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Capital and Closure in the EU Field. Advancement in the European Economic and Social Committee

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Abstract

This article explores what it takes to advance to the top of an EU institution (European Economic and Social Committee). The article combines Bourdieu's theories of field and capital with Weber's theory of social closure to study the interplay between required forms of capital and closure practices during three ideal-typical phases of upward mobility: 'getting in', 'fitting in' and 'moving on'. Drawing on 26 semi-structured interviews, the article finds that capital and closure are mutually interdependent as members' access to capital to advance depends on whether they pass the closure tests deployed by closure agents and manage to get in, fit in and move on in the EU field. By combining capital and closure approaches, the article suggests a new balance between structure and actor-centred theories, which can help us better capture what is at stake in the EU field, and how the game of career advancement is played.

Keywords: EESC; EU field; capital; social closure; status transformation

Introduction

The sociological turn in European Union (EU) studies has pushed academic debates beyond grand theories of European integration (for example Georgakakis and Weisbein, 2010; Kauppi, 2013, 2018), and theories of fields and capital (especially those of Bourdieu) have been applied to the EU, its institutions, and their inner life in new ways (Johansson and Kalm, 2015). The related 'practice turn' in EU studies (Adler-Nissen, 2016) has resulted in a number of anthropological and micro-sociological studies. Insightful research on the European Commission reveal the inner life of the EU as a field of Eurocracy (for example Georgakakis and Rowell, 2013; Georgakakis, 2017), the European Parliament and its parliamentarians (Landorff, 2019), the European Central Bank and its bankers (Lebaron and Dogan, 2016), the European Court and its lawyers (Vauchez, 2015), and EU civil society (Johansson and Kalm, 2015). These have advanced knowledge of the EU as a social field, the types of capital at play, and the relevant positions in the social space compared to national fields and forms of capital. While existing Bourdieu-inspired research has its merits, scholars tend to downplay the subtle practices of closure and exclusion that arise as actors compete over positions and capital. Although identifying and acquiring necessary capital is crucial, access to key positions is also about controlling and even closing opportunities for individuals seeking to advance in the EU hierarchy. While we have extensive knowledge on *what* is at stake in the EU field, scholars have rarely investigated *how* the game is played when one seeks to move into top positions.

This article aims to explore what it takes to advance to the top of an EU institution. The paper develops an innovative approach by combining Bourdieu's theory of capital

and Weber's theory of social closure. Closure theories allow us to capture acts of closure and marginalization that actors perform as they compete over opportunities and advantages when seeking to advance in the EU field. Alongside Bourdieu's theory of capital, a Weberian approach allows us to analyse how the game is played within EU institutions (see Keene, 2012). The research questions guiding the study are: 'What forms of capital allow upward mobility as actors seek to enter and advance in the EU field?' and 'What types of closure practices are at play as actors compete over capital and over relevant positions of power and influence?' To identify the interplay between required forms of capital *and* closure practices, we draw on recent studies in social mobility research that illustrate upward mobility through three ideal-typical phases, namely 'getting in', 'fitting in', and 'moving on' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). By putting advancement at the centre of our analysis, we aim to empirically identify and conceptually clarify how types of capital and closure practices vary between these phases.

Previous research has explored capital and career paths within the EU (Kauppi, 2005), especially with a focus on members of the European Parliament (Scarrow, 1997; Norris, 1999; Beauvallet and Michon, 2010), but also the European Commission (Ross, 1995). We contribute to this literature empirically by focusing on the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which so far has received very limited scholarly attention (but see Smisman, 2000; Hönnige and Panke, 2016; Westlake, 2016; Panke, 2019) The EESC is a particularly well suited case for a study of capital and closure in conjunction. Like other EU institutions, it offers status rich positions for actors to strive for and compete over as top positions (e.g. president or vice-president) come with status, and its president ranks higher than a Commissioner. At the same time, it is an EU institution that brings together diverse interests with members representing employers, workers, and other civil society organizations and hence forms an arena where actors constantly have to navigate collective corporatist interests, especially when seeking to become an EU leader. Hence, we believe that a study of advancement in the EESC can complement similar studies on other EU institutions and contribute to our understanding of the EU field at large and what shapes an EU career.

