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# Towards a Practice Turn in EU Studies:

## The Everyday of European Integration

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### Abstract

This paper explores how practice theory can be recruited for the study of European integration. New generations of EU researchers are fascinated by the prospect of leaving the armchair and studying the people and artefacts that make the EU on an everyday level. This paper surveys key practice-oriented, anthropological and micro-sociological studies of the EU and European integration and shows how their findings challenge more traditional understandings of the dynamics of European integration. Moving beyond a stock-taking, the paper distinguishes between 'organised' and 'everyday' practices and explores the potential of a practice turn in EU studies for both *theory* (overcoming dualism, replacing substantialism with processualism and rethinking power) and *methods* (including unstructured interviews, fieldwork and participant observation). A practice turn will force us to rethink core assumptions about the EU and allow us to grasp otherwise uncharted performances and social activities that are crucial for European integration.

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## Introduction

European integration continues to deepen and affect people's life. The European Union influences the labels of nutrition information we use on food products, the environmental standards for our water and the standards of AC power plugs in our homes. The EU – and European integration – is even implicated in our emotions. From the frustrations of a junior Commission official with her Head of Unit to the exhausted Syrian boat refugee's first meeting with a Frontex border guard in the Mediterranean. While these experiences may seem particular and personal, they are crucial for making the EU what it is. Without these materialized and embodied experiences, the EU would only exist on paper.

However, existing approaches within EU studies, be they rationalist or constructivist in orientation, often ignore routines and habits that are integral to making the EU what it is. Insiders such as George Ross (1994) who was a fly on the wall in Jacques Delors' cabinet in the European Commission and memoirs such as Jean Monnet's (1976) have provided inspiring, but anecdotal glimpses of the importance of everyday practices. While anthropologists have studied lived, culturally embedded experiences for several decades, such experiences are often not even considered as meaningful research objects by EU scholars. Yet, new generations of EU researchers are fascinated by the prospect of leaving the armchair and exploring the EU from the point of view of the people actually producing it 'from above' and 'from below'. Fieldwork, participant observation and other ethnographic methods are now making their way into EU studies.

This paper argues that a practice turn in EU studies will allow us to grasp otherwise uncharted experiences and practices that are crucial for the performance of European integration. The paper is organised as follows. The next section briefly introduces practice theory. The subsequent sections show how political scientists and anthropologists have begun to explore the mundane and often unspoken ways people make sense of 'Europe', thereby challenging more traditional understandings of the mechanisms of European integration, including how EU institutions work, how member states become influential and what European identities might mean. The second part of the paper explores the potential of the meeting between practice theory and EU studies at the level of *theory* (rethinking dualisms, substantialism and power) and *methods* (e.g. unstructured interviews, fieldwork and participant observation). The paper concludes that a practice approach is 'dissident' (Manners and Whitman, 2016), not by arguing that we should stop focusing on voting behaviour, institutional turf-wars, Europeanization or democracy, but by offering alternative accounts for such phenomena – and for what drives European integration more broadly.

## **I. The emerging practice turn in EU studies**

Practice theories constitute a broad intellectual landscape with roots in pragmatism, phenomenology and critical theory. The seeds of the current practice turn (sometimes labelled ‘cultural’ or ‘practical’ turn) in the social and human sciences were planted in the late 1960’s, at the same time as some of the canonical texts of the linguistic turn. Originating in philosophy, sociology and anthropology, where it lives on, it has also had considerable success in organization and management studies, professional education and more recently in international relations (Polyakov , 2012). Its main theoretical purpose has been to resolve the tension between structure and agency in the moment of practice, to suggest a processual ontology and to rethink how power works.

Practices can be defined as ‘open-ended, spatially-temporally dispersed nexus of doings and sayings’ (Schatzki, 2012, p.14). Practice theory aims to liberate agency – and the human, bodily experience of the world – from the constrictions of structuralist and systemic models while avoiding the trap of methodological individualism. Practice theory’s most important contribution is in specifying the unit of analysis: practice, that is, socially meaningful patterns of action. By telling scholars where to start from – practices –, practice theory moves beyond the usual social-theoretical dichotomies that have hitherto led to a metaphysical dead end.

Before presenting key elements of practice theories and their implications for EU studies, I will briefly discuss the way in which everyday practices have hitherto been studied in relation to the EU, suggesting that the time for a practice turn is ripe. While many of the scholars do not explicitly ascribe to practice theory, they point to the importance of everyday and mundane practices for analysing the EU. However, as will become clear, what is lacking is a theorization of the nature of these practices. This will be the purpose of the second part of the paper.

