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### **Abstract**

The project of establishing a European community since World War II has been further advanced by adding - besides the four freedoms of free movement of goods, persons, services and capital - a fifth freedom – the free circulation of researchers, knowledge and technology – that intends to promote community building at the level of higher education and research and by creating of a European Research Area (ERA). Based on a study of academic careers of postdocs in Switzerland and secondary data, the paper aims to analyse the key governing principles implied in the standard of transnational academic mobility of 'human capital' as well as the experiences of individual researchers in coordinating their interests and lives in this context.

We refer to the theoretical framework of the economics of conventions and regimes of engagements by Boltanski and Thévenot. We show that the policies, values and norms of the ERA and the standard of geographic mobility are, at their core, based on four conventions – industry, market, project and fame. This arrangement forces researchers to establish themselves as academic self-entrepreneurs in the knowledge market. In consequence, the mobility requirement of the ERA governance regime makes it difficult for individuals to engage in an individual plan, in familiarity and in exploration.

### **Keywords**

Academic mobility, geographic mobility, European Research Area, economics of convention, regimes of engagements, governance

**Free movement of people and capital and the standard of transnational academic mobility:  
Principles of governance in the European Research Area (ERA)<sup>1</sup>**

*“The peoples of Europe, in creating an ever closer union among them, are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values. Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; [...] it [...] ensures free movement of persons, goods, services and capital [...].”*

*Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,  
Preamble (European Union, 2016: 393)*

## **1 Introduction**

The project of creating a European Union (EU) goes back to the World War II (European Union, 2017). At its core was promoting economic cooperation and establishing a common market. The idea underlying this endeavour was to create a web of economic ties to prevent future wars between the members of this union. Fifty years after the initial agreement on economic cooperation between the six founding countries (1958: European Economic Community), the EU member states push ahead with this goal of a united Europe by adopting various treaties and resolutions.

One of the key treaties, proclaimed in 2000, is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which entered into force with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 and is legally binding throughout the EU today (European Union, 2016). The common market (referred to today as the *single market*) between the member states is based on the *four freedoms*, which are to ensure the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital. In addition to promoting economic interrelations, the charter also

<sup>1</sup> I would like to extend many thanks to Stephan Elkins (SocioTrans – Social Science Translation & Editing) for his careful and thorough work in translating the text from German to English.

seeks to extend the sphere of shared values among EU citizens to the areas of human rights, education, health, environmental protection, and security (Fontaine, 2014). A range of articles under the six headings of “Dignity”, “Freedoms”, “Equality”, “Solidarity”, “Citizens” Rights” and “Justice” are to guarantee the respective rights, liberties and principles. The hope and expectation is that “[s]hared rights and values create a feeling of kinship between Europeans” (Fontaine, 2014: 5). To evoke such a sense of unity among the citizens of the EU member states, the responsible actors therefore expect education and culture to contribute to the emergence of a shared identity as EU citizens and an imagined community of equals (Rosenmund, 2015), in the same way that Anderson (2006) once described this process in regard to the formation of nation states.

*“A sense of belonging together and having a common destiny [...] can only arise from a shared cultural awareness, which is why Europe needs to focus not just on economics but also on education, citizenship and culture” (Fontaine, 2014: 29).*

In the field of higher education and academic training, the freedoms of free movement of persons and capital are unfolding according to a standard of transnational geographic mobility of human capital—of “cerveaux mobiles” (mobile brains), as Bruno has called it (Bruno, 2011: 74). In this vein, the reforms in the field of higher education initiated by the Bologna Declaration and the creation of a European Higher Education Area have aimed to facilitate and promote mobility among students (Powell and Finger, 2013; Powell et al., 2012). For many years, the EU has encouraged educational exchanges among students through a number of mobility programmes. In the meantime, these programmes have been bundled in the EU’s Erasmus+ programme<sup>1</sup>, which intends to enable students to attend another university, learn other languages and participate in joint activities in their host country (Fontaine, 2014: 29). Geographic mobility among doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars is a relevant dimension in the Council of Europe’s resolution to create a European Research Area (ERA). The member states are invited “to cooperate in order to identify and take action with a view to removing present obstacles to the mobility of researchers to facilitate the creation of a genuine European scientific community” (Council of the European Union, 2000: 2).

The context of this resolution was the Lisbon Treaty's goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. In 2008, the Council of the European Union recalled the resolution and reaffirmed in its vision for Europe 2020 "that the ERA [...] fully contributes to the 'knowledge triangle' of research, innovation and education" (Council of the European Union, 2008: 4). In addition, the council introduced a "fifth freedom" that should be guaranteed and promoted by the member states: "free circulation of researchers, knowledge and technology" (Council of the European Union, 2008: 6).

The integrative potential of such 'brain circulation' has been demonstrated in Germany, for instance, where the many visiting academics from all over the world launched a cumulative process of subsequent academic mobility and collaboration that contributed significantly to the reintegration of Germany into the international scientific community after the Second World War (Jöns, 2009).

Against this backdrop, the present contribution is interested in the social construction of a common European higher education and research area as a new policy space (Lawn and Grek, 2012) and asks what role the fifth freedom, of mobility of researchers and knowledge, will play in this context. Which governing principles of transnational mobility of 'human capital' underpin this policy toward creating the envisioned European scientific community? Which common values are supposed to cement this community? Where can we expect contradictions to surface? What is lost and what is sacrificed? How do the individual researchers experience this freedom? To what extent can they pursue their own interests and realise their life plans?

To answer these questions, this contribution draws on the sociology of conventions (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). The aim is to introduce a theoretical framework for the analysis of processes of (conflictual) community building and the construction of shared social spaces and identities on different levels of action (macro, meso, micro).

