Review of International Studies, Vol. 42, part 5, pp. 939–967. doi:10.1017/S0260210516000085
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First published online 31 March 2016

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Community at the border or the boundaries of community? The case of EU field diplomats

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Abstract

This article contributes to the communities of practice (CoP) literature by focusing on the neglected role of the boundary in constructing community. It takes issue with advocates of International Relations' (IR) most recent 'practice turn' who have overrated inclusive practices of linking to the detriment of taking account of exclusive practices of demarcation. A conceptual turn to the boundary, understood as a 'site of difference', highlights how the two sets of practices operate simultaneously in creating shared senses of belonging to a community. The article empirically probes this turn to the boundary by studying how the postmodern community of the European Union (EU) is (re)constructed by EU diplomats in its neighbouring state Ukraine. As a borderland, it symbolises an interstitial zone of high connectivity where the EU's otherwise latent order is unearthed. A reconstructive analysis of interviews with members of this 'community of practice' reveals that they function as 'boundary workers' who engage in both boundary-spanning and boundary-drawing practices on an everyday basis. Zooming in on the 'boundary work' by EU diplomats exposes the complex process of community-building and thereby helps grasp community as an emergent structure of possibilities whose meaning is contextually mediated by its members' social experience of the boundary.

Keywords

Communities of Practice; Practice Turn; Diplomacy; Boundary; European Union; Ukraine

Introduction

While living in unsettled times, we long for order and meaning. Yet, statesmen and leading political figures deplore the increasingly perceived gap between the requirement for and *de facto* absence of order beyond the nation-state. The political settlement of the Westphalian state system that provided us with the certainty of clear demarcation lines between (liberal democratic) order on the 'inside' and anarchy on the 'outside' belongs to the past. Whereas the world order once thought stable is collapsing under the pressures of globalisation, the newly emerging rules of the game are yet unknown as they are no longer written within the Westphalian frame of reference. The world is in flux as the 'state-sovereigntist "order of orders", or metaprinciple of authority, has been threatened in its position of preeminence'.[1]

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[1] Neil Walker, 'Beyond boundary disputes and basic grids: Mapping the global disorder of normative orders', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 6:3–4 (2008), p. 376.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Underlying the tension between a perceived disorder in global politics and the human desire for order is a more profound paradox of global governance that scholars across the social sciences have identified.[2] On the one hand, there is a thickening web of transboundary relations that is progressively regulated by a network of global, regional, and transnational institutions. On the other hand, as Neil Walker has astutely detected, 'the underlying basic grid' of the Westphalian model that during the twentieth century held together diverse (legal-) normative orders under the inside/outside logic of the modern state system is no longer shared by the plurality of actors participating in global governance.[3] With pluralism as the 'normal' global condition and global governance on the rise, a single normative grid is on the decline, if not absent, and a similarly hegemonic metaframe like the Westphalian one is unlikely to replace it. Instead, contending, often diffusing metaprinciples seem to point to a new 'disorder of orders'.[4] These metaprinciples are among those others based on global, hierarchically structured institutions, a regionally divided world order or the universalisability of norms across orders.[5]

On a regional scale, the European Union (EU) shares many of the features that are reflected in the broader paradox of global governance and here serves as a 'laboratory'[6] in which to enquire about how culturally plural large-scale phenomena beyond the state can sustain in the absence of the Westphalian metaprinciple. As both a 'multiperspectival polity'[7] and postmodern community, it is considered to have 'mov[ed] beyond the hard boundaries and centralised sovereignty characteristic of the Westphalian, or "modern" state, towards permeable boundaries and layered sovereignty'.[8] Yet, absent the Westphalian metaprinciple, *what constitutes the EU community and what is the normative grid that makes the EU 'hang together' and cohere over time?*[9] To discover the 'normative grid' of the EU, I assert that the EU community must be viewed as a 'structure of meaning-in-use'[10] whose very normativity can be reconstructed by examining how the *macro*-social structure is negotiated and given meaning by its members practicing it in smaller-scale sites of interaction. This is possible, if one adopts a practice-theoretical approach and conceptualises large-scale communities

[2] Anne W. Rawls, 'An essay on two conceptions of social order', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 9:4 (2009); Saskia Sassen, 'Neither global nor national: Novel assemblages of territory, authority and rights', *Ethics & Global Politics*, 1:1–2 (2008); Walker, 'Beyond boundary disputes'; Antje Wiener et al., 'Global constitutionalism: Human rights, democracy and the rule of law', *Global Constitutionalism*, 1:1 (2012).

[3] Walker, 'Beyond boundary disputes', p. 373.

[4] Ibid., p. 385.

[5] Ibid., pp. 385–91.

[6] Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'International institutions and socialization in Europe: Introduction and framework', *International Organization*, 59:4 (2005), p. 802.

[7] John G. Ruggie, 'Territoriality and beyond: Problematizing modernity in International Relations', *International Organization*, 47:1 (1993), p. 172.

[8] Barry Buzan and Thomas Diez, 'The European Union and Turkey', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 41:1 (1999), p. 56.

[9] Note the similarity with John G. Ruggie, 'What makes the world hang together? Neo-utilitarianism and the social constructivist challenge', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), who posed the lead question of 'What makes the world hang together?'.

[10] Jennifer Milliken, 'The study of discourse in International Relations: a critique of research and methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), p. 231; Jutta Weldes, 'Bureaucratic politics: a critical constructivist assessment', *Mershon International Studies Review*, 42:2 (1998), p. 218; Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, 'Making state action possible: the United States and the discursive construction of "The Cuban Problem", 1960–1994', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 25:2 (1996), p. 373; Antje Wiener, *The Invisible Constitution of Politics: Contested Norms and International Encounters* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Antje Wiener, 'Enacting meaning-in-use: Qualitative research on norms and International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 35:1 (2009).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

such as the EU as being layered into multiple, often-overlapping 'communities of practice' (CoP) that each reflects in its unique way the individual members' direct and local experience of belonging to the larger community. Consequently, one must reconceptualise the EU as a 'community of communities of practice'[11] that underlies no single overarching order, but has at its disposal multiple realities in different sites of interaction. The EU then becomes a 'community without unity' in which senses of belonging emerge in the absence of a homogeneous 'we'.[12]

The concept of CoP here serves as an observable medium through which the researcher can reconstruct the meaning that is attached to large-scale configurations in their respective small-scale interaction orders. As a primarily informal 'context for the negotiation of meaning',[13] it makes visible the normative background that is located in the relationships among those people who mutually engage in a specific set of practices and establish a shared repertoire of communal resources. Assemblages of practices must therefore be conceived as the principal source of the EU's coherence. They 'house'[14] the social and, as a consequence, the meaningfully shared 'constitutive rules'[15] that order members' actions and senses of belonging to the EU. Thus, the EU is perceived as a meaningful community because its members negotiate its normative make-up by perpetually appropriating it in their everyday life contexts *qua* practice. Hence, the background from which *macro*-structural entities become meaningful consists of the reflexive quality of practice that both creates the rules for members' engagement and constitutes the shared resources for the development of shared identification with the community.

An innovative and useful research strategy to tap these communal resources is to turn to 'b/ordering sites'[16] that are the objectified territorial form of the boundary that clearly separates an 'inside' from an 'outside'. They can be conceived of as the 'testing ground' for an otherwise latent order whose norms are worked out on the bordering collectivity.[17] For the purpose of 'visibilising'[18] the EU's

[11] John S. Brown and Paul Duguid, 'Knowledge and organization: a social-practice perspective', *Organization Science*, 12:2 (2001), p. 203; Federica Bicchi, 'The EU as a community of practice: Foreign policy communications in the COREU network', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 18:8 (2011), p. 1119.

[12] See Davide Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 94.

[13] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 84.

[14] The term of practices 'housing' sociality refers back to practice theorists working in the tradition of Heidegger and Wittgenstein. See Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*, ch. 7.

[15] The concept of 'constitutive rules' originally goes back to a distinction made by John Rawls between constitutive and regulative rules: John Rawls, 'Two concepts of rules', *The Philosophical Review*, 64:1 (1955). In IR, John Ruggie was the first who took up the concept of constitutive rules to argue that they 'are the institutional foundation of all social life'. See Ruggie, 'What makes the world hang together?', p. 873. More recently, Sending and Neumann have drawn on sociologist Ann Swidler's use of the concept with reference to anchoring practices: Ole J. Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Banking on power: How some practices in an international organization anchor others', in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds), *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). In turn, my use of the concepts stems from Anne Warfield Rawls's ethnomethodologist interpretation: Rawls, 'Two conceptions of social order'.

[16] On the concept of 'b/ordering' see especially Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering', *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 93:2 (2002); Henk van Houtum, Olivier T. Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer, 'B/ordering space', in Henk van Houtum, Olivier T. Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer (eds), *B/ordering Space* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Henk van Houtum, 'Remapping borders', in Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds), *A Companion to Border Studies* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).

[17] Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering', p. 129.

[18] I take this term from D. Nicolini, 'Articulating practice through the interview to the double', *Management Learning*, 40:2 (2009).

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latent order, I investigate EU diplomacy in Ukraine. Based on a reconstructive analysis of interviews conducted with field diplomats from the EU member states and the European External Action Service (EEAS) posted to the EU's neighbouring state, I come to identify 'boundary work' as both the constitutive rule and communal resource that makes the EU cohere over time. Boundary work is the generic term for a nexus of practitioners' 'boundary-spanning' and 'boundary-drawing' practices that negotiate the terms and conditions of EU membership and thus the boundaries between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the EU. In a dynamic relationship, these two modes of boundary work perpetually instantiate the EU community in practitioners' immediate contexts of action. They come to constitute the normative background from which participants in CoP conceive of themselves as members of the EU project. While the pertaining practices vary across time and space, boundary work remains the constant pattern or leitmotif that orients members' actions. The lived experience of boundary work hence creates a shared stock of knowing-in-practice that, in turn, constitutes an 'act of belonging'[19] to the larger EU community.

The article proceeds in four steps. The first section presents an adaptation of CoP as a 'core approach' in international practice theory.[20] By way of turning to the boundaries of community and introducing the concept of 'boundary work' I develop the CoP framework further in order to capture the multiple, sometimes contradictory modes of organising community. This more nuanced framework is able to synthesise functional-constructivist accounts of community-building that highlight modes of linking with poststructuralist accounts that emphasise modes of differentiation as the key mechanism of identity constructions. In the next section this intermediary perspective is bolstered by a corresponding research strategy of 'zooming in' on b/ordering sites to seize the multiplicity by which carriers of practice generate feelings of belonging to a community. The following section then proceeds with addressing the intricacies associated with conducting practice-based research when practices are conventionally held to evade the public gaze. To empirically probe that boundary work constitutes the anchoring practice for CoP, I zoom in on the b/ordering site of Ukraine and exemplify EU diplomats' everyday practices by reconstructing their accounts of self-(re)presentation as field diplomats. In a concluding section, I summarise the main contribution that my rereading of Etienne Wenger's CoP concept makes to the IR discipline and specifically underscore the promise of taking an interdisciplinary approach towards the boundaries of community.