### **Implicit understandings of practice in EU studies: Europeanization and socialization**

Interestingly, some of the early European integration scholars were more interested in quotidian practices than current EU scholarship. Karl W. Deutsch’s (1953) transactionalism, for instance, argued that channels of communications, the mobility of people across borders, telephone calls, density of trade etc. would create common interests and identities (what he called a ‘we-feeling’) and thereby promote European integration. Deutsch suggested that repetition of relatively mundane activities, such as talking on the phone, would be crucial for Europe as a security community. This argument is not far from a practice theoretical argument, although the practice dimension was never made explicit in Deutsch’s theory.

In the past decades, a number of theoretical turns have marked the study of European integration and drawn attention to its mundane workings. While these turns have challenged existing notions of European integration, they had one thing in common: They largely focused on the institutional and regulatory dimensions of the EU system. In the 1980s and 1990s, the EU was conceptualized in terms of ‘new modes of governance’ (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006). EU scholars imported concepts from policy analysis and effectively side-lined the gridlocked debate between abstract European integration theories by explaining the EU as a hybrid mix of a state and non-state actors (Hix, 1998). At the tail end of the governance turn came an increased focus on Europeanization, moving EU scholarship closer to everyday practices. Scholars began to study the implementation of EU legislation in specific policy areas or across member states (Radaelli, 2008). They developed ever more sophisticated accounts of EU institutions and the relations between them (Naurin and Rasmussen, 2011). Yet the main drivers of European integration and Europeanization were found in rather classic political science spaces – sectoral policies, subnational government, political parties and interest groups. Moreover, the main goal was often to capture particular cause-effect relationships, identifying intervening variables such as ‘veto players’ (see Exadactylos and Radaelli, 2011), not to capture dimensions of everyday life, which are mediated by habit and ritual.

In the 1990s and 2000s constructivist-leaning scholars began to raise questions resonating with practice theory. They argued that EU leaders have been ‘rhetorically entrapped’ to continue with the Eastern enlargement (Schimmelfennig, 2001), that identity politics shaped the EMU (Risse, 2003) and that European ‘others’ affected European identities (Diez, 2004). Central for constructivist EU scholars was a focus on discourse for institutionalized, authoritative political decisions and European identity, socialization and learning (Christiansen, Joergensen and Wiener, 1999). A number of constructivist-oriented EU scholars focused on routinized and everyday practices such as Wiener in her work on citizenship (Wiener 1999). However, this literature differs from practice theory in at least two important ways: First, it tends to focus on discursive practices and disregard ‘the implicit, tacit or unconscious layer of knowledge which enables a symbolic organization of reality’ (Reckwitz, quoted in Bueger and Gadinger, 2015). Second, constructivism has traditionally been interested in how member states and officials demonstrated ‘pro-normative’ behaviour, but downplay the accidental and unintentional developments in European integration.

Even scholars examining how tacit rules and negotiation culture within e.g. the Commission or COREPER impact the outcome of negotiations (Lewis, 1998; Lewis, 2005; Checkel, 2005; Checkel, 2007), have only begun to explore the rituals and performances that help produce particularities such as the ‘consensus-reflex’ in Council negotiations. As I will argue in more depth below, their interest in informal practices of negotiations takes us some way, but an explicit attention to practices opens for the possibility that power need not be ‘authoritative’ (or discursively articulated) to actually shape European integration. Contrary

to work on norm transfer and socialization, a practice approach connects such phenomena to the lived and embodied experiences from the European Commission official to the unemployed EU citizen.

Organizational and public management oriented EU scholars have perhaps come the closest in capturing the everyday of European governance. They recognize routines of daily activities as the backbone of social organization and its stability. Three examples are Michelle Cini's (2007) pioneering studies of how the European Commission handled ethical concerns following its resignation in 1999, Radaelli's work on policy-learning in the open method of coordination (Radaelli, 2008) and Carolyn Ban's (2013) analysis of the management culture in the European Commission after the Kinnock reforms and enlargement process. Through 140 interviews and extensive fieldwork, Ban provides a detailed professional sociology of EU civil servants, including how individuals became aware of the possibility of applying for EU jobs and how the new staff end up fitting the typical profile of a European official.