The sociology of conventions counts among the novel approaches in the social sciences in France and pursues the ambitious theoretical endeavour of integrating structuralist and pragmatic-ethnomethodological perspectives (Diaz-Bone 2011, 2015). The view of humanity and society underlying this approach provides connecting points to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which declares the dignity of the individual person and community building based

on shared values to be fundamental principles. The sociology of conventions is suitable for the analysis of the establishment of a common market in Europe because it shows that the principles governing the construction of an European policy space are not only based on the logics of action and orders of worth that underpin the market convention but that various other conventions of action and evaluation also are brought into play by the actors involved. The aim of this contribution is to reconstruct the key governing principles underlying the creation of a European area of higher education and research by means of promoting and demanding transnational mobility.

The concept of different regimes of engagement (Thévenot, 2014) directs attention to the individual actors and their social coordination with conditions in their environment and with their own selves. It allows one to investigate to what extent individual regimes of engagement are supported by the conventions in the European higher education and research area and to what degree certain engagements in the conduct of life are impeded.

We will address our research questions, theoretically and in exemplary analyses, on the basis of a study on academic careers of postdocs five years after completing their doctorate.<sup>2</sup>

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework. Section 3 and 4 are devoted to reconstructing the dominant governance principles in the ERA and inherent in the standard of transnational mobility. Section 5 demonstrates the barriers that these governance principles pose to the junior researchers' conduct of life. Section 6 summarises the findings.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Governing principles of transnational academic mobility—plurality of conventions**

This contribution draws on the conventions of justification, which Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thévenot and Eve Chiapello reconstructed for Western societies in their works “On Justification” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and “The New Spirit of Capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2003) on the basis of classical political philosophies, handbooks targeting enterprises and contemporary management literature.

As governing principles, these conventions guide and support decisions and evaluations in situations in which action is coordinated and justified in the public sphere. They imply a specific conception of the common good that underpins societal solidarity and the wellbeing of its members; this notion of common good is a general value and logic—a kind of social glue—that is to be established for the benefit of all and society in general.

The theoretical approach owes to a conception of humanity and society according to which people “are brought together by virtue of a fundamental equality” and a “common humanity” that provides a point of moral orientation (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999: 366). In tests of worth people, objects and actions are judged on the basis of whether they contribute to this specific common good and thus maintain moral greatness, worth or, in short, quality. The person who is “great” in terms of a convention contributes more to the common good than those who are “small” and is therefore also useful to the small ones.

Individual actors are endowed with the ability to make argumentative reference to these conventions, to justify their actions, to engage in promoting the common good, and to criticise other principles governing action. They are also capable of switching to another order of justification depending on the situation.

Boltanski, Thévenot and Chiapello have reconstructed seven conventions (civic, industrial, market, project, inspiration, domestic, fame) that underpin economic and social action. Table 1 summarises the key concepts and working hypotheses in regard to transnational mobility.

In terms of the *civic convention*, the common good in the context of a European education and research area is oriented toward the collective. Not the individual interests of junior researchers are of relevance but the solidarity and participation of all. Geographic mobility should be possible and enriching for all and have integrating and not exclusive effects.

The order of worth associated with the *industrial convention* emphasises efficient planning and the contribution of mobility to enhancing scientific expertise. The newly acquired expert skills and knowledge contribute to the common good of all. This expertise must prove itself along scientific performance indicators (e.g., number of scientific publications).

The social glue of the *market convention* is competition and purchasing and selling power in exchange processes. Geographic mobility becomes a competitive factor in that the individual accumulates transnational cultural and social capital and invests this capital profitably in his or her own career (Leemann, 2010). It is only through the logic of competition that mobility enhances the quality of science.

*Table 1: Governing principles of transnational mobility (plurality of conventions)*

<b>Conventions</b>	<b>Common good: Worth, quality of European education &amp; academic training</b>	<b>Logics of action, orders of justification</b>	<b>Test of worth (evaluation)</b>
<b>Civic convention</b>	Collectivity, solidarity, participation, inclusion	Non-discrimination, equal treatment, quota regulations	Equal opportunities, collective interest, democratic principles, equity
<b>Industrial convention</b>	Plan, expertise, efficiency, performance, long-term nature	Planning, productivity, developing research skills	Predictability, improved expertise, performance indicators
<b>Market convention</b>	Purchasing power, competitiveness, transnational capital	Exchange, competition, privatisation of knowledge	Price, applicability of knowledge, return on investment, job offers
<b>Project Convention</b>	Flexibility, autonomy, capacity for teamwork	Being mobile and autonomous, activity, self- management, project work, boundary blurring	Straightforwardness, mobility, cooperation and networks, employability
<b>Convention of inspiration</b>	Creativity, innovation	Vocation, devotion, charisma, genius, talent, curiosity	Originality of research, discovery, passion
<b>Domestic convention</b>	Family, tradition, community	Caring, cultivating social relationships, mentoring, respect, trust	Home (institution), homeland
<b>Convention of fame</b>	Fame, renown, reputation	Becoming visible	Prestige, acknowledgment, visibility

Source: Our own illustration based on Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, and Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005

In terms of the *project convention*, the quality of academic education in a European research area depends on the individual ability to commit to project-type work, to move flexibly in various geographic and social spaces, and to activate relationships and networks. Here, mobility is a core element in justifying the common good in that it promotes the creation of an imagined community of European scientists, for instance, by encouraging them to learn other languages in the community and cooperate across geographic and social boundaries.

The *convention of inspiration* is essential to research activities. Criteria such as creativity and innovation are the currency for assessing the worth of mobility for establishing and justifying a European area of higher education and research. Mobility must combine with curiosity and passion, promote talent and enable discovery.

When actors invoke the domestic convention to create a European scientific community via mobility, it must be one that safeguards traditions and local ties. Mobility must be compatible with sense of rootedness in one's home region and family—guaranteeing the global and local simultaneously.

