DICHOTOMIES OF SUPRANATIONAL SOCIALISATION AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH – THE CASE OF COUNCIL OFFICIALS

Kamil ŁAWNICZAK, PhD

University of Warsaw

k.lawniczak@uw.edu.pl

Abstract: *Research on socialisation in supranational environments such as the EU institutions has to face the complexity and diversity of the socialisation process. Theoretical differentiations can provide useful analytical frameworks, but all are not equally suitable for specific research purposes. They often take the form of dichotomies, such as the basic differentiation of socialisation as process and product. As shown by Zürn and Checkel, two important distinctions can be applied to supranational socialisation: actor's behaviour vs their properties, and agent vs structure. This paper argues that another dichotomy, one between causal and constitutive relations, is theoretically significant and analytically useful, in particular for research embedded in IR constructivism. It provides an empirical application of eight aspects of socialisation produced by the three dichotomies taken together, based on interviews with Council officials. Afterwards, it discusses what can be gathered from this illustration for further research.*

Keywords: causation, constitution, typology, social practice, socialisation.

Socialisation is a process that affects behaviour and properties of individuals embedded in different communities (Zürn & Checkel, 2007). The constructivist and sociological shifts in the study of international relations and European integration have made socialisation one of the important topics of research. Such scholarship mainly concerns the consequences of secondary socialisation of people involved in international organisations.

Research on socialisation in supranational environments such as the EU institutions has to face the complexity and diversity of the socialisation process. To adequately understand and systematically explain supranational socialisation, we need to distinguish its aspects, mechanisms, sources, outcomes and so on. Various theoretical differentiations can provide

useful analytical frameworks but are not equally suitable for specific research purposes. They often take the form of dichotomies, such as the basic differentiation of socialisation as a process (of socialising) and as a product (the state of being socialised).

As shown by Zürn and Checkel, two important and deeply entrenched distinctions can be applied to supranational socialisation: actor's behaviour vs their properties (what is socialised?), and agents vs structures (where is the source of the socialising?). This paper argues for another dichotomy, between causal and constitutive relations. This distinction is also theoretically significant, as well as analytically useful, in particular for research embedded in IR constructivism. This argument is illustrated by empirical material gathered in interviews with Council officials from Poland.

In the first section below, I evaluate the existing typologies of socialisation. Then, I provide a solution to their shortcomings by introducing the above-mentioned new distinction. In the third section, I present the methods used to generate the material for the illustration of the new typology's empirical application, and then provide examples for each of the eight aspects of socialisation distinguished using the three dichotomies. Afterwards, I discuss the usefulness of the proposed typology for empirical research, considering each of the dichotomies and taking into account how useful they actually are confronted with qualitative data, which is the type of empirical material most commonly used in studies of supranational socialisation.

1. Theoretical evaluation: typologies of socialisation

Secondary socialisation, which occurs when individuals enter into new social situations, consists of assimilating the expected ways of thinking, feeling and acting in a given environment, introducing the individual to a portion of objectified social knowledge associated with a certain group of people, and producing a sense of membership in a community that takes some intersubjective understandings for granted. Therefore, we can distinguish: (1) socialisation mechanisms, through which the socialised individuals are introduced into organised interaction patterns, (2) content of socialisation – norms, values, attitudes and behaviours accepted and practiced in a given environment, and (3) socialisation effects, i.e. how the socialised individuals

begin to act in accordance with the group's expectations by recognising and internalising the above mentioned contents of socialisation. These processes differ between individuals – the ties to social standards built as a result are subjective and mediated by previous experience (Checkel, 2007, p. 5; Johnston, 2001, pp. 494–495; Juncos & Pomorska, 2011, p. 1098; Wendt, 1999, pp. 142–143).

Behaviour in accordance with norms doesn't equal internalisation of these norms. Material factors, persuasion, authority, or identification with a group may incline a change in behaviour without a similar change in normative beliefs of an individual (Johnston, 2001, pp. 488, 495). The unstable dynamics of secondary socialisation emphasises its processuality, continuity and reflexivity. While structures influence individuals' behaviour by providing them with its ready-made patterns (such as social roles), actors can in turn reshape social structures, e.g. by challenging established social practices (Hopf, 2018; Neumann, 2002).

