

Traffic Safety Cultures and the Safe Systems Approach – Towards a Cultural Change Research and Innovation Agenda for Road Safety

Reporting

Project Information

TraSaCu

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[Project website](#) 

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Periodic Reporting for period 2 - TraSaCu (Traffic Safety Cultures and the Safe Systems Approach – Towards a Cultural Change Research and Innovation Agenda for Road Safety)

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Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

"The Traffic Safety Culture (TraSaCu) Project aimed at developing a cultural approach in road traffic safety research and accident prevention. Traditional approaches to traffic safety shall be complemented by a cultural perspective which has emerged recently in safety research and

complemented by a cultural perspective which has emerged recently in safety research and prevention. Safety culture has been identified as an important factor of road safety as it helps understanding and explaining the typical patterns of risk perception and risk taking that prevail in different national, regional or local traffic systems as well as their relationships with numbers and forms of accidents. A weak safety culture produces higher numbers of accidents which are more severe. A strong safety culture helps reducing the number of accidents as well as mitigating their severity. It strengthens safety relevant attitudes and behaviour and it is also a condition for making road safety measures more effective.

The Overall aim of TraSaCu was to take up the concept of safety culture, which is well established e.g. in the US and in organisational safety research, and apply it to road safety in Europe. According to a working definition of the US Department of Transportation Safety Council (US DOT), traffic safety culture is defined as the shared values, actions, and behaviours that demonstrate a commitment to safety over competing goals and demands. Based on this definition a number of case studies of different traffic safety cultures were described and analysed across Europe by means of quantitative and qualitative methods. Research focused on the culturally mediated interaction between traffic participants and their environment in terms of the cultural patterns of risk taking and risk perception. It also looked at those cultural elements that can be changed easily in order to improve road safety of the investigated traffic systems. Furthermore, the practical relevance of the concept was highlighted by providing hands-on advice for road safety practitioners ("Action Framework") on how to deal with defining, measuring, transforming and institutionalising Traffic Safety Culture, and how to design targeted interventions during this change process. This implementation strategy describes how a process of change can be geared into a specific historical and political situation and the obstacles and opportunities it offers.

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Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far ^

Within the first two years of the project, the concept of traffic safety culture was analysed from a theoretical perspective and applied to the analysis of selected traffic systems. Furthermore, strong links between the project partners have been established through the secondments and regular meetings. The project has enabled each partner to improve its international network by establishing new contacts with organisations where no previous relationship existed and by strengthening existing relationships.

As a foundation for further work in the project, a website and a knowledge platform for the project partners was established (WP 1).

In WP 2, cultural patterns in road traffic systems were analysed. A theoretical model on traffic safety culture was developed (D2.1) and the traffic safety culture of selected countries, namely Albania, Austria and the US (Virginia) was analysed (D2.2). In a comprehensive research report the possible relationship between traffic safety culture and accidents on the basis of a comparative analysis was modelled.

In WP 3, data on national traffic violations as well as self-reported data on road safety relevant attitudes and norms was collected and documented (D3.1). The data on attitudes and self-reported behaviour was analysed in D3.2. Furthermore, cultural factors that are suitable for a potential transformation were identified, providing a basis for WPs 4 and 5 (D3.3).

In WP 4, a model of traffic cultures and impact factors has been proposed (D4.1) and factors relevant for change management strategies on micro, macro and magna levels of a safety culture have been inferred (D4.2) based on the work conducted in work packages 1 to 3.

This was the pre-stage for the development of the action framework for implementing the paradigm of Traffic Safety Culture in road safety programmes and guidelines (D5.1) carried out in WP5. The process of creating an action framework, addressing road safety authorities, decision makers and stakeholders, has been undertaken in the US years before the TraSaCu project. By having Montana State University (MSU) in the project consortium, the project team benefited greatly from their experience and, furthermore, was able to anticipate and address potential pitfalls when transferring theoretically sound knowledge into practice. Therefore, MSU's Prof. Nic Ward also contributed to the project's final webinar, held in February 2018 with more than 30 participants, as a speaker. Eventually, the project's work has been summarized in WP5 a final report (D5.2) which bundles the various approaches followed by TraSaCu's multi-disciplinary research team and project staff. Research strands (psychology, sociology, cultural studies and human ecology) have been contrasted and combined to extract safety culture.

Research results were disseminated throughout the project by various means and by all Partners (conferences, websites, social media, stakeholder interviews, presentation in research Networks, work with students etc.). The concluding core dissemination activity was a Webinar, held at KFV together with MSU on February 22nd, 2018 on the project and its results as well as on how to translate the output into practically applicable actions.

Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far) ^

Traditional road safety approaches such as 'safety by design', engineering, enforcement and education have been successful in the past in reducing road fatalities and mitigating accident severity and injuries. Still, too many people die on Europe's roads. The ultimate goal is 'Vision Zero' – striving for zero deaths due to road accidents. Traffic safety culture can be interpreted as a new and promising, complementary paradigm to the traditional ones.

However, even though the paradigm has received some recognition among researchers, it has not yet reached beyond that, especially not decision makers. This is not surprising, since a shift in paradigms is a slow process. The process requires continuous evidence-based work and a network to disseminate it in order to sensitize stakeholders and anchor the importance of the cultural approach in their minds.

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If this paradigm shift succeeds, it has the power to contribute to the prevention of road accidents and thereby to reduce socio-economic costs and suffering related to road accidents. TraSaCu is dedicated to promoting this process towards considering cultural aspects in road safety work. Thus, the project has the potential to impact the well-being and health of EU residents as well as society as a whole.



Traffic Safety

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