Capital, Closure, and Status Transformation: Towards an Analytical Framework

We combine Bourdieu's theory of capital and Weber's theory of closure to develop an analytical framework to address what is at play and how the game is played. We draw on recent studies on the EU as a social field (for example Kauppi, 2003; Georgakakis, 2017) because academic debates have pushed EU studies beyond the focus on formal rules and procedures to the social, professional, and academic backgrounds of people in Brussels, analysing them as social agents operating in a social field (Georgakakis and Weisbein, 2010). We follow Kauppi's suggestion that one needs to focus on the inner life of EU institutions in order to 'know who the individuals and groups making up the EU are, where they come from, what kinds of resources and networks they have access to' (2011, pp. 150–1).

Fields and Capital

Fields, according to Bourdieu (1993, p. 72), are 'structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analyzed independently of the characteristics of their occupants (which are partly determined by them)'. Inherent to any field are relationships of inequality and struggles for power (Thomson, 2012). The EU field is shaped by its particular transnational nature because actors have to leave their previous positions in national fields. Busby (2013, p. 204) portrays Brussels as '… a multinational and multilingual space, an intense environment with a distinct rhythm to life, where people come and go continuously but which feels like a small village where everyone seems to know each other and news travel fast'. Actors have to leave their national positions to compete over the offered EU positions, but, as Bourdieu often exemplified, there is no immediate and automatic transfer of capital between fields. The notion of a European career gives us some indications thereof (for example Norris, 1999; Scarrow, 1997), and Beauvallet and Michon (2010) use the term 'political virgins' to capture MEPs moving to the European Parliament. Their previous (prestigious) posts at the national level (for example as a minister or a key spokesperson of a party) lose value as they encounter this new field.

Capital sits at the centre of these discussions, and studies of EU capital focus on the significance of cultural and social capital as distinct types, and less on economic capital. Cultural capital generally refers to the 'knowledge and know-how, of the skills and analytical tools that allow one to manage and produce social relations, cultural products and technical devices' (Neveu, 2018, p. 350). Social capital in contrast refers to the capital of a group, which could be a family or the alumni of an Ivy League university and to the possession of 'a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 95). Often scholars make a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital, where the former refers to social networks between homogeneous groups and the latter refers to networks between heterogeneous groups (Putnam, 2000).

Cultural capital is significant in the EU field because actors need detailed knowledge of the EU political process. Expertise as a form of institutionalized cultural capital is valuable because EU policies are highly technical and legally oriented (Busby, 2013; Landorff, 2019). International cultural capital is relevant in the form of international experience, foreign degrees, professional merits, and membership in international organizations, all of which are highly valuable assets (Lewicki, 2017). However, actors working in EU institutions, and especially the Commission, need to acquire a particular form of cultural capital that allows them to make interventions at the right time, as a form of 'gamesmanship' (Lewicki, 2017). This implies balancing effectiveness (getting things done, delivering on time, and following rules) and being entrepreneurial (using policy issues to push one's own career and agenda). Georgakakis and Lebaron (2018, p. 220) use the phrase 'sense of the game' to refer to the cultural skills associated with the necessary volume of cultural capital (see Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). In their view, spending time in Brussels is essential – that is, having time to develop the particular cultural knowledge required to be and to act in Brussels. Time furthermore allows actors to be recognized as permanent actors, which gives status and standing.

The notion of institutionalized EU capital (Georgakakis, 2017) indicates a particular type of capital that corresponds to actors adapting to the ideals of the EU, considering themselves and seen by others as custodians of this project. Such EU capital requires particular skills – that is, diplomatic skills and the ability to forge coalitions across divides. Actors have to show proficiency in understanding and taking into account the views of others, thus reflecting the importance of compromise, negotiation, and consensus in decision-making. Alongside necessary social capital, institutionalized EU capital thus comes from a reputation of being able to bridge various interests and of being a great negotiator or capable of synthesizing. This is in essence what a good director general stands for (Georgakakis, 2017, p. 119). Although this primarily refers to a kind of capital most prominent in the EU Commission, it also guides our analysis of the types of capital at play within the EESC.