In sum, what characterises existing approaches within EU studies – with some important exceptions – is a tendency to focus on what could be called the authoritative dimension of the EU decision-making machinery and its effects outside of Brussels. This reflects a tendency to disregard practices that may appear too 'banal or 'apolitical' to be of importance.

### **Anthropology's (overlooked) contribution to EU studies**

Anthropology's key characteristic has been its attachment to the 'field'. Of course, this has changed with the anthropology of globalization and networks, but it is still in the DNA of much anthropological work. But where do people 'live' Europe? The answer from pioneering anthropologists Maryon McDonald, Marc Abélès, Irène Bellier, Thomas Wilson (Abélès, 1992; Bellier and Wilson, 2000, Shore 2000) was to go inside the EU institutions. Through an ethnography of the European Commission, McDonald has shown that officials identify with various units in the organizational structure, for example: 'we in the translation section' and so on (McDonald, 2000, p. 53), but despite an official rhetoric of unity and (benign) diversity, Commission officials continuously construct new cultural distinctions that shape the EU politics.

In *Building Europe* (2000), Shore analyses the EU's cultural policies after the Maastricht crisis and provides an inside view of the European Commission. Drawing on his experiences as a *stagiaire* as well as interviews, Shore shows how European identity has been sought established 'from above' through technocratic and managerial initiatives in the Commission such as subsidies given to EU studies at universities and efforts to encourage a more widespread use of the European flag and anthem. Methodologically, Shore analyses otherwise abstract notions of 'European identity' and 'European public' from the perspectives of civil servants, examining the 'trajectory or nature of the European idea at the level of

practice' (Shore, 2000, p. 5; for a critique of the Commission's embrace of neoliberal governance, see Shore, 2011). More recently, Koskinen (2008) was embedded the Finnish translation unit at the European Commission and discovered that irony and laughter was crucial for dealing with ambiguity and for making a multilingual EU work. Such findings go significantly beyond the socialization literature about 'dual loyalties' (Trondal, 2004).

Turning to how EU integration works 'from below', since the late 1980s, anthropologists have studied everyday life and politics in various localities in Europe (for an overview, see Wilken, 2012). Many of these studies have focused on people and places with ambiguous relationships to Europe and the EU such as Herzfeld's work on Greece (1989) and Mitchell's study of Malta (2002). Sassatelli used participant observation and unstructured interviews to trace how the 'European City of Culture' and culture policies are implemented by officials and artists (Sassatelli, 2002, p. 441). She demonstrates how local communities co-construct European culture. Sassatelli suggests not only that the outcomes of EU cultural politics cannot be reduced to the intentions of the policies (something that implementation studies would also confirm), but also that such funding and official rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' gains its own unpredictable life on the ground, leading for instance to artists 'high-jacking' EU cultural policies for local purposes (Sassatelli, 2007, pp. 37-38). This is clearly an alternative take on Europeanization and goes beyond domestic 'veto-players' (Sedelmeier, 2012).

There have also been studies that explore how some groups of people identify themselves as Europeans. A model example of anthropology's engagement with such issues is Adrian Favell's (2008) *Eurostars and Eurocities: The free movement and mobility in Europe*. Favell traces European citizens as they move across borders, exploiting the free movement of people. Building on ten years of ethnographical research in Amsterdam, Brussels and London, Favell mixes interviews and life histories of 60 higher-educated Europeans (the 'Eurostars') with more theoretical insights on mobility, migration and integration within a unifying Europe. Favell's book demonstrates why international mobility within the EU is still rather exceptional and how this goes beyond the usual explanations of lack of mutual recognition of educations and qualifications, portability of pensions and differences in social security schemes.

An excellent illustration in the book is how the Eurostars have to engage with the after-work-drinking behaviour of British Londoners. The British custom is essential for maintaining social networks with their British colleagues. Local social networks in general are difficult to enter since they often date back from high-school. However, they access to the nationals' network for instance means access to information on local cheap housing, which is crucial in London and Amsterdam. Favell's perhaps key finding is that the free movement of people differs fundamentally from traditional migration, a finding he builds on the in-depth study of everyday practices. A denationalized mobility such as the European compels a person to break the social contract of the national welfare state.

Together these rich contributions from anthropologists and practice-oriented scholars do not merely complement mainstream EU research, they also challenge and sometimes contradict its findings. To further this agenda and provide a theoretical starting point, the next section develops key elements of a practice approach for EU studies.