The logic of the *convention of fame* is another relevant order of justification in the context of research. Community building relies on visibility, which the researcher achieves through mobility. The European research community as a whole benefits from the prestige and reputation that individual researchers are able to build.

Most social situations involve more than one convention that has proven its worth and is considered socially legitimate, which results in different logics of action and orders of justification intersecting. In negotiations over the appropriate order of justification, one convention may prevail or compromises between different conventions may be made, leading to “compound communities” (Thévenot, 2014).

Conventions and compromises between them are generalised and stabilised by “investments in forms”, that is, in material entities (objects, subjects, technologies) and immaterial dispositifs (standards, cognitions, rules, programmes, procedures; Thévenot, 1984; Dodier, 1993). Investment in form refers to bringing information, processes or things into a certain shape by generalising them and giving them a ‘conventional’ form. This occurs at the expense of ignoring individual cases and by sacrificing alternatives and variations (Thévenot, 2011) but facilitates the coordination of action and trust in the established (Diaz-Bone, 2015: 297).

Sacrificing alternatives and variations expands a convention's temporal and socio-spatial reach, which unleashes agency and power for purposes of social coordination for the benefit of the common good (Thévenot, 2014: 10). *Standards* are an ideal-type instance of this phenomenon of enhancing power and effectiveness for the pursuit of the common good by eliminating alternatives. Standards refer to commonly recognised and widely applied procedures and ways of doing things that have prevailed

over alternative options (Thévenot, 2009). They are accepted as ‘natural’, taken-for-granted forms of coordinating action and operate as established and familiar categories. Actors close their eyes to other forms of possible coordination that could likewise have been used for coordination but have been sacrificed in the establishment of the form (Thévenot 2009: 795).

Standards are nevertheless not immune to criticism and can be questioned. Thévenot has called this doubt and suspicion of the established and recognition of alternatives “opening one’s eyes” (Thévenot 2009: 797).

## **2.2 Governing principles of transnational academic mobility—plurality of engagements**

Apart from action leading toward a common good that meets the requirement of public justification, Laurent Thévenot worked out other regimes of engagement that have less social scope and where the good is more limited and localised (Thévenot, 2006, 2014). These are forms of coordination that enable the individual to act in more stable and reliable ways across various situations. They make it possible for the individual to shape his or her personality, course of life and practical conduct of life (for the following, see Diaz-Bone, 2015: 352f.). However, the “self” is not an isolated entity that is detached from social relationships and equipped with personal technologies of power that enable it to exercise autonomy in dealing with itself. The regimes of engagement are embedded in formatted environments in which conventions have become more or less powerful and therefore preform—that is, limit or encourage—the possibilities of engagement. The cognitive and material formatting of the environment can thus facilitate or hinder the ability to engage in a certain mode of action.

Intermediaries, such as mentors, for instance, can be a constitutive element for mediating between the formatted environments and the regime of engagement.

Thévenot reconstructed three such regimes that preserve and maintain their capacity to a certain degree to coordinate action across a variety of differently formatted environments. Table 2 lists these regimes in the latter three columns. Individuals possess the capacities of all three regimes, which results in “compound personalities” (Thévenot, 2014). They are also capable of switching from one regime to the other depending on the situation. In its *engagement in an individual plan*, the individual seeks to carry out actions that it has planned strategically in view of the future. This planning can

involve conceptions of the future, for instance, career planning including research stays at research institutions abroad. But it can also be of a temporally or spatially narrower kind, for example, the intention to submit an application for a mobility scholarship in time. Coordinating with others takes place via formal agreements and joint projects, such as a publication project. The individual being able to coordinate with itself in the logic of this regime requires that it possess basic autonomous agency. Governance thus implies a certain degree of autonomy along with the existence of environmental conditions that allow for choice and the realisation of plans. A mentor can act as an intermediary between the surrounding conditions of the academic environment and an individual's academic career planning.

The *regime of engaging in familiarity* involves the individual coordinating action with an immediate, familiar environment that is characterised by habits, taken-for-grantedness and a sense of comfort. This includes the familiar everyday working relationships at the university as well as the security and affectionate closeness that family and friends provide. In this regime, the relationships with others are based on intimacy and informality. The power of this form of coordination derives from the attachment to persons and things. The investments that this requires have been made in the past and need time to evolve and prove themselves.

*Table 2: The plurality of engagements in transnational mobility*

	<b>Compound communities (conventions)</b>	<b>Compound personalities (regimes of engagement)</b>		
	<b>(1) Engaging in justification for the common good</b>	<b>(2) Engaging in an individual plan</b>	<b>(3) Engaging in familiarity</b>	<b>(4) Engaging in exploration</b>
Evaluative good	Worth (qualifying for the common good)	Accomplished will	Ease, comfort, personal convenience	Excitement by novelty
Information format	Conventional	Functional	Usual, congenial	Surprising
Capacity, power to uphold the engagement	Quality, worth	Autonomy, intention	Attachment	Curiosity, exploration
Mutual engagement (with other persons)	Legitimate convention of coordination	Joint project, contract	Close friendship, intimacy	Play
Time orientation	Depending on the convention	Future	Past	Present

Difficulties, constraints, challenges of transnational mobility		Lack of autonomy; uncertainty; scarce funding; lack of mentor support; dual-career constellation; family obligations and children	Loss of personal ties; distance; lack of hospitality; living apart together; need to sacrifice attachment to well-known things and person	Pressure to be successful (performance indicators); lack of time and money to play around; intellectual desert
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Source: Four regimes of engagement with the world (Thévenot, 2014: 13; the rows "Time orientation" and "Difficulties" have been added by RJL)

*Engaging in exploration* emphasises the excitement of encountering novelty. It needs an environment that allows for surprise, trial and error, and playing around without having to achieve objectives or deliver results. Experimentation and exploration are important features. Curiosity is the power that counts. Governance requires an environment that ensures the degree of liberty and security needed to fully immerse in the present and forget time. This regime of engagement is the essence of research activity. Its worth lies in individual insight and discovery, which, via the dissemination of results, is subsequently collectively appropriated by the scientific community or stylised as an inspiring experience (Thévenot, 2006, with reference to Nicolas Auray).

