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### Does function matter? Researching comparative regional governance

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The comparative studies of different regional processes has now evolved into a relatively well developed sub-discipline – or perhaps a sub-sub discipline if the study of regional integration is a sub-discipline in itself. It is, in the words of one of the more recent collections on the topic, Comparative Regionalism (CR) is “a field whose time has come”.<sup>1</sup> And it’s fair to say that the UNU CRIS as well as the wider membership of the GR:EEN project have played a significant role on moving the research agenda forwards. In the process, a number of potential pitfalls have been identified that might impede the development of a truly comparative method.<sup>2</sup>

This paper draws out the conclusions of research which sought to separate out key issue areas corresponding to different arenas of policy action and academic discourse in three related fields; security, the environment and economics.<sup>3</sup> In trying to pull together the collective findings of two studies, each containing eight case studies, it is inevitable that first, you can only speak in very general terms and second, that there will be exceptions to any rule. Indeed, perhaps the clearest conclusion is, not surprisingly, that there remains considerable diversity in forms of regional governance. Interestingly, this is not just the case when you compare different regions, but also when you compare different issue based governance forms in the same region.

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<sup>1</sup> Though this title is followed by a question mark, so its more of a suggestion than a definitive statement. Amitav Acharya (2012) “Comparative Regionalism: A Field Whose Time has Come?”, *International Spectator*, 47 (1): 3-15.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps best outlined in Philippe de Lonbaerde, Fredrik Soderbaun, Luk van Langenhove and Francis Baert (2009), “The Problem of Comparison in Comparative Regionalism”, University of Miami Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series.

<sup>3</sup> Although we had an economics stream in the original conference in The Hague, and subsequently tried again to consider economic governance in light of the global crisis at a second workshop in Beijing, we were unable to bring together a final volume in this area. However, the concept was revived and became part of the GR:EEN programme via a workshop in Warwick in 2012 that will lead to an edited collection on regional governance and crises (Haastrup and Eun, forthcoming).

But if we can pull out two major conclusions (other than the persistence of diversity), we can point first to the continued problems of finding the right regional “fit” – the most effective territorial space and the best mix of actors to deal with the specific issue at hand. Second, and most important for this project, the position of key regional actors is crucial in determining not just the type of regional governance that might/should emerge, but whether the region should become an effective site of governance in the first place.

### **Methodological Problems in Comparative Regional Studies**

#### **The Europe Problem**

For example, one of the key challenges in developing this research agenda is what to do with the European experience.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Europe remains a central component of any study of CR. Not only is it an obvious example of a regional integrative project with now a relatively long history of both successes and problems, but it is also the case study that has been most influential in generating theories that explain regional integration (or at least, integration in a region). Through its external actions and partnerships with other regional groupings, the EU has also actively promoted regional integration as a means of promoting development and solving transnational problems in other parts of the world.

So there are good reasons for suggesting that the European experience deserves to maintain a central position in CR studies – perhaps even a

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<sup>4</sup> See Alex Warleigh-Lack, Nick Robinson & Ben Rosamond (2011) (eds). *New Regionalism and the European Union: Dialogues, Comparisons and New Research Directions* (London: Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science).

privileged position. Its how this privileged position is treated that is the potential problem. For example, are theories developed to help explain what happened in Europe transferable to different settings – or put another way, are they theories of regional integration or more simply of European integration with other theories needed to explain very different processes of integration elsewhere?<sup>5</sup> And it is not just that regionalist theories have emerged from the European experience, but a narrow European experience at that. As Rosamond notes, “neofunctionalism can be read at one level as a theory provoked entirely by the integrative activity among the original six member-states”.<sup>6</sup>

The key, appears to be whether the EU case is *sui generis* or in some ways universalisable? Murray identifies a form of “integration snobbery” in the promotion of an EU style regionalism as a model for others to emulate;<sup>7</sup> the idea that there is something superior about the nature of European regionalism compared to regional projects elsewhere. Moreover, this overlooks the fact that not just Europe’s history, but also European objectives might be very different from those in other parts of the world. As such, trying to copy what Europe did might not just simply be difficult, but inappropriate for regions that face a very different set of challenges – a mistake that is not necessarily a result of the promotion of a European model from within Europe,

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Hurrell (2005) “The Regional Dimension in International Relations Theory”, in Mary Farrell, Bjorn Hettne and Luk van Langenhove (eds) *The Global Politics of Regionalism. Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press).