## II. Practice theories: Overcoming dualism, promoting processualism and rethinking power

What does it mean to analyse the EU – or European integration – from a practice perspective? The key assumption is that everyday actions are consequential in producing social life. Practice theories interpret human activity by parsing it into practices: stable and structured clusters of behaviours, communicative actions and accompanying mental and bodily activities. Practice theories emphasize situated understanding and unmask apparent stability of social systems (including the EU) as contingent and agent-driven productions. Taking the European Council as an example, this means moving away from treating it only as a formal institution centred on strategic events (summits) to the process of enactment. This implies tracing the social activities that go into making the European Council what it is. This can only be done by zooming in on the people and materials involved. For instance, the choice of venue, decoration of meeting rooms, menu and wine for the dinner of the Heads of the State and Government.<sup>2</sup> Yet such ordinary aspects are difficult to grasp because they often belong to the world of the unsaid and taken-for-granted. A first task is then to further clarify key elements in practice theory.

For heuristic reasons (and grossly simplifying), I distinguish between the ‘organised’ and the ‘everyday’ theories of practices. The ‘organised’ version of practices focuses on how practices become organized and organizing of social ‘fields’ (Bourdieu, 1977) or ‘communities of practices’ (Wenger 1998). In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, there is a strong focus on the way in which people come to take their own superior or subordinate position in a social web for granted, manifesting itself in bodily postures and stances, ways of standing, sitting, looking, speaking, or walking (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 15). For Wenger the question is more how ‘communities of practice’ foster learning processes and collaboration rather than how they dominate or exclude particular ideas or groups of people (Wenger, 1998, p. 85). Drawing on Wenger, Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (2011) define practices as ‘socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world’ (Adler and Pouliot 2011: 6). They distinguish practices from two neighbouring concepts: behaviour and action. *Behaviour* captures the material aspect of doing; the concept of *action* adds on a layer of meaningfulness, at both the subjective (intentions, beliefs) and intersubjective (norms,

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<sup>2</sup> See Neumann (2012) for an account of the diplomatic meal.



identities) levels. From this perspective, practices can thus be anything from negotiations in the Council of Ministers to playing hockey or smuggling drugs. Such activities involve skills and techniques and can be performed better or worse in the eyes of other practitioners. In terms of EU studies, this ‘organised’ approach would focus on daily activities of EU policy-makers and EU policies, the people and artefacts populating European institutional sites, participating in a range of community of practices, hierarchies and social fields.

The ‘everyday’ approach to practices differs from the ‘organised’ in that it does not require recognition of competent behaviour or social capital. This is what gives it its emancipatory potential. It focuses on subordinate and ordinary people and their experiences of broader power relationships (for a great overview, see Hobson and Seabrooke, 2009). Everyday approaches include the ‘everyday life’ concern with disciplinary logics and how the everyday life manifests itself in bodies, urban landscapes, consumption and even boredom (Lefebvre 2002). Others, in the ‘everyday politics’ tradition associated with James C. Scott (1985), are more interested in subtle form of subaltern agency and defiance, at the local level. In terms of EU studies, the everyday approach would focus on seemingly ordinary or subordinate people, non-elite groups, including lower-middle and middle classes, migrant labourers and diasporas whose lives are shaped by and shape the EU ‘from below’, exploring their capacity to change their own political, economic and social environment.

### **Overcoming dualisms**

A key principle of practice theories and everyday approaches is the rejection of dualisms and recognition of ‘the inherent relationship between elements that have often been treated dichotomously’ (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1242). These include conceptual oppositions such as mind and body, cognition and action, objective and subjective, structure and agency, individual and institutional, free-will and determinism. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, for instance, transcends the dichotomy between agency and structure with the notion of *habitus*, which is a experienced disposition to act in particular ways, structuring our daily practices. A primary purpose of Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory is also to transcend the dualism of agency and structure. While analytical oppositions are sometimes useful, practice theory encourages skepticism towards these trying to avoid the twin fallacies of, on the one hand, ‘objectivist reification’ and ‘subjectivist reduction’, on the other (Taylor, quoted in Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1242).

For EU studies, this rejection of dualism is important. One of the key discussions in analyses of decision-making at all levels in the EU is whether it is ideas or interests that drive actors (be they states or individual negotiators, MEPs or Commission officials) (Hayes-Renshaw et al., 2006). However, this

distinction between interests and ideas – while it makes sense analytically – is difficult to observe empirically. For instance, Michelle Cini (2013) concludes that both interest and ideas matter in the negotiation of inter-institutional agreements. A practice approach would argue that the social world escapes such distinctions.