Major problems or crises in coordinating action can mobilise individuals to make competent reference to orders of justification, i.e. to switch from the private to the public sphere. They can denounce a prevailing convention by invoking another convention. In so doing, they can make legitimate demands for conditions that enable an alternative regime of engagement (Diaz-Bone, 2015: 354). On the one hand, this can take the form of public protests, also mediated by intermediaries. On the other hand, interview situations are public by their very nature and can lead to such shifts toward an engagement for justifying the common good.

The last row in Table 2 lists working hypotheses as to the potential problems that can impede a specific individual engagement or make it impossible and therefore have the capacity to provoke a shift of engagement to the public sphere. For instance, a dual-career partnership can make planning one's own career and therefore engaging in an individual plan extremely difficult. Such a constellation can also be a stress test for a partnership if the partners are forced to accept employment at far-apart places and attachment and intimacy is lost over the course of living apart together.

### **3 Governing principles in the European Research Area—dominant policy conventions**

Isabelle Bruno investigated the processes and instruments of governance in the context of the establishment of the European Research Area from 1990 to 2010 (Bruno, 2011). The initial idea of a ERA, laid down in the white paper “Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century” in 1993, was the creation of a “European Information Society” (Bruno 2011: 67). The goal was to improve the competitiveness of industry and commerce in the EU by means of increasing the number of researchers by building bridges between economy and science. We can conclude that, at the time, the idea of a ERA rested mainly on the logics of the industrial convention, which motivated measures geared toward enhancing the availability and quality of specialist expertise in the economy.

A few years later, this idea of a European Information Society was replaced by a new paradigm advocated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD among others: a “knowledge society” based on an “economy of knowledge”. In 2000, an official communication from the European Commission mentioned the creation of a “European Research Area” for the first time and linked it with a market concept: “The European market of supply and demand in knowledge and technology still remains largely to be created” (European Commission, 2000: 8). One of the strategies to create this European market for knowledge and technology has been to promote mobility across Europe. Two years later, the new governance paradigm was outlined as follows in an information magazine published by the European Commission:

*“The days when knowledge acquired in academic scientific circles was handed down and available for all are well and truly over. In today's knowledge circles, acquisition goes hand in hand with protection and exploitation. Patents and, more generally, intellectual property rights (IPR) are very much the ‘hot topic’ in the world of public research” (European Commission, 2002: 16).*

The principles of action and rationality underpinning this new paradigm are geared toward a researcher modelled after a manager type and the neoliberal logic of new public management (Bruno 2011: 70). The governance practices utilise the instruments and methods of “knowledge management”, an ensemble of concepts, methods and techniques for managing knowledge.

Governance is based on inducing and controlling competition by means of statistical key indicators, league tables, benchmarking, best-practice models, agreements on objectives, action plans, all of which can be deciphered to represent investments in form in accordance with a market-based principle of governance.

The role of research was tailored to supporting the economic competitiveness of the EU and not related to accessible education, knowledge and culture for all (civic convention). This governance was not designed to deepen the integration of national policies into a common European policy by means of common European law as implied in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Advancing transnational research, however, requires motivating individual researchers to cooperate across spatial and cultural boundaries. With reference to Bourdieu (1990), we might consider competition for symbolic recognition to be the driving force in academia and thus this type of engagement as being primarily based on the forces of the convention of fame. It was this parameter of competition that has now been manipulated. The accumulation of transnational social, cultural, economic, and, in consequence, of symbolic capital (such as international cooperations, publications in international journals [impact factors], citations, language skills, funds from the European Research Council, research periods abroad [Leemann 2010]) has turned into a quantitatively measurable, comparable factor that has become increasingly relevant to the advancement of an academic career.

We can therefore conclude that the logics of action and orders of worth underlying this concept of knowledge society continue to rest on the industrial convention, as it is expertise and know-how as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the system of public research that must be increased (European Commission, 2012: 2). However, this order of worth has entered a new compromise with the market convention that also relies on the convention of fame to establish itself in academia.

Knowledge is no longer a public good available to all members of the scientific community but is commercialised and marketed instead (commodification). Knowledge production occurs according to

the logic of competition and excellence and serves the purpose of competition both in the global struggle for economic leadership and “in addressing global challenges and reaching sustainable development goals” (Council of the European Union, 2008: 7).

The wide scope of the market convention is demonstrated in later communications on the ERA (European Commission, 2012). Knowledge has become the “currency of the new economy” (European Commission, 2012: 2). The ERA priorities are “increased competition” and “Europe-wide open competition” as well as “achieving lasting economic recovery and [...] securing Europe’s position in the emerging global order”(European Commission, 2012: 3–4). Even the values of the civic convention, geared toward equality and integration, are interpreted in market terms. For instance, one of the primary goals of gender equality is “to end the waste of talent which we cannot afford” (European Commission, 2012: 4). The problem referred to here is not the social exclusion of women from a central social sphere but the loss of know-how in the competition for economic dominance.

#### **4 Transnational mobility as a standard in the European Research Area**

In its communication on establishing a ERA, the European Commission devoted a section to mobility (European Commission, 2000: 16). It states that, although the mobility rate among researchers is higher than among other professional groups, their mobility is still not sufficient “in proportion to the requirements” (which are not specified in any detail). The commission strongly advocates the “[i]ntroduction of a European dimension into scientific careers”. The transnational mobility of researchers must be promoted and facilitated, it claims, and the recruitment committees must open up to scientists from other European countries. The expectation of mobility in science thus plays an important role in shaping the European Research Area (Morano-Foadi, 2005; Oliver, 2012) and is seen as representing a useful aspect in research practices and academic careers (Ackers, 2005).