Closure and Status Transformation

Social closure theories highlight how actors exercise domination and how they control the opportunities of others (Baehr, 2016). Weber used the term as a way to study how power is derived from processes of exclusion (Weber, 1978, p. 638). Later Tilly (1998) developed a theory of opportunity hoarding showing how categorical imperatives tend to form durable inequalities. This has also served as a source of inspiration in studies of social classes (see Murphy, 1984) referring to a 'process by which social collectives seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles' (Parkin, 1979, p. 44). Closure theory hence refers to the formation of an inner circle, 'a closed monopolistic group' (Weber, 1978, p. 342), who exercise control over resources and opportunities and who set rules for group access as well as for advancement. For Weber, social closure was a key element in the competition between groups. Insiders' willingness to include others depended on whether this would 'lead to an improvement of their situation' (Weber, 1978, p. 43).

The analytical significance of closure theory has been widely shown, for instance, in relation to professional and occupational groups because these mobilize support and control resources based on monopolization of the resources associated with their position in society (for example Weeden, 2002; Harrits, 2014). Terms like monopolization and exclusion (Murphy, 1984) point to the practices of closure of resources and opportunities. Weber's notions of open/closed relations (1978, p. 43) have similar significance because group participation is 'excluded, limited or subjected to conditions'. However, in practice the transition from an open relation 'to one of regulation and closure is gradual' (Weber, 1978, p. 44).

The distinction between formal rules and informal practices can advance our understanding of social closure. Formal closure refers to groups' ability to institutionalize their interests into neutral rules, entrenching their privilege in the legal order (Parkin, 1979). Social partners' inclusion in public policy-making (as in the EESC) is a reflection thereof as employers, unions, and certain other civil society organizations have turned their particular interests into formally recognized institutions. Here we find extensive studies on how professional and occupational groups derive power through control of educational institutions, leading to different types of ceilings related to class, ethnicity, or gender (for example Karabel, 2005). Similar processes are at play in EU institutions forming

status divides in the EU field, as representatives from 'old' member states have higher status compared to others, thus granting them social, cultural, and symbolic advantage (for example Lewicki, 2017).

Informal practices refer to closure based on subjective evaluations of status and esteem (Jarness, 2013). These are subtle practices linked to the formation of a group based on common membership. Attributes might depend on claims of a common accord, shared values, or similar ideological backgrounds and political interests. Evaluations for admission might be based on formal credentials, merits, and skills and include tests and evaluation practices that assess whether the person can become 'one of us'. This points to something more subtle than the EU concourse, and the notion of 'fitting in' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019) signals practices of control as potential members are tested in correspondence to the groups and their lifestyles. Closure agents (gatekeepers, custodians, or the keepers of rituals) engage in evaluating potential candidates, and we assume that more subtle closure practices are tied to entrance and admission rituals where actors need to prove themselves worthy of the roles and assignments. Actors seeking admission might engage in status emulation of those in central or senior positions as a strategy to gain acceptance and potentially pass closure tests. Being closely linked to an understanding of social mobility, social closure theories assume a process of status transformation as upward and/or downwards mobility is followed by changes in lifestyles, manners, and ways of talking as actors enter into higher (or lower) status groups (for example Flemmen *et al*., 2017).

Phases of an EU Career

Theories of capital and closure are at the centre of our analysis, yet we use the concepts of getting in, fitting in, and moving on as tools to investigate the processual elements of what it takes to advance. These concepts originate from studies of elites, social mobility, and career trajectories (Friedman and Laurison, 2019) and we propose the three concepts as tools to identify phases through which members advance within a system of positions. 'Getting in' concerns the process surrounding the appointment to the EESC. 'Fitting in' refers to a process of adjustment, where the individual begins to understand the rules of the game and what practices are required to find ones place and gain influence within the Committee. The phase of 'moving on' concerns advancing to leading positions within the Committee. These theories combined opens up for a fine-grained analysis of the types of capital at stake, the closure practices deployed, and the forms of status transformation at play at each phase of advancement.