In my own work, I consider member state diplomacy in the Council of Ministers as a particular practice. What distinguishes a practice approach to member state decision-making from more traditional approaches is that it tries to overcome the dualism between interests and ideas by insisting that agents are not (necessarily) socialized into adopting certain norms (Kauppi, 2003, p. 777); instead norms are often performed rather than internalized. For instance, in my research on euro-outsiders and the Council of Ministers, an official from the Danish Ministry of Finance explains that he is teased (in a friendly tone) for being outside the eurozone:

My colleagues often ask me if and when there will be a new referendum; if there is any news. They are teasing a bit. Sometimes when we take a *tour de table* in the working group on the preparation on the euro and external communication [...] teasing remarks are made (Official, quoted in Adler-Nissen, 2014, p. 105).

In a similar vein, Saurugger (2010) holds that we need to look at micro-level struggles to understand the adoption of norms of ‘civil society involvement’ and ‘participatory democracy’ in EU decision-making. As she concludes, borrowing from the dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman, norms need not to be internalized to matter. What matters is that they work as a ‘framework of appearances that must be maintained, whether or not there is a feeling behind the appearances’ (Saurugger, 2010, p. 473).

### **Process, not substantialism**

A second argument in much of practice theory is that most social forms cannot be explained without paying attention to the actual doings in and on the world that give them shape. In other words, it is the unfolding of everyday practices that produce the bigger phenomena and social realities of our world. This goes against the substantialism that dominates much of social science. Substantialism claims that substances (things, beings, entities, essences) are the ‘units’ or ‘levels’ of analysis and that they exist prior to the analysis. In modern social theory, this perspective is expressed in arguments about the existence of the will and methodological individualism. Within EU studies, rational choice approaches assume that human beings and states act rationally to maximize utility (e.g. Moravcsik, 1997) while constructivists find that social norms is the main behavioural driver (Börzel and Risse 1997).

As Wolfe (2011) has convincingly argued, most EU scholarship presumes that power resides in a

preferred factor (e.g. agent's motives and resources, rational utility maximizing options of choice, ideas and norms), which then determines the outcomes or the relations among determinants. Seen from the perspective of practice theory, the problem is that such approaches predetermine concepts such as European integration, causality and power – and hence the very research objects that needs to be explored – before even beginning the analysis. EU scholars tend to bracket practices away or use particular interests or actors as proxies for everyday moves. They often search for kicks of exogenous change (since its units are usually left unchanging), leaving the change itself unexplainable. In contrast, practice theories interpret the EU through a relational ontology rejecting that objects or structures have a fixed, stable identity or that closure is achieved at some point (Bueger and Gadinger, 2015).

That practice is consequential for social life is, for many practice theorists, associated with the foregrounding of human agency (Schatzki, 2002) and attention to bottom-up change within everyday politics: overt and covert resistance, which is the most common form of everyday activity during 'normal' times (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2009, p. 25). Recent work in a post-humanist vein, however, has strongly influenced practice theory. Science and technology scholars, for example, Latour (1987), Pickering (2010) and Jasanoff (2004) have articulated the consequential role played by non-humans such as natural objects and technological artefacts in producing social life. While these scholars differ as to how they theorize the status of nonhuman agency relative to human agency — for example, whether these agencies are posited to be symmetrical (Latour, 1987), intertwined (Pickering, 2010) or entangled (Suchman, 2007) – their work has helped practice scholars acknowledge the importance of materiality in the production of social life (for an overview, see Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). To stress the impact of objects, things and artefacts on social life is not merely adding the element of materiality; it is an attempt to give non-humans a more precise role in the ontologies of the world.

For instance, building on practice theory, Kate McNamara (2015) argues that the legitimation of EU authority rests on technologies and people's day-to-day experiences of 'social facts' such as the euro coins and bills and EU public architecture. Following Latour, William Walters focuses on 'inscription', that is on the material practices of making distant events and processes visible, mobile and calculable in terms of documents, charts, forms, reports, signs and graphs in Justice and Home Affairs (Walters, 2002, p. 84), seeking to overcome the ideational/material dichotomy and thereby distinguishing his analysis from traditional social constructivism. But what does Walters mean when he argues that the approach moves beyond the search for causality and formulating and testing hypotheses?

The methodological situationalism of the practice approach has consequences for our explanation of social phenomena. It raises important issues concerning where we look for the action. In assuming *a priori* that member states have certain interests or that voters will particular preferences, we ignore other social

mechanisms may play in. The practice approach insists in holding such questions more open, in an inductive approach, which begins not with theoretically deduced hypotheses, but with an interest in the stories and accounts that practitioners – or objects – of European integration tell.