As we have argued elsewhere, the process of developing a common European Research Area as a political and geographic entity has turned geographic mobility in academic careers into an institution

based on cultural-cognitive expectations and shared beliefs, normative conceptions of appropriate action and regulatory instruments (Leemann and Boes, 2015).

Geographic mobility has evolved into a standard guiding the actions and evaluations of transnational actors in the EU as well as those of the national academic bodies (universities, research-funding organisations) and of individual scientists in coordinating with themselves and their environment. As such the standard of geographic mobility has become a powerful force. It is effective as an established format—largely taken for granted and not questioned by political actors—for the excellence of research and researchers (Morano-Foadi, 2005), for their education and academic training as well as for the creation of a knowledge-based economy. “Mobility is an effective and well-known way of training researchers and spreading knowledge” (European Commission, 2000: 16).

The Visions 2020 of a European Research Area state the goal that “European research institutions provide attractive working conditions for researchers from all parts of the world [...] in the framework of a single labour market which enables mobility between countries and sectors with minimal financial or administrative obstacles” (Council of the European Union, 2008: 10). In regard to research careers, the EU Commission’s *EURAXESS – Researchers in Motion*<sup>3</sup> initiative provides researchers who wish to pursue their careers in Europe with information and assistance regarding funding opportunities, entry conditions, accommodation, social-security pensions, work permits, language courses and the like. This is the task of more than 200 EURAXESS Service Centres in 40 countries (European Commission, 2015: 26).

An assessment of mobility in the European Research Area shows that 48% of the researcher population has been mobile at least once in their career following their doctorate (European Commission, 2013: 17). Nearly a third of this group has completed an at least three-month research stay abroad in the last ten years during their postdoctoral career. However, geographic mobility is not always a matter of free choice and based on scientific interest and personal circumstances, for instance, because of specific technologies, data, or people at a certain place being relevant to one’s own research (Morano-Foadi, 2005). For many junior researchers, mobility is a result of the job insecurity that often comes with an academic career and the outcome of searching for a new job and permanent employment in the international academic labour market. In light of diminishing basic

state funding of university research, the pressure to obtain third-party funding and dependence on professors (a system of academic neo-feudalism; van Dyk and Reitz, 2017), junior scholars are increasingly forced to pursue temporary project work and teaching assignments in various geographic regions to continue their academic careers (Oliver, 2012). The “mobility imperative” (Oliver, 2012: 3859) is also a consequence of the competition for permanent employment since tenured professorships increasingly require international experience, which involves research stays at universities abroad in particular (Leemann and Boes, 2015).

An analysis of the principle that governs this standard of transnational mobility shows that, in addition to the logic of the market and of fame, it involves logics of action that closely correspond with the project convention. Here, greatness is achieved through activities that overcome the traditional boundaries and dichotomies between work and non-work, steady and unsteady, paid and unpaid, profit-sharing and volunteer work, private and public or private and professional life (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Individuals have great worth when they are willing to sacrifice everything that could possibly hamper their availability and flexibility. These people are mobile, dispense with enduring personal relationships and long-term employment, take risks and turn their backs on rootedness and stability. They easily make new contacts and engage in networking and project work. However, they are not simply individualists but contribute their skills and abilities to the benefit of the community by providing team leadership based on tolerance and acceptance and making their capital (networks, expertise) available to the other team members. These are the prevalent qualities in this new academic capitalism (van Dyk and Reitz, 2017).

In recent years, various authors have reconstructed an ideal type of an academic worker in the (global) knowledge society that can be seen as a formula for a compromise between the criteria of worth that dominate the market convention, the convention of fame and the project convention. This ideal type is the academic self-entrepreneur (Leemann, 2010). These self-entrepreneurs take a high level of personal responsibility and exert substantial *self-control* in monitoring and managing the productivity and results of their own labour, engage in *self-commercialisation* in terms of marketing the self, selling their own skills as a commodity, and investing in their own careers according to an economic rationale, and exercise *self-rationalisation* by gearing their own (private) life toward the requirements

of their ‘enterprise’ (i.e., science and their own academic career; Pongratz and Voß, 2003). In their analysis of the EU’s higher education and research policy discourse, Kenway and Fahey come to the conclusion that the European cosmopolitan traveller is “a monadic” and “deterritorialised, disembodied and disembedded figure” (Kenway and Fahey, 2008). Bruno speaks of the incarnation (i.e., the concretisation) of the abstract idea of a free circulation of knowledge and commercialisation of knowledge in the form of a mobile “chercheurs-entrepreneur” (research entrepreneur, Bruno, 2011: 73–74), who is the bearer of deterritorialised human capital and moves without difficulty and impediment towards the most attractive places.

## **5 Governing principles in the European Research Area—barriers to individual engagement**

In the following, we will turn to the circumstances surrounding the lives of researchers, their experiences and points of view in regard to the standard of transnational mobility. What conceptions of common good can be reconstructed from the findings of these studies? Where do conflicts surface that make engagement on behalf of the common good or for the benefit of one’s own conduct of life difficult?