<sup>6</sup> Ben Rosamond (2000), *Theories of European Integration* (Basingstoke: Macmillan): p.10.

<sup>7</sup> Philomena Murray (2010) “Comparative regional integration in the EU and East Asia: Moving beyond integration snobbery”, *International Politics*, 47, pp.308-23.

but can also stem from “regionalists” in other parts of the world putting too much emphasis on the EU as model.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis on Europe as some form of exemplar can result in two important analytical flaws. First, it generates an assumption about some form of convergence of regional types – or perhaps more correctly, because it assumes an end point for regional projects, other types of regional projects that don’t have the same level of institutionalization are seen to in some ways fall short of attaining full or “proper” regionhood. This seemed strange to those who considered the politics of different non-European regions where considerable regional integration seemed to be taking place, even without the levels of institutionalization that were apparent in the European case. Second, and very much related, because Europe is one of the units that is typically used in comparative approaches, the result is an exaggeration of the extent of institutionalization and multidimensionalism in regional integration. The greater the set of regions being compared, then the greater the evidence that rather than perhaps Europe being the exception and informality and shallow integration the norm in most of the world.

As a result of these concerns, New Regionalism Theories have emerged in an attempt to find non-EU based approaches to understanding processes of regional integration – and quite rightly so. But in the process of searching for the new, there has perhaps at a time been a tendency to throw away the old and assume that Europe has no relevance for these other cases – not least

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Draper (2012): Breaking Free from Europe: Why Africa Needs Another Model of Regional Integration, *The International Spectator*, 47 (1): pp.67-82.

because explanations of European integration have come to be dominated by a very narrow set of theoretical positions.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, we end up in the rather strange and apparently paradoxical situation where Europe can be a problem for CR both when it is considered to be a unique *sui generis* case and also when it is considered to be a benchmark, and a model, and an originator of theories. Both positions have made it difficult to develop theoretical perspectives that elucidate the salience of regionalism as a challenge to the current global order beyond the European case. This position is further complicated by the evolution of EU studies as all but a separate sub-discipline from CR studies with specialist journals, conferences, book series and associations that locate the study of European regionalism as separate from the study of regional integration *per se*.<sup>10</sup> Here there is a focus on major concerns within Europe that are a consequence of long term and deep integration - the potential for a federal Europe superseding the state, the move towards a common foreign and security policy, how to handle enlargement, the democratic deficit and the relationship between different agencies.

And at the risk of a massive oversimplification, it is here that we perhaps find the key difference between the study of Europe and the study of CR and integration elsewhere; in Europe the main considerations today is the

**consequences** of regionalism whereas elsewhere the emphasis is on **causes**

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<sup>9</sup> Alex Warleigh-Lack and Ben Rosamond (2010) "Across the EU Studies—New Regionalism Frontier: Invitation to a Dialogue", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (4), pp. 993-1013 and Fredrik Söderbaum & Alberta Sbragia (2010) "Linking European Integration and Comparative Regionalism"

<sup>10</sup> Ben Rosamond (2007) "European integration and the social science of EU studies: the disciplinary politics of a sub-field", *International Affairs*, 83(2).

– what makes a region come into existence, cohere and have longevity. Or even more fundamentally, it is often on the prior question of what the region under investigation is, could be, or should be.

This statement immediately needs qualifying in three ways – qualifications that had an impact on our thinking in establishing the projects on comparative regional environmental and security governance. First, it isn't wholly correct to say that it's only Europe that is concerned with the consequences of regionalism. Regional bodies in other parts of the world are also interested in the impact of what they have already done – and indeed, in a number of our case studies, whether the process of integration to date has established mechanisms that are well placed to deal with environmental and (new) security challenges. Second, the idea that regions are still in the process of being defined and articulated in many parts of the world – that the emphasis is on the causes and not the consequences – is a strong working hypothesis. But it would be wrong to think that this is not an issue for Europe. How many scholars in 1945 or even at the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 would have predicted the EU that existed on its fiftieth anniversary? If Europe is defined as the members of the EU (and its forerunners) then what Europe is today is very different from what was Europe in the 1980s. Indeed, how many people in early 1989 would have foreseen a Europe of 27 including many that once formed part of the opposition “bloc” or “camp”, and states that didn't even exist less than two decades ago? Indeed, we might well be on the verge of another upheaval that could change the membership of the EU, establish different levels of membership and integration, or both. So considerations of