Rereading the 'communities of practice' approach

In their recent review of how the concept of 'community' has been employed by IR scholars, Antje Vetterlein and Antje Wiener found surprisingly few studies on the nature and processes of community construction beyond the state.[21] Rather, the concept was centrally used as an analytical and artificially fixed reference frame to explore the validity of norms and rules of international order.[22] The very exploration as to how the foundations of a given communal order are socially constructed and constituted has only been advanced more recently by a group of scholars around Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot.[23] As principal advocates of the most recent 'practice turn' in

[19] Etienne Wenger, 'Communities of practice and social learning systems', *Organization*, 7:2 (2000), p. 238.
[20] Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, *International Practice Theory: New Perspectives* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), ch. 3.
[21] Antje Vetterlein and Antje Wiener, 'Gemeinschaft *Revisited*: Die sozialen Grundlagen internationaler Ordnung', *Leviathan*, 41:S28 (2013).
[22] Ibid., p. 78.
[23] See especially Emanuel Adler, 'The spread of security communities: Communities of practice, self-restraint, and NATO's post-Cold War transformation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:2 (2008); Emanuel

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IR,[24] they have proposed to study practices to 'explain and understand how world politics actually works, that is, *in* practice'.[25] Arguably, then, studying practices helps disclose the building blocks of global politics. As ontologically situated in-between structure and agency, the two authors understand practices to be 'socially meaningful patterns of action which … simultaneously embody, act out and possibly reify background knowledge'.[26] This ties in neatly with conceptions provided by other practice theorists, albeit defined in multiple ways as 'organized nexuses of activity',[27] 'the regular, skilful "performance" of (human) bodies'[28] or 'the temporally unfolding, symbolically-mediated interweaving of experience and action'.[29] While differing in focus, these definitions share the assumption that practices are always associated with repetitive, interlinked, or relational occurrences that 'house' the social'.[30] As the 'site of the social',[31] they are a patterned and historically situated activity carried out by the individual whose meaning, however, extends beyond it and is collectively shared. Yet, how can IR researchers analytically incorporate practices to bridge *micro*-social processes of intersubjective knowledge production among individuals and *macro*-social phenomena such as community formation in beyond-the-state contexts?

Emanuel Adler's adapted concept of Etienne Wenger's 'communities of practice' (CoP) has provided a convincing analytical access point to this question.[32] He has seen the conceptual value of CoP in its ability to resolve the traditional dualism between *macro* and *micro* studies where either structural

Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds), *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vincent Pouliot, 'The logic of practicality: a theory of practice of security communities', *International Organization*, 62:2 (2008); Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[24] In IR, scholars belonging to the 'practice turn' are no homogeneous group, but have rather been associated with it in retrospect due to their analytical focus placed on practices. Earlier work has primarily drawn inspiration from poststructuralist theory, working with Michel Foucault's practice term. See, for example, James D. Derian, 'Mediating estrangement: a theory for diplomacy', *Review of International Studies*, 13:2 (1987); Roxanne Doty, 'Aporia: a critical exploration of the agent-structure problematique in International Relations theory', *European Journal of International Relations*, 3:3 (1997). Later work was more or less related to ideas developed in the philosophy of language, that is by Ludwig Wittgenstein or John Austin. See, for example, Karin M. Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies: Critical Investigations in Security* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning practice to the linguistic turn: the case of diplomacy', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 31:3 (2002), incorporated insights gained from social theory more broadly: see Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina, and Eike van Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001); Andreas Reckwitz, 'Toward a theory of social practices: a development in culturalist theorizing', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5:2 (2002); Christian Bueger, 'From epistemology to practice: a sociology of science for International Relations', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 15:1 (2011); Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, 'Praktisch Gedacht! Praxistheoretischer Konstruktivismus in den Internationalen Beziehungen', *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 15:2 (2008) or based their theoretical framework on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory: Pouliot, 'The logic of practicality'; Rebecca Adler-Nissen, 'Symbolic power in European diplomacy: the struggle between national foreign services and the EU's external action service', *Review of International Studies*, 40:4 (2014).

[25] Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices', *International Theory*, 3:1 (2011), p. 3.

[26] Ibid., p. 6.

[27] Theodore R. Schatzki, 'Practice mind-ed orders', in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina, and Eike van Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 56.

[28] Reckwitz, 'Toward a theory of social practices', p. 251.

[29] Barbara Simpson, 'Pragmatism, mead and the practice turn', *Organization Studies*, 30:12 (2010), p. 1338.

[30] See Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*, p. 162.

[31] Reckwitz, 'Toward a theory of social practices', p. 251.

[32] Emanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2005); Adler, 'The spread of security communities'; Wenger, *Communities of Practice*.

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determinants or agents are given ontological priority to explain specific outcomes. As he states, '[c]ommunities of practice cut across state boundaries and mediate between states, individuals, and human agency, on one hand, and social structures and systems, on the other.'[33] CoP, then, are the 'social space where structure and agency overlap'[34] and where more abstract, reified concepts are given shape and meaning through parties organising them in specific localities. By way of the example of NATO as a security community he has held that transnational elites belonging to the military alliance function as a community of practice as they engage in self-restraint and cooperative security. As a *meso*-level concept, it thus proves useful to unearth both the rules and intersubjective processes that constitute the resources that help maintain and expand securities communities. Building upon Wenger, Adler has identified that the everyday practice of mutual engagement and the negotiation of a joint enterprise by diplomats, experts or civil servants creates 'a repertoire of communal resources'[35] that, in turn, becomes the sociocultural raw material upon which individual members collectively draw to make (sense of) their community. In a joint piece with Vincent Pouliot he thus defines a community of practice as 'a configuration of a domain of knowledge that constitutes like-mindedness, a community of people that "creates the social fabric of learning", and a shared practice that embodies "the knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains"'.[36]

The boundaries of (the concept of) 'communities of practice'

The moment a concept starts to travel and crosses disciplinary boundaries its meaning changes. As researchers adapt a concept to a different discipline or to a specific case some of its elements gain, some others lose in significance. As a consequence, adaptations may often attract critique, which the originally conceived concept sought to hedge against. This course of events also applies to the concept of CoP that has been criticised for its progressive reification. In light of the turn towards an analytical focus on practice, it is precisely the delicate combination of 'community' and 'practice' that has led scholars who have dealt with the concept of CoP to grapple with the question as to which ontological understanding underlies this approach. Davide Nicolini has related this uncertainty to 'the risky juxtaposition of two terms, … each of which has a distinctly different lineage'.[37] Specifically Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between the organically determined *Gemeinschaft*-form of community and the modern functionalist *Gesellschaft*-form has contributed to romanticising the image of the organic community as 'a form of social life for which solidarity and harmony are characteristic, as well as cooperation amongst members and a common goal based on tradition'.[38] Against these value-laden notions, Nicolini has warned that 'once we couple the notion of practice with a "stronger", more entrenched notion, such as community, the former tends to lose its main processual, social, temporary, and conflictual character'.[39]

[33] Adler, *Communitarian International Relations*, p. 15.
[34] Adler and Pouliot, 'International practices', p. 18.
[35] Adler, 'The spread of security communities', p. 199.
[36] Wenger et al. in Adler and Pouliot, 'International practices', p. 18.
[37] Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*, p. 88.
[38] Antje Wiener and Antje Vetterlein, 'The constitution of international order: Towards a grand theory of community for IR', paper prepared for presentation at the Young Researchers Conference: 'Liberalism: Causing or Resolving the Crises of Global Governance?', 3–6 February 2011, Germany: Frankfurt a.M. (2011), p. 11.
[39] Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*, p. 92; see also Joanne Roberts, 'Limits to communities of practice', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43:3 (2006).

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Ironically, the reification of the concept was never intended by anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger who coined the term in their 1991 work on *Legitimate Peripheral Participation*.[40] On the contrary, the two authors took pains to explicate the use of the term in the following way:

> we do not imply some primordial culturesharing [*sic*] entity. We assume that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a *community of practice*. Nor does the term community imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities.[41]

CoP are therefore nothing more than an 'activity system', that is, a 'pattern of sociality performed by a practical regime through its reproduction process'.[42] They do not denote a clearly carved out entity. Instead, the configuration of the community is temporally defined and flexible as its 'existence' depends on the recurring realisation of its meaning through mutual engagement.

Etienne Wenger has held firm to the processual quality of CoP, even though it has been his conceptualisation that attracted most of the criticism of progressive reification[43] and has been equated with 'a container of practice with clearly identifiable boundaries and recognizable social coherence'.[44] I would argue against such criticism and rather submit Wenger's work to a creative rereading and seize the relational ontology of CoP that its originators Lave and Wenger (1991) sought to stress. To that end, it is crucial to emphasise that its three dimensions of mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a communally shared repertoire 'create a context for the negotiation of meaning'[45] rather than a 'thing'. Thus, we must conceive them as primarily informal and local social structures of meaning in which modes of belonging are negotiated through both the enactment and reification of shared practices. This implies that CoP need not, but can be equated with institutionalised, geographically and spatially bounded communities. They may constitute part of and strengthen a more formal form of community, yet they may also merely crisscross or overlap in some areas. This image can be linked to what Wenger calls the '"fractal" layers of belonging' of individuals whose identity is made up of different degrees of commitment and connections to others.[46] As he states,

> if a community is large, it is a good idea to structure it in layers, as a 'fractal' of embedded subcommunities. … With such a fractal structure, by belonging to your … subcommunity, you experience in a local and direct way your belonging to a much broader community.[47]

[40] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[41] Ibid., p. 98.
[42] Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*, p. 87.
[43] Alessia Contu and Hugh Willmott, 'Comment on Wenger and Yanow: Knowing in practice: a "delicate flower" in the organizational learning field', *Organization*, 7:2 (2000); Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*; Roberts, 'Limits to communities of practice'. For a more general critique of practice scholars having reified social practices see C. Navari, 'The concept of practice in the English School', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:4 (2011).
[44] Bueger and Gadinger, *International Practice Theory*, p. 30.
[45] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, p. 84.
[46] Wenger, 'CoP and social learning systems', pp. 242–3.
[47] Ibid., p. 243.