Researchers usually adopt a narrowed down approach to socialisation, e.g. by operationalising it in a fairly simplistic way for the purpose of quantitative research (e.g. Kirpsza, 2016). Another solution consists of creating typologies of socialisation types, mechanisms, aspects, etc. Zürn and Checkel (2007) suggested employing a typology of first-order socialisation mechanisms. Their typology is based on two distinctions: (1) whether these mechanisms originate in agents or social structures; (2) whether socialisation results in changing constraints (which affect behaviour) or the preferences of the socialised. Based on this differentiation, Zürn and Checkel distinguished four main mechanisms: bargaining, social influence, arguing and cognitive role-playing (Zürn & Checkel, 2007, pp. 247–250).

Because of its emphasis on mechanisms, this typology fits the approach to socialisation which focuses on causal explanations and the so-called mainstream or "thin" constructivism prevalent in IR (Czaputowicz, 2016; cf. Kratochwil, 2016). However, if we move towards interpretive approaches and "thick" constructivism, the typology might be less helpful. Such approaches focus on meaning-making and in the context of socialisation might be studying how understandings frame behaviours and norms, how the actors involved define themselves in the context of entering a new group, how are they defined by that group, and how they name what they encounter (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; cf. Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). My

solution to these limitations is distinguishing between causal and constitutive relations and making it less focused on mechanisms.

2. Solution: new typology of socialisation

The following part of the paper presents a new typology of socialisation that combines three key theoretical distinctions related to the sources of socialisation, its outcomes, and the nature of the relation between the two (cf. Wendt, 1999, pp. 143–145), expanding the notions present in the Zürn and Checkel typology with a distinction between causal and constitutive relations.

The first dichotomy is the one between the aspects of socialisation mainly driven or upheld by: (1) the structure in which the socialised individuals are embedded, and (2) the agents and their interactions.

The structure is closely related to the specific group of people, which is joined by the socialised individuals. It consists of collective knowledge, institutionalised norms of behaviour and roles attributed to its members. Collective knowledge is a subset of social knowledge – a set of convictions that encourage and allow the agents to participate in structure-replicating practices, meaning that these convictions can modify one's behaviour and, when internalised – can modify one's identity (cf. Doty, 1997, pp. 368–372; Wendt, 1999, pp. 150–165).

Agential aspects of socialisation can include outcomes of cognitive processes, such as the reduction of cognitive dissonance or the calculation of the most beneficial course of action. On the other hand, they can result from interactions between the agents. To describe these phenomena, Wendt (1999, pp. 143–145) uses the notion of "interaction-level microstructures". The main difference between them and the macro-structures lies in the point of view adopted: by the individual agents or by the structurally-rooted community. The agents can, for example, attribute roles to themselves or to others, modifying or perpetuating some of their properties. Even if those very roles are determined by the structure, their attribution is carried out by the agent themselves (cf. Doty, 1997, pp. 372–374; Wendt, 1999, pp. 326–336).

The second differentiation concerns consequences of socialisation which are either related to the (1) behaviour or (2) properties of the socialised individuals.

Behaviour, as the more easily observable and measurable, is the most popular subject of study in socialisation research, although it has to deal with challenges regarding interpretation of observations, for example regarding the motivations of the socialised individuals. Conforming to the norms and standards of a given community can be considered a rather typical effect of the socialisation process. This aspect of socialisation also includes attributing new meaning to actions.

Agents' properties, on the other hand, are less empirically tangible, yet some might argue that only a process which affects them is the "true" socialisation. By properties I mean internalised norms, generalised convictions, roles and identities, the modification or redefining of which may be either exclusive (e.g. when one part of identity is replaced by another) or inclusive (when new characteristics are added to the existing ones) (Suvarierol, 2011, pp. 194–195; Wendt, 1999, pp. 26–27).

The third differentiation concerns the difference between (1) causal relations and (2) constitutive relations. It goes beyond the considerations of Zürn and Checkel, and is inspired mostly by Alexander Wendt. As argued above, this addition makes the typology more interesting theoretically, in particular it allows for important (as I argue below) distinctions within the categories of behaviour and properties.

Causal relations can be identified in situations when we observe the cause (X) and effect (Y) that exist independently from each other, in the case of which X precedes Y, and Y would not have taken place if X would not have happened before (Wendt, 1999, pp. 77–79).

Constitutive relations, on the other hand, mean that one thing is what it is only based on and in its relation to another thing, and *vice versa* (Wendt, 1999, p. 25). Wendt (1999, pp. 83–84) points out that this constitution can happen in two manners: through internal structure (for instance through self-awareness or self-understanding of the agents) and through external structure (through what is usually understood simply as structure; i.e. the notional necessity or discourse that defines a given item, that determines what a given thing is).

