Integrating crisis early warning systems: power in the community of practice

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Abstract

This paper argues the importance of integrating power considerations into the study of the communities of practice in European studies and International Relations. Since its introduction, the 'community of practice' concept has been criticised for implying overly consensual relations of its members. Notably, the concept has been criticised for underplaying the relations of power affecting the structure and processes of the communities of practice. Drawing on this critique, this paper offers a framework for integrating the considerations of power into the study of the communities of practice in European studies and International Relations. The argument is illustrated with the case of crisis early warning systems, following the European Union's initiative to integrate them at the global level. While the case analysis mainly serves the purpose of probing the suitability of the theoretical framework, it offers insights into some of the power-related challenges facing the community of crisis early warning practitioners.

Keywords: communities of practice; power; early warning; practice theory; European Union

Introduction

There is something peculiar about the concept of the 'community of practice' (CoP). It seems to imply a high degree of consensus, or even harmony. By extension, it indicates that power relations have somehow been transcended. The concept was coined by Etienne Wenger (1998; see also Lave and Wenger 1991) and originates from organisation studies, management theory and learning in work places (Bueger 2012). At the most basic level, it means a group of people engaged in a shared practice. Interestingly, the concept has been long criticised in these fields for implying relations of consensus and harmony, while underestimating politics, power relations and mistrust (Fox 2000; Marshall and Rollinson 2004; Mørk *et al.* 2010; Roberts 2006). It is thus the purpose of this paper to build on this critique and formulate a framework for studying the relations of power in CoPs in European studies and International Relations (IR).

In addition to contributing to the literature on CoPs, this paper should also be read a cautionary tale for the European Union (EU), which recently undertook a preliminary effort to facilitate the creation of the global network of crisis rooms. Crisis rooms are 'secluded high-tech locations where huge TV monitors and computer screens collect and process data, imagery and information from the outside world in real time, and convey their findings to decision-makers 24/7' (Pawlak and Ricci 2014, 6). This paper, reflecting the narrative of the practitioners involved in this EU's effort, focuses on crisis early warning systems (CEWSs) more generally, of which crisis rooms are often key components. The EU's activity in this case, especially if developed into consistent policy, would constitute an interesting dimension of European integration. By working towards the creation of the global network of CEWSs, the EU would undertake the role of a policy entrepreneur and position itself at the centre of this process, drawing on its own expertise and experience. In short, we would see an example of integration process *by* the EU, rather than *of* the EU.

What is the relationship between the concepts of CoPs and CEWSs? The paper suggests that CEWSs can be helpfully conceptualised as a CoP in the making. Drawing on Wenger's framework, we can find some evidence for mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire among practitioners working in CEWSs, even when they do not meet in person on a daily basis. Consequently, the community of CEWSs practitioners serves in this paper as a probe to examine the plausibility of the theory linking power relations with CoPs (Eckstein 1992). Full-scale investigation into the power relations of the community of CEWSs practitioners would, at the minimum, require a series of semi-structured interviews involving a representative sample of the relevant institutions, and, ideally, some form of ethnography. While such an endeavour could be the next step, this theory-oriented paper draws its evidence from the previous primary research, from the existing narratives of CEWSs practitioners and from the pilot series of interviews conducted by the researcher at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in 2014.

What are CEWSs?

The immediate problem with the case study at hand is that the category of CEWSs is very inclusive. For example, it can include CEWSs which are concerned with monitoring natural catastrophes and those concerned with political conflict. While these problems are different, however, international actors engaged in fostering integration of CEWSs do not seem to reify this distinction (as the quote below, by Graham Hutchings, illustrates). In their approach, they

also follow the practice of CEWSs, with crisis rooms often engaged in monitoring and analysing crises stemming from both natural catastrophes and human-induced conflict. Consequently, in delineating its empirical scope, the paper reflects the narrative of the CEWSs practitioners. In other words, it is how the practitioners themselves tend to understand the boundaries of practice relevant for their community which delineates the term 'CEWSs'. Indeed, the EU's most recent initiative de facto targets a broader category of operational CEWSs, rather than the narrower category of crisis rooms.

