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**Author(s):** Taipale, Sakari

**Title:** Mobility of cultures and knowledge management in contemporary Europe

**Year:** 2012

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

    Taipale, S. (2012). Mobility of cultures and knowledge management in contemporary Europe. *European review*, 20(2), 173-181.  
    <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798711000445>

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# Mobility of Cultures and Knowledge Management in Contemporary Europe

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SAKARI TAIPALE

Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, PO Box 35,  
40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Email [sakari.taipale@jyu.fi](mailto:sakari.taipale@jyu.fi)

In the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the European Union (EU) has included more and more new member states from Central and Eastern parts of the European continent. This enlargement process has increased the cultural diversity of the European community as new languages and minority groups have been subsumed into the EU. It is the purpose of this article to discuss the challenges that result from the EU's enlargement, together with the added intra-European mobility of cultures, that affect the national knowledge infrastructures. Based on recent social scientific scholarship on mobility and cultures, this article proposes that knowledge management in contemporary Europe is not only a technological or organisational issue but also a cultural question. Since people are free to move within the EU, it becomes of greater importance not only to increase our understanding of other cultures but also to ensure that member states can provide public services for EU citizens arriving from other cultural regimes. The paper shows that, because of the increased mobility of cultures, national knowledge infrastructures have to be opened and remodelled. New forms of collaboration between national knowledge systems are needed to guarantee the equal treatment of people representing different cultures in contemporary Europe.

## Introduction

Over the past 15 years, the European Union (EU) has grown strongly to include new member states. The next steps of enlargement to the East are already on the horizon, while membership negotiations with Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia are in progress. Above all, the enlargement process has ended up increasing the cultural diversity of the European community because new languages and ethnic minority groups have been subsumed into the EU. When Finland and Sweden joined the EU together with Austria in 1995, they incorporated a variety of cultural values of the Nordic welfare state into the community. Although the population structures of the Nordic countries are relatively homogeneous, they brought along such values as strong gender equality in the home and labour market, universal social rights and free education, which diverged remarkably from the institutionalised values of Western European member states and those of Mediterranean countries. In 2004, the cultural structures of the EU changed perhaps even

more substantially when 10 new member states were included in the union at the same time. Together with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the two Mediterranean islands states of Malta and Cyprus also became member states. The second wave of enlargement to the East took place in 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania were accepted. Many political decisions and practical measures, such as the open method of coordination in social security and inclusion and the Bologna process in the educational sector, have already harmonised the national systems within the EU, but the described tendency is setting pressures for more initiatives and calling for more critical discussion. It is the purpose of this article to discuss the challenges that result from the EU's enlargement, together with the added intra-European mobility of cultures, that affect the national knowledge infrastructures.

My hypothesis is that an increasing number of challenges regarding knowledge management in contemporary Europe can be understood through the mobility of cultures. In this context, knowledge management should not be considered primarily an issue of using technological solutions to manage knowledge. Neither should the concept be understood as it is applied in organisational studies with the purpose of rationalising internal and/or external communications in corporations. Rather, knowledge management refers here to administering the necessary knowledge when people from different cultural backgrounds cross national and cultural boundaries. Similarly, the term 'knowledge infrastructure' does not refer to established technological structures, but rather to the institutionalised systems of organising, storing and disseminating information in and between societies.

It is against this backdrop that this article builds on recent social scientific scholarship on the mobility of cultures. Such scholars as Ulrich Beck<sup>1</sup> and John Urry<sup>2,3</sup> have recently rejected 'methodological nationalism' in social sciences. The mobility of cultures, along with many other forms of mobility such as the movement of information, images, sounds and capital, undermines the role of national borders as naturally given entities. From the perspective of mobility studies, the EU is an interesting case because one of its basic principles is to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. At the same time, EU member states have had an opportunity to maintain their nationally designed knowledge infrastructures, which are often very tightly coupled, for example, with local language systems and religions. Because of the increased (intra-European) mobility of people, national knowledge infrastructures should now also be ready to serve other EU citizens regardless of their prior understanding of national knowledge systems or differences between national systems. This article will show that a new kind of knowledge is required to deal with the challenges emerging from the mobility of cultures.