This is where practice scholarship differs from the standard qualitative approach found in for instance process-tracing, which aims to measure and test ‘hypothesized causal mechanisms’ (Bennet and Checkel, 2013, pp. 3-4). In contrast, practice approaches insist that situations constitute a *sui generis* reality, which cannot be predicted from knowing the attributes of participating agents (Knorr-Cetina, 1988, p. 27). This requires suspending the view that the researcher has a privileged version of the social world be it ECJ judgments or first readings. Only then, and building on this information, does it make sense to formulate more general statements about the patterns or trends in a particular social field. A good example is Virginie Van Ingelgom’s (2014) excellent book on citizens’ indifference to the EU, which builds on a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, asking people to tell how they feel about the EU in their own words. Ingelgom reminds us that studying events, institutions, or actors that may be invisible from non-ethnographic vantage points can be of consequence to politics (e.g. apathy or nonparticipation in elections or social movements).

### **Power as relations, not capabilities**

A third principle of practice theory is that relations of continuous processes of mutual constitution do not imply equal relations. Rather these are relations of power, laden with asymmetrical capacities for action, differential access to resources, and conflicting interests and norms. While those ‘in power’ make decisions, which may affect the powerless, the latter also make decisions, which may affect the former. Practice theorists differ in how they theorize power. In Bourdieu’s (1977) work, for instance, power occurs through the objectification and institutionalization of subjective relations. For Giddens, power is identified with the agentic capacity to ‘make a difference’ in the world and is defined as the ‘the means of getting things done’ (Giddens 1984: 283). Importantly, a practice turn is not interested in motivations or intentions, when it comes to analyzing power; the fundamental building blocks of social life are not individuals but social interactions.

For the everyday perspective, the question is not about competence, but about how everyday agents mediate and refract elite policies (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2009, p. 9). For Lefebvre, the logic of discipline runs through, informs and replicates everyday experiences of non-elite actors, so that discipline becomes self-disciplinary (somewhat similar to Bourdieu’s *habitus* or Goffman’s ‘sense of one’s place’). Yet this still leaves agency to resist through revealing the potential of ordinary actors to transform their lives, from subtle expressions of resistance to more dramatic exercises of defiance and unintended change.

For the ‘organised’ version of practice theory, any enactment of practice contains an implicit claim of authority—that ‘this is how things are done.’ What renders a given practice more competent than others in a given context is a highly complex question. Markers of standing tend to be shifting and contingent (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). In other words, power as a micro-process of social life is central to the practice turn.

This is also the case in the EU. In COREPER diplomacy, for instance, Lewis (2005) identifies a long list of ‘sources of influence’ for ambassadors, including: personal expertise, experience, personality, interest, importance of the country, seniority, relationship with others, formal leadership positions etc. These are very interesting insights, but unless they are contextualized, it is hard to learn any insightful lessons about how practice generates social hierarchies. How does ‘personality’ play out in a Council of Ministers negotiation, for instance? What does ‘interest’ mean in a Council working group, specifically? Studies of turn-taking in conversation provide a wealth of information about how encounters work in cues and body language and patterns of argumentation.

In my own work, I have identified a particular form of power, the ‘diplomatic capital’ in the Council of Ministers. It is a composite form of capital and its meaning is constantly negotiated. For example, to influence the development of the EMU, officials enter a classification game about what a sound economy is and how well – as a member state – one performs as a European capital. Diplomatic capital can only be translated into influence in concrete negotiations. Thus, while a member state can be said to possess different degrees of objectified power, for instance the UK has 29 votes and Denmark has seven votes in the Council of Ministers – this resource can only be exercised effectively if channelled through narrowly defined and accepted roles and scripts defined by the Council. To be influential, one must respect the informal norms of problem-solving and consensus-seeking. Indeed, voting power may never apply as an effective resource (Adler-Nissen, 2014, p. 161).

To conclude, power is not something that can be assessed as a general resource or capability. It is deeply contextual. For the ‘comPractical mastery is fought for through competing authority claims; it is the object of political struggles. For that reason, it must be studied inductively and through thick contextualization. There is often nothing very obvious in such interactions, and to identify them requires getting access to practices. This is, ultimately, the key added value of taking practice seriously in the constitution of power and influence in the EU.