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It is this layering analogy that I regard as a useful bridge and point of departure for thinking about the interrelation between the *macro*-social and *micro*-social dimensions of community. I hence conceptualise the EU as a community made up of manifold subcommunities in which practice is the central (re)source of their respective coherence and link to its reified, institutionalised structure. In other words, to borrow from John S. Brown and Paul Duguid's insights from organisation studies, the EU is a 'community of communities of practice'.[48]

Boundaries as 'sites of difference'

A second, but thus far neglected way to avoid reification is to look for the 'things of boundaries' instead of the 'boundaries of things', as Andrew Abbott has forcefully argued.[49] In his view, zooming in on what happens at the boundary allows examining how people actually create entities since he considers boundaries a precondition for all things social. This should not be mistaken for a strategic move to simply reverse the order of what is ontologically prior as if boundaries are now the essentialised and pre-existing entity to all subsequent phenomena. Rather, it underlines the nature of boundaries as neither absolute nor pure, but inherently relational[50] and as 'a social practice of spatial differentiation'[51] So while they have in the past been primarily conceived of in the material, territorial sense of state borders, more recently their socially constructed nature as products of human practice has been acknowledged by political geographers together with sociologists and anthropologists.[52] These authors have sought to evade the longstanding 'territorial trap' in IR theory.[53]

But what exactly is a boundary then? For Abbott, boundaries are for a start nothing more than 'sites of difference', that is, random locations of difference that 'emerge from local and cultural negotiations' between diverse 'units' such as people, physical locations or prior social entities.[54] For these to constitute a coherent 'thing', however, they need to be actively 'yoked' or linked together 'such that one side of each becomes defined as "inside" the same entity'.[55] Abbott's conception of boundary is highly instructive, for it captures two crucial elements of a boundary: first, it is spatially embedded

[48] Brown and Duguid, 'Knowledge and organization', p. 203.
[49] Andrew Abbott, 'Things of boundaries', *Social Research*, 62:4 (1995), p. 857.
[50] Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Ellis Horwood and Tavistock, 1985), p. 58; Alan K. Henrikson, 'Facing across borders: the diplomacy of Bon Voisinage', *International Political Science Review*, 21:2 (2000), p. 130.
[51] Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering', p. 126.
[52] Eiki Berg and Henk van Houtum, 'Prologue: a border is not a border: Writing and reading borders in space', in Eiki Berg and Henk van Houtum (eds), *Routing Borders between Territories, Discourses, and Practices* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Houtum, 'Remapping borders'; Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering'; David Newman, 'Boundaries, borders, and barriers: Changing geographic perspectives on territorial lines', in Mathias Albert, David Jacobson, and Yosef Lapid (eds), *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis [etc.]: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); David Newman, 'The lines that continue to separate us: Borders in our "borderless" world', *Progress in Human Geography*, 30:2 (2006); David Newman and Anssi Paasi, 'Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: Boundary narratives in political geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, 22:2 (1998); Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds), *A Companion to Border Studies* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).
[53] John Agnew, 'The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of International Relations theory', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1:1 (1994), p. 59; see also R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[54] Abbott, 'Things of boundaries', p. 867.
[55] Ibid., p. 871.

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and, second, active work is required for sites of difference to become linked into a coherent 'thing'. Boundaries must then be seen as particularly dense sites of interaction where differences and diversity are possibly greatest and must undergo intense negotiations, maybe even conflict among practitioners to create new entities or sustain particular divides between separate ones.

I would thus argue that boundaries are not only an essentially constitutive element of communities, but that they also represent the ideal site in which to investigate how a community becomes meaningful. They might be compared to what Heidegger called a *Lichtung*, that is, a clearing in the woods where entities take form and come to light.[56] It is furthermore compelling because boundaries are the sites where differences can be confirmed, for example, through the clash of practices, but also where commonly shared understandings can be generated through encounters. Boundaries therefore have a dual quality in that they create possibilities for conflict and sustained inside/outside divides, on the one hand, and/or knowledge of and mutual understanding for differences, on the other. They are never barriers or bridges by default.[57] They merely become sites of exclusion or inclusion depending on their use in context.

Boundary work: Boundary practices as modes of organising community

If it is their use that determines whether a boundary constrains or enables boundary crossing, then we need to pay due attention to the processes that organise or manage the boundary and thereby create and maintain communities as social phenomena. Yet, with regard to the concept of CoP, scholars have largely neglected the aspect of actively managing the boundary or portrayed boundaries in an exclusively positive light. This is grossly negligent, given the increasingly symbolic significance that boundaries have for the meaning of entities in light of globalisation processes that have, at least in the EU context, led to the weakening of traditional territorial borders and a concomitant increase in their cultural dimensions.[58] Thus, boundaries are always sites of political negotiation, contestation or even conflict over what it means to be an 'insider'.[59]

Wenger for his part has pointed to the dual quality of boundaries,[60] but primarily elaborated on the positive effect of the boundaries of CoP to create new opportunities for learning. The exposure to an experience of difference at the border demonstrates that one's competences no longer match the new situation and therefore require adaptation. Learning is then part of an individual's effort to close the perceived gap between his or her competences and experience. This process can be facilitated by connections that are generated across the boundary through specific actors who act as 'brokers' or 'boundary spanners', through specific artefacts, a shared language or coordination procedures that serve as 'boundary objects' or through boundary encounters.[61] In IR, it is Christian Bueger who has

[56] Cited in Davide Nicolini, 'Practice as the site of knowing: Insights from the field of telemedicine', *Organization Science*, 22:3 (2011), p. 604, fn. 2. Note also that since the German word *Lichtung* comes from *Licht*, that is, 'light', Heidegger also implied that the situated 'being-in-the-world' becomes intelligible to us through its illumination (Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 163).

[57] See Newman, 'The lines that continue to separate us'.

[58] Gerard Delanty, 'Borders in a changing Europe: Dynamics of openness and closure', *Comparative European Politics*, 4:2/3 (2006), p. 185.

[59] See T. K. Oommen, 'Contested boundaries and emerging pluralism', *International Sociology*, 10:3 (1995).

[60] Wenger, 'CoP and social learning systems', p. 233.

[61] Ibid., pp. 235–7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

centrally taken up the concept of 'boundary objects', albeit in a similarly positive light due to his interactionist reading of the UN concept of 'human security'.[62]

Emanuel Adler also acknowledges the role that boundaries play for community-building, its expansion or overlap with other communities. In a jointly authored piece with Patricia Greve, for instance, he promisingly starts a debate about the boundaries of regions as the two authors point to the implications that overlapping security mechanisms among regions may have for the nature of their respective boundaries.[63] However, they leave it to others to empirically probe the effect of travelling security practices across borders.[64] Similarly, in his 2005 monograph on *Communitarian International Relations* Adler already refers to boundaries as one of the main characteristics of CoP, yet does not conceptualise the idea further. Instead, he conveys the impression that boundaries are effortlessly overcome and primarily function as the positive link between communities that enable community expansion and integration.[65] Unfortunately, this reinforces a static conception of CoP in that his illustrative security community NATO becomes a stable, 'container-like' entity that progressively spreads towards integrating 'outsiders' into an ever-larger community. Even though he seeks to understand how change is possible through practice,[66] what he shows is how former 'outsiders' are successively transformed into 'insiders' through the process of socialisation that follows a linear logic: the end state appears to be fixed as newcomers adopt those practices they were 'taught' by existing members based on a rule-following behaviour. Through participation the 'pupil' learns how to be a 'good' member of a community.

Poststructuralist analyses of collective identity formation provide a stark alternative to this inclusive understanding of boundaries and point to their exclusive effects instead. In his 1996 article 'Self and Other in International Relations', Neumann argued that 'social boundaries are not a consequence of integration, but one of its necessary *a priori* ingredients'.[67] Since poststructuralism suggests that the Self cannot make sense of its being without the Other, collective identities are formed through specific *processes of differentiation* of the Self from a perceived Other. As the necessary markers between an 'inside-group' and 'outside-group', then, boundaries make processes of identification possible in the first place. The corresponding mechanisms of exclusion were first conceptualised by David Campbell. In his study on how the state as Self is constituted in its foreign policy, he found that it is through 'boundary-producing practices' that the state instantiates its identity to create a constitutive outside and thereby secures its ontological Self through distinction.[68] While he sees the potential for a positive association between Self and Other in principle, Campbell exclusively focuses

[62] Christian Bueger, 'Human security – what's the use of it? On boundary objects and the constitution of new global spaces', paper prepared for presentation at the 49th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, March 2008.

[63] Emanuel Adler and Patricia Greve, 'When security community meets balance of power: Overlapping regional mechanisms of security governance', *Review of International Studies*, 35:S1 (2009).

[64] See ibid., p. 82.

[65] See his short paragraph on boundaries in Adler, *Communitarian International Relations*, p. 24; see also Adler, 'The spread of security communities', p. 200.

[66] Note, however, that Adler sees practice as a means to bring about both change and stability. In a 2011 article co-authored with Vincent Pouliot, for instance, he distances himself from the contingency argument put forward by poststructuralists and argues instead for the role of practices in fixing meaning and thereby enabling stable structures to evolve. See especially Adler and Pouliot, 'International practices', p. 3.

[67] Iver B. Neumann, 'Self and Other in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2:2 (1996), p. 167.

[68] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on negative Othering, where the Other is portrayed in antagonistic terms as radically different.[69] Lene Hansen has sought to provide a more nuanced picture of this binary mode of Othering in that she has stressed how different degrees of difference exist that can lead to *less-than-radical* Otherness.[70] However, a convergence between Self and Other in the sense of the Other becoming or eventually merging with the Self is still considered improbable as it would threaten the very ontological security of the Self. Following the line of poststructuralist IR scholars, then, implies that boundaries can never be overcome, as they are a constitutive element in the construction of identity. Even though they are regarded as essentially productive, they work as barriers or constraints rather than enablers for transboundary action.

While poststructuralism is thus strong on highlighting how 'boundary-producing' practices or Othering are specific modes of organising that create categories, classifications of objects, people, and collectivities, it is weak on conceptualising the boundary as a site that can be used for both exclusion *and* inclusion. It follows that, if inclusive accounts such as Adler's (2005, 2008) operate with stable conceptions of community, it is exclusionary accounts that operate with static conceptions of the boundary. The latter approach to community is therefore no less one-sided because it is equally unable to capture the whole spectrum of members' practices that make their community meaningful. As a response, I propose an integrated approach that acknowledges that community dynamics cannot be explained by a simple binary logic of internal/linking vs external/differentiating, but that community is the result of a complex interplay or overlap of both practices of linking and differentiation. I hence argue that on an everyday basis, members of a community enact the rules undergirding it both through practices of linking (*boundary-spanning*) and practices of differentiation (*boundary-drawing*). These I shall subsume under the generic term of *boundary work*. Boundary work thus captures people's efforts to 'yoke' or link diverse, heterogeneous, sometimes even contradicting practices into an assemblage that creates a sense of like-mindedness among members of CoP. For this exercise, people do not necessarily need to share the same interests or be of the same opinion. It is the mutual engagement in boundary work that creates a joint enterprise. Over time, then, the experience of how diverse locations of difference are managed comes to constitute a shared repertoire of resources and helps the community cohere. Boundary work is hence the community members' capability learnt 'on the job' to engage meaningfully in their community. This competence serves as background knowledge that is practice and resource at once and thus bears the negotiated normativity of the community.

In conclusion, the above elaboration on the sites of difference suggests that looking at how the diverse boundaries are managed highlights how a community is meaningfully experienced. Moreover, it shows that the constitution of community is more complex than functional accounts of integration suggest and less antagonistic than poststructuralist accounts assume. While members do indeed 'span' across boundaries through generating strong interdependence, shared discourses and processes of cooperation and coordination with a perceived Other, they equally draw or maintain boundaries *vis-à-vis* an Other to secure the Self's position *ex negativo*. Here, senses of belonging are not brought about by shared norms, but by the shared practice of creating a constitutive outside, which obscures the internal diversity. Thus, the constitutive outside helps enhance the distinctiveness and social cohesion of the 'inside'.