the causes and consequences of regionalism can be identified in many parts of the world – it's just that the **primary** focus of academic interest has tended to break down along different lines in the EU studies community on one hand, and the CR community on the other.

Which brings us to the third qualification. While the study of Europe **today** is mainly focused on consequences, this wasn't always the case. Indeed, part of the problem of comparison in general emerges from trying to compare two (or more) different processes at dissimilar stages of their evolution. Thus, if we look historically at the evolution of the European project, particularly in the early post WWII years, we may indeed find debates, challenges and policies that have salience for considering how regions might be established and begin to cohere in other parts of the world (at other times).

For example, a comparative historical approach can suggest that apparently insurmountable obstacles to regional projects aren't always as insurmountable as they might appear if studied on their own. From the vantage point of the safe European home of today, it is perhaps easy to forget that the Europe of the early 1950s was characterised by fragmentation and potential challenges to regional stability and peace rather than integration and union. Indeed, despite the emphasis on economic and potential political union today, we shouldn't forget that the current EU had its origins in an attempt to establish in what "a working peace system",<sup>11</sup> and avoid a repeat of the slide into another continental or global war. Of course, identifying what **can** be overcome, what

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<sup>11</sup> David Mitrany (1943) *A Working Peace System*, (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs).



**might** be overcome and how they **have** been overcome in one setting doesn't necessarily mean that they inevitably **will** be overcome in other (or all) settings – or overcome in the same way in every place. But looking historically does give us more of a purchase for seeing commonalities between the European experience and the challenges to regionalism elsewhere than simply taking a snapshot of what is happening today.

Building on this understanding, our project decided to look backwards to the establishment of the modern European project for one of its key inspirations. Rather than take the creation of an institutionalized and multifaceted regional organization for granted, we instead returned to Mitrany's understanding of whether regions work better when the membership and *modi operandi* vary depending on the specific issue at hand. So one of our key objectives was to consider whether environmental and security issues were best dealt with at the regional level through existing regional bodies and whether the currently accepted parameters of region are appropriate given the specific challenges at hand. Or should the definition of region vary and the type of regional governance change to meet the specific functional challenge?

### **Identifying Regions**

If we take this understanding of functional regions and bring Europe back into the equation, then we can see, for example, that the security region does not simply map on top of the institutional and geographical boundaries of the EU. And it was in identifying which regions should be the focus of attention in the project that we came to one of the biggest problems. Many – probably most –

CR studies tend to focus on different regional institutions – the EU, Mercusor, ASEAN, SADC and so on. The problem for our study was fourfold. First, one of the basic questions was whether these institutions are the right fit given the issue at hand. And this suggests that there must be some other conception of what the region could or should be if not reflected by the institution. Second, and very much related, the members of a regional organization are not always the states that are key to solving common regional issues. It would be strange to think of Switzerland or Norway as not being part of Europe, for example, but they don't form a direct part of "Europe" if the region is simply defined as the members of the EU. North Korea is clearly an important component in searching for regional security in Asia/Northeast Asia/East Asia, but is not a member of the key regional organizations (and Taiwan is also absent from most for political reasons).

Third, we return to the idea that regional formation remains fluid and the parameters of the region are not agreed. The region (any region) is not a given – it is constructed and reconstructed, and at many moments seems to have a solidity and an objective form, yet at others, seems fluid and particularly with historical hindsight, malleable. Fourth, we share with many of the proponents of new regional approaches that there is more to regions than formal institutions, laws and treaties. Rather, we decided to focus on forms of regional governance, which we defined as structures of authority that manage collective problems and resolve conflicts between stakeholders. Whilst this includes institutions, it also brings in informal transnational public and private authority arrangements and networks. Building on the points made above, this

means that it is unlikely that simply focusing on member states of specific bodies is enough to capture first the territorial space in which the functional challenge exists, and second, the actors and interests that are involved in trying to resolve these challenges.