The dichotomies described above result in eight possible combinations, or aspects of socialisation: (1) agential causation of behaviour, (2) agential constitution of behaviour, (3)

structural causation of behaviour, (4) structural constitution of behaviour, (5) agential causation of properties, (6) agential constitution of properties, (7) structural causation of properties, (8) structural constitution of properties. I discuss them below, using quotes from the interviews I have conducted as illustrations.

3. Methods

The empirical material used in the following section has been gathered by conducting in-depth interviews among officials who represented Poland at various bodies of the Council, which was part of a larger project concerned with tracing the links between socialisation and decision making in the preparatory bodies of Council (Ławniczak, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2023). Potential interviewees were contacted by email. Because the response rate to interview requests was low, additional interviewees were recruited using snowball sampling. Most of the interviewees worked at the Permanent Representation and, at the time of interviewing, they had between three and fifteen years of work experience in the Council. Most worked in more than one of the Council layers: working parties, Coreper, and ministerial configurations (as members of the delegation). Interviewees represented diverse policy areas. They were either experts delegated to the Permanent Representation by one of the ministries or more versatile diplomats, usually employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The interviews were conducted between March and September 2015 in Brussels (7 interviews) and Warsaw (3 interviews). All interviews were conducted in Polish, each took between one and two hours. Detailed notes were taken during interviews. I followed an interview guide, with additional questions asked *ad hoc* in order to clarify or deepen particular topics.

4. Empirical application: socialisation among Council officials

The first four socialisation aspects are related to the causal formation or the constitution of behaviour, by the agent themselves or by the structure. In the case of the agent-based causation of behavioural change, change (or the adaptation to group expectations: Juncos & Pomorska, 2011,

p. 1099) is caused by the working of agent's internal processes and is usually motivated by the will to acquire some form of individual benefit. This socialisation aspect is typically described in terms of calculation, meaning that an individual decides to perform certain actions because these actions help them reach their goals. For instance, one of the interviewees declared that "if you can help a person, then you do it because there might be a time when you yourself might need help" (Interview 4), which can be read as describing the exchange of favours (in a diffuse rather than strictly tit for tat way).

The agential constitution of behavioural refers to the agents' outlook in the scope of which they perceive and define behaviours. A claim by one of the interviewees that they have "a lot of freedom in the case of sudden appearance of some kind of offer" (Interview 10) might be interpreted as an example of this, as the interviewee paints a picture of his actions which emphasises his freedom.

Turning to structural side, for the causal aspect of behavioural change there is some external gratification for the individual, which could mean obtaining something from the group or avoiding sanctions due to the way that group is structured, how it functions and what it affords. One official declared that "sincerity might result in being more liked by other group members" (Interview 3) – contrary to the agential side, this is a collective, rather than individual reward.

The structural constitution of behaviour can be illustrated with an example: "a good ambassador does not always follow their instructions" (Interview 7). This aspect manifests group-based definitions that may be shared by a given actor, but not necessarily – when a definition for a given behaviour is not the same as the definition adopted by the group, we can talk about a lack of socialisation of a given actor in this particular case.

The following four aspects of socialisation focus on the properties of the socialised. These aspects are generally referred to as "deep socialisation" or internalisation. On the agential and causal side, the aspect focuses on how agents' convictions change and how they become cohesive with other properties or agents' behaviour. In this case, a reference to a change in one's convictions concerning a given matter can be expected, for example some practices will be viewed as "right" or "correct" as a result of individual thought processes or as an outcome of confronting previously held convictions with actions carried out after individual's calculations showed that adapting or conforming will be profitable for the individual. This process happens

10

through reduction of cognitive dissonance and through rationalisation of individual's actions. The following quote illustrates a rationalisation: "We must remember that Coreper [the Committee of Permanent Representatives] is a forum for negotiations and that by following our instructions in each and every case with no exceptions, we would not get anywhere." (Interview 9).

Agent-based constitution of properties, on the other hand, is about self-determination, answering the question "who am I within this community?" and consequently attributing an appropriate social role to oneself. What is expected here are the references to specific views on oneself, for instance declarations such as: "My role is..." (Interview 10) or even "I am the government" (Interview 5). In some cases, such self-determination accounts are not easily interpreted, as for example an interviewee stating that they "want to present themselves as more *green*" (Interview 3), which could be seen as either a calculated modification of one's behaviour or an example of self-determination (the context of the whole interview suggests the latter).

The structural aspects concern the internalisation of norms adopted by a given group. If the change in agents' convictions results from the processes of learning or mirroring, we can talk about structural causal influence on agents' properties and expect descriptions of how the socialised individuals are affected by contacts with other group members. Interviewees have often declared how important it is "to learn how a given group functions" (Interview 6) and "to understand and acquire a desired level of knowledge on group's rules and practices" (Interview 2).