Table 1 gives a heuristic overview of the diverse practices pertaining to boundary work that I have identified on the basis of my interview data generated in 2012 and 2014. In addition to displaying the

[69] Ole Wæver, 'European security identities', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34:1 (1996), p. 122.
[70] Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 36.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. Types of boundary work.

Practices	Internal to CoP	External to CoP
Practices of linking	Internal boundary-spanning	External boundary-spanning
Practices of differentiation	Internal boundary-drawing	External boundary drawing

two different sets of 'linking' and 'differentiating' processes, it shows a twofold partitioning into 'internal' and 'external' 'boundary-drawing' and 'boundary-spanning' practices. Together they make four different types of boundary work in which EU field diplomats engage in Kyiv, Ukraine. The rationale behind this additional distinction is to take account of 'boundary-spanning' and 'boundary-drawing' practices that go beyond the simple 'inside'/linking and 'outside'/differentiation dichotomy.[71] The reconstruction of my interviews yielded more complex processes of boundary work that included not only the generally anticipated 'boundary-spanning' or 'boundary-drawing' by EU field diplomats *vis-à-vis* actors 'external' to the EU, such as those pertaining to the host state or other 'international players'. Given the contingent nature of community, 'boundary-spanning' and 'boundary-drawing' practices also take place 'internally', that is, among the members of the EU diplomatic 'community of practice' as well as with a view to the wider EU community in Brussels or the member state capitals. In light of these manifold and sometimes contradictory modes of organising, critics might question the very distinction of 'internal' and 'external', suggesting that this artificially reifies the EU as a given community with preexisting boundaries. I would object here, however, for the typology does not only help us pin down the diverse practices of 'b/ordering',[72] it also makes particularly prominent the idea that we cannot assume the presence of a homogeneous EU community, but rather the ordered practice of creating a 'community without unity'.

The intricate practice of capturing practice

Before I move on to demonstrate how EU field diplomats' boundary work represents the EU's normative grid that makes the community cohere, it is necessary to briefly outline the research strategy and method that provide steps detailing how the constitutive rules of the EU community can be reconstructed from practices. These steps need to be made explicit as background knowledge is notoriously difficult to capture. I contend that, if it is the rule-governed and yet contextual use of *macro*-phenomena that constitutes community, the researcher can unearth the meaning-in-use found in agents' practices[73] and thereby visibilise them. In a first step, I do so by advancing a two-pronged strategy of 'zooming in' on practices, which indicates where to look when aiming at unearthing the underlying order of practices. In a second step, I explicate why the technique of interviewing can be considered a worthwhile alternative to ethnographic participant observation that is traditionally seen as praxiology's 'natural' method of data generation.[74]

[71] See Friedrichs and Kratochwil's call for moving beyond a traditional binary logic: Jörg Friedrichs and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'On acting and knowing: How pragmatism can advance International Relations research and methodology', *International Organization*, 63:4 (2009), p. 705.

[72] Houtum, 'Remapping borders'; Henk van Houtum, Olivier T. Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer (eds), *B/ordering Space* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering'.

[73] Wiener, 'Enacting meaning-in-use'.

[74] Andreas Reckwitz, 'Praktiken und Diskurse: Eine sozialtheoretische und methodologische Relation', in Herbert Kalthoff, Stefan Hirschauer, and Gesa Lindemann (eds), *Theoretische Empirie: Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung* (Frankfurt, M: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 196.

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As for the first part of the strategy of 'zooming in', I propose venturing new sites of research, that is, borders or borderlands as 'b/ordering sites'.[75] As the objectified, territorially defined outcome of practices of ordering and bordering, a border can be conceived of as the 'testing ground' for an otherwise latent order whose norms are worked out on the bordering collectivity.[76] As Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár point out with reference to national borders, these

> provide most individuals with a concrete, local, and powerful experience of the state, for this is the site where citizenship is strongly enforced (through passport checks, for instance). The social experience of borders encompasses formal and informal ties between local communities and larger polities, and hence constitutes a privileged site for analyzing micro and macro dimensions of national identity.[77]

Borders are thus the site where the inside of political entities is reproduced on the outside and where the members of a community experience their belonging to a community most intensely. Borders, and borderlands respectively, are hence assumed to closely reflect the constitution of a given polity. Even though I have previously sought to make plain that sites of difference exist everywhere in social space, I nonetheless contend they are more easily observable in localities that lie in so-called 'power margins' rather than 'power centres'.[78] Although, or precisely because, b/ordering sites are located 'on the margins' of a given entity, boundary negotiations are expected to compound here as contestation over questions of membership and belonging is intensified. Thus, they might shape the entity more strongly than the normality at the centre.[79]

For the purpose of analysing the EU's constitution as a community I take the EU's neighbouring country Ukraine to constitute such a b/ordering site in which multifarious sites of difference overlap and are subjected to negotiation. Following Friedrich's and Kratochwil's pragmatist suggestion to choose the 'most important' or 'most typical' case,[80] Ukraine must be considered among the most important cases due to its archetype role as a borderland. This claim is grounded in a twofold rationale: first, as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Ukraine politically lies at the borders of the EU and thereby belongs to the group of sixteen 'outsiders'[81] that currently encircle the EU on both its Eastern and Southern fringes. Moreover, its very name *ukraina* is representative of Ukraine's status as a country that has seldom been portrayed as independent, always part of or in-between larger 'wholes'.[82] Thus, it symbolically represents the site where the 'Western' liberal

[75] See especially, Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering'; Houtum, Kramsch, and Zierhofer, 'B/ordering space'; Houtum, 'Remapping borders', on the concept of 'b/ordering'.

[76] Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering', p. 129.

[77] Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, 'The study of boundaries in the social sciences', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28 (2002), p. 183.

[78] See Merje Kuus, 'Europe's eastern expansion and the reinscription of Otherness in East-Central Europe', *Progress in Human Geography*, 28:4 (2004), p. 473.

[79] See Ole Wæver, 'Discursive approaches', in Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez (eds), *European Integration Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 175.

[80] Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 'On acting and knowing', p. 718.

[81] Karen E. Smith was the first to call the ENP countries 'outsiders', thereby criticising the inside-outside logic of the ENP; Karen E. Smith, 'The outsiders: the European Neighbourhood Policy', *International Affairs*, 81:4 (2005).

[82] Kristof has explicated that *ukraina* literally means 'borderland' and denotes an area 'on the margins' of some larger entity. As he details, '[t]he Ukrainian (and Russian) equivalent of the English "march" (French: *marche*; German: *Mark*) is *ukraina*, meaning literally "borderland". *Krai* (or *kraina*) means in Ukrainian "land" or "country", but *krai* (or *ukrai*) means also "border" or "margin" *U kraia* (or *na kraiu*) means "on the margin", and *ukraiaty* (or *ukroity*) is to "cut off", especially to cut off a smaller piece (e.g., margin) from some larger entity.

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*EU*rope directly encounters its former absolute communist Other. On the other hand, Ukraine is where diplomacy is taking place at multiple levels at once. While it is the 'mediated exchange'[83] between the EU and the third state Ukraine, it is also that among the EU member states that struggle to find a common EU approach towards this very country. The consequence of these multiple exchanges is that they do not only show how the constitutive parts of this post-Westphalian polity negotiate their community among themselves and try to represent it abroad, but that it is the site where the EU's external representation is at times challenged by intra-EU diplomatic struggles over what *EU*rope actually means.

Whereas Ukraine constitutes the b/ordering site in which an ensemble of practices unfolds most visibly, the question remains as to how their meaning reflects back on the larger EU community. This is answered by the second part of the strategy of 'zooming in'. I contend that this 'transfer' is undertaken by a group of individuals – the *corps diplomatique* of the EU and its member states in Kyiv – that acts as a 'carrier' (Weber's *Träger*) of practices that bring the *macro*-social structure to life.[84] Because of their function as representatives of the EU member states, or of the hybrid EU non-state respectively, EU field diplomats are the actors whose practices are most exposed to the public gaze. As 'France', 'Poland', or 'the EU', they personify their respective political entity and act on behalf of the larger whole. This facilitates the researcher's task to relate the constitutive practices to a specific *macro*-social entity.

This two-pronged strategy is considered most effective when implemented under conditions of crisis.[85] Crisis situations arguably increase the chance of tapping background knowledge because they visibilise the latent social order.[86] In contrast to settled times during which commonsense goes unformulated, moments of crisis or upheaval compel agents to make their taken-for-granted background knowledge explicit. It is here that active work on the part of agents is necessary to either re-establish the previous order that has recently broken down or construct new strategies for managing the crisis. It follows that specifically in new, unfamiliar situations a greater emphasis can be placed on the articulated, representational knowledge that is required to address these situations by *account*-giving. Crisis situations are thus rare moments in time during which the tacit agreement among practitioners is disrupted and leads to a visible 'break' in the 'order of things'.[87] For that reason I have chosen two consecutive periods of hiatus in which the EU diplomatic routine was

Ukraina (like the several German *Mark*) was originally not a proper name of a specific country, the Ukraine of today, but a general description of the lands on the periphery of Russ or Lithuania (later Poland).'; L. K. T. Kristof, 'The nature of frontiers and boundaries', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 49:3 (1959), pp. 269–70.

[83] Iver B. Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Enquiry* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013), p. 6.

[84] See Jeff Coulter, 'Human practices and the observability of the "macro-social"', in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina, and Eike van Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 42.

[85] See Bueger who has suggested putting conflict, controversies or more generally moments of crisis at the centre of his research framework: 'From epistemology to practice'; Christian Bueger, 'Pathways to practice: Praxiography and international politics', *European Political Science Review*, 6:3 (2014).

[86] This claim is informed by the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel: Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1967).

[87] Note here that this 'break' was intended by Garfinkel with his so-called 'breaching experiments': he sought to bring to the fore the 'seen but unnoticed' (ibid., p. 44). In one of his tutorials students were asked to engage in everyday conversations with friends and 'breach' the underlying expectancies by 'insist[ing] that the person clarify the sense of his commonplace remarks' (ibid., p. 42). As in all other experiments, they were to defamiliarise themselves with the commonsense structures or expectations. The result of puzzlement or outright

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threatened or interrupted in Ukraine: first, the period leading up to the 2012 Ukrainian parliamentary elections and, second, the period following the suspended signature of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) on the part of the Ukrainian authorities that triggered the mass protests and eventually a national revolution on Maidan from late November 2013 onwards.