The article begins by presenting the general drift of mobility studies and how this paradigmatic change in social sciences is connected to the intra-European movement of people and cultural groups. After that, the concepts of established and new knowledge are discussed. The article will argue that the increased mobility of people and cultures within the EU adds to the need for new knowledge. In contrast to established knowledge, new knowledge is less associated with national infrastructures and it is characterised by internationality and multiculturalism. Finally, the article will analyse the implications for new forms of knowledge that stem from the boundary-crossing mobility of cultures and for knowledge management and existing knowledge infrastructures in Europe.

## **Mobility of Cultures**

The mobility of cultures is considered as part of the paradigmatic change in sociological thinking. Urry introduced a new mobility paradigm to argue that sociologists have neglected the role of mobility while focusing on societies and nation states as bordered and sovereign units.<sup>2,3</sup> Society has been the most pervasive concept applied in social sciences. However, when taking into account that many of today's social problems (e.g. rights of migrants to work, prostitution, nomadic forms of beggary) are common to the majority of nation states, do not obey national boundaries (e.g. migration, smuggling, natural hazards) and have forced different types of supranational entities (e.g. EU, UN, IMF) to be set up to deal with such problems, it would make sense to study the 'social' as mobilities to indicate the weakening connection between the 'social' and the society. Urry's post-societal sociology that is organised around networks and mobilities offers a viable conceptual framework to study such horizontal fluidities as cultural mobility in Europe.

The literature about the mobilities paradigm is concerned with many levels of movement, or if we use the term cultivated by Urry, various types of travelling.<sup>2-4</sup> In addition to the corporeal movement of people and objects, mobility takes place at the imagination, communication and virtuality levels. New media and computer-mediated communication transmit cultural material to a great extent over national borders. The amount of physical travel from country to country is comparatively small compared with the amount of electronic cross-border traffic, although both have been increasing rapidly over recent decades. Compared with corporeal mobility, the possibilities to affect non-corporeal forms of cultural mobility by political or administrative means are very limited. Thus, this article pays the most attention to the knowledge management challenges that are related to the corporeal forms of mobility within the EU.

Just as the term 'mobility' refers to movement from place to place,<sup>3,5</sup> the mobility of cultures includes the idea of a 'minority' culture that comes from outside a host culture.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the EU, it is people's freedom to move within the union and other countries of the Schengen area that engenders new cultural minorities in various 'host cultures'. What is most important is that these minorities often lack the recognition of the established minorities of each member state, and might thereby risk being excluded from society and its knowledge infrastructures. National knowledge infrastructures are not prepared, for instance, to provide education for new immigrant groups as they provide it for their own citizens and for those minority groups whose societal status is more established due to a longer stay in region. The question is not so much about putting people and cultures in a certain priority order, but about the national education models, which have only recently started to recognise challenges originating from the mobility of peoples. Many countries have come to recognise the lack of teachers that can teach local languages as a second language for immigrants or arrange religious education other than the dominant religion of the country. To remodel national knowledge infrastructures to fill this gap is a slow structural adjustment process. Another example relates to traditional cultural institutions, such as museums and galleries, which often ignore the products of cultural and ethnic minorities as well as the products of cultural mixing.<sup>6</sup> To ensure popularity and economic profit, many galleries and museums would rather have exhibitions of major national artists or successful international displays. In a broader sense, this is a question of

recognising cultural rights in Europe, just as economic and social rights were recognised with the industrialisation and development of labour markets.<sup>7</sup>

Seeing the European community as a space of mobility requires the abandonment of methodological nationalism, which prevents us from seeing a zigzag-type of movement of people and cultures in contemporary Europe. Furthermore, Beck and Grande aptly stated that methodological nationalism can only recognise the mobility of people and groups within societies, whereas we should also be able to see the mobility of entire countries and cultures.<sup>8</sup> The mobility of countries actually characterises the current integration policy of the EU, which has taken place through the policy of enlargement. The Central and Eastern enlargement of the EU has meant moving countries and cultures from outside the EU into it with the purpose of increasing European coherence and stability. Such integration-through-enlargement policies are likely to create more and more challenges for the reconciliation of national knowledge infrastructures.