Earlier attempts at integration focused on enhancing cooperation and coordination among European intelligence services, mainly through European Commission-funded grants (Manchin 2014, 154). In December 2013, the EU organised a conference called 'Towards a Global Network of Crisis Rooms', which attracted a global audience. In her opening speech, then the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton asked the delegates to reflect on two questions: how do we increase the coordination and effectiveness in crisis response? How do we network, partner, pool our resources more efficiently? (Ashton 2014) She was speaking to an audience consisting of experts in the field of crisis early warning, mainly working in crisis coordination centres within governments, international organisations (IGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Graham Hutchings from Oxford Analytica further challenged the delegates with the following observation:

> Crises and catastrophes do not respect frontiers. They do not respect spatial frontiers, temporal frontiers. They are not respecters of culture and context, of wealth, status and gender. They are genuinely international. We have got used in the last few decades to a global manufacturing industry, a global financial industry, global tourism and the like. What I submit we have not yet got used to is a global industry or practice of crisis detection, of crisis analysis, crisis monitoring and, most importantly, crisis response (Hutchings 2013).

Among the identified areas requiring further integration at the global level are information sharing and communication, including the shared use of 'big data', and strengthening civil-military cooperation, including better cooperation between military operation rooms and civilian crisis rooms (Nyheim 2014). But what exactly are CEWSs? According the OECD report on the future of early warning and response, crisis early warning systems 'are those that involve regular and organised collection and analysis of open source information on violent conflict situations. They deliver a set of early warning products (based on qualitative and/or quantitative

conflict analysis methods) that are linked to response instruments/mechanisms' (Nyheim 2009, 48). We can complement this process-oriented definition with a structure-focused one: 'An early warning system is then a network of actors, practices, resources, and technologies that has the common goal of detecting and warning about an imminent threat so that preventive measures can be taken to control the threat or mitigate its harmful effects' (Choo 2009, 1072). Although typically associated with monitoring violent conflict, the initial drive for establishing early warning systems came from different UN humanitarian agencies to allow timely prediction of refugee flows (Nyheim 2009).

The end of the Cold War enabled early warning to become more prominent on the international agenda. At the global level, in 1992, UN Secretary General produced a report urging the UN to be capable 'to identify at the earliest possible stage situations that could produce conflict and to try through diplomacy to remove sources of danger before violence erupts' (United Nations 1992). Also in 1992, the Organisation for African Unity established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, with the objective of monitoring conflict in Africa. It was the failure to prevent the Rwanda genocide, however, which emphasised the need for effective mechanism allowing conflict early warning and – possibly – response. In response to this failure, various initiatives at the regional and global levels were undertaken. In 1997, a global network of NGOs, UN agencies and academic institutions established the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response. In the same year, a West African network of civil society organisations created the West Africa Network for Peace Building. Although the number of operational agencies concerned with early warning and response was growing, there was no consensus about their actual purpose. On the one hand, there was the argument that they should focus exclusively on data analysis and prediction, in order to maximise their analytical capacity. On the other hand, there were those who argued that unless they actually engage in strong advocacy and strive for response, they will not really serve their purpose of saving lives.

CEWSs can either be governmental, inter-governmental or non-governmental. The governmental systems mainly aim to identify and assess threats to national security. United States, France and Germany are amongst the developed countries which currently poses such systems located respectively in Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization and National Intelligence Council. Inter-governmental systems are typically designed to monitor a particular region and many of them are centred in Africa (e.g. the Continental Early Warning System). Within the EU itself, there is a vast variety of operational

CEWSs which are entrusted with what Boin *et al.* (2014) call crisis sense-making, which includes the collection, analysis and sharing of data. Non-governmental early warning systems vary in their operational scope, ranging from the systems providing analysis only, to the systems also involved in advocacy and even response. The International Crisis Group (ICG) is among the most prominent organisations of this type. According to its own narrative, ICG focuses on three main areas: expert field research and analysis, practical policy prescriptions and high-level advocacy.

Communities of practice

It often happens that concepts and theories travel across disciplines and 'CoPs' is no exception. The fundamental research on CoPs originated in organisation studies, where the concept was defined as 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger *et al.* 2002, 4). The level of interaction varies, however, depending on geographical location of the community members. The so-called distributed CoPs, for example, cannot meet face-to-face and interact on an ongoing basis. In those situations, common practice can link the community across different types of boundaries, including time zones, countries and organisational units. This observation points to another interesting characteristic of CoPs: their membership may, but does not have to overlap with the boundaries of formal organisations. A finance office in a university is likely to engage in a similar practice as another finance office in a different university, but their practice will be very different from that of maintenance teams, student support teams and academics in their own institutions.