One way of managing this is to try to fix what we mean by 'region' through geography. A whole continent is sometimes taken as a reference point. But does Asia stop at the Bosphorus, the Urals, or somewhere else? Is Russia part of Europe, Asia, both or none? Are seas natural dividers between one region and the next or essential communications routes that bind a region together? Perhaps most significantly, it's not always clear when a region is a region or a sub-region – for example, as Svensson points out, is South Asia defined as SAARC a region in itself, or a sub-region of a wider Asia? If it is the former, then the major power cleavage in the region is between India and Pakistan. If it is the latter, then it is arguably India and China that are the major powers, and the relationship between them a key determinant of the region's (future) security. A non-EU definition of Europe might make Russia a dominant player, and while Brazil is the dominant state actor in Mercusor/UNSUR, there is no doubting the supremacy of the USA in the Americas as a whole.

Conversely, the understanding of where North America starts and stops does not seem to have much in common with the sources of and potential solutions to transnational environmental challenges, but is instead defined by other criteria. It might be a cliché to say that transnational environmental challenges do not have much regard for political boundaries – but clichés often persist

because they are based in truth. While governments and laws can establish the boundaries of an economic region, this is much less possible in ecological terms. While this might suggest that the subdivisions of, say, Asia into South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Central Asia (and so on) create regions that are too small, they also in some respects create regions that are too big, with some of the most effective cooperative mechanisms being established at “sub-sub-regional” levels to manage specific and discrete issues.

This perhaps generic problem of identifying the territorial space to be investigated was complicated by the different issue areas under consideration. In short, specialists from different disciplines saw regions differently – even within a broadly agreed territorial space. As a result, we eventually simply took a pragmatic approach and divided the world into four major areas – Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East, and Asia – and asked specialists on each of these areas to tell us what the region (or regions) for investigation within those areas should be.

### **Bilateralism and Regionalism**

One of the questions that emerged during the early stages of the project was whether a focus on bilateral relations was compatible with a regional focus. While bilateral relations might appear to fall numerically short of the basic requirements for a ‘regional level’ analysis, we decided to include them for two main reasons. The first is the importance of cold war style bipolarity as the major dynamic in a number of regions - most clearly between nuclear and

territorial tensions between India and Pakistan in South Asia, but also the Japan-China relationship in East Asia. But perhaps the most significant example comes from the Middle East, where bilateral relations with Israel remain key determinants of and form or regional interaction. It is not just that these bilateral relations are the most urgent dynamic within the region, but that other regional states all also have a stake in resolving (or governing) the relationship. The discursive practices of other regional states – and through this, modes of regional governance - can thus be shaped by the dominance of a single bilateral relationship within a region.

Second, this is not a study of regionalism, but instead a study of regional governance. And borrowing from approaches largely devised to explain processes of regional economic integration, in some parts of the world regional governance is often comprised of a patchwork of bilateral relations. That they are not codified and established as region-wide institutions, but combine to establish laws, norms and expectations that affect the region as a whole.

### **Research Findings**

Perhaps the first point to make is that the study of regions and issues can often evolve as separate intellectual projects. By this we mean that while students of regionalism – and in particular, students of particular regions - might consider different issue based challenges in their region, it is less likely that students of disciplines will consider regional dynamics. The big exception is economics, where the search for regional economic solutions to shared

concerns does seem to have become embedded in the broader study of economic governance and international political economy. Environmental scholars are perhaps the next most likely group to think in terms of region, not least because the major global institutions have promoted the regional level as an effective locus of environmental governance – an issue we will return to shortly. A focus on regional governance seems relatively well established in the economics realm, and has some purchase when it comes to the environment.

It is in the realm of security that both regionalism and governance are least likely to be part of mainstream studies. There is considerable work on security communities, and interest of course in security in different regions, but rather little on the regional governance of security *per se*. The emphasis remains more firmly on states providing security solutions either on their own or in partnership with other states and international organizations. Where security is on the agenda, it is typically in “human security” or “non-traditional security” arenas rather than security defined in terms of the use of force and/or the threat of the use of force. It might be a bit of an exaggeration to say that the study of regionalism has developed separately from the study of security, but it’s not an exaggeration to say that there is still room for much more work that tries to connect the two.