### **III. Methods: Practicing practice theory**

How does one apply practice theory? The favourite methods chosen by practice theorists are not necessarily specific to practice theory, but they are carried out in particular ways. One suggestion by Pouliot (2012) is a three-fold research strategy for ‘organised practises’: First, he argues, one needs access to practices, either directly or indirectly. Because it is often complicated to get direct access, methodological proxies must sometimes be imagined, with their merits and limits. Second, one should reconstruct the dispositional logic of practices. In order for practice X to do something in and on the world, what tacit expertise would practitioners need to have? Whether practices are ‘seen,’ (ethnography, participant observation), ‘talked about’ (interviews) or ‘read’ (textual analysis), practical logics can be interpretively inferred through a variety of methods, including the combination of different methods or mixed methods. Third, one has to construct the positional logic of practices. This task includes both the interpretation of intersubjective rules of the game and the mapping of the distribution of resources across participants. Other practice scholars adopt different research strategies, but there are some common characteristics that I will briefly touch upon below.

### **Interviews, ethnographic fieldwork and written sources**

The main method that practice theorists have used in gathering data is qualitative interviewing. Semi- and unstructured interviews can help reconstruct the situational and dispositional spaces, but what kind of information can be generated from interviews? Interviews are important, not because informants know the ‘big-T’ truth, but because their particular truths are valuable. From a practice viewpoint, interviewers and informants are always actively engaged in constructing meaning. Practice scholars spend time asking interviewees to recount in detail how they and their colleagues and friends go about their business—what their daily schedule looks like, with whom they meet regularly, the kinds of negotiations they conduct, etc

The construction of the interview guide as well as the interpretation of the interview data does not involve already defined coding rules. Instead the interpretation builds on a careful construction of how the agents perceive themselves and their conditions for action. This does not necessarily mean long-time fieldwork, but it may involve spending more time in Brussels than one would usually do for a standard qualitative interview (Adler-Nissen 2014, pp. 22-23).

A second method is ethnography, ‘close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time’ where the investigator detects ‘how and why agents act, think and feel’ (Wacquant, 2003, p. 5), which can offer special insights for the study of the EU. Participant observation’s major advantage, of course, lies in the possibility to closely understand political processes by observing paths of decisions as they take place and having direct access to the political actors involved. Ethnography allows the researcher to bring up the mundane details that can affect politics, providing a ‘thick description’. Only this closeness enables us to

identify a previously under-evaluated array of conflict patterns, hierarchy and identities. Often participant observation is combined with formal interviews and informal talks. As Bellier (2002, p. 16) writes, observing concrete social and cultural relations are much more efficient in terms of the quality of the data than ‘trying to justify a pre-established theoretical model of interaction that would have been set without knowing any of the social conditions that are part of the institution’s life’.

Ethnography of EU institutions and beyond can deliver exceptional results. One example is Stacia Zabusky’s (2011) analysis the Space Science Department (SSD) of the European Space Agency (ESA). Zabusky is explicitly drawing on practice theory, including the work of Ortner and Giddens as she studies ‘dynamic, temporal processes of everyday work (the practice of “working together”’) (Zabuski, 2011, p. 20). Her research, based on nearly one year of fieldwork at the SSD headquarters in the Netherlands, focuses on the various meanings of cooperation among space scientists. Zabusky asserts that scientists actively transform their everyday practices into something sacred. The scientists' dream of modernity, according to Zabusky, is the quest for unity through the sacred journey into outer space, where pure nature is absorbed through the medium of the satellite and its instruments.

Characteristic for good ethnographic – and practice – approaches, Zabusky systematically accounts for her own methodology: How she defined her ‘field’, how she gained access, how she interacted with the scientists and how her own position changed as she came back to the field and how she used field notes. The field is constructed by already overlapping relations, and of course shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources of the scholar. The value of reflexivity lies both in a more systematic collection and treatment of data and in increasing intersubjectivity and transparency.