Structural constitution of properties reflects the fact that self-determination within a community is rarely a purely individual matter. The social context provides roles and partial identities to the actor (Wendt, 1999, pp. 175–177), which is why the observable manifestations of the constitution of properties of the socialised are more often present in the interviews in their structural aspects. In such a case, the definition of who an individual is, is valid only if this individual is seen as a member of a given community. This in turn is expressed in declarations of belonging to a given group and by describing oneself as its part or its member. Interviewees used such expressions as "our common goal" (Interview 7), claimed that "we are all looking in the same direction" (Interview 3) or that the Coreper ambassadors "are becoming a part of a community" (Interview 10). One might argue that such sense of belonging is related to an

increased level of trust and, to some extent, to a stronger inclination to put oneself in a more vulnerable position based on the belief that it would not be abused for example during the exchange of sensitive information (Juncos & Pomorska, 2014, p. 311). On the other hand, however, close ties within a community can lead to a groupthink syndrome (Novak, 2013, p. 1102) and result in rejection of any criticism.

5. Discussion: which dichotomies are useful?

As shown in the previous section, it is often difficult to clearly separate personal calculations of the agents and the influence of the structure on their decisions. Obviously, this doesn't invalidate the theoretical dichotomy between structures and agents (which has been the topic of countless scholarly debates). However, whenever the empirical material is generated in the form of interviews, it is difficult to differentiate between the two. Even very careful approach to this matter within the interviewing process might not suffice, as agential and structural aspects inevitably overlap in the narratives of the socialised. The fact that this issue is most prominent in the case of pairs concerning behaviour should not be surprising, especially if one accounts for the fact that behaviour (or rather behaviour which is meaningful and socially patterned, i.e. practice) is where agents and structures actually co-exist and sustain each other's existence.

The difficulties of using interviews as primary data generation method also show regarding the distinction between the behaviour of social actors and their internal properties, including beliefs and identities. For example, when interviewees say that things are done in particular way ("one typically argues for rather than against something", Interview 8; "consensus is being sought", Interview 10) or that everyone thinks so and so ("everyone understands that", Interview 4; "everyone knows how instructions are sometimes", Interview 5), they are in fact speaking about what they do and, at the same time, how it is understood, hinting at their agreement, perhaps belief. This dichotomy is particularly important for the ability to distinguish between surface level adaptation and deep socialisation (i.e. internalisation), so the weakness identified here should be treated seriously by anyone who wants to discuss the differences between the two.

Finally, the dichotomy between causation and constitution allowed for some nuanced distinctions between certain aspects concerning behaviour and properties. However, it doesn't escape all of the problems mentioned above. Let's return to the quotes concerning Coreper. One of the interviewees said that "a good ambassador does not always follow their instructions" (Interview 7) and I classified this statement as an example of structural constitution of behaviour. Another interviewee said: "We must remember that Coreper [the Committee of Permanent Representatives] is a forum for negotiations and that by following our instructions in each and every case with no exceptions, we would not get anywhere." (Interview 9) – this was classified as an example of agential causation of properties (in this case, rationalisation). A sceptical reader might question this distinction – however, there is a clear difference between the first one which is definitional towards a behaviour, and the second one which shows the process of accepting a certain way of doing things.

There is a similar pair of examples regarding the way objections are handled. One interviewee said that "even when the presidency's position is not acceptable, the statement will be very diplomatic – there is a certain way, a meta language" (Interview 1). This statement explicitly defines a behaviour as "a certain way," without offering the agent's understanding or saying what they think about it. Because of that, it is another example of structural constitution of behaviour. On the other hand, there is a colourful statement by a different interviewee: "In general, softening applies when it comes to the rebuttals, for example vis-à-vis the European Commission, first a good trifle, then a list of objections. This is such an obfuscation of the opponent" (Interview 10). Here the interviewee first provides a description of a way of doing things (again, it's structural constitution of behaviour) and then follows with rationalisation of their convictions regarding the proper way of doing things. In this second part, the focus is moved from the behaviour towards their properties. What I hope can be seen from these examples is that without the distinction between causation and constitution, it would be difficult to determine what such statements tell us about socialisation regarding agent vs structure or behaviour vs properties.

6. Conclusions

This paper explored the theoretical approach to supranational socialisation, in particular the attempts at typologising its different aspects. Taking the typology of socialisation mechanisms introduced by Zürn and Checkel as a point of departure, I proposed to make is less focused on mechanisms and causal relationships by introducing, alongside two existing dichotomies (agent vs structure, behaviour vs properties), the distinction between causal and constitutive relations. I used data gathered by interviewing officials working in the preparatory bodies of the Council of the EU to illustrate the new typology and discuss its application.

