

# **Revealing Cultures and Sub-Cultures During the Implementation of Lean Construction**

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# Background

- Momentum for *process-orientated* initiatives, e.g. LC, requiring closer and less rigid working relationships.
- An approach radically different from institutionalised fragmentation and task-orientated practice.
- Bad match with construction culture and sub-cultures of individual trades and professions.
- Despite support and good intentions this challenges successful implementation.

# Social Systems and Culture

- Social system:
  - “A group of people systematically sharing control of a common process” (Tavistock 1966)
- (Organisational) Culture:
  - “The shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organisation and the means whereby they are expressed” (Geertz 1973)
- Culture exists *between* persons!
  - Culture cannot be studied in its pure form independent from the context in which it is manifested.
  - Culture and its display often marked by ambiguity.

# A Particular Construction Culture(?)

- Construction in comparison to other industries:
  - A culture of conflict
  - A culture of fragmentation
  - A culture of labour mobility
  - A culture of subcontracting
  - A culture of crisis management

(Hancock 2000)

- Control and coordination executed outside formal systems.
- Strong socialisation on all organisational levels.
- Disparate subcultures between designers and builders hamper cooperation throughout the SC.

# A Case Study

- Large office project:
  - Denmark 2002
  - Design-build
  - Approximately 30 subcontractors
  - Lean construction
    - Last Planner System, process facilitation etc.

# Concluding comments

- Basis for cultural interpretation in construction circles:
  - Action, personal qualities and power
- Cultural interpretation an impediment to implementation
  - LC and process-orientated cooperation not perceived as intended
- Process facilitation not utilised as intended
  - New roles intangible in the informal systems of soc. relations
- Need for more research in existing construction paradigms in terms of:
  - Process understanding
  - Identities, roles and de facto functions