### **5.1 Barriers to engaging in an individual plan**

*“You fall into a hole after your dissertation. There is no career; there are only various individual job [opening]s, somehow, that you have to fight hard for. But that also means that many people drop out.” (Female postdoc, natural sciences).*

An issue that surfaces repeatedly in the interviews in our study is the great uncertainty and imponderability in regard to one’s future career as long as one has not managed to achieve tenure as a professor. Max Weber once called this the “mad hazard” of science as a profession (Weber, 1946). Upon completing their doctorate, many young researchers must work their way up a “ladder without rungs” (Schmeiser, 1995) by “jumping instead of climbing” (Krais and Krumpeter, 1997) and further

advance their academic qualifications via jobs in projects and scholarships without reliable prospects of future employment. The need to go abroad in this insecure and competitive phase in one's career adds to the problematic situation. Although scholarships support mobility, they must be obtained under competitive conditions, and being awarded one requires luck as well. Academic achievement alone does not suffice. This is underlined by the European Commission's MORE2 Higher Education Report (2013)<sup>4</sup>, which concludes that obtaining funding and finding a suitable position is the most significant barrier to the mobility of doctoral students and postdocs (European Commission, 2013: 155, 158).

*"Of course, you truly travel down a very long road, where for a rather long time you really don't know where it will lead you. I've always found that to be a bit stressful, this prospect, and also this being at the mercy of others, where I have to tell myself that I can be as good as I can and it may still not work out" (male postdoc, humanities and social sciences).*

A female postdoctoral scholar from the social sciences experienced the unpredictability of and impossibility to plan a scientific career when, upon finishing her doctorate, a junior professorship position abroad that she had been promised was cancelled on short notice. She realised that not only could she not rely on a single plan but that she also always had to have a second and even a third contingency plan to fall back on. This involves an enormous effort since several options invariably have to be organised at the same time.

Oliver (2012) speaks of a dual uncertainty among junior scholars who move from one temporary job abroad to the next: "uncertainty about continuing employment and about access to a career track in the academic context" (Oliver, 2012: 3860). What is at stake is both career and livelihood.

Researchers are of course aware that individual achievement is not the only decisive factor in their career but that contacts and support by a mentor also act as a safety net in career planning (Leemann and Stutz, 2008: 39, 79f.).

The empirical examples referred to above indicate that the competitive and project nature of scientific work that is inscribed into the ERA, and the standard of geographic mobility reinforces the hazards of

pursuing the academic profession. This often makes it very difficult for junior researchers to develop some degree of a coherent and reliable plan for their lives and careers and hence to engage in an individual plan. In their criticism, the junior researchers refer to the industrial convention, in which the common good relies on predictability, the possibility of planning and orientation toward the long term, which are the preconditions for autonomy and self-governance in the regime of an individual plan. The need to sacrifice these values for the sake of mobility can lead to junior researchers abandoning science. In this vein, Oliver (2012) cites a young female researcher:

*“I’m not really keen on doing post-docs one after the other, I would like some stability in life and not a year planning ahead [...] I would hope to get a permanent position somewhere in the next 5 years. If that’s not going to work then [...] that would make it quite hard for me to carry on” (Oliver, 2012: 3860).*

This principle of selection frequently comes with the belief that it produces excellence, but it also involves the production and legitimation of inequality (Leemann and Boes, 2015). This is so because not all scholars are in the same position to endure and handle uncertainty. As Max Weber stated early on, “[...] it is extremely hazardous for a young scholar without funds to expose himself to the conditions of the academic career (Weber, 1946: 129f.).

Still today, a scholar’s social background is of significance for coping with uncertainty. In the following quote, a female postdoc from the humanities and social sciences does not make explicit reference to economic resources but to her pronounced habitual need for security, which she traces to her social background.

*“Indeed, the obstacle is uncertainty. It also requires a personality with a rather large willingness to take risks. I have to say that I didn’t have it for a long time because of my social background. I come from the rising lower middle class, it’s difficult (laughs), and have a very strong need for security. [...]. I know that there are people that cannot tolerate that. They quit for this reason. And I found that to*

*be the biggest problem, social mobility” (female postdoc, humanities and social sciences).*

Owing to her scientific background, this scholar probably possesses sociological knowledge and is therefore able to reflect on her difficulties and conceive of them conceptually as being associated with the issue of social mobility. Her analysis refers to the common good of the civic convention, which strongly values human equality. She raises the issue that the risks involved in an academic career are even more difficult to bear for members of a lower social class since their need for security is an obstacle to their willingness to take risks. To be on an equal footing in terms of planning competence would require that junior researchers have the same resources in terms of social background. Since this is not the case, the standard of geographic mobility produces inequality. Our quantitative study supports this observation. Junior researchers who have an academic family background are significantly more likely to be internationally mobile than those who do not (Leemann and Boes, 2015: 210f.).

## **5.2 Barriers to engaging in familiarity**

*“The other thing that isn’t always that easy is this uncertainty. It was always from year to year, from project to project. No sooner than you have something, it goes on for two years, then you have to look for something new. It is also not so easily reconciled with family plans.” (Female postdoc, legal studies)*

The hazards of an international career additionally collide with engaging in familiarity, with putting down roots in a familiar environment. This involves everyday working relationships at universities but also other areas of life such as establishing a family and caring for children, which will be addressed in the following. For female scholars in particular, the desire to have children and actually having them raise questions and doubts and are another source of insecurity. Since the responsibility for reconciling family and career frequently rests with them, engaging in familiarity turns into a handicap detrimental to their careers.

*“As far as handicaps go, I have to say, honestly, that you often have the feeling, ‘Is my family a handicap?’ If you handicap yourself, like when you’re running a race, it means that you have to achieve the same thing while carrying an extra weight, right?” (female postdoc, law).*

The social embeddedness of scholars in partnership and family as well as their responsibility for children and perhaps for elderly parents in need of care are issues rendered highly taboo in academia (Leemann and Stutz, 2008: 71). The values and norms of the project convention—unlimited temporal availability and geographic flexibility, the ideal of “science as a way of life” (Krais 2008)—as well as the competitive pressure in the market convention conflict with the values and actions that are essential in the context of the common good of the domestic convention: caring for and helping one another, and cultivating relationships. The common good inherent to the familial convention is threatened by the standard of geographic mobility. The voices not only in our study but in many others as well that criticise these conditions surrounding career, mobility and family and speak of, for instance, deracination, refer to—each in their own individual way—the obstacles to engaging in familiarity (e.g., Sautier, 2016: 71ff.). The European Commission’s MORE2 study (2013: 155-162) arrives at the same conclusion that personal and family reasons are important barriers “to overcome when embarking upon an international research period, and are a even more important factor which convinces researchers not to travel” (European Commission, 2013: 161), and this is especially so for women.