Emanuel Adler (2005) introduced CoPs to IR. For Adler, CoPs are everywhere; epistemic communities or security communities are all examples of CoPs. A CoP is a structure and a collection of agents at the same time. It is a structure, because it allows collective meaning to emerge, it establishes common discourse and identities. It shapes appropriate action. At the same time, CoPs consist of people who affect the structure through various resources. Learning, as the collective process of producing shared understanding and knowledge, is at the core of CoPs. However, if learning cannot be seen, how can we observe a CoP? We can observe it through reified products, which are created by the processes such as making, designing, representing, naming, describing, etc. (Wenger 1998, 58). The reified products in international relations include diplomatic practices, warfare practices, human-rights practices, etc. (Adler 2005, 19). As this paper demonstrates, they also include the practices constituting crisis early warning.

In an authoritative volume on practice in international relations, Adler and Pouliot (2011, 24) invite us to '[t]hink about our world neither as an assemblage of states nor as divided by borders and lines of national identification, but as transnational CoPs, based on what people actually do rather than on where they happen to live'. This invitation appears to have been taken up by a number of scholars in IR and European studies, who adopted the concept of CoPs for their own research. For Bueger (2013), 'CoP' is a useful framework to capture the dynamics of maritime security policy at the regional level, involving transnational networks which share common security policy-related practice. For Bicchi (2011), the framework is helpful in that 'it grounds EU foreign policy co-operation in the ongoing practice of communication' (Bicchi 2011, 1120). She also notes that the CoPs framework links the field of European studies with that of IR (see also Adler 2010).

CEWSs as a CoP in the making

How do we know that a particular type of practice acts as a source of coherence and enables the formation of a community? According to Wenger (1998), there are three characteristics of such practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement refers to the fact that practice is not abstract. Although it does not happen in historical vacuum, it entails constant (re)negotiation of meaning among participants engaged in shared practice. Mutual engagement does not require participants to know each other very well and interact constantly, but the less they do, the more we can talk about a set of interrelated practices rather than a CoP (Wenger 1998, 126). Joint enterprise entails that practice includes a number of core tasks (e.g. processing financial claims by a university finance office), but it also involves all the other practices negotiated by the community which are not determined by the outside mandate (Wenger 1998, 80). Shared repertoire refers to a set of shared resources, which can include 'routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts (…)' (Wenger 1998, 83).

Based on these criteria, CEWSs professionals should be considered as more than merely engaged in a set of interrelated practices, but it would be too early to conclude that they constitute a fully-fledged CoP. Considering the number of efforts undertaken in Europe and elsewhere to bring more cooperation and coherence to their work, we can define CEWSs professionals as a CoP in the making. Alternatively, if we approach the question of community existence as a scale rather than simple dichotomy, we could argue that CEWSs professionals constitute still

a rather weak CoP, and there is a widely-spread, conscious effort on the part of various international actors to strengthen it. The 'scale' perspective is much more appropriate in case of large, distributed CoPs like the one discussed here (also diplomats, international traders, international human right lawyers, etc.), because such CoPs are always in flux, always evolving on a scale from weak to strong, but also, potentially, in the opposite direction. In this sense, the community of CEWSs practitioners can be considered representative for the category of distributed COPs – the kind prevalent in international relations. They are characterised by divergent institutional affiliations, cultural background and language. Communication within such communities constitutes a distinctive challenge, which inevitably affects the degree of mutual engagement.

Mutual engagement

With regards to mutual engagement of CEWSs practitioners, the whole point of the efforts by the EU and other actors is to further develop it by creating opportunities for communication. Of course, this task is more difficult in distributed CoPs, of which CEWSs is an example. Different affiliations, differences in culture and language further complicate the process of fostering communication and building trust (Roberts 2000; Wenger *et al.* 2002, 121-22). While modern communication technologies can help, their effectiveness will be limited among people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In such circumstances, at least initially, '[h]igh levels of face-to-face contact and a process of socialization are usually required to establish and reinforce a relationship of trust and confidence between agents' (Roberts 2000, 434). There are a number of international initiatives which aimed to foster mutual engagement among CEWSs practitioners (see Manchin 2014, 154, for an overview). They are certainly helpful in that respect. However, growing a more tightly integrated CoP will require that the opportunities and channels for communication are further institutionalised and organised on a less *ad hoc*, project-dependent basis.