Methods and Data

The article draws on 26 qualitative semi-structured interviews with current and former members and administrators of the EESC. Our strategy was to interview informants with different roles and positions in the Committee in order to obtain data that are both varied and detailed regarding members' entry into and advancement within the EESC. We interviewed EESC members with different country profiles (including representatives from France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and the UK) and from the three groups: Employers, Workers, and Diversity Europe, though with a focus on

the third more complex group consisting of members from a number of different civil society organizations. We included both men and women of different ages and approached newly appointed members as well as members who had spent more than a decade in the EESC. We interviewed members at all levels in the Committee, from ordinary members to presidents of sections, groups, and the Committee itself. Interviews focused on the background and motivations of the interviewee, their career trajectory, the process of being nominated to the EESC, the daily work at the Committee, strategies to advance to leading positions, and so on. We also interviewed administrative staff at the EESC in order to get additional perspectives on members' career paths. Interviews took place between 2019 and 2021 and lasted about 30 to 90 minutes. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*. We coded the interview transcripts in line with our analytical framework focusing on capital, social closure, and status transformation in the getting in, fitting in, and moving on phases.

While we rely heavily on the interviews in our analysis, we also draw on the EESC website and a number of documents produced by the Committee as well as a series of on-site observations, including at an EESC plenary session, a public hearing, the annual Civil Society Days conference, and some issue-specific workshops. Participation in these events allowed us to observe everyday interactions. Informal conversations over coffee and lunch further informed our understanding of the EESC.

The EESC

The EESC meets in plenary nine times a year, and EESC members are supported by a secretariat-general and some 700 staff (Westlake, 2016). As a consultative body providing opinions, it is the only treaty-based institutional channel for civil society input in EU decision-making. Established by the 1957 Rome Treaties, its role is to involve economic and social-interest groups in the process of European integration. Even if the political influence of the EESC as an institutional body might be limited (Hönnige and Panke, 2016; Panke, 2019), the privileged access that its leading members have to the core EU institutions (and their leaders) constitutes a form of capital that is always at stake within the Committee. This makes advancement within the Committee an opportune avenue for members to gain a key position in the EU field and to act as a formal leading representative of an EU institution.

The EESC has 326 members who are nominated by national governments for a five-year renewable term. Members do not receive a salary from the EESC, and most of them are not based in Brussels. They receive travel and subsistence allowances for participating in meetings. Members belong to one of three groups – Employers (Group 1), Workers (Group 2), or Diversity Europe (Group 3). The latter group is supposed to include all kinds of civil society organizations except for trade unions and employer organizations. Work within the EESC is organized in seven permanent sections focusing on different issue areas. We consider the positions as president and vice-president of the groups, sections and the Committee as the top positions in the EESC. A key activity within the Committee is to write opinions, often on request from the Commission, or so-called own-opinions (by the initiative of Committee members). These constitute the backbone of members' activities and are the 'political product' of the Committee in correspondence to other EU institutions because the opinions contain advice on legislative matters. Opinions are drafted by study groups

with members from all three groups and are led by a rapporteur from one of the groups. Opinions are adopted by simple majority in plenaries.

Getting in: Becoming a Member of the EESC

The process of entering into the Committee is complex and plays out mainly at the national level as national governments act as gatekeepers in selecting candidates who are formally appointed by the Council of the European Union. The list of eligible candidates is limited from the outset because nominations follow the three groups (Employers, Workers, and Diversity Europe) and governments tend to prioritize key areas of interest for the EESC such as agriculture, consumer interests, and social economy. The established interest groups are further privileged as most national nomination procedures tend to be closed or delegated to national economic and social councils (Fonseca, 2013). In most countries responsibility lies with the central government, or with individual ministries. Only a few countries opt for an open procedure, inviting national organizations, or even individuals, to nominate themselves or their candidates (Irigoien Domínguez, 2019).

Because the nomination process is controlled by national governments, it is not surprising that EESC members mention close contacts with the government when asked why they were selected for the EESC. One member says frankly: 'We had good contacts with the government at that time and that was why I was included' (Interview, EESC Member 13). Another interviewee argues that some members were nominated because governments tend to select 'friends within the same party' (Interview, EESC Member 5). Being seen as linked to the opposition or as a critic of the incumbent government could be an obstacle. '[N]ot all countries would like to nominate representatives that may be critical of their own government, so to say' (Interview, EESC Member 2). Governments occasionally block candidates because they do not want to provide certain leaders (and their issues) with a European platform. For instance, in 2020 the Polish government changed the nomination procedures and opted for candidates more in line with the government's agenda (for example EESC, 2020). Such politicized and controversial nomination processes lead to suspicions that some EESC members are not genuine civil society representatives. 'There are some countries where I think there are people who are appointed for other reasons than to contribute to a job, because they are here to monitor other members', argues one interviewee (EESC Member 5).

