

# The Franco-German Round Table on Intangibles

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**IRS**

Leibniz Institute for  
Regional Development  
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# The knowledge flow among communities

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“The Franco-German Round Table on Intangibles”  
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# The tangibility of the intangible

## Knowledge as a relational effect

- Knowledge is „there“ when practically performed
- Knowledge is intangible, because it exists neither in persons, nor in practical contexts alone, but between them

## Tangible elements in relationships of knowledgeability

- Expertise embodied or embrained in individuals
- Programs inscribed in artefacts
- Information encoded in documents

## What is mobile when knowledge travels?

Knowledge is inherently local

- E.g. flute makers in their workshop,  
Xerox mechanic in the office

What actually moves when knowledge gets mobile?

- Experts who travel
- Documents that are spreaded across space
- Technical equipment sent to another location
- E-mail being sent from one computer to another

## What is mobile when knowledge travels?

Knowledge travels when it is re-enacted at another location:

- E.g. expert demonstrates insights in front of an audience
- Documents are read, interpreted and discussed before they influence the way people think/act at another location
- Equipment is installed in a different location and workers are trained in the proper use of device
- E-mail contains a hint which triggers a purchase decision

Mobility of knowledge is always a transformation of knowledge

## Geography of Communities I

The idea of communities of practice implies that practitioners despite local idiosyncrasies can share practices

Communities of practice offer a way to project the idea of a shared practice in space

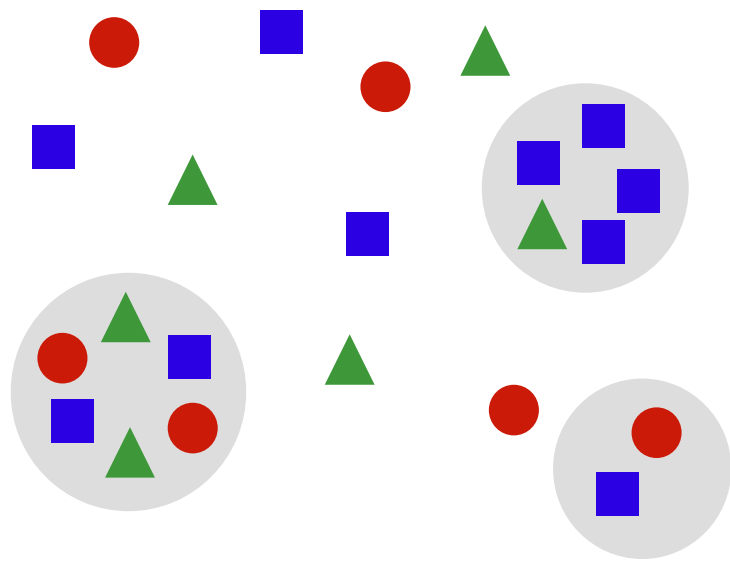
1. Practices tend to be situated at places with supportive local conditions
2. Practitioners shape the local conditions according to their needs

## Geography of Communities II

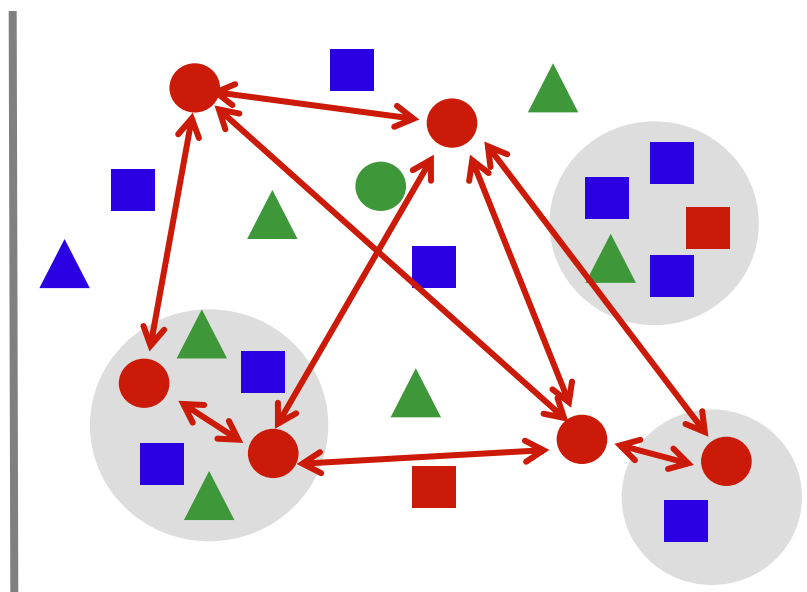
How do communities unfold in space?

- “The relations that constitute practice are primarily *defined by* learning. As a result, the landscape of practice is an emergent structure in which learning constantly creates localities that reconfigure geography”  
(Etienne Wenger 1998: 131)
  
- Twofold Tension:
  - between physical distance and relational similarity
  - between mobile and immobile assets

# Geography of Communities III



Urban Diversity/Knowledge Clusters



Shared practices and traveling acquaintances



## Geography of Communities IV

Tension between mobile and immobile assets

- Knowledge practices require the co-presence of tangible assets at one location
- Sites with immobile assets cannot be completely ignored in knowledge practices.
- Sites with specific immobile assets cannot easily be replaced by alternative sites.

Thank you very much  
for your attention.