Joint enterprise

Joint enterprise relates to all those activities which CEWSs practitioners do on a daily basis as a result of their mandate as well as their mutually-negotiated understanding of their roles. According to the narratives of CEWSs practitioners, the nature of their daily activities indicates and requires a constant process of learning: 'It is a constant learning process, where lessons come in the shape of "formative shocks". All of those involved must dare to be creative, make proposals, create new bridges and imagine new, previously unthinkable solutions' (Miozzo

2014, 42). All of these innovations, of course, are subject to constant (re)negotiation among the community members, often within a single institution but also across agencies, so that the nature of the joint enterprise is also in flux. Similarly,

> [c]risis rooms are learning organisations. Each crisis provides an opportunity for learning and further fine-tuning. For example, analysis of past experiences and current cooperation efforts suggests the need for better data analysis in real time as well as the need to spread the culture of information sharing by developing a reflex for coordination and communication (Pawlak 2014, 90).

To a significant extent, this learning process has been driven by advances in quantitative and qualitative methods, which in turn were integrated by CEWSs operated by governments, IGOs and NGOs (Nyheim 2009). Furthermore, user-centred technologies such as Ushahidi ('testimony' in Swahili), which is a non-profit tech company producing information-gathering software, are setting new directions for how information on crisis is collected and shared (OCHA 2013). Indeed, advances in technology appear to be the greatest drive for the need to constantly renegotiate the meaning and content of joint enterprise.

Shared repertoire

Both mutual engagement and joint enterprise contribute to the development of shared repertoire which binds a CoP and reflects the history of its evolution. Words, artefacts and tools define a CoP. In the community of CEWSs practitioners, words such as 'methodology', 'field' and 'system' have meanings negotiated over years and well-understood by the insiders. In a similar vein, crisis rooms, which often constitute the nerve centre of CEWSs, look alike. They are equipped with big screens on the wall displaying maps, smaller screens with 24/7 news channels, and many stationary phones. All this is well-understood by CEWSs professionals, because such artefacts define their practice. The community of CEWSs practitioners also grasps the advantages and limitations of various methodologies involved in crisis analysis. Notably, quantitative models are appreciated for their high predictive value and policy-relevance, but not for offering a more in-depth picture. Qualitative methods, in turn, are mostly valued for providing rich contextual data and address stakeholders more directly, but they are also limited in various ways (Nyheim 2009, 39-48).

Power in CoPs

The critiques of the 'CoP' concept in organisational studies agree that the considerations of power have largely been overlooked (Fox 2000; Marshall and Rollinson 2006; Mørk *et al.* 2010; Roberts 2006). While this omission is problematic for the study of any social grouping, the relations of power are especially important in the context of politics, both national and international. The recent contribution on power in practice by Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot (2014) is valuable in this respect, even if it does not engage directly with the problem of power in CoPs. Without such considerations, we can never fully understand why CoPs have certain structures, and why knowledge is developed and distributed in a particular manner (Roberts 2006, 626). Consequently, the structural properties of CoPs should not be misinterpreted as '[b]eing excessively quiescent and consensual' (Marshall and Rollinson 2004, S74), because the opposite is true. The negotiation of collective meaning, common discourse and identities are essentially political processes and misunderstandings, disagreements, turf wars and mistrust are central for the dynamics of CoPs.

I borrow the typology of power from Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (2005), although I integrate it in a slightly modified form, to reflect the specific context of CoPs. Barnett and Duvall developed their understanding of power relations based on four criteria. On the one hand, they contrast the relations in which participating social actors are already constituted, with the situation where social actors become constituted as a result of power relations. On the other hand, they contrast power relations which are direct and specific with relations that are indirect and diffused (2005, 45). As a result, they come up with four types of power: (1) compulsory, which is the most popular form of power in the study of international relations; in its essence, it is the ability of A to get B to do what B otherwise would not do; (2) institutional, which is an indirect form of power, where 'formal and informal institutions mediate between A and B' (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 51) (e.g. agenda-setting, dependence); (3) structural, which entails the co-constitution of structural positions, so that structural position A exists only by virtue of its relation to structural position B (e.g. master – slave); and (4) productive, which is similar to structural in some respects, but entails indirect and diffuse relations through systems of knowledge and discursive practices (e.g. the production of subjects, fixing meaning).