National governments thus have influence over nominations, but the pool of candidates is limited because members come from a small set of influential national organizations within EESC-prioritized fields. National councils and large umbrella organizations control the supply of candidates irrespective of whether the system is open or closed. One EESC member explains: 'I'm nominated from that third sector umbrella body because I'm their vice president' (Interview, EESC Member 14). Others express that it is hard to get in unless one has made a key career in one of the recognized organizations (Interview, EESC Member 18). National leaders lacking a formal organizational base, perhaps belonging to more loose movements or networks, are not nominated. Even members who claim to have been selected because of personal qualifications rather than because they belong to a certain organization tend to have such organizational capital.

> When I applied it was a personal application with a CV. It was not, oh, you've been chairman of the [his organization], you've got a right to go. […] I had to send a CV in and that's how I was put forward by the UK Government. But I don't represent anybody in particular. I am here as a person, not as a delegate of an organization. (Interview, EESC Member 8).

While this member is certainly correct in pointing out that membership in the EESC is on an individual basis, not as a representative of a specific organization, most members, including this interviewee, have held leading positions in prominent national organizations.

The selection furthermore favours those towards the end of a high-profile career. This has repercussions on EESC members' social composition, and older white men tend to be overrepresented (see Irigoien Domínguez, 2019). One female representative expressed that she often got comments like 'how nice to have a young woman like you in the Committee' (Interview, EESC Member 3). Another young representative said that she was met by surprise by other Committee members, at times mistaken for an intern and expected to take a backseat at meeting tables (Interview, EESC Member 18).

A track record of working in EU-related projects or through being associated with pro-EU movements is also important. One EESC member explains his background in the following way: '[W]e had a lot of European work happening […], we had European projects. I was involved in the European movement […] which is another organisation so I had a kind of a track record' (Interview, EESC Member 16). This suggests that it is helpful to represent organizations that have an explicit pro-European profile and networks on the EU level. An EESC administrator bluntly states: 'We have a lot of steps that prevent, I think, having too many anti-Europeans coming into the Committee' (Interview, EESC Administrator 4).

Personal qualities matter too, beyond just being a leader of a national organization. One EESC member describes his fellows as 'key players in the member states' (Interview, EESC Member 9). Several interviewees claim that in order to become a member of the EESC you have to have proven yourself.

> There are a number of people who are able to get in because of their political background. […] There are certainly some people who would have served as ministers in governments. […] So there are a whole variety of roles, but I think the bottom line is everybody in the Committee has proven themselves in some area of work that is required by the Memorandum and the Articles. (Interview, EESC Member 16).

Not everyone shares this very positive view of the competence of EESC members. One EESC administrator somewhat cynically remarked that it is not always the brightest people who get positions in the EESC. In some cases, sending people off to the EESC seems to be a way to get rid of people you do not want to have somewhere else (Interview, EESC Administrator 3). This is in line with arguments about membership in the EESC sometimes being a retirement post. Many people who are in the midst of an organizational career in their home country might not have the time required for and/or interest to take an active membership in the EESC. As one EESC administrator argues, 'If you want to have time for the Committee you can't have a very challenging job at home' (Interview, EESC Administrator 4). This suggests that the levels of ambition and competence vary considerably among those nominated to the EESC. Several informants argue that only about one

third of the members are active. While the level of activity may depend on the types of capital new members have acquired in previous positions, it is also related to closure practices experienced in the process of fitting in.