### **Why “Go Regional”?**

There are times when it appears that the creation of a regional body forms part of a “status game”. Because everybody else has a region, then “we”

should have a reason too. But in general, the rationale for seeking regional solutions to shared problems can be summed up by three words - effectiveness, legitimacy and identity. At the most basic level of all, the search for regional governance emerges from the recognition that the state alone – any state – cannot solve problems that it faces through unilateral action alone. To this we can add the also rather basic desire to ensure that where there are transboundary issues, they can be resolved peacefully rather than descend into conflict.

The flip side of the coin is that the issue at hand, for whatever reason, cannot be dealt with effectively (for whatever reason) at the global level. So the region is what Katzenstein refers to as the “goldilocks principle” – neither too small, nor too big but just right. This is based on an understanding that the region “better” than collective action at the global level, or through non regional international partnerships, or through unilateral means. “Better” here might refer to regional level activity being more effective in attaining stated objectives or being perceived to be more *legitimate* – or both. Or perhaps in some cases, the region can do things that simply cannot be done at all through and at other sites of governance. But as we have already noted, while there might be a cognition of the need to find a site of governance above the national but below the global, this still leaves a huge amount of space to search for the best fit.

The regional level is seen as being a legitimate site of governance for a number of reasons. For example, in protecting the region from the diktats of

the global; particularly where the global level is seen as representing the interests and goals of “some”. This “some” often means the “West” which is largely perceived to dominate not just the power structure of global organizations, but also the norms ideas and principles that underpin them. For example, after the Asian financial crisis, there was a strong feeling in the region that the Western (neo)liberal powers were trying to punish regional economies for pursuing statist development strategies that did not conform with western interests. But while in many parts of the world not being the west is an important component of many regions, there is also a conception in Europe that the region protects from the global. Here, the idea is that the EU acts as what Wallace called a “filter” for globalization,<sup>12</sup> protecting European social security traditions from the forces of global neoliberalism.

This understanding of region as filling gaps in global governance leads to two further findings. First, crises seem to play important roles in spurring cooperation. Here, the “never again principle” (the desire to make sure the crisis isn’t repeated) combines with dissatisfaction with global level solutions (or the lack of them) to force regional states to look to each other for answers. A key question going forward is whether the global financial crisis has further undermined both the efficacy and the legitimacy of the global level as a source of solutions to transnational challenges.

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<sup>12</sup> Helen Wallace (2002), ‘Europeanisation and Globalisation: Complementary or Contradictory Trends?’, in Shaun Breslin *et al* *New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy* (London:Routledge), p. 149.



The second is the importance of identities – agreeing on who the “we” is and (perhaps more often) who the “they” are that “we” are not. Quite simply, being “different” does play a role. This understanding of the importance of identities has played a particularly strong role in explaining the emergence of security communities, but is a constant in most considerations of what makes regions form (and also stick together once they form). Again, while this often takes the form of identifying the west as the “they”. In Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia regional responses are an important manifestation of doing things independently and not controlled by either old colonial masters or newer hegemonic poles. But identities are also important in the west as well. For example, US-Canadian cooperation, and the exclusion of Mexico from such North American collaboration, is in part based on perceptions of “us” and “them”. We have also seen how the EU’s promotion of its values and norms as a means of ensuring security at home and abroad is also based on a specific understanding of what the EU is and what it stands for; of Europe’s “difference” from other powers in the global system.

In ASEAN too, there is a sense of being different and having an alternative way of thinking about international relations and an alternative way of conducting transnational affairs from the dominant orthodoxy – “the ASEAN Way.” And in both ASEAN and Europe, the region is seen as a means of socializing (potential) new members into preferred *modi operandi* of international interactions and crisis management. But we should note here that socialization is seen as a beneficial bi-product of regionalism, and not the reason why regions are formed in the first place.