When it comes to capturing diplomatic practice in the field, scholarly research is particularly challenged by a potential lack of access. Due to diplomacy's secretive nature, ethnographic fieldwork therefore remains a rare exercise in foreign policy or IR and scholars have mostly relied on textual analysis and interviewing.[88] Yet, qualitative interviewing as the 'second best' option of data collection is contested in praxiology. This method may be criticised for its language-centric bias where the researcher focuses less on the participatory and implicit elements of practice and more on its reified forms that come in the guise of discursive interventions.[89] Contrary to the objective of 'praxiography',[90] then, the researcher and interviewee merely 'talk about practices'.[91] While these objections cannot be ignored, they nonetheless undervalue that representation and performance are two sides of the same practice coin. Explicitly reified forms of practice often close the gaps left open by the vagueness of its participatory forms so that these two aspects must be understood to be in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship. It is not without reason that Garfinkel's notion of 'accountability' implies that interactants provide *accounts* to one another in order to make their practices intelligible, which, in the end, serve as 'narrative justifications of order production'.[92] Thus, *a priori* rejecting qualitative interviewing is short-sighted since '[t]he researcher always relies on the inference from the explicit to the implicit, from movements to meaning'[93] – regardless of whether is directly or indirectly observed.

Adopting the technique of interviewing for data generation in the context of praxiographic research, however, requires attuning the questions asked during the interview situation from *What?* to *How?*. *How?* questions can provide opportunities to disclose and thus make explicit the interviewees' methods used to make sense of their context.[94] Furthermore, interviews also allow exploration of how interviewees construct their 'social selves in context'.[95] This is crucial in light of my endeavour to reconstruct field diplomats' self-understanding as boundary workers. To this end, it is fruitful to

anger on the part of the conversation partners indicated that the tacitly assumed agreement of being committed to order-production was breached, but uncovered at the same time.

[88] Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise: Knowledge and Authority in European Diplomacy* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 54; see also Adler-Nissen, 'Symbolic power'; Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*. For an exceptional ethnographic account of diplomatic practice in IR see Neumann's work who has undertaken his research in the Norwegian foreign ministry in the double role of researcher and temporary diplomat: Iver B. Neumann, 'To be a diplomat', *International Studies Perspectives*, 6:1 (2005); Iver B. Neumann, '"A speech that the entire ministry may stand for", or: why diplomats never produce anything new', *International Political Sociology*, 1:2 (2007); Iver B. Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[89] Jan Kruse, *Qualitative Interviewforschung: Ein integrativer Ansatz* (Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2015), p. 284.

[90] Christian Bueger is the first in IR to employ the term 'praxiography' to denote the 'practice of the practice of doing practice theory driven research' (Christian Bueger, 'Pathways to practice', p. 385).

[91] Bueger and Gadinger, *International Practice Theory*, p. 89. One should note, however, that the interview itself is a form of practice that is generated by the interviewee and interviewer and is ordered according to specific rules: Kruse, *Qualitative Interviewforschung*, p. 290.

[92] Anne W. Rawls, 'Harold Garfinkel, ethnomethodology and workplace studies', *Organization Studies*, 29:5 (2008), p. 714.

[93] Reckwitz, 'Praktiken und diskurse', p. 196, author's translation.

[94] Simpson, 'Pragmatism, mead and the practice turn', p. 1341.

[95] Ibid.

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ask comparative questions so that interviewees are required to position themselves. Accordingly, one can ask the interviewee to recount or evaluate other practitioners' practices, weigh other practitioners' quotes as presented by the interviewer, or put their own role into comparative perspective.[96]

EU diplomacy as boundary work: Identifying the constitutive rules of community

In the following I highlight that boundary work by EU diplomats forms the nexus of the EU's constitutive practices that must be understood as the backbone of the EU community. Without the constant praxiological instantiation of the EU community through its constituent members' boundary work the EU community would falter as its members would lack the competences to make it cohere over time. Thus, boundary work is the constitutive rule orienting EU diplomatic practice. The individual practices pertaining to boundary work together form the pool of skills, competences, and resources that govern the EU diplomats' activities in the field in ways that make the joint enterprise of representing the EU in a third country a task worth pursuing. The practice of negotiating difference leads to shared ways of knowing that, in turn, create a sense of belonging and attachment to the EU among the local diplomatic 'community of practice'. In the following I provide an analysis of the diverse practices of boundary work by way of the fourfold differentiation presented in Table 1. To that end, I will first present the internal boundary-spanning and boundary-drawing practices identified among the group of EU diplomats and then I turn to the external dimension of boundary-spanning and boundary-drawing.

Internal boundary-spanning

As I demonstrate in this section, what makes EU field diplomats share an everyday lifeworld is the melange of procedural as well as substantive values. On a substantive level, field diplomats from EU member states share the joint enterprise of (re)presenting a common stock of EU values and principles to the host country. This common repertoire of reified structures is provided by the EU's *acquis communautaire*: at the most foundational level, Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) sets out the principles which shall guide the EU's actions in its CFSP, such as democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights, and Article 8 states the aim of 'good neighbourly relations' with Ukraine. Yet, due to their vagueness, these legal provisions have been complemented by further contractual relations between the EU and Ukraine over time.[97] The contractual framework has provided overall direction and functioned as a common reference point for diplomats' everyday activities, which include the task to assess and report which political and economic direction the country is taking.

On the procedural level, permanent diplomacy's 'key knowledge-producing practice'[98] of information gathering is accompanied by a sustained exchange of information that comes in both formal and

[96] See Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*, p. 69.

[97] The 1998 Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) long formed the overall legal frame within which official bilateral relations proceeded throughout the 2000s. Since 2004, however, it was reinforced by the regional ENP framework that provided for additional Action Plans (APs), *inter alia*, in the area of freedom, security and justice, and was further beefed up with the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative in 2009. Following Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004/2005, relations started to deepen in 2007/2008 with the beginning of negotiations over a more far-reaching legal framework that would include an Association Agreement (AA) in the political sphere and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) in the economic realm.

[98] See Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites*, p. 20.

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informal guises and represents an additional layer of practices that EU field diplomats share in their community of practice. With respect to formal channels of coordination, EU diplomats in third countries have an institutionalised consultation mechanism at hand that is uniquely accessible to EU diplomats and helps them engage in sustained mutual relationships. As formally laid down by Articles 32(3) and 35 TEU, EU member state missions are encouraged to 'contribute to formulating and implementing the common approach' by, *inter alia*, 'step[ping] up cooperation by exchanging information and carrying out joint assessments'. These are supposed to form part of showing 'mutual solidarity' (Article 32(1) TEU).

Prior to the Lisbon Treaty these objectives were primarily dealt with within the framework of monthly coordination meetings of Heads of Missions (HoMs) from each EU member state present in the host country.[99,100] The post-Lisbon setting now provides for regularised contact among the two major configurations of coordination meetings, that is, among HoMs and Deputy Heads of Missions (DHoMs). Convened and chaired by staff from the EU Delegation at least once a month, and in times of crisis up to two or three times per week,[101] these coordination meetings formally function as the forum within which common positions, joint *démarches vis-à-vis* the third country and the so-called HoMs report are agreed upon, subsequently written up by staff from the EU Delegation, and then communicated by the EU Delegation on behalf of the EU.[102] With regard to Ukraine, these formats have been extended to issue-related meetings to cover areas such as trade, visa issues, development cooperation and human rights as well as energy. These, however, take place irregularly and are demand-driven.[103] While the latter formats are thus often overshadowed by short-term priorities, HoMs meetings increased in frequency and took place up to three times a week during Maidan.[104]

The main objective of the above formats is information sharing and the exchange of views on perceived problems, concerns, and expectations regarding Ukraine's most recent developments.[105] More specifically, however, they help member states form a better picture of their colleagues' views, 'gage their temperature'[106] when it comes to different member states' views on Ukraine and develop a better understanding of the EU's proposed initiatives.[107] Ultimately, coordination meetings represent efficient ways for a diplomat to meet the ends of expanding his or her horizon by obtaining

[99] As of 1 July 2013, with Croatia's accession to the EU, there have been twenty-five member state embassies in Ukraine, excluding Ireland, Malta, and Luxemburg.

[100] Depending on the pro-activism of the respective country holding the EU's Presidency, coordination meetings also took place at lower levels of Deputy Heads of Mission or heads of specific sections. See also Heidi Maurer and Kristi Raik, 'Pioneers of a European diplomatic system: EU delegations in Moscow and Washington', *FIIA Analysis*, 1 (2014), p. 9, available at: {http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/415/pioneers_of_a_european_diplomatic_system/}, accessed 30 May 2014.

[101] Michele Comelli and Raffaello Matarazzo, 'Rehashed commission delegations or real embassies?: EU Delegations post-Lisbon', Istituto affari internazionali (IAI) Working Papers, 11/23 (2011), p. 3, available at: {http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiwp1123.pdf}, accessed 16 August 2013.

[102] Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the task of representing the EU's common stance in third countries has been taken over by the EU Delegation, laid down in Article 221 Treaty on Functioning of the EU (TFEU). Previously, the EU country internally holding the EU's Presidency also communicated the EU's positions externally.

[103] Special working groupings were also convened on the occasion of Ukrainian elections and with respect to Ukraine's constitutional reform efforts.

[104] Interview 2014/#IE.

[105] Interview 2012/#II.

[106] Interview 2012/#IN.

[107] Interviews 2012/#IG, 2012/#IN.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

new information from reliable sources and based on different perspectives. The result is 'knowing about the others' positions by ninety-nine per cent'.[108]

Beyond these standardised formats of consultation, the EU Delegation becomes an effective coordination hub that creates synergies with member states. While it has still not reached the status of a 'leader',[109] let alone an instigator of policy initiatives on a regular basis, it functions as a platform on which individual member states propose initiatives in issue areas that they feel strongly about, but in isolation lack the political weight to effectively realise them.[110] Consequently, especially smaller member states 'download' and filter information, but are also given the opportunity to lobby for their positions and thus 'upload' issue-related objectives in the hope to rally support and give their ideas more prominence as the EU 'as a whole'.[111] Accordingly, as a diplomat from a small member state highlighted, 'for us …, we know that we can push more through the EU. So we go to the meetings, we try to raise our ideas, we try to make coalitions even here. … We can only be stronger together.'[112] This does not imply that member state embassies suddenly stop cultivating their individual bilateral contacts with other member state missions. On the contrary, these remain intact and especially bigger member states often prefer to draw on their own bilateral networks of informants. However, EU member state diplomats do value the EU Delegation as a 'service point' or 'facilitator' that eases especially smaller member states' tasks of information gathering as they often lack the time and resources to cover their diverse portfolios. Actions such as briefings on delegation visits or the provision of the daily press review represent signs of mutual solidarity where the EU Delegation seeks to offset potential information asymmetries in the fashion of a boundary-spanner in its own right.