The mobilities paradigm lets us identify such challenges in knowledge management that stem from nationally created knowledge infrastructures that do not adequately respond to the growing need for international knowledge generated by the cross-border mobility of cultures. The next section will examine the ways the mobility of cultures within the EU questions the sufficiency of established forms of knowledge and calls for the new knowledge that is more and more disconnected from the national systems of knowledge production.

### **Management of Cultural Knowledge in Europe**

To understand sufficiently the challenges of knowledge management evolving from people's weaving across cultural and national boundaries in Europe, we will pay attention to the concept of knowledge. On the one hand, we can ask what characterises the established knowledge upon which everyday interpretations of strangers and other cultures are based. On the other hand, we will elaborate what kind of new knowledge is needed to recognise cultural differences and the growing plurality of cultures within the EU. New knowledge could be, for instance, something that is required to understand and respect cultural differences in a world of inequality.<sup>9</sup>

The next two sections concern the relationship between the terms 'established' and 'new knowledge'. On the one hand, these sections point out that the domination of established knowledge and national knowledge infrastructures can sustain nationalistic outlooks of cultures and cultural difference. On the other hand, demand for such new knowledge that is disconnected from the structures of nation states and that combines knowledge provided by knowledge systems of different countries and cultural regimes is growing in the age of multiple mobilities. Nevertheless, the sections also recognise that new forms of knowledge, which are alternatively called hybrid knowledge, have disadvantages.

#### *Established Knowledge*

It is not only the new mobilities paradigm but also an extensive body of literature about knowledge and education that provides the justification for defining established knowledge as national knowledge. For example, Delanty reported that a historical contract between the state and knowledge had already been formed in the late seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> However, he

made clear that this contract is now coming to an end. Even if the nation states are still major financiers of knowledge production, knowledge is increasingly produced by private universities and other private institutions. For example, many private educational institutions provide distance learning courses to students residing abroad and universities have also started to provide joint degree programmes with their foreign partner universities. This means that the language of instruction in these courses and programmes is typically other than students' mother tongue. Dismantling this historical link between the state and knowledge is one indication of the insufficiency of nationalistic approaches to knowledge management.

Other transformations also indicate the changing role of established knowledge. It can be argued that the difference between lay knowledge (or common sense), professional knowledge (competence of some specially educated professionals) and scientific knowledge (that is based on logical and abstract reasoning) is blurring. As a result of mass education, the development of information and communication technology as well as social activism knowledge spreads around efficiently and reaches all social layers of industrialised societies.<sup>10</sup> In other words, knowledge is no longer a property of the elite and academics but it is available to the majority.<sup>11</sup>

National knowledge infrastructures (e.g. libraries, museums, public archives, public data registers) have been typical systems for organising, storing and disseminating data for the special information needs of one particular state and its citizens. When thinking about the knowledge needs of the European community, which integrates through enlargement, it is apparent that the knowledge infrastructures of its member states, or at least many of them, have been developed to serve culturally more uniform populations than would be of interest today to the EU as whole. With the increased mobility of people and cultures within the union, pressure to modify the national knowledge systems to respond to the more diversified needs of knowledge has grown. It must be remembered that as far as knowledge infrastructures are developed to meet only national needs, the risk of not recognising cultural differences increases.

### *New Knowledge*

In contrast to established knowledge produced within and for nation states, new knowledge is something that evolves from the interaction of cultures, typically, between societies. The interaction of various cultures and people serves as a breeding ground for new knowledge. Thus, new knowledge is characterised by internationality. Another difference between the two forms of knowledge is that established knowledge is premised to the collective history and identity of national populations, whereas new knowledge lacks these features. New knowledge is rather a combination of various understandings originating from different cultural territories and mediated by a variety of mobilities.