## **Where is the Region?**

As already noted, in most parts of the world, considerations of regional governance are still dominated by issues related to regional formation, rather than the consequences of regionalism. Identifying where the parameters should be remains a work in progress, and as already noted, this becomes even more complicated first when you try and separate out different policy arenas and second, when you try to focus on governance. So the task is to consider what most effective site of authority for regional governance in any specific issue area, and whether different issues require different regions.

Although the original impetus behind the European project was to ensure security and prevent war, both the study of Europe and new and comparative regionalism studies have tended to focus on economic issues. This is because economic drivers are typically seen as being the major factors that determine the shape and constitution of regional bodies. So if we ask the question of whether it is best to work through existing institutions, or instead seek different functionally defined arrangements to deal with different problems, then the answer is rather mixed.

On the plus side if you have the institution, the trust, the history of working together and so on, then there is evidence that this can provided the basis for building effective solutions to other problems as well. This is most clearly the case in Europe where the existing mechanisms of regionalism, the legitimacy of working at the regional level, and a related shared regional identity have

contributed to the establishment of environmental governance in Europe. In other parts of the world, existing institutions have provided the basic starting point for getting states together to start discussing governance issues – even though they have not always been successful (for example, the way in which ASEAN provided the basis for the ASEAN Regional Forum). In general, we can suggest that the more embedded and the more accepted the region is as a site of governance *per se*, the greater the likelihood that it will develop means of providing security governance (in partnership with other sites of governance above and below it).

Nevertheless, there does seem to be a mismatch – not everywhere but widely enough to warrant comment here – between region defined as the most effective locus for economic governance, and region based on security and/or environmental considerations. In many places the region is either being too big, too small or simply inappropriate and ineffective for dealing with regional environmental challenges and transboundary externalities.

Another problem is the possibility of negative externalities from existing institutions spilling over into other policy areas. Perhaps the best example is SAARC, which Svensson suggests is an impediment on regional security governance in South Asia. Because it is there, then regional issues tend to get pulled into it, and as a cold war style polarity dominates the region, this results in regional states taking opposing sides even when they would benefit from cooperation. Its not so much that the existing regional institution gets in the way but that the region would be better off if it did not exist at all.

The SAARC example draws attention to the way that cold war divisions still split many regions in two – an issue briefly mentioned in the discussion on bilateralism and regionalism. Even though the Cold War has long been over, old alliances with (and against) the USA still continue to divide some regions, while new alliances have emerged as a source of regional cleavages elsewhere. The continued global dominance of the US marks it out as a particularly important actor and determinant of the balance of influence in many parts of the world. For example, in the MENA region, in Africa and East Asia, there are key divisions between those states that form security and other alliances with the United States, and those that either remain neutral or oppose the US presence in the region. New forms of bipolarity also characterize some regional relations. In South Asia, the Middle East and arguably East Asia, this bipolarity not surprisingly impacts on the evolution of regimes and alliances that can divide rather than unite regions.

A related issue here is that the fear of being dominated by a regional power can actually fundamentally change the nature of the region itself. Cottey argues that the existence of two major powers in Russia and China in the SCO makes it more legitimate in the eyes of the Central Asian members as it means that this is an organization that Russia cannot dominate.

The problem in Asia, is not the lack of regional organizations that define the parameters of the region, but that there are a number of different conceptions of region; ASEAN, ASEAN plus three, APEC, the Shanghai Cooperation

Organisation, and the East Asia Summit to name but five. These in some respects represent different visions of what the region should look like, built on conceptions of how one or more states might build (or bloc) regional leadership. Indeed, what Flemes and Radseck call the “logic of power balancing” seems to be an important component in many regions. This helps explain the network of alliances that divide regions – and also networks of alliances between regional and extra-regional actors. If it is not possible to find a means of balancing a dominant power within the region, then the region has to be changed.

Finally, we need to acknowledge the importance of extra-regional actors in many regional governance forms. There is a tendency for global environmental institutions to devolved governance issues to regions, and establish from above regional institutions that are often dependent on higher authorities for finance and capacity (more on this shortly). Alternatively, the regional level might become a means of transmitting governance provided by international institutions as is the case with the African Union.