In the context of CoPs, the relations of power can be further differentiated based on their location. On the one hand, power dynamics can be located within CoPs, i.e. take place between the community members and involve the issue of hierarchy. On the other hand, power relations can be located in the interaction between any particular CoP and its external environment, including governments funding CoPs and those being the subject of CoPs' activities, other CoPs,

NGOs and IGOs. The power relations involving the external environment can take place in the context of collaboration or competition. They can, most likely, affect a CoP in two different ways: the community can either be on the 'receiving end' of a power relation, for example through depending on external resources, or it can exercise power towards the external environment which may, in turn, depend on the resources of this community.

Compulsory power relations may occur inside CoPs, for example in the form of bullying. They should not be common, however, because they indicate that the community is dysfunctional. Compulsory power should not be disregarded, however, when studying the relations between CoPs and the external environment, including governments and their agencies. If a particular CoP heavily depends on government resources, for example, it may find itself forced to direct its own resources towards certain objectives, which it would not do without external pressure. **Structural power** defines the very existence of CoPs. The self-understanding of members is shaped by other members who are involved in the same practice, as well as by the engagement with non-members. For example, to be a diplomat means performing the practices that are recognised by other diplomats as 'doing' diplomacy, and also which are recognised as such by influential non-diplomats.

Considering that CoPs largely involve interactions within and between formal and informal institutions, indicates that we should pay attention to **institutional power** relations, i.e. relations mediated through institutions (e.g. governments, agencies, divisions, firms, NGOs). Questions about institutional mandate, budget allocations, turf wars, decision-making procedures, national interest, alliances and media coverage can all be asked in relation to institutional power relations. Institutional power relations can take place within a single CoP, but also through interaction and dependency on the resources of other actors. **Productive power** relations can help to understand how meaning is fixed, what the dominant discourses are, how actors perceive their identity and who is constructed as 'others'. I use the term 'constitutive' to describe this type of power, because it is more familiar in European integration studies and IR. Again, constitutive power relations can be equally present within a single CoP, where status and meaning are constantly renegotiated, and in interactions with other actors, such as governments, which may contest the interpretation of their policies by a particular CoP (e.g. the community of human rights activists).

Power in the community CEWSs

All of these power types matter for a policy entrepreneur, such as the EU, which intends to transform the loosely-connected and often incoherent CoP into a closely-integrated one, whose members not only engage in a similar practice, but actually coordinate their work and share resources on a regular basis. Understanding compulsory, structural, institutional, constitutive and internal/external types of power relations can indeed contribute to uncovering fundamental dynamics defining and shaping CoPs at the international level. Each CoP, however, is different. The power relations in the community of diplomats may manifest themselves differently from power relations in the community of international human rights lawyers. Equally, power relations in the community of CEWSs practitioners manifest themselves in a particular manner, which is related to the specific set of problems defining and shaping this community. Based on empirical evidence, the relations of power in the community of CEWSs practitioners can be broadly grouped into four problems: information, dependency, status and meaning. As a consequence, the framework allows to approach the community of CEWSs practitioners individually for the unique nature of power relations affecting it, while at the same time being sufficiently versatile for application to other instances of distributed COPs.

The four types of power relations, including the distinction between internal and external power relations, apply to the aforementioned four CEWSs-specific problems, although not uniformly. For example, the institutional type of power relations can be more appropriate to understand the problem of information in the community of CEWSs practitioners, while the constitutive type of power can be more suitable for analysing the problem of status. To summarise this point, the problem of information primarily concerns the role of institutions in production, distribution and access to information on crisis. Timely information is the most valuable currency in the community of CEWSs practitioners. The problem of dependency is also affected by institutional power relations, in that power relations are mediated by pre-constituted institutional entities, but it mainly concerns the relationship between crisis rooms and external stakeholders, such as governments, which provide legitimacy and resources. The problem of status is about the ability to shape definitions (i.e. what is a crisis?) and best practices in matters such as methodology and response. Finally, the problem of meaning focuses more on the relationship with the outside world and concerns challenges such as different political and ideological nuances in vulnerable regions.