Yet, while institutionalised *fora* for consultation prestructure practices, they do not help diplomats organise their day-to-day business. This is only achieved by additional informal coordination. As was repeatedly underlined by EU field diplomats, EU coordination succeeded thanks to well-functioning relationships on the interpersonal level. Informal networks, then, generally matter more than what textbooks on the EU's political system have us believe.[113] As an essential element to breed 'trust',[114] the maintenance of informal networks makes up for all the gaps that are left open by the treaties and helps appropriate them to the conditions on the ground. In the end, as several diplomats confirmed, 'it's all about the people. … Whatever the Lisbon treaty [contains], I don't think it has changed much.'[115] Other artefacts such as the HoMs report are equally downplayed in their overall usefulness.[116] The HoMs report does serve as a summary of the *status quo ex post* that provides opportunities to contemplate the 'overall picture'.[117] However, as one diplomat explicated,

[108] Interview 2012/#IL.
[109] Interview 2014/#IP.
[110] Interviews 2014/#IO, 2014/#IP.
[111] See, for example, interviews 2012/#IC, 2012/#IL.
[112] Interview 2014/#IP.
[113] See also Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise*, pp. 44, 75, who in her study on transnational elites in Brussels has criticised the mainstay of institutional accounts of EU policymaking for not sufficiently acknowledging the role of informal networks among individuals. She has, in contrast, identified these to potentially provide EU transnational actors with a comparative information advantage over those who do not network as intensely.
[114] Interview 2014/#IO.
[115] Interview 2014/#IP; also interviews 2012/#II, 2014/#IO.
[116] However, for a different view that provides detailed insights into how genuine European knowledge is produced through the drafting of the 2009 HoMs report on East Jerusalem see Federica Bicchi, 'Information exchanges, diplomatic networks and the construction of European knowledge in European Union foreign policy', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 49:2 (2014).
[117] Interview 2014/#IO.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> [i]n the end, when decisions need to be made, it is more about phoning each other, brainstorming, debating, openly talking. You would probably not build up a construct of European positions on the basis of a paper. In the end, most things play out in the field of human relations.[118]

Thus, most EU diplomats do not wait for institutionalised meetings to get information from their EU colleagues; they just pick up the phone, write an email, or meet informally over lunch or a coffee.

It was particularly the period of high uncertainty during Maidan that disclosed that informal ties among EU diplomats and a high degree of personal commitment were key to 'getting by'. During a time in which routine templates no longer provided guidance, these proved to become the two most decisive resources upon which diplomats drew to engage in creative problem-solving. In the absence of institutionalised meetings at the DHoMs level,[119] for instance, less formal coordination based on '*ad hoc*-ing'[120] filled the gaps on numerous occasions. Besides individual member state initiatives, the period showed various instances of crisis-management where diplomatic staff from the EU Delegation channelled or even initiated joint EU actions. One visible initiative concerned the coordination of court visits based on email distribution lists that served as an *ad hoc* 'platform of information sharing' where ideas for new initiatives could be circulated.[121] Another set of initiatives involved efforts undertaken to prevent further human rights abuses as a result of abductions of wounded Maidan protestors from hospitals. In the case of two of the most famous Maidan activists, Tetyana Chornovol and Dmytro Bulatov, individual EEAS diplomats gathered a group of EU member state ambassadors during the Christmas holidays to form a 'human wall' in front of protestors' hospital rooms;[122] within a matter of hours, EU diplomats succeeded in grouping together via SMS.

Internal boundary-drawing

The cultural repertoire or the resources that are established by members of the EU's diplomatic community over the course of mutual engagement are neither stable nor distributed and used by individual members evenly, though. While the very practice of EU coordination was never questioned in principle, and diplomats frequently referred to the EU as the wider 'family', it was clearly set apart from the national 'home'. On the ground, as one member state diplomat clearly stated,

> When Tombinski [the EU Ambassador to Ukraine] says something, I don't perceive him as my ambassador. My ambassador is here, and this is Tombinski, this is the EU. … It's like another country, not like a 'Krisha', like a roof.[123]

The EEAS or the EU Delegation thus occasionally served as a constitutive outside for the local diplomatic community. Yet, signs of fragmentation among EU member states became equally apparent and disclosed various layers of belonging. These layers concern two different forms of coalitions or groups that are present in Kyiv. At the formal level, institutionalised meetings such as

[118] Ibid.
[119] DHoMs meetings were reportedly suspended during Maidan.
[120] On the concept of '*ad hoc*-ing' see Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, p. 21.
[121] Interview 2014/#IE.
[122] Ibid.; while these actions were coordinated by the EU Delegation, other non-EU states also participated, such as the United States, Canada and Japan.
[123] Interview 2014/#IP.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

those of HoMs and DHoMs 'almost perfectly mirror' those strategic coalitions found in Brussels. Since historical, geographical, political, and commercial considerations structure each EU member state's foreign policy orientation, change only occurs incrementally and makes coalitions appear rather fixed.

Yet, coalitions do not go uncontested, a fact that can be demonstrated by taking member state and EEAS diplomats' perceptions of Poland and its embassy's actions in Kyiv as a case in point. Poland formally belongs to the 'geo-strategic' grouping of new member states and is recognised for its active and historically special role in Ukraine. Nonetheless, it is equally criticised for its bilateral approach towards Ukraine that makes it act 'everywhere and nowhere' at the same time and even abstain from EU coordination meetings because it perceives its bilateral action as more effective.[124] *Visegrád* partners have for this reason considered it to often act unilaterally without prior consultation, while older member states have had difficulty evaluating on which 'side'[125] Poland stands: back in 2012 Poland was called a 'mixed bag'[126] and could not clearly be defined as a close or more distant partner.[127] With a view to Poland's policy in the run-up to the potential signing of the AA in late November 2013, one diplomat criticised that 'there was simply a messianistic desire to have that agreement signed in any way, at any price'.[128] Gossip and prejudices *vis-à-vis* specific member states or groupings thus exist and dissonances over the appropriate policy towards Ukraine became especially evident in the aftermath of the failed signature of the AA as well as during Maidan.

Official coalitions are only one side of the coin, though. At the more informal level, coalitions on the ground are not necessarily 'hard facts',[129] but are negotiated based on the diplomatic capital accumulated by individual diplomats or a given embassy as a whole. A country's official policy towards Ukraine as well as the material resources of a mission – the size of the mission and its allocated budget – are structural conditions that have significant practical implications for the capacities of a mission.[130] Yet, the symbolic resources such as the personal commitment by individual diplomats, the density of their network, and access to information and contextual knowledge of the scene are highly valued in the daily work with colleagues. It follows that resources in the material sense are important, but that information in terms of knowledge of the scene weighs heavily as symbolic capital and can, in turn, modify the expected group constellations and establish new forms of social hierarchy. Sweden's relative activity, high esteem, and influence on shaping other member state opinions, for instance, is to a large degree the result of the country's principled human rights focus in its foreign policy. However, on the ground, it is primarily actualised based on personality, making the embassy cooperate closely with the 'big three': as recounted by a colleague from another EU member state, the DHoM posted to Ukraine until June 2014 was high in standing as he had worked in Ukraine several years before becoming the DHoM, spoke the Ukrainian language fluently, and hence was well connected as well as having valuable contextual knowledge at his disposal.[131]

[124] Interview 2014/#IP

[125] Here, the term 'side' refers to the frequently mentioned policy divide that is visible between 'old' EU member states' policy towards Ukraine and that of 'new' member states that joined the Union with the 'big bang' enlargement in 2004 and 2007. They have purportedly been more lenient with Ukraine's reform agenda due to their geographical proximity, cultural affinity and shared experience of communism.

[126] Interview 2012/#IL.

[127] Interview 2012/#IK.

[128] Interview 2014/#IF.

[129] Interview 2012/#IL.

[130] Cyprus, for instance, is represented by only one diplomat in Ukraine.

[131] Interviews 2012/#II, 2014/#IJ.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

External boundary-spanning

> [O]ur identities are the living vessels in which communities and boundaries become realized as an experience of the world. Whenever we belong to multiple communities, we experience the boundary in a personal way. In the process, we create bridges across communities because, in developing our own identities, we deal with these boundaries in ourselves.[132]

That field diplomats' everyday practices follow a different logic to that of their colleagues 'back home' in the ministry or in Brussels became especially visible as a result of my interviewees' accounts of how they had experienced the period of Maidan. As the above quote by Etienne Wenger neatly captures, most of the field diplomats at times crossed their diplomatic boundaries and created bridges across their diplomatic community towards civil society. In cases where diplomats could no longer maintain the 'professional detachment' that they themselves think a diplomat generally requires,[133] their identity as a 'split diplomat' emerged. The term denotes that a field diplomat's identity always involves a balancing act between the diverse boundaries that he or she combines and has to manage on an everyday basis. Depending on the experience that a diplomat makes, the relative balance of a diplomat's multiple memberships[134] can at times tip and temporally bring one membership more prominently to the fore than others. Crisis situations can trigger the pointed emphasis on one of these. During the period of Maidan EU field diplomats spun their boundaries towards supporting the political opposition and civic protestors on Maidan, periodically abandoned their diplomatic neutrality and developed a logic of action that one could place in-between that of diplomats and humanitarian aid workers.

The 'shirking' scenario of field diplomats' switched loyalties seems to be a particularly persistent theme in the history of permanent diplomacy.[135] While it cannot be confirmed in the present case study, civil society's Maidan demonstrations left a mark on diplomats' personal perspectives on their host country as well as on their own capitals' policy during the crisis. More than was already subtly discernible in interviews conducted in 2012, the understanding of field diplomats as boundary workers materialised. Like someone 'sitting on the fence', diplomats seemed to be caught between their capitals' official policy to remain objective observers of the events on Maidan and the direct experience of the political dynamics in the host country itself. As a consequence, it comes as little surprise that a clash between a diplomat's professional position as an official representative of a country and that of the diplomat as private person can develop. Quite emotionally, one diplomat recalled,

> I live on Maidan, I witnessed these sensibilities from the beginning to end, I marched [over Maidan] every day, I felt what was going on. Often you are, really inwardly, in the situation that you think 'Damn it, why don't they, back home, get that something's going on here?'[136]

[132] Wenger, 'CoP and social learning systems', p. 239.

[133] Paul Sharp, 'Who needs diplomats? The problems of diplomatic representation', *International Journal*, 52:4 (1997), p. 627.

[134] I take EU field diplomats to hold various memberships, *inter alia*, that of his or her foreign ministry, that of the EU, where he or she represents the EU together with his or her member state and EEAS colleagues in a third country, that of the diplomatic corps of the country to which he or she is accredited, or that of those individuals that care for the wellbeing of the citizens of a country in which they currently live.

[135] As a result of being permanently posted to the host country, Niccolò Machiavelli's friend Francesco Guicciardini already in the sixteenth century held field diplomats to have a 'natural tendency' to 'develop a fondness for foreign ways and even to adopt the outlook of a foreign prince'. See G. R. Berridge, 'Machiavelli', in G. R. Berridge, Maurice Keens-Soper, and T. G. Otte (eds), *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 24.

[136] Interview 2014/#IO.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A field diplomat's job thus amounts to a 'balancing act' undertaken on a daily basis, which is argued to be accomplished without allowing one's personal sensibilities to gain the upper hand.