Fitting in: Finding your Place in the EESC

Once formally accepted as a member the process of 'fitting in' starts. Members enter a structure of groups and sections, which offer the most valuable positions in the Committee and are important arenas for networking and skills development. Previous positions tend to lose significance once in the EESC and instead, members have to acquire new forms of capital, develop new skills, and learn a new game in order to fit in and possibly advance. To act outside of groups is hardly possible because members have their designated place representing a particular category of interests. The conflict between employers and workers constitutes a major structural tension of the EESC field. There is a general understanding that these groups are tied to the 'constant and historical battle' (Interview, EESC Member 10) between capital and labour. These tend to hold the highest status in the Committee, and members suggest that this relates to their recognition as social partners and that EU politics and policies are closely connected with issues linked to work, labour regulation, and the inner market (Interview, EESC Administrator 5). A general understanding is that members of Group 3 find it more difficult to find their place, reflecting that this group consists of a broad range of interests with internal competition over which interest to promote. Some interpret Group 3 as a mediator between Groups 1 and 2 (Interview, EESC Member 4), whereas others see it as suffering from 'heterogeneity' (Interview, EESC Member 7).

Group closure acts through social and political control. Group 2, in particular, has a reputation of requiring members to vote in accordance with the Group's official view.

> You do not vote against Group 2. If you want to live, you just do not. […] Group 1 is not as dictatorial, but it is pretty mandatory that if Group 1 has an opinion, yes, they expect every member to vote with it (Interview, EESC Member 16).

Others argue that Group 2 aims to act as 'the unified voice of the European labour movement' (Interview, EESC Member 5) and use the notion of a 'party whip' (Interview, EESC Member 2) or 'disciplined voting' (Interview, EESC Member 5) to demonstrate the control exercised in Group 2. The formal group structure hence constitutes a key layer of closure as actors are sorted into groups based on broad interests.

National delegations may, however, facilitate the process of fitting in as they offer an additional belonging across the three formal groups. Members from different countries (for example Italy and Sweden) tell about coordination between members of the same nationality (Interviews, EESC Members 4, 5, 12) to provide a common social arena and a source of advice and socialization into the culture of the Committee. This suggests that social capital is produced and may vary not only between the three groups but also along national divides.

Those in higher formal positions act as closure agents with regard to what issues, agendas, and topics to promote. A major obstacle to fit in is if one represents too-narrow interests or, even worse, has a too-radical agenda. One member recounts a conversation with a senior member who made it clear that her agenda was not welcome.

> During that meeting, he basically told me explicitly that I could never do anything with LGBTQ rights in this Committee because, according to him, no one else wants it. It's just me. So he will not support any such initiatives. [...] He is not only uninterested, but he is against it (Interview, EESC Member 2).

In most instances, this kind of closure would operate already at the nomination stage, preventing such actors from getting into the EESC. When someone representing such interests nevertheless manages to get in, it appears very difficult to actually fit in and find a place at the EESC.

Members compete over being accepted to a study group writing an opinion, and even more so for acting as a rapporteur for an opinion. The role of a rapporteur is an internal stepping-stone and valued among members because it is through this role they can be visible in the Committee and prove their competence on particular issues (Interviews, EESC Members 1 and 15, EESC Administrator 2). To access the rapporteur role, it is important to demonstrate one's competence and expertise in specific issue areas. A few members have gained a reputation as experts on certain issues and regularly get rapporteur tasks on 'their' issues (Interview, EESC Administrator 6). To gain the role of being a rapporteur one needs to be active. As one member puts it: 'I have worked hard and taken on writing assignments. I have been active in the meetings. I think they realized that I could contribute' (Interview, EESC Member 5). By acting as the author of an opinion, one not only gains visibility within the Committee, but also outside the Committee because one can – if it is an important opinion – become invited to conferences and meetings. One of our informants expressed with great pride that one of his opinions had been read by ministers across Europe (Interview, EESC Member 13).

Those in higher positions control access to the role as rapporteur. Acting as a gatekeeper, one interviewed group president claimed to be able to quickly get a feeling for how suitable or not a member will be as a rapporteur when interviewing applicants. He said that 'some people are not so interested in compromise', and therefore should not get such an assignment, indicating that the ability to compromise is a key competence (Interview, EESC Member 11). Another member said that when there was a change in group presidency she did not get any more invitations to become a rapporteur (Interview, EESC Member 18).

Among those who manage to gain positions, many seem to have benefitted from mentors. Such informal mentors tend to hold senior posts and to know the rules of the game, and they can open access to assignments. One member in a leading position said that she got invaluable support from a previous EESC president. She is now acting as a mentor for other new members and is seeking to make their way into the Committee smoother (Interview, EESC Member 5). Other informants, lacking such mentors and informal networks argue that they experience problems in getting into study groups. One member expressed a lack of understanding of the game and of 'what takes place behind the scenes' (Interview, EESC Member 3). Such problems of fitting in are also obstacles to advancing to leading positions.