The problem of information

Information-focused power relations are crucial in the community of CEWSs practitioners. In fact, it is not exaggeration that 'information sharing or cooperation are a reflection of power relations among institutions that position themselves on a market where information is of strategic importance' (Tardy 2014, 103). Turf wars, institutional cultures, decision-making procedures, perceived institutional interest, special relationships, enmities and competition can all affect how information is shared within a community, and – as a consequence – support or hinder efforts for closer cooperation. The obstacles to information sharing can be called 'speed bumps' or 'bottlenecks'. They include problems such as the culture of information (over)sensitivity which is the single most important challenge to timely information-sharing. The results of the regional survey conducted by the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies corroborate this observation, noting that in crisis early warning '[t]here is a lack of a tradition in the sharing information within and across organizations/nations/internationally. In most instances the reverse is true; information is hoarded as a source of power' (APCSS 2008).

One specific example of information-related power relations concerns the bureaucratic competition between national intelligence services and non-governmental CEWSs. As noted, CEWSs can be located within government structures, but also in IGOs and NGOs. This, potentially, represents a threat to government-based intelligence services. As Schrodt and Gerner (1998, 20) note,

> [k]nowledge is power in any bureaucracy. But in the intelligence community, knowledge is the only source of power. (…) An intelligence agency (…) has only a single consumer - the decision-maker - and a single product. If the analysis provided by an IGO is identical to that of the agency, that information is redundant; if it is different, the agency may be shown to be wrong. In either situation the agency is better off without the competing analysis.

Notably, available evidence suggests that the demise of the UN's Office for Research and Collection of Information was related to the United States' unwillingness to support independent sources of intelligence and analysis (Schrodt and Gerner 1998). External government pressures can also discourage early warning efforts in locations considered to be of strategic importance, including places such as eastern Ukraine, Caucasus, central Africa or Lebanon. Another information-related instance of power struggles concerns the difficult relationship between civilian and military structures, including the aforementioned cooperation between military operation

rooms and civilian crisis rooms (Nyheim 2014). As Eva Gross observes, the cooperation between the military and civilian crisis responders 'is affected by different working cultures, rotation of staff and lack of institutional memory, all of which present challenges to information sharing' (Gross 2014, 95). Incidentally, close cooperation between civilian and military CEWSs is considered fundamental by the community of CEWSs practitioners (Gross 2014). These two examples signal important areas where mostly institutional, information-related power relations can undermine the development of the more coherent community of CEWSs practitioners.

The problem of dependency

The second type of power relations affecting the community of CEWSs practitioners relates to the problem of dependency, whereby community coherence is affected by the fact that CEWSs depend on different actors for funding and legitimacy. One illustration of this problem concerns the access to satellite imagery and other expensive resources by NGO-based CEWSs. As one representative of the World Food Programme admits, '[i]nformation, such as very high-resolution satellite imagery, is commercially available and there are many ex-military imagery interpreters available. Information can also be extracted through application of more human and computing power' (Abdulla 2014, 74). This, of course, requires resources, which triggers the problem of dependency. In order to understand how dependency-related power relations can affect CEWSs, it is also important to consider the position of actors which provide funding. From their perspective, CEWSs can be useful in providing confidential data which can help to prevent panic and/or to achieve/avert certain political outcomes. In this case it is true that 'information is power, and information received by one special-interest group, a ministry, for example, ahead of others can be politically very rewarding' (Glantz 2009, 23).

The manner in which dependency-related power relations can affect CEWSs can be demonstrated with specific examples. To this end, Schmeidl (2008) points to the different characteristics (and fates) of the ICG, Forum of Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) and FAST International. The ICG was founded in 1995 by a group of prominent and influential figures, such as the Vice-President of the World Bank. From the start, it has been engaged in influencing high-level policy-makers through strategic lobbying. It produces thematic and issue-specific reports and spends one quarter of its budget on advocacy – the largest proportion out of the three organisations discussed. Considering the fact that almost half of the funding for the

ICG comes from governments (ICG 2014), the ICG seems to accurately interpret the power relations it depends on, and it tailors its services accordingly.