New knowledge emerging from the interaction of cultures and the international mobility of people is sometimes called hybrid knowledge. In some scholarly works, the novelty of knowledge is associated with the amalgamation of lay, professional and academic knowledge,<sup>12</sup> or it is said to spring up when 'Western' academic knowledge and local, community-rooted and 'indigenous' knowledge are mixed.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the latter reveals the need to reconceptualise knowledge in the age of cultural mobility. It suggests that new forms of knowledge are generated from the dialogue between minority

and host cultures. In addition, studies of hybrid knowledge have shown the limitations of national knowledge infrastructures in providing the knowledge needed to understand the roles of minority and nomadic cultures in the globalised world.

Since the cross-boundary movement of cultures also takes place in computer-mediated communication (in the forms of imaginary, communicative and virtual mobility), it is worth noting that the interaction of people from different cultures is likely to generate new knowledge and the need for knowledge about cultural differences in particular.<sup>14</sup> In a computer-based networked environment, it is relatively easy to combine various pieces of established knowledge (lay, professional and academic) and make deductions about other cultures and people. However, distinguishing between information and disinformation becomes more and more difficult in the context of the internet because there are no clear criteria for what is reliable and what is not. As Wallenstein stated, when legitimate sources of knowledge such as the scientific community begin to lose their appreciation, there is an increasing number of uncertainties regarding the reliability of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

As foreshadowed above, new forms of knowledge have two main disadvantages. First, they are more liable to be misinterpreted or misrecognised than the established forms.<sup>14,15</sup> When the mobility of cultures contributes to the rise of new knowledge, established knowledge from different origins is metamorphosed and merged into new knowledge. To comprehend hybrid forms of knowledge, people should be aware of all those cultures from which hybrid knowledge originates. For example, nationally organised knowledge infrastructures are typically not capable of operating with several languages or understanding different cultural values and codings.

Second, new, hybrid forms of knowledge contribute to the ignorance of cultural memory. The term 'cultural memory' refers to memorial forms and mediums to recall things lived through in everyday life. This concern emerges from a way of thinking that every group of people, every family or individual, has a unique and non-transferable store of memories, and that cultural interaction would create a risk of losing these unique repertoires of memories. But if we try to understand the concept of cultural memory as a continuous and dynamic process, as Rigney does in her analysis of the concept of cultural memory,<sup>16</sup> this concern is unnecessary. If we admit that cultural memory is not a static concept, but changes and is defined in relation to other cultures, we can see that interaction with other cultures actually creates their uniqueness and highlights the role of cultural memory in knowledge management.

To sum up, new knowledge emerges from the boundary-crossing mobility of cultures both at the corporeal and non-corporeal levels. This section pointed out that besides the growing need for new knowledge that stems from the mobility of people and cultural groups, the interweaving of various cultures calls for the need to increase people's understanding of other cultures. The next section will take a closer look at the challenges of knowledge management in the level of the EU knowledge infrastructure.

### **Implications for Knowledge Management and Infrastructures**

What are the implications for new forms of knowledge that stem from the boundary-crossing mobility of cultures and for knowledge management and existing knowledge

infrastructures in Europe? First, this article suggests that knowledge infrastructures should be developed so that they work as mediators between European cultures and nomadic groups of people. This is a key factor to making Europe a genuine cosmopolitan territory as described by Beck.<sup>1</sup> Until now, the EU has sustained a multilayer structure of European languages and cultural, ethnic and minorities groups, even though it has pursued policies to harmonise and coordinate, for example, Europe's economic area and its educational and social security systems. Based on these experiences, there are reasons to believe that the more extensive coordination and harmonisation of national knowledge infrastructures would also be possible without creating policies of cultural fusion or dissolving cultural differences.

Second, national knowledge infrastructures of EU member states have the enormous potential to enrich one another through the new forms of intra-European and international collaboration. To concretise this argument, we can refer to two examples used earlier in the article. First, the lack of special expertise in certain school subjects for immigrants could be overcome by developing a cross-national teacher exchange program or by providing supportive online teaching materials that have been developed in other countries. Second, collaborative acts between cultural institutions, artists and their interest groups could be implemented to increase the awareness of successful cultural exhibitions displaying minority art and culture in different countries. The ultimate aim should be to gradually shift focus from the development of state-based knowledge systems towards more and more European knowledge infrastructures that evolve from the reciprocal and intense communications of national knowledge systems.