Moving on: Acquiring Leading Positions in the EESC

To advance and compete for formal senior positions requires a new type of capital and passing of closure tests. As one senior member puts it, 'In the EU, many more positions are gained on the basis of personal skills than on the basis of the weight of the

organization that is represented' (Interview, EESC Member 17). In particular, one needs to demonstrate one's skills in the work of the Committee. One informant reflected on how actors presented their candidacy for senior posts in terms of all they had accomplished within the Committee: 'I have been in the Committee this long, I have been rapporteur so many times, I have been in these groups, I have been at these conferences. Like an EESC CV' (Interview, EESC Member 18). Others stress that you need time to prove your competence and become someone in the Committee because it 'takes time to be seen' (Interview, EESC Member 4).

Only accumulating posts (for example as rapporteur for an opinion) and spending time, however, are not enough. What has traction is to 'build a name' (Interview, EESC Member 18) and to gain personal status and reputation or symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's term (Bourdieu, 1989). Informants say that a name can be built through activity in terms of signing up for delegations and seminars and taking on duties. But this is not sufficient. We find that a name is gained through the combination of particular forms of cultural and social capital.

As a rapporteur, members can show that they can negotiate different interests in the Committee and can work toward compromises and consensus. If opinions are not approved by unanimous voting in the plenary meeting, this is considered a failure and damages the reputation of the member acting as a rapporteur (Interviews, EESC Members 1, 6).

> I think this Committee has a mission, and that is to produce consensus opinions. And then it makes it easier if you have that attitude, […] that we want everyone to agree and come to compromises, instead of pushing your own agenda (Interview, EESC Member 5).

Moving on hence depends on what can be referred to as diplomatic skills – that is, being able to listen to others, negotiate, and contribute to reaching consensus. Providing opinions based on compromises between different interests is the raison d'être of the Committee, so section, group, and committee presidents must have the skills required to promote compromises and consensus.

This depends on actors' ability to distance themselves from personal and group interests and to show interest in different issues, particularly across North–South and East–West divides (Interview, EESC Member 4). While being a rapporteur means these skills are both tested and evaluated, skills are further enhanced by building bridging social capital within the Committee, as having the ability to build and form alliances is considered of key significance. To advance, one needs to get to know many people, and thus it helps to move between sections (Interview, EESC Member 16).

First after having acquired these forms of cultural and social capital, actors can run for top positions in the Committee. When campaigning as a candidate for senior posts, one is assessed by fellow members and a successful candidacy depends on the support of people who already hold key positions in the Committee (Interviews, EESC Members 4, 5, 13). What is at stake in these election campaigns is the access to a specific form of institutionalized capital. As one former EESC president points out, according to the formal EU protocol the EESC president ranks higher than a commissioner (Interview, EESC Member 4). Being a leading representative of the EESC gives one access to influential decision-makers in Brussels, and interviewed presidents of the EESC and of groups and sections within the Committee tell about their close contacts with high-level figures in the Commission and the European Parliament.

Table 1: Capital, Status Transformations, and Closure in EESC Trajectories

	Getting in	*Fitting in*	*Moving on*
Main type of capital at play	• Organizational capital (linked to key position in major national organizations)	• Committee-specific cultural capital (know the game, cultural skills), and bonding social capital (networking in Committee)	• Bridging social and cultural capital to gain EU institutional capital
Form of status transformation	• From leader of prominent national organization to EESC member with a personal mandate	• From an individual EESC member to a member of a group with particular interests	• From a group member with particular interests to a formal EU representative promoting common institutional interests
Types of closure	Formal rules of closure in nomination and appointment (exercised by governments) exclude • interest groups such as movements and networks • actors not representing influential organizations in prioritized fieldsInformal practices of closure exclude • actors in opposition to the incumbent government • unproven actors lacking long organizational careers • actors lacking time and other resources	Informal practices of closure (exercised by EESC leaders) exclude • members representing interests that are not considered central for the Committee and especially interests that are too radical • members lacking potential and competence • members lacking support from influential mentors	Informal practices of closure (exercised by peers and EESC leaders) exclude • members lacking leadership skills • members too strongly associated with Group interests • members who fail to build alliances across divides • members who fail to adopt a dominant discourse of consensus, to represent organized civil society, and to be pro-European