The other two organisations were less successful. FEWER was founded in 1996 by the Secretary General of International Alert among other figures, but closed in 2004. Its main focus was on facilitating civil society networks in crisis areas and mediating between early warning actors in the countries of the South. It never managed to build an extensive network, however, and it failed to pursue its potential advantage: producing networks between North and South expertise (Schmeidl 2008). The case of FAST is particularly revealing for the dependency-related power relations in the community of CEWSs practitioners. It was established in 1996/97 by a Swiss Peace Foundation, which is a development agency. Development agencies benefit mostly from conflict assessment methodologies rather than early warning reports. The FAST system, however, was developed as an early warning system monitoring conflict situations and opportunities for peace; its ultimate goal was to predict conflicts. Unsurprisingly, the main clients of FAST were foreign ministries, security agencies and regional organisations. They did not pay for the services, however. The funding was coming from development agencies, for which the reports were superficial. FAST also did not manage to establish connections with high-level policy-makers, which further contributed to its closure in 2008 (Schmeidl 2008; Nyheim 2009). This overview demonstrates that dependency-related power relations can affect the very existence of CEWSs, which in turn impacts the dynamics within the community CEWSs practitioners and its potential for stronger coherence.

The problem of status

The community of CEWSs practitioners includes institutions of different status. Status can be defined as a collective believe about a given institution's ranking on valued attributes (Larson *et al.* 2014, 7), thus it is best captured by the constitutive type of power relations. The most illuminating way to understand the nature of the competition for status within CoPs is through adopting the notion of the field, as developed by Bourdieu (1993; see also Pouliot and Mérand 2013). The field is a hierarchical social space where actors of unequal standing compete for status and influence. The power relations in any particular field are structured by the struggle for capital, which may have many different forms, such as economic, social, cultural and symbolic. What is particularly valued in the field depends on how it, including the associated valuable commodities, has been socially constructed. In the area of conflict prevention and response, de Guevara (2014) argues that it is the social and cultural capital which matters most.

By social capital he means 'both with regard to contacts "on the ground" in post-/conflict spaces, which are necessary to the gathering of information, as well as regarding high-level contacts in the "highest echelons" of decision making, which ensure the possibility of influence and impact' (2014, 551). The cultural capital entails the perception of credibility of an institution, which in this particular community involves attributes such as expertise, quality research, independence and objectivity.

Why and how do the status-related power relations matter? They influence the structure and process of CoPs in important ways. The structure is affected because in the field which can be characterised as a 'knowledge market', 'different suppliers of knowledge compete with each other, sometimes forming oligopolies, sometimes even creating a knowledge monopoly' (Nullmeier and Rüb, translated by de Guevara, 2014, 549). The process is affected, for example, through the competition over the definitions of key concepts, such as what constitutes a crisis and what a 'comprehensive response' should entail (Miozzo 2014). In a world with abundant resources directed to all CEWSs operating on the 'knowledge market', none of these considerations would have mattered that much, except for prestige and recognition. In a world of scarce resources, however, the ability to shape definitions and influence response methodologies can affect the very existence of an organisation. As a result, the coherence of CEWSs will be impacted by alliances and special relationships, enmities and competition, access to media and media coverage and political cost-benefit calculations (Nyheim 2009). Wenger *et al.* (2002) argue that such risks are inherent in CoPs. They note that those involved in establishing a domain may be tempted by an 'imperialistic' and arrogant wish to own it. It is the role of the policy entrepreneur, such as the EU in this case, to recognise and mitigate these risks.

The problem of meaning

The power relations related to the generation of meaning are similar to these related to status, in that they are often also constitutive, but they can also be observed in interactions of the CoP with non-members. Meaning-related power relations in the community of CEWSs practitioners have various dimensions. One concerns the meaning attributed to the phrases such as 'conflict prone' countries or 'fragile states'. As Nyheim (2009) notes, the work of regional CEWSs is heavily restricted by states' sensitivities 'on monitoring of violent conflict and state fragility' (2009, 54). For domestic and international reasons, state political elites may prefer to reject outside assistance even if such help is actually needed. What the involvement of CEWSs often entails is 'a process that affects the dynamics of power within a particular society (…)' (Tardy

2014, 103). The experience of CEWSs in this instance is similar to that of the UN agencies entrusted with publishing reports and rankings assessing countries' performance in different areas. As one UN official recalls, when UNICEF published its report on child well-being in rich countries, 'the UK was simply out to undermine some of us as individuals, and UNICEF, and sources, etc.' (research interview at the UN, 2014).