External actors are also crucial when it comes to keeping the peace – and not just through alliances with extra-regional poles or powers to ensure balancing. Crucially, where security governance is most needed – where there is war or a perceived real threat of war – then regions often give way to global institutions or powerful extra regional states to at least make peace in the short run (if not to maintain it in the long term).

Interregionalism is also important. Despite the scepticism of some, the EU does act beyond its borders and promotes a set of good governance objectives (including direct support for regional initiatives). Until recently, whether rightly or wrongly, it has also acted as an inspiration for others and even sometimes a model to aspire to. Whether this remains the case today remains to be seen – indeed, perhaps one of the collective conclusions of the GR:EEN project to date is that the rest of the world does not necessarily see the EU as the EU sees itself, and that the financial crisis has done much to undermine faith in the European project.

### **On Governance**

Despite the attempt to draw attention away from simply states and institutions and towards other actors and interests, the majority of the studies retained a focus on formal agreements between state actors. This is partly because of the problem in defining where one issue area ends, and another one starts – and in this respect we are taken back to the debates over functionalism and the question of whether it's actually possible to separate out distinct and discrete policy areas given the connections between them. Is it possible, for example, to conceive of effective environmental governance that is separate and discrete from economics? Indeed, the relationship is so tightly intertwined that it creates problems for understanding what the nature of environmental governance actually is. Agreements over regional economic activities may have very clear environmental consequences, but are not considered to be part of environmental governance within the specialist community. Rather they form part of economic governance, with only action specifically and

deliberately conceived of as having **positive** environmental solutions considered to be part of environmental governance.

In this respect, non state actors may be affected by any new regulations that are brought in, but they aren't active participants in the development of these regulations. They are also, of course, major causes of problems that need to be addressed. And the same is true in the security field, where non-state actors are seen as one cause of insecurity. The increased focus on international terrorism is an obvious source of this focus, and the broader the conception of non-traditional security, the greater the role for non-state actors.

However, there does appear to be a role for non-state actors to provide a form of security governance. What we might call "uncivil society" often occupies a space left by weak states, and where such groups interact with others over national boundaries they can often find modes of interaction that allow for regional transactions and thus provide a form of governance that exists outside of the formal (statist) structure of international relations. Or perhaps more correctly, it is a form of "insecurity governance" where state power and the rule of law has been replaced by the authority of transnational militarised criminal groups that often "keep the peace" in a way that falls far short of providing freedom from fear for those under their "jurisdiction".

This brings us to the question of whether governance is always good. It is a term that seems to have taken on a positive slant and perhaps less ominous than talking about govern**ment**. But regional governance might produce

outcomes that are less than ideal. For example, Despite its tensions, the Cold War balance of power and the acceptance of legitimate spheres of influence established a form of regional governance that kept the inter-state peace in Europe. But this occurred at the expense of the freedom from fear of individuals in authoritarian states, and arguably entrenched conflict in post-colonial states in East Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America. Svensson notes that a similar focus on security defined as preventing war in South Asia and the dominance of bilateral India-Pakistan relations means that there is no real focus on human security in formal regional (or even bilateral) governance institutions. Jackson points to the tendency of African states, in the name of preventing (or more often stopping) conflict, to intervene in the domestic politics of other sovereign states, thus undermining the stability of states and creating what he calls an “insecurity complex”. Conversely, in Asia the problem is not interference but a principle of non-interference in the domestic politics of other regional states. Forming part of what is known as the “ASEAN way”, these principles can be considered to be part of a relatively dense network of security governance that does not always result in individuals being free from fear on a daily basis. As Katsumata argues, security arrangements in the region don’t allow for the promotion of human rights, but instead defend Asia from what is often portrayed as the imposition of western values by emphasizing Asia’s “difference” and reinforcing the importance of a strict belief in “sovereignty”. This might help deal with inter-state tensions, but creates what he calls a “human security dilemma”.



We noted in the introduction that the patchwork of different governance systems are characterized by diversity. But while this is true, there is some evidence of convergence on environmental governance, with Debora Van Nijnatten suggesting a similar five-step typology that anticipates a deepening of governance arrangements and practices, starting with information-sharing and moving through consultation, cooperation, harmonization to integration. Even here, though, similar paths can and do lead to rather diverse outcomes. As such, convergence and divergence are not necessarily mutually contradictory if you separate out process from outcome.