As a president, one hence represents the whole Committee, not a specific interest or group. In our interview material, we find a striking difference in how people in leading positions and ordinary members speak of themselves as a key indicator of status transformation. Ordinary members tend to concentrate on their specific interests or the group interests they represent, whereas the leaders speak about the Committee as a whole and tend to downplay conflicts across groups and specific issue areas. Members thus internalize the official EESC discourse when finally advancing into top positions.

Conclusion

This article shows that theories of social closure can contribute to the sociological turn in EU studies and advance our understanding of the types of capital at play in the EU field. We find that capital and closure are mutually interdependent because actors' access to required forms of capital depends on whether they pass the closure tests deployed by closure agents and manage to 'get in', 'fit in', and 'move on' in the EESC. Table 1 summarizes our results.

Getting into the EESC is a complex process including layers of formal rules and closure practices, mainly in the hands of national governments. Procedures of nomination and selection favour established interest groups and major civil society organizations in recognised policy areas. Although European societies have changed profoundly since the establishment of the Treaty, access to the EESC continues to be restricted to established organized forms of interests. Such formal rules limit the set of candidates to those with extensive organizational capital in terms of a long career with leadership positions in prominent national organizations and a reputation of being someone.

Closure practices with regard to fitting in take place over an extended period of time. While getting in depends on one's previous track record as a national leader, fitting in is about developing networks as an individual member and having a personal sense of the game. This implies fitting in to one of the three groups as already set interest communities, clearly closing off those with too radical and/or diverging views. Personal networks are primarily developed within groups, showing the value of bonding social capital at this phase. One's position in a group is essential for the possibilities to accumulate the skills necessary to advance. Here the role of rapporteur functions as an entry point and stepping stone controlled by those in leading positions who evaluate who is competent to carry out the formal duties of the Committee.

To move on, members have to leave established group structures behind and enter into a higher sphere as custodians of the Committee. Subtle closure practices and competition over Committee-specific forms of capital shape this process. Like fitting in, advancing is about socialization, gaining trust, and understanding. Actors have to do this in a manner that bridges interests within the Committee and across groups, and this implies leaving particular interests behind and focusing on common institutional interests. While bonding social capital is essential for fitting in, moving on is rather shaped through accumulating bridging social capital as actors form broad alliances within the Committee, for instance, by moving between sections.

Moving on moreover requires a particular type of bridging cultural capital as manifested in diplomatic skills and the capacity to reach compromises. These skills do not depend on the numbers of appointments as a rapporteur, but to what extent members manage to produce EESC value – that is, consensus opinions. This is the test that members have to pass, and those who do not manage to distance themselves from their particular interests (as individuals or as tied to one of the groups) do not reach the highest positions. The status transformation from an ordinary member to Committee leader is thus shaped through members' internalization of the official discourse on consensus and by representing organized civil society and being pro-European. This shows that despite being structurally shaped by internal conflicts between capital, labour and civil society interests, EESC leaders adapt to the EU field in general where such status outlook,

capitals and skills are valued (for example Georgakakis, 2017). However, this puts the legitimacy of the EESC at stake as their loyalty and group alignment come to lie with other EU leaders rather than the groups and interests they used to represent in the Committee.

This study hence shows the significance of combining social closure and capital theories. A combined approach allows a more nuanced analyses of what it takes to enter the EU field because it is only when actors have passed 'closure tests' that they gain access and can compete over the capital at play. A combined approach moreover opens up for more fine-grained analyses of the types of capital at play in the EU field, as this article shows in terms of the different capital needed to 'get in', 'fit in', and 'move on'. A combined approach helps us illustrate how some types of capital are only available to centrally located and dominant actors acting as closure agents and that closure tests tend to precede capital access in career trajectories. Through such a combined approach, we hence strike a balance between the structural theories of fields and capital and the practise and actor-centred theories of closure and thereby we can better capture what is at stake in the EU field as well as how the game is played.

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