As is evident in the previous section, confronting the proposed typology with empirical material reveals the difficulties of imposing dichotomies grounded in theoretical distinctions on utterances of people involved in the process of secondary socialisation. It is therefore worth asking what other approaches could complement or replace the approach to socialisation which relies on typologising its different forms or aspects.

One such approach is practice turn. Practice turn focuses on how things are done in a particular formal organisation or informal group, social scientists engage with the meanings these actions have within these communities. This focus can help avoid many issues regarding agent-structure relations, and generally provide a new perspective to socialisation research (Ławniczak, 2019). Moreover, practice turn provides tools to analyse the ways in which norms can be performed without necessarily becoming internalised, and still be important for the political processes, which lessens the importance of the distinction between behaviour and properties (Adler-Nissen, 2016, p. 92)

Bibliography

1. Adler-Nissen, R. (2016). Towards a Practice Turn in EU Studies: The Everyday of European Integration. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *54*(1), 87–103. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12329.

2. Checkel, J. T. (2007). International institutions and socialization in Europe: introduction and framework. In J. T. Checkel (Ed.), *International Institutions and Socialization in Europe* (pp. 3–27). Cambridge University Press.

3. Czaputowicz, J. (2016). *Zastosowanie konstruktywizmu w studiach europejskich* (J. Czaputowicz, Ed.). Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

4. Doty, R. L. (1997). Aporia: A Critical Exploration of the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory. *European Journal of International Relations*, *3*(3), 365–392. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066197003003004

5. Hopf, T. (2018). Change in international practices. *European Journal of International Relations*, *24*(3), 687–711. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117718041

6. Johnston, A. I. (2001). Treating International Institutions as Social Environments. *International Studies Quarterly*, *45*(3), 487–515.

7. Juncos, A. E., & Pomorska, K. (2011). Invisible and unaccountable? National Representatives and Council Officials in EU foreign policy. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *18*(8), 1096–1114. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.615197

8. Juncos, A. E., & Pomorska, K. (2014). Manufacturing Esprit de Corps: The Case of the European External Action Service. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *52*(2), 302–319. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12107

9. Kirpsza, A. (2016). *Jak negocjować w Brukseli? Proces podejmowania decyzji w Unii Europejskiej*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR.

10. Kratochwil, F. (2016). A Funny thing happened on the way to the Forum : Ruminations concerning the disappearance of constructivism and its survival in the farcical mode. *European Review of International Studies*, *3*(3), 118–136.

11. Ławniczak, K. (2015). Socialisation and decision-making in the Council of the European Union. *Przegląd Europejski*, *38*(4), 122–140. https://doi.org/10.31338/1641-2478pe.4.15.7

12. Ławniczak, K. (2017). *Społeczne zakorzenienie aktorów procesu podejmowania decyzji w Radzie Unii Europejskiej*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR.

13. Ławniczak, K. (2018). Socialisation and legitimacy intermediation in the Council of the European Union. *Perspectives on Federalism*, *10*(1), 200–218. https://doi.org/10.2478/pof-2018-0010

14. Ławniczak, K. (2019). The practice turn contribution to socialisation and decision-making research in EU studies. *On-Line Journal Modelling the New Europe*, *30*, 4–22. https://doi.org/10.24193/OJMNE.2019.30.01

15. Ławniczak, K. (2023). Consensus-Seeking and Reversed Representation among Polish Officials in the Council of the European Union. *East European Politics and Societies*, *37*(2), 678–697. https://doi.org/10.1177/08883254221101465

16. Neumann, I. B. (2002). Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *31*(3), 627–651. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298020310031201

17. Novak, S. (2013). The Silence of Ministers: Consensus and Blame Avoidance in the Council of the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *51*(6), 1091–1107. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12063

18. Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D. (2012). *Interpretive Research Design. Concepts and Processes*. Routledge.

19. Suvarierol, S. (2011). Everyday cosmopolitanism in the European Commission. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *18*(2), 181–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.544494

20. Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183

21. Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (2014). *Interpretation and method. Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn* (D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Shea, Eds.; 2nd ed.). Routledge.

22. Zürn, M., & Checkel, J. T. (2007). Getting socialized to build bridges: constructivism and rationalism, Europe and the nation-state. In J. T. Checkel (Ed.), *International Institutions and Socialization in Europe* (pp. 241–274). Cambridge University Press.