Demands derived from this observation such as installing gender equality officers at universities and research organisations have brought this criticism to public attention and address the level of orders of justification (Toader and Dahinden, 2018).

Mobility requirements also give rise to other fields of tension. In the following quote, the researcher refers to the convention of fame in science when he claims that his reputation would have been on the line would he have declined a job offer abroad for family reasons. This convention’s logic of coordination makes it difficult for him to engage in familiarity and demands that he and his family live apart together.

*“I think that the compromise actually came at the expense of the family, but I didn’t really have much choice. My position in Switzerland is ending, and then I’m offered this appointment in Germany. I can’t decline the appointment. Well, in science you can’t do that. You would definitely also be scarred for later applications. And that’s why I went to Germany” (male postdoc, humanities and social sciences).*

The compromise that the interviewee is referring to is at the expense of his family. He later explicitly criticises this necessary sacrifice for his academic career of not being able to be close to his children and wife on a daily basis and expresses his hope that this situation will improve in the future.

A number of studies on the geographic mobility of researchers have addressed the difficulties of dual-science-career couples. As Oliver (2012) has shown, the customary practice of fixed-term contracts for many positions in science makes planning two careers even more difficult and, statistically speaking, it is the wife who is more likely to sacrifice her career plans and follow her husband: her mobility is more ‘tied’ to that of her male partner than vice versa (Ackers, 2004). The female postdoc from the natural sciences cited below did not give up her mobility for her partner because she loves her work as a scientist and did not want to risk her career. To her, mobility is to work at scientifically interesting and renowned research institutions and, in so doing, make herself known in the scientific community and advance her career (Leemann and Da Rin, 2010).

*“Presumably, it would have been difficult to be married or generally to live in a stable and long-lasting partnership because I lived at so many different places. I had a partner for many years, but unfortunately the relationship broke down. I think what contributed to this disruption was the fact that both of us worked at different places and only for short periods. Most of these postdoc fellowships are for a year or two and then you have to move. For sure, this had some effects” (female postdoc, natural sciences).*

In this example, too, mobility demanded sacrifices in the regime of familiarity to achieve greatness in the convention of fame, that is, to be visible and boost one’s reputation by working at prestigious places.

### 5.3 Barriers to engaging in exploration

*”But in the meantime, I attended a conference of the [International Association of her discipline] in [large US city] this summer and found it to be dull and boring and decided to definitely abandon the America project.” (Female postdoc, humanities and social sciences).*

Exploratory action, which is at the heart of research, is a key motive for international mobility.

Nerdrum and Sarpebakken (2006: 218) distinguish three reasons for mobility: 1) to keep up to date with the state of the art; 2) to have qualified feedback on the originality, relevance and quality of your own research; and 3) as a source of inspiration. Seeking inspiration from a new environment, in particular, is a central motivation that drives cross-border academic mobility sparked by interest and curiosity. The female postdoc from the natural sciences cited below repeatedly emphasises the significance of geographic mobility for her career. She already went for several stays abroad during her doctoral phase, and her subsequent scientific career led her to different research institutions in various countries.

*”All those stays abroad, they were mostly influenced by the opportunities they offered to get to know new things, by opportunities to expand one’s horizon” (female postdoc, natural sciences).*

In her scientific career, there is no indication of barriers to engaging in exploration. She does not let problems of planning or family ties interfere with her desire to expand her horizon and discover new things. In other studies, junior researchers also tell about experiencing exciting encounters and gaining interesting insights during their stays at institutions abroad (e.g., Sautier, 2016, 60ff.; Morley et al., 2018). An evaluation by EURAXESS reports that 80% of internationally mobile researchers felt that the mobility had a positive impact on developing their research skills and more than 60% believed that mobility had increased the quality and quantity of their research output (European Commission, 2014: 10).

However, not all of the scholars interviewed view mobility as an inspiring and enriching experience. They question a mobility requirement that serves the sole purpose of career advancement without making a substantial contribution to their own research, as illustrated in the citation introducing this section. Many of their accounts testify to the heavy pressure to be mobile to develop an international profile or for the sheer purpose of continuing their career. They suffer from the pressure of performance indicators and forms of benchmarking that measure and compare research output, third-party funds, networks, cooperation and research stays abroad.

What Max Weber had in mind when he spoke of the hazard of science as a profession was not just the risk involved in planning one's career but also the risk involved in the scientific work of thinking, exploring and discovering.

*“Ideas occur to us when they please, not when it pleases us. The best ideas do indeed occur to one's mind [...] when smoking a cigar on the sofa; or [...] when taking a walk on a slowly ascending street; or in a similar way. In any case, ideas come when we do not expect them, and not when we are brooding and searching at our desks. [...] However this may be, the scientific worker has to take into his bargain the risk that enters into all scientific work: Does an 'idea' occur or does it not? He may be an excellent worker and yet never have had any valuable idea of his own”*  
(Weber, 1946: 136).

In his view, there is no guarantee that the scholar will have an inspiration and that creative and original ideas will come easily. This cannot be forced, and it cannot be achieved by hard and passionate work alone. It also requires ease of mind, time, and space for thinking and exploring. These are conditions that are usually not present in environments for the education and training of junior researchers. Stays abroad are functionally and strategically planned as part of a career, or they not pursued because the family situation does not permit to do so.

