operating in our regular work in AAU context.
2. **EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION inside our own Department** (which, after all, is about **COMMUNICATION AND PSYCHOLOGY**), the Humanities Faculty, and University leadership
3. **OBEL FOUNDATION**– granting (through University) a 5-year visiting professorship place for Robert Innis, one of the World’s leading semioticians and philosophers of aesthetics (U-Mass in Lowell, USA) for monthly stay in AAU and collaboration with the Centre.

## **OUR OBSTACLES** (we are working at overcoming them, but this is still “work in progress”):

- 1. Rigidity of the organization** of PSYCHOLOGY TEACHING in Danish universities— prohibits us from making our Masters Program (Cultural Psychology and Social Practice) fully international (now--teaching staff is very international, but students are all Danish— no internationalization here)
- 2. Existing psychology curriculum— needs internationalization** from the very beginning (turning some courses fully taught in English, to allow for European student mobility to Denmark). Here the situation is currently improving with new Study Board looking at it (Thomas Szulevicz, Mogens Jensen, Luca Tateo)
- 3. Under-utilization in AAU of the Erasmus exchange mechanisms.**
- 4. Over-bureaucratization of European (Horizon 2020) projects** (very slow start of the mega-project we participate in— ReCriRe on European Local Democracies).
- 5. Funding for international Ph.D. aspirants** who want to come to Denmark for study (only their own national funds support available, economic conditions different)

To summarize:

IN THE FIRST 2.5 YEARS WE HAVE CREATED A **BASIS FOR LONGER-TERM SUCCESS IN THE OBJECTIVES** OF THE PROFESSORSHIP

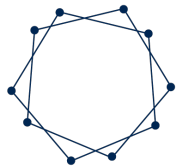
**INTERNATIONALIZATION IS ACHIEVED** IN MAKING AALBORG THE CENTRAL INTERNATIONAL PLACE FOR THE NEW FIELD OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY. But **it is still limited in the teaching** side of psychology.

YET THERE ARE OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME (and we work on these)

AND **MANY NEW PATHWAYS** FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT (sustainability!).  
These need to be discussed

- And—

now on to the research synopsis!



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