At times, this delicate balancing act can be put to the test, though, and result in the situation that what the diplomat witnesses on the ground is hardly reconcilable with the capital's position he or she has to represent. Behind closed doors, EU field diplomats commonly deplored the EU's slow and hesitant response to the unfolding events on Maidan. Until the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 21 February 2014, the EU's policy had reflected little substance beyond the Council's reiterated expressions of 'deep concern' for Ukraine's political crisis.[137] Almost as a catchphrase or running joke, 'deep concern' was figuratively used by field diplomats to convey their deep resentment at member states' divided positions on Ukraine. After all, some contended, they did not expect any other crisis response from Brussels as the EU was 'not able to deliver' anyway.[138] One diplomat even ironically submitted that, '[i]f you expect a white rider coming and killing the dragon, then you will be very disappointed.'[139]

The image of the professionally detached diplomat that acts based on reason rather than emotion also came under strain as events on Maidan developed further. The diplomatic principle of non-interference in sovereign affairs,[140] the order to officially cooperate with the domestic authorities 'until the very end', was principally pursued as diplomats talked about the 'delicate' balancing act they had to accomplish.[141] Yet, the frequency with which some diplomats went to Maidan and the intensity of contact with the political opposition sometimes reached a degree at which diplomatic neutrality was under threat of being undermined.[142] Others openly admitted that in their supporting actions of Maidan protestors, they could no longer remain objective.[143] Despite the significant risk of losing contact with or compromising respect towards the official authorities EU diplomats felt they had the responsibility to support civilians – staff from the EU Delegation, including EU Ambassador Jan Tombinski, were even threatened by the former government to be expelled from Ukraine as *personae non gratae*.[144] Thus, EU field diplomats sought to mobilise their official channels to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs and prevent the crackdown on civilians by law enforcement forces by acting as a 'deterrent' and by warning of possible official EU condemnation.[145] A sense of

[137] See, for example, Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on Ukraine', Foreign Affairs Council meeting, 10 February 2014 (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2014), available at: {http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/140960.pdf} accessed 28 August 2014.

[138] Interviews 2014/#IP, 2014/#IQ, and 2014/#IH. Note, however, that such statements did not result in grievance about the EEAS's general incapacity to act. Rather, EU member state diplomats notably blamed the diverging positions among EU member state capitals for the inaction, not the EEAS as an institution.

[139] Interview 2014/#IQ.

[140] As Article 41 VCDR sets out, any person falling under the VCDR has the duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of the host state *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* (Vienna: United Nations, 1964 [orig. pub. 1964]).

[141] See, for example, interviews 2014/#IE, 2014/#IO.

[142] Interview 2014/#IJ.

[143] Interviews 2014/#IP, 2014/#IF. It must be noted, however, that others firmly underlined that throughout Maidan they refrained from going to Maidan because their capital had instructed them to do so (Interview 2014/#IH). Thus, there was no unanimous agreement or line of action pursued among EU diplomats.

[144] Initially, this information was provided off the record. It was, however, later confirmed by another interviewee in a private email in 2015. While EU member state diplomats were never officially threatened to fall under Article 9 VCDR, that permits a host state to declare mission personnel *personae non gratae*, diplomats knew their actions were closely monitored by SBU, Ukraine's main government security agency. They therefore sought to keep a low profile.

[145] Interview 2014/#IE.

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caring for civil society in the host country thus seemed inevitable. As one diplomat succinctly pointed out with reference to the popular uprising against the Yanukovych regime, 'If we were strictly diplomatic, you would just sit here, you would not care. But you care for the country.'[146] This sense of caring even led some diplomats to disobey diplomatic instructions. As one diplomat conceded off the record,

> I think that we here all behaved like human beings, like people who have their consciousness [*sic*] and sense of responsibility. Because frankly speaking, there were moments where most of our colleagues in other embassies and us included, we were not doing everything possible to fulfil the instructions from the capitals because we have our own sense of responsibility.[147]

What stems from this is that especially during crisis situations field diplomats follow a logic of action that is not purely diplomatic, but also resembles that of humanitarian workers. For in contrast to diplomats, as Ole Jacob Sending has argued, the latter are 'infused with a moral ideal of care for distant others' which makes them share a 'set of substantive objectives around which humanitarian activity is organised'.[148] The sources from which field diplomats derive their authority differ from those who Sending has identified for diplomats in general. Field diplomats must be placed somewhere in-between diplomats and humanitarian workers as they might be described as 'experts in authority': endowed with authority by virtue of their being state representatives, they nonetheless take on a bridging function between non-governmental experts and their principals back in the capitals. They gather information from their non-governmental networks on the ground, filter and process this expertise for their principals, always in the hope to at least bringing about official condemnation of the regime from the headquarters or capitals. Moreover, it is the above mentioned sense of caring for the country that resembles the logic of action of humanitarian workers. Thus, the 'thick culture' that humanitarian workers share through 'witnessing' how those, who they seek to help, are suffering can to some degree be transposed to field diplomats. The experience of witnessing and feeling first-hand potentially provides field diplomats with a thicker texture of 'culture' than the 'thin culture' known to exist in diplomacy. Consequently, as one diplomat firmly stated, the crisis experienced had had the distinct effect of 'gluing' the local EU diplomatic community closer together.[149] Maidan was not only the cultural site in which civic protestors fought for their *Revolution of Dignity*; it also marked the material embodiment of EU diplomats' experience of split belonging that made them engage in boundary spanning.

External boundary-drawing

Mutually defining identities in CoP are often little reflected and rarely articulated explicitly by participants. CoP can actually be so informal that participants are not even aware of their own membership.[150] Consequently, diplomats come to terms with what their EU membership means when they compare their Self with Others. By differentiating the Self from an alleged Other, EU diplomats create a constitutive outside that helps them enhance the distinctiveness and social cohesion of the 'inside'. Especially in times of uncertainty or crisis, boundary-drawing practices potentially increase in frequency and intensity, for individuals and collectivities alike are assumed to

[146] Interview 2014/#IP.
[147] As this sensitive information was provided off the record, I make no reference here.
[148] Ole J. Sending, 'United by difference: Diplomacy as a thin culture', *International Journal*, 66:3 (2011), p. 649.
[149] Interview 2014/#IE.
[150] Roberts, 'Limits to communities of practice', p. 625

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strive for 'ontological security'.[151] In the effort to re-establish order, they seek to create an 'inside'-order with clearly defined boundaries to reach a stable identity of the Self. A reconstruction of how my interviewees negotiated the boundaries of 'Europeaness' shows that what EU membership actually means and what kind of distinctive identity it entails crucially depends on the constructions of Others. Individual experiences of belonging inevitably vary, but particularly converge on the demarcation line drawn between EU members and the non-member Ukraine.

The majority of diplomats were highly reflective, knowledgeable, and self-conscious when it comes to portraying Ukraine. Except for one diplomat interviewed, all remaining diplomats concluded that Ukraine was part of Europe. The 'civilisational fault lines', one diplomat explicated, purportedly lay elsewhere, that is, between the 'West' and the 'Arab Word, China'.[152] Since all Europeans shared the same cultural 'Judeo-Christian humanist humus', there were many things that did not need mutual explanation.[153] Yet, as he concluded, *within* Europe, one could discern a 'clash' between two different 'conceptions of how to organise society'.[154]

This sentence is paradigmatic of the lines that were drawn between the EU, on the one hand, and Ukraine and Russia, on the other.[155] The diplomats interviewed predominantly practiced a discourse of development in which Ukraine seemed to undergo different 'rites of passage'[156] 'towards the community of values',[157] while not having reached the stage of development of a mature 'European-type democracy and European-type society'.[158] This path of progress was regarded as particularly threatened by Ukraine's latest political developments. Whereas the nuances of my interviewees differed, a major line of argument materialised along two interrelated arguments. First, for reasons of Ukraine's Soviet legacy, the Ukrainian political elite have adopted a mentality that diverges from that of EU members. The roots of Ukraine's ambiguous identity as arguably 'somehow', but not fully European are seen to lie in the country's Soviet experience[159] or even in its orthodox Christianity that was brought about by the great East-West schism.[160] Even diplomats from the EU's new member states drew a line between them and Ukrainians, arguing that they had gone 'through similar transformation processes' as 'post-Soviet countries', but that the mentality still differed due to Ukraine's distinct 'historical situation'.[161] The difference hence amounted to a cognitive discrepancy that made Ukrainians 'tick' or 'think' differently.[162]

Second, this mentality has led to a different conception of how to organise society, underpinned by different political and economic practices. Among the most pertinent problems mentioned was that

[151] Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:3 (2006). For the original conception see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
[152] Interview 2014/#IO.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Note that in 2012 Russia did not figure as prominently in my interviewees' accounts as in 2014. It was significant to see how Russia suddenly took the place of the Other that previously had been filled by the Ukrainian elites. This shift in Othering demonstrates the contingency underlying the construction of identities.
[156] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
[157] Interviews 2012/#IK, 2014/#IJ.
[158] Interview 2014/#IH.
[159] Interviews 2012/#II, 2012/#IM, 2014/#IH.
[160] Interviews 2012/#II, 2012/#IC.
[161] Interview 2012/#IM.
[162] Ibid.; Interview 2014/#IH.

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politics was reportedly understood to first and foremost serve the personal gain of the political elite and not the common good or society's wellbeing.[163] Thus, rent-seeking was a key practice underlying corruption and clientelism. Especially under President Yanukovych the leading principle of the political elite amounted to what one of my interviewees termed the 'rule by law' rather than the 'rule of law'.[164] Changing or adopting new laws, he explained, was seen as serving to assist the political elite in increasing their political gains. With an increasing monopolisation of power, Ukraine's political leadership was accused of changing laws as it saw fit. This led one diplomat to contend in 2012,

> this is what the country needs to learn first, that rules exist … to ease societal coexistence – like lubricating oil so that everyone feels better. And this is reversed here; here, one plays with the rules, not by the rules.[165]

Accordingly, the deeply embedded political culture of rent-seeking has led Ukraine to essentially lack the rule of law that, in turn, comes to constitute the main principle that separates the 'outsider' Ukraine from the EU 'insiders'. This line of difference is uniquely encapsulated by the observation of another EU diplomat of the different cultures of communication existing in the EU and Ukraine. As he explicated,

> [o]ne [culture] is quite a formal culture, culture of constant consultations, consensus culture. That's the typical thing of the EU. We'll not make a statement unless we reach a consensus among the main stakeholders. So there is a limited space for personal decisions. … While here in Ukraine, many things are done on the ad hoc basis, the personal comments matter, personal interests matter, they determine the content of these messages. So our culture is more institutionalised, institutions-based, while the other one is very much based on personal attributes or personal statements. … I'm myself calling that one Byzantine culture because the rulers were the ones who were making the decisions. It was their personal prestige, personal self-esteem that were determining their policies. While I would say [the other one], I'm calling it European culture, … is based on facts, … is based on the attempt to accommodate various interests, being balanced, being empathetic and based on consensus.[166]

The diplomat thus produces a binary opposition between a 'European' and 'Byzantine' cultures which roughly differ along the dimensions of institution-person, consensus-conflict, and fact-fiction. Byzantine culture was once known for its 'meretricious aspect, fraudulent inspiration and manipulative technique';[167] this reputation was paralleled by Ukrainian authorities who were seen as attempting to dazzle the EU by "appearing" European',[168] while, in fact, applying practices of a bygone era. Because the diplomat explicitly mentions the Byzantine Empire as a reference point for the above juxtaposition of two communication cultures, 'Europeanness' is delineated along a spatiotemporal dimension. In addition to the aforementioned arguments about Ukraine's Soviet-type mentality and governing style of the political elite, Ukraine's identity is portrayed as temporally lagging behind and as inferior to that of Europeans. More specifically, it is essentially depicted as premodern, since the European identity is, in contrast, tied to a specifically modern conception of the liberal democratic constitutional state that emerged in opposition to the monarchical system of

[163] Interviews 2012/#IN, 2012/#IB, 2012/#IC, 2012/II.
[164] Interview 2012/#IN.
[165] Interview 2012/#II.
[166] Interview 2012/#IC.
[167] Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites*, p. 143.
[168] Interview 2012/#IM.