Another meaning-related problem for CEWSs concerns striking the balance between respecting cultural diversity and harmonisation. In this context, Assistant Secretary General of the League of Arab States Haifa Abu Ghazaleh (2014) argues that CEWSs must appreciate cultural context for their operation. This, naturally, raises the challenge for furthering cooperation and establishing a coherent network of CEWSs, which entails standardisation and developing a common language. That outcome, however, runs contrary to the requirement for recognising and respecting cultural diversity, especially that crisis management often touches upon multiple sensitive areas. Mr. Ghazaleh offers an example of the Arab World in this context, as representing a wide spectrum of traditions of cooperation, with the Gulf States cooperating closely and North African states doing so to a much lesser extent. According to a different study (Grigat 2014), we can observe this very problem in conflict-driven Indonesia. Instead of tailoring its policy recommendations to the country's specific cultural context, 'ICG publications essentially aim to discursively discipline their audience through practices and procedures characteristic of liberal governance into this specific form of social action and corresponding mind-sets, thus perpetuating liberalism as the global "regime of power"' (Grigat 2014, 565). Cooperation with local stakeholders, such as the governments of vulnerable states, is important for effective early warning and for forging a stronger community of CEWSs practitioners. Consequently, meaning-related power relations should also be recognised by policy entrepreneurs, most notably the EU, interested in promoting greater CEWSs coherence.

Conclusion

It is certainly too early to know whether the study of practices and CoPs will find their long-term place in European studies and IR. Adler and Pouliot certainly have high hopes for this research programme, but some early criticism has already been formulated (Duvall and Chowdhury 2011; Ringmar 2014). Notably, the concept has been described as too vague and its definition too broad (Ringmar 2014, 6). One way to overcome this arguable limitation would be to link 'CoPs' closer to the original understanding as developed by Wenger, in contrast to

Adler's wide-ranging formulation, encompassing epistemic communities, security communities and many other social phenomena. The explanatory power of the concept, however, will still be limited unless the considerations of power relations are fully integrated. To this end, the paper has suggested distinguishing between compulsory, structural, institutional and constitutive types of power. This framework, originally developed by Barnett and Duvall (2005), was further adapted to studying CoPs by distinguishing between internal power relations (within CoPs) and external ones (affecting CoP members and non-members). By integrating power considerations into the study of CoPs in European studies and IR, we can hope to uncover important questions concerning the structures and processes affecting CoPs dynamics. This broader outlook, in turn, should strengthen the explanatory power of the 'CoP' concept.

The theoretical argument was illustrated with the 'plausibility probe' case of the community of CEWSs practitioners. Recently, the EU undertook an initiative to support integration of CEWSs at the global level, with the aim of improving crisis early warning and early response capabilities. While certainly a noble initiative, it is likely to encounter a number of obstacles related to the relations of power operating inside the community of CEWSs practitioners, as well as those operating across the community's boundaries. At the time of writing, the community of CEWSs practitioners remains a rather weak CoP, with only limited mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Any efforts at stronger integration will have to take into account the realities of power. To this end, the paper offers a framework which could help to organise the analysis of power relations affecting CoPs at the international level.

The framework integrating power considerations into the study of COPs is versatile enough to allow application to other examples of distributed COPs in international relations. Its generalisability largely stems from the comprehensive approach to power originally advanced by Barnett and Duvall (2005), who urged scholars to appreciate the concept's multi-dimensional character. In this context, compulsory, structural, institutional and constitutive types of power relations should not be regarded as competing for relative importance, but rather as allowing to capture power dynamics affecting complex social phenomena, such as COPs. The framework's generalisability is further enhanced by the very nature of COPs, which are defined by the boundaries separating them from the external environment. These boundaries are often blurred, but – as this paper has indicated – the exact nature of power relations affecting COPs varies according to where it is located. Power relations operating within the communities of diplomats, international traders, lawyers, military officials, advocacy networks or EU foreign policy practitioners are likely to affect their dynamics differently from power relations operating across

the boundaries separating these communities and the external environment in which they are embedded.

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