As we have argued above, the logic of competition in the ERA requires that the scientific community privatise discoveries and knowledge and no longer make them available to all. This impedes engaging in exploration, inhibits the joint experience of passion and curiosity (the convention of inspiration)

and fails to promote the common good in the form of creativity and innovation in which all members of the community could participate.

## 6 Conclusion

The starting point of this contribution was efforts since World War II to establish a united Europe enabling peace, welfare and solidarity. In this project of establishing a European community, the actors are committed to promoting economic interrelations and creating a single market for the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital (four freedoms). A fifth freedom, the free circulation of researchers, knowledge and technology, has been added, which intends to advance community building at the level of higher education and research and the creation of a European Research Area (ERA). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union frames this market in terms of recognising, alongside the value of freedom, also human dignity and the principles of equality, solidarity and justice. The interrelations via an integrated economy, but also via education and shared citizenship, are supposed to create a feeling of kinship between Europeans.

At the centre of attention in this contribution has been the social construction of a European Research Area as a new policy space by means of the principle of geographic mobility of junior researchers.

The European Commission postulates that mobility, and the quality of knowledge and technology that it entails, improves and strengthens economic and social welfare in the European Union and, in other words, contributes to the common good and thus to cohesion in Europe.

*“Mobility is a core concept of the ERA. It is often associated with excellence, the creation of dynamic networks, improved scientific performance, improved knowledge and technology transfer, improved productivity, and ultimately enhanced economic and social welfare” (European Commission, 2014: 10).*

In our study, we pursued the theoretical and empirical question as to the significance of the standard of transnational mobility of junior researchers for this project of community building. To answer this question, we reconstructed the governing principles underlying ERA policy and analysed to what

extent they impede the individual engagements of researchers in conducting their lives. On the basis of this analysis, we have drawn conclusions as to what values and dimensions of the common good have been sacrificed by establishing the standard of transnational mobility.

Our analysis made reference to the theoretical framework of the sociology of conventions, which provides a basis for the investigation of the governing principles of the ERA. This theoretical framework points to the pluralistic nature of the common good, which can rest on various conventions, and allows us to explain conflicts and contradictions in pursuing it. We have shown that the policies, values and norms of the ERA and the standard of geographic mobility are, at their core, based on four conventions. The industrial convention emphasises the improved scientific knowledge and performance that is achieved through mobility in the long term and that contributes to social welfare. To accomplish this, the EU relies on the market convention as well as on the convention of fame – which is crucial in the context of research – and the logic of competition inherent in both. Scientific knowledge is no longer a public good available to all within the scientific community but rather commercialised, marketed and privatised. Researchers are forced to establish themselves as self-entrepreneurs in the knowledge market. The idea that transnational mobility of junior researchers enhances the quality of research and fosters competitiveness rooted in the project convention. Researchers move from one research location to another, flexibly and in project form, and cooperate in dynamic networks across national borders.

The experiences and perspectives of junior researchers point to problems and tensions that are inherent to such a governance regime. Along three regimes of individual engagement, we have worked out the key barriers that can impede junior researchers in the conduct of their lives.

First, the mobility requirement of the ERA governance regime makes it difficult to engage in an individual plan, that is, to pursue a sensible, realistic plan for a professional career and a family.

Committing to this requirement involves sacrificing principles associated with the industrial convention that allow predictability, the possibility of planning and orientation toward the long term.

This also weakens values related to the civic convention, such as human equality, since the impossibility of planning an academic career and the uncertainties involved in pursuing one disadvantage especially women and junior researchers from non-academic families (Leemann, 2010;

Leemann and Boes, 2015; Toader and Dahinden, 2018). The governance principles of the ERA are thus more closely tailored to men of an academic family background and involve exclusionary power. Second, the standard of transnational mobility in the ERA impedes engaging in familiarity, that is, interacting in the immediate environment with those with which one is familiar and those to which one is emotionally close. What is lost with mobility is the support and sense of wellbeing provided by friends, family and colleagues at the place of work and thus the common good of the domestic convention. This becomes manifest in feelings of isolation (e.g. Morley et al., 2018) and problems in relationships with partners and establishing a family since mobility requirements are geared toward the isolated individual who has no partner and children (or desire to have children) and can therefore easily move from one place of work to another. However, those who give up mobility to engage in familiarity risk losing their quality in terms of the convention of fame.

Third, the governance regime of the ERA is detrimental to engaging in exploration since research stays abroad are reduced to the function of acquiring an international profile in the competition for tenure. There is often a lack of ease of mind and time to devote oneself to exploration and discovery. Yet it is such conditions that make the development of creative and original ideas possible in the first place. The common good that falls by the wayside here is that of the convention of inspiration.

Robert K. Merton developed four ethical principles for democratic and ethical science against the backdrop of national socialism and German academics' readiness to serve the Nazi regime (Merton, 1968: 607ff.). Our analyses suggest that the design of the ERA and its standard of transnational mobility partially violate the first three norms and hence must be criticised as a foundation for community building in the EU via mobility-based education and training. 1) Universalism: Mobility is not equally possible for all social groups, which leads to discrimination in terms of career opportunities. 2) Communism: Common ownership of goods in science is not ensured since commodification results in scientific knowledge not being freely available to all members of the scientific community. 3) Disinterestedness: The commitment to science is no longer solely based on "a passion for knowledge, idle curiosity, [and – RJL] altruistic concern with the benefit to humanity" (Merton, 1968: 613).

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en) (accessed 29 June 2017).

<sup>2</sup> For details on the research design, see Leemann and Stutz, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/> (accessed 29 June 2017). See also the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions research fellowship programmes <http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/>. For previous EU initiatives, see van der Hijden, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> This is a study conducted in 2012 of the careers, working conditions and mobility of researchers in the 27 EU member states and the associated (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland) and candidate countries (Croatia, Turkey, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).