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absolute rule and sought to contain the excessive and arbitrary use of state power. This essentially modern make-up is only furnished with a *post*modern veneer in that these principles are sustained at the supranational level due to the 'culture of constant consultation and consensus'.[169]

The consequence for both the EU and Ukraine is paradoxical. First, as for the EU, this supposedly postmodern entity with overlapping authorities that is built on the principle of the rule of law is more modern than generally conceived in the EU's official and academic discourse.[170] Yet, it is such a taken-for-granted background scheme that it provides for a highly similar outlook among diplomats. Second, even though Ukraine is regarded to be on the path towards further development, and is thus in principal capable of change, the reference to Ukraine's Byzantine and Soviet history holds the country captive to a seemingly fixed state of development. It is, as its name *ukraina* suggests, a borderland that is stuck in the in-between position of being 'somehow' European, yet not entirely. This definitional margin, in turn, creates a state of undecidability that enables EU diplomats to draw on a wide repertoire of ascriptions of difference that seeks to erase the remaining ambiguity between Ukrainian and European identity and create a clear demarcation line. As a consequence, Ukraine becomes the b/ordering site which functions as the key reference for EU diplomats to define 'Europeanness': 'Europeanness' in essentially EU-terms so that EU diplomats can project the idealised version of the EU Self onto Ukraine and thereby ensure their ontological security.

Conclusion

In this article I proposed a specific practice-theoretical approach to the constitution of community via a creative rereading of Etienne Wenger's CoP concept. The aim was to view community as layered into multiple and crisscrossing 'communities of practice' that mediate between *macro*-social structures and *micro*-social processes of interaction and to unearth the normative background of community. To that end, I specifically focused on three interrelated praxiological themes that prove themselves as a worthwhile contribution to the conception of community in beyond-the-state contexts. The triad encompasses: 'practice' as the central object of analysis that does justice to a relationalist ontology that emphasises process over substance;[171] CoP that function as the social space within which *macro*-structures are demonstrably in-*use* through their practical instantiations *in situ*; and boundaries as sites of difference in which community is experienced as a meaningful enterprise. Moreover, I surveyed disciplines such as human geography and sociology to sharpen my conceptual lens for a process- and practice-based understanding of order, community, and boundary. The resulting interdisciplinary approach to community helped me capture both theoretically and empirically the contingency as well as heterogeneity of the EU community and uncover its normative background as 'boundary work'.

Contribution to the IR discipline

The joint focus on practice, CoP and boundaries allowed me to carve out the dual quality of practice, an aspect thus far neglected in the IR literature on CoP. Principal advocates of the 'practice turn'

[169] See quote from interview 2012/#IC, fn. 166.
[170] See, for example, Robert Cooper, *The Post-Modern State and the World Order* (London: Demos, 2000).
[171] See Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Relations before states: Substance, process and the study of world politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:3 (1999), pp. 291–2.

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have acknowledged that practices are responsible for producing and reproducing social phenomena.[172] Yet, their productive quality has been primarily taken to be of a positive and integrative nature: security and peace are maintained by diplomatic practice,[173] 'security communities' expand through the practice of cooperative security[174] or EU foreign policy is sustained by the practice of sharing and exchanging confidential information.[175] Its dual quality, that encompasses both its integrative and exclusionary effects, has not been the explicit subject of discussion, though. In contrast, I have made it the centre of discussion by contending that a shared discourse, feelings of like-mindedness and senses of 'we'-ness among a group of practitioners can be brought about by both, integrative practices of, say, coordination and the exchange of information and/or exclusionary practices of Othering. Having identified that EU diplomats engage in boundary work that includes both practices of linking – boundary-spanning – and demarcating – boundary-drawing – enabled me to recognise that practices are not innocent, but are infused with power that creates differential social positions within and without community.

My explicitly proposed turn to boundaries as a way to zoom in on how the EU's normative make-up is negotiated by diverse modes of organising has equally been neglected in conventional CoP accounts. The argument to subsume modes of linking and differentiation under the generic mode of 'boundary work' suggests transcending the long-standing divide between constructivist and poststructuralist theory, at least with a view towards creating more encompassing methodological frameworks. Despite significant ontological differences over what unit of analysis exists prior, both theoretical approaches are communitarian in the sense that they presuppose 'community-shared background understandings' from which social phenomena are assigned meaning.[176]

Crossing disciplinary boundaries

My turn to sociology and human geography has been instrumental in pointing towards boundaries as the sites in which the reappropriation of a community's meaningful background is most forcefully brought to bear. Abbott's conception of boundaries as sites of difference has helped highlight an entity's processual state of 'becoming' and acknowledge diversity as an inherent feature of any social phenomenon. His work demonstrates that linking random 'locations of difference' into stable properties, and thereby demarcating an 'inside' from an 'outside', does not go uncontested, but involves local, 'cultural negotiations'.[177] This processual dimension of social phenomena has also been of central concern to human geographers interested in 'border studies'.[178] Their insights are critical for IR as they equally seek to avoid the 'territorial trap'[179] that has principally led IR scholars

[172] Adler and Pouliot, 'International practices', p. 5.
[173] Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*.
[174] Adler, 'The spread of security communities'.
[175] Bicchi, 'The EU as a community of practice'.
[176] See R. K. Ashley, 'The geopolitics of geopolitical space: Toward a critical social theory of international politics', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 12:4 (1987), p. 403.
[177] Abbott, 'Things of boundaries', p. 863.
[178] Eiki Berg and Henk van Houtum (eds), *Routing Borders between Territories, Discourses, and Practices* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Houtum, 'Remapping borders'; Houtum and Naerssen, 'Bordering, ordering and othering'; Newman, 'Boundaries, borders, and barriers'; Newman, 'The lines that continue to separate us'; Newman and Paasi, 'Fences and neighbours'; Wilson and Donnan, *A Companion to Border Studies*.
[179] Agnew, 'The territorial trap', p. 59.

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to reify the state as a fixed and bounded container and adopt an inside/outside logic that clearly distinguishes between the sovereign state with a thriving political community, and an asocial international system. Moreover, insights from human geography have allowed me to methodologically contextualise the sites within which the management of difference is most intense. As I demonstrated, zooming in on the b/ordering sites within which carriers of practice negotiate difference made visible the constitutive rules of community. Distinct from the centre, the b/ordering site is replete with boundary encounters that both reveal how community members contest categories of membership and visibilise the resources on which they draw to actualise their community.

Diplomacy: Managing boundaries, governing the global

The case of EU diplomacy in Kyiv demonstrated that field diplomats' boundary work is the 'normative grid' that informs and orders EU diplomats' relations. For these rules of engagement to sustain the large-scale EU community, a substantial overlap in interests and shared agreement on concrete policies was not needed. Rather, what was required for a regime of mutual accountability and trust to emerge was each participant's commitment to jointly negotiating the sites of difference. Diplomats' ensuing repertoire of resources hence forms a cluster of competences and skills they have learnt 'on the job'. Their experience with and knowledge of mediating between different cultures allows them to traverse different boundaries and switch among diverse sociocultural schemes. Their boundary work thus represents both the essential constitutive rule and communal resource that addresses the EU's internal and external challenge not to overcome boundaries, but to manage them without compromising on diversity.

The example of EU diplomats' resources and rules of engagement also applies to global diplomacy more broadly as the challenges of cultural fragmentation intensify. The fact that globalisation has made pluralism the 'contemporary global condition'[180] and has contributed to an increase in boundary encounters requires more rather than less boundary workers who know how to handle difference. Rather than formalising these rules of engagement by way of institutional engineering, however, I contend that the conditions for effective coordination must be ensured in the existing institutions so that the 'rules of the game' can be continually adjusted to new situations. In light of diplomats' high level of adaptability, this is likely to be smoothly accomplished. Informal coordination must therefore not be seen as a weakness, but an asset. More rather than less room for informal coordination and *ad hoc*-ing is therefore needed.

Thus, with respect to global governance, there is no necessity for the establishment of new formal institutions. Neither do I believe that regional formats designed to mediate between the global and national levels bring about the desired effect of common understanding.[181] This unnecessarily reproduces the modernist inside/outside logic and territorial rigidity of, for example, the United Nations regional groups that contain rather than enable the negotiation of difference across cultural divides. Instead, it is issue-related and demand-driven coordination in looser formats of CoP that, based on a joint enterprise, creates regimes of mutual accountability that breed the necessary trust among participants. The shared experience of negotiating different points of view or ways of

[180] David Campbell and Morton Schoolman (eds), *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

[181] See Nicole Deitelhoff, 'Grenzen der Verständigung? Kulturelle Fragmentierung im Regieren jenseits des Nationalstaates', in Nicole Deitelhoff and Jens Steffek (eds), *Was bleibt vom Staat?: Demokratie, Recht und Verfassung im globalen Zeitalter* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 2009), pp. 208–12.

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problem-solving creates the necessary sense of 'ownership' of the process and generates a feeling of belonging to the large-scale polity within which the CoP is embedded. Future analysis should now comparatively probe whether other CoP with different contextual conditions than in Kyiv generate the same normative grid. Reaching beyond the European example, one might consider the comparative case of the EU and Turkey. Here, the analysis of the boundary encounter could be more rigorously pursued by investigating how not only EU members manage the sites of difference, but how Turkey as the EU's potential Other actively negotiates the boundary in light of its self-ascribed function of a bridge between the 'Western' and 'Arabic World'.[182] This research design would significantly contribute to destabilising this dichotomous worldview and unveil the two worlds' inherent interdependencies.

Acknowledgments

The final version of this article greatly profitted from discussions when presented at the UACES Annual Conference in Cork, 1–3 September 2014 and the ECPR General Conference in Glasgow, 3–6 September 2014. Next to my three anonymous reviewers, I am particularly grateful to the following people for their extensive feedback throughout the duration of my research: Hannes Hansen-Magnussen, Sassan Gholiagha, Philip Liste, Antje Wiener, and Jan Wilkens. I owe my greatest thanks to my interviewees in the field as well as to the local network of supporters in Kyiv, without whom this research would not have been possible.

Biographical information

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[182] I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for highlighting how the analytical focus on a community's boundaries invites researchers to capitalise on the boundary encounter between Self and Other. Incorporating the negotiation of the boundary by the external(ised) Other arguably underscores the two-way process of building community.

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