Knowledge systems such as online publications and peer-sharing and social media, which are not nationally organised, hold significant potential in this respect. Different forms of social media have proven to be an effective vehicle for disseminating knowledge about different cultures and values. Organisations representing public knowledge infrastructures, such as schools, libraries, museums and local governments, could take the initiative in association with the EU to develop more coordinated and centralised knowledge infrastructures for various public online services in Europe. As a single but important measure, this has the potential to foster the status of minority groups and improve their access to knowledge within the host culture.

A third and most fundamental challenge is to transform knowledge infrastructures so that they promote the conversion of cultural knowledge into cultural wisdom. If symbolic data and information (i.e. useful material sorted from data) represent the simplest levels of the human mind, knowledge provides us with a mental model of how to use information. But knowledge is just a precursor of wisdom. As Jozwik and Gist articulated, wisdom couples knowledge with experience and employs it in real-time.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, wisdom is a process of distinguishing between various choices (good and bad, right and wrong) when making everyday decisions. The right choices, of course, are the prerequisites of wise behaviour.

Converting knowledge into wisdom is a complicated and time-consuming process. Whereas national knowledge infrastructures can be reformed to meet the challenges of cultural mobility by timely political decisions, new forms of knowledge are much more difficult to convert into wisdom by using any political or administrative top-down mechanism. This is



because wisdom is not a property of infrastructure but is a characteristic of an individual. It depends mostly on how individuals learn to use new knowledge judiciously and take other people and cultures into account while making daily choices. Yet, it would be irresponsible to say that national knowledge infrastructures have nothing to do with wisdom in their societies. It is true, for example, that public education institutes have a task teaching citizens to make ethically right decisions. This also applies to how people choose to treat different nationalities or cultures. A concrete example from today's Europe is what kind of knowledge, established or new, is used when assessing the rights of Romanian and Bulgarian Gypsies to move to other EU countries and beg for money.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This article addressed some of the challenges of knowledge management in contemporary Europe through the concept of the mobility of cultures. It described how the enlargement of the EU and the freedom of movement within it have contributed to the mobility of cultures. With the increased mobility of people, national knowledge infrastructures have to be renewed to be more capable of dealing with the enormous diversity in European cultures. International collaboration, networking and cooperation with private and non-governmental actors are a way forward in this respect.

The article showed that the new mobility paradigm helps us pay attention to challenges in knowledge management that are boundary-breaking and difficult to catch with the concepts of classical sociology made up to study state-specific social problems. In this article, the new mobility paradigm was tackled, on the one hand, on a theoretical and conceptual level and, on the other hand, through concrete examples. However, in between there is an enormous gap that still needs to be filled. This gap lies between policymaking and planning and deals with the ways knowledge infrastructures could be transformed and the kinds of political decisions and compromises needed to harmonise and coordinate European knowledge infrastructures.

Finally, this article underlined that knowledge infrastructures have to be developed to serve a range of cultures in Europe, not to overcome cultural differences. This should remind us that effective knowledge management is not just a question of European competitiveness or economic growth, but is also a question of quality of life and equality in Europe. The adequate understanding of changing cultural and social conditions is a prerequisite for successful integration in Europe. This is important in today's EU, where a great number of cultures coexist in the same space, but will be even more important in the future when the enlargement of the EU proceeds further East.

### **Acknowledgement**

The first version of this paper was presented at COST Exploratory Workshop: Knowledge Management in Contemporary Europe, Brussels, 30 May – 1 June 2010.

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### About the Author

**Sakari Taipale** works as a Post-doctoral Researcher, funded by the Academy of Finland at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. He holds an MA (2002) and a PhD (2009) in Social and Public Policy, both earned from the University of Jyväskylä. Prior to his current position, Taipale acted as a Senior Lecturer in Social and Public Policy and as a Junior and Senior Lecturer in a multidisciplinary Master's degree programme in Development and International Cooperation and as a researcher in an EU-funded research project on quality of life. His main research interests are related to mobile communication studies, time-space relations and social relationships in the information age.