Archival material, official documents and other written texts may also be of crucial value in a practice perspective. Again, text is not taken as some kind of ‘pure’ data, instead the goal is to try to reconstruct the daily production of decisions and reflections of practitioners. In my own work on the diplomacy of opting out, accessing archival material in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs proved immensely fruitful. It made it possible for me to reconstruct how euro-outsiders such as the UK and Denmark challenged their gradual exclusion, in ways that could not be adequately accounted for in an interview or through observations alone. By going through the email correspondence between British and Danish representatives, EU institutions and other member states, drafts, notes etc., I found that British officials took active part in the preparatory committee’s lengthy discussion about the design of the single currency coins and banknotes. For instance, they suggested that national emblems should take up at least 20 per cent of the individual coins and notes. This helped me reconstruct the everyday moves of a member state that might appear as a convinced euro-outsider in public, but which negotiates behind the scenes, as if it was bound by the same rules as the euro zone members (Adler-Nissen, 2014, p. 99). Of course, an archive will document

some struggles while silencing others. Practice scholars therefore often combine the analysis of text with interviews with the people producing them to address issues of self-censorship and self-legitimation.

Fieldwork, participant observation, in-depth-interviews and other methods of the practice turn are not without challenges. First, requests to do participant observation within EU institutions can be turned down for confidentiality reasons. 'How does one get in?' is not a simple question (Bellier, 2002). It involves delicate issues of terms of access. Due to the high sensitivity of some information, informants will sometimes need to be anonymized. In building trust and gaining access, the researcher also need to handle important ethical issues regarding the treatment of controversial, personal or confidential material as well as the protection of informants from dangers of misinterpretation, attention to issues of cultural and national sensitivities and how to avoid 'going native'.

Second, the field of European integration cannot necessarily be restricted to a particular physical site. Here, the practice turn in EU studies will benefit from the last decades' fruitful debates in anthropology about the limits of the 'field'. As people become more mobile and as their worlds are transnationalised, so should our research site approaches (Gupta and Fegurson, 1997). 'Spheres of experience', 'interconnected social spaces', borderland and 'global ethnoscaapes' (Appadurai, 1991) are just some conceptual candidates for capturing the erosion and entanglement of territorial, cultural and communication boundaries. For the study of the EU and European integration, this proves particularly interesting. It will provide scholars with analytical models to trace policy-makers, policies, migrants, consultants, students and refugees as they move around Europe.

## **Conclusion**

Recent years have seen an increased interest in everyday practices of European integration. Building on the surge of interest in micro-sociological and anthropological perspectives, this paper has argued that they are part of a practice turn that has the potential to generate important insights about the EU and European integration. The paper has developed three theoretical claims from practice theory for EU studies: First, the rejection of dualisms such as agency-structure, individual-institutional, free-will-determinism. Second, replacing theoretically deducted hypotheses and substantialism with processualism. Third, understanding of power as a situated performance that involves display of competence, defiance or discipline.

Practice theories do not ascribe to one particular method, but are particularly attached to participant observation and unstructured interviews as ways of generating data. Practice theory is a deeply inductive approach, which starts from the micro to explain the macro, it is 'methodological situationalist', meaning that



large-scale social phenomena such as ‘market prices’, ‘the state’ or ‘euro-skepticism’ ultimately come about through mundane transactions of people (and things) in micro-social situations (see Knorr-Cetina, 1988).

The promise of a practice turn in EU studies is a deeper understanding of the everyday aspects of European integration ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. EU politics, the events, institutions, or actors that are normally considered ‘political’ (e.g., states, bureaucracies and institutions), can be explored in an ethnographic way: at a smaller scale and as they happen. Thus, my argument is *not* that we should stop examining the European Council, COREPER, cabinet meetings in the European Commission or judgments of the European Court of Justice. These institutions *do* deserve our analytical attention. This question is how we approach them. We also need a broader view of the everyday. The making of the EU often requires leaving official buildings of bureaucracies, exploring local performances across and beyond Europe. To fully understand questions of euroscepticism, Europeanization and inter-institutional power games often requires a multi-sited ethnography. At a time where the EU is more controversial than ever, the practice approach may have a particular value: It brings EU scholars closer to the people who construct, perform, and resist the EU on a daily basis.

Practice-oriented scholars do not necessarily agree on where to look for practices. Is best to begin with established policy-makers or to study the EU from below? Practice theorists also disagree on the role of science in society, placing themselves differently in epistemological debates. At the one end of the spectrum, some practice-oriented approaches buy into most of the aims of standard sciences (in the bridge-building tradition of social constructivism) (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). At the other end of the spectrum, we find those practice-oriented scholars that are sceptical towards the idea that the researcher can somehow be separated from her research, and have a more critical agenda (Bigo and Walker, 2007). This debate within practice theory is ongoing. While it appears significant in terms of principles, in actual analysis, the difference may be less important because of the shared interest in a what happens ‘on the ground’ in apparently trivial moves, that turn out to be crucial for European integration..

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