We suggest that this apparent convergence in environmental governance might be a result of the way that global institutions seem to have identified the regional level as a logical and natural site of governance, and a means of transmitting standards and principles downwards. So while the study of regionalism often focuses on those internal “bottom up” forces that lead to greater action at the regional level, the importance of top down initiatives should not be overlooked. Indeed, in some parts of the world, there would be very little (if any) regional governance at all were it not for top down initiatives, including funding to provide the otherwise absent capacity to act at the regional level.

Finally, while there has tended to be a focus on institutions, there is also a recognition that regional governance does not need to be built on regional organizations. We noted above the idea that networks of bilateral relationships can combine to provide a form of governance within a region. The examples

of environmental governance in Northeast Asia and the Americas both provide good examples. Neither has any real effective institution as such, but when you map all the bilateral and cross border and trilateral arrangements together then you end up with a regional regime of sorts. Whether it's the best possible form of regional governance is an entirely different question.

### **When Does Regional Governance “Work”**

To massively oversimplify Walter Mattli's approach, regional organizations are most likely to work – to do what they are meant to do – when the supply of regional solutions meets the demand for them. And the findings of these studies at a very simple level confirm this basic understanding. They also generate a number of other conclusions that point to why regions work – and more often why they don't. The first, quite simply, is if there is no commitment to the region as a site of governance, it is not going to work – as is the case in South Asia and North America. Second, the success of bringing new issues into existing regional frameworks largely depends on how legitimate and embedded that framework already is. If it is weak, then it is not exactly likely to cope well with added considerations.

Third, while regions can be created by top down initiatives, they rarely lay down a solid basis for a framework of lasting and working long term governance arrangements. Bottom up processes built on a shared conception amongst the stakeholders that they are all part of a regional effort seem to have more chance of “sticking”. Fourth, capacity is important too – if the

members don't will to the organization the ability to act, then regional bodies can simply become empty rhetorical shells of regionalism.

Fifth, where state power is weak, there is little chance of regional institutions emerging or even informal modes of governance that provide the basis for security however defined. Sixth, where extra regional actors are essential participants in attempts to create or maintain peace, then the regional effort often becomes subordinate, with bilateral relations with the key external actors deemed more important than interactions between regional actors.

But finally, the single most important determinant is the position of regional powers. Regionalism is not democratic – there are clear asymmetric power relations within any given region, and the political expectations and interests of regional powers or hegemons are often a key factor influencing the shape and extent of regional cooperation. The changing attitude of China to regional multilateralism has altered the nature of regional governance in not only East Asia, but also in (or with) Central Asia. Indeed, as other states try to find ways of countering China's regional dominance, it has actually changed the understanding for some of what the region actually should be, with initiatives to draw regional boundaries that include India and Australasia. Russia's determination to lead has driven attempts to build regions in the former Soviet Space; Brazil's acceptance of a regional leadership role has been crucial in Latin America; India's desire to extend its influence over its neighbours is a major determinant of power relations in South Asia; and the attitude of the regional powers in each of the African sub-regions (South Africa in SADC,

Nigeria in ECOWAS and Ethiopia in IGADD) are also crucial determinants of the delivery (or not) of security governance. Finally, in the MENA region, Ehteshami argues that one of the reasons that there is no great push for regional level governance is that there is no regional great power promoting it – indeed, arguably the most significant power in the region is a cause of fragmentation and conflict rather than cooperation

## **Conclusions**

It is important to repeat the caveat outlined in the introduction that it is difficult to find general conclusions from wide-ranging case studies over two major policy issues. But with this in mind we can perhaps say four main things in conclusion. First, trying to marry research specialism on issues and sub-disciplines with CR perspectives is not easy. But that doesn't mean it is unimportant. Rather, the suggestion here is that more studies are required to deepen our knowledge base – studies that include the EU and recognize its place, but which also focus on other parts of the world and do not simply use the EU as a hub to compare other experiences with. Comparing two or more non European cases to each other can generate interesting conclusions that are not always evident when the EU looms (too) large.

Second, there is at least some suggestion in our case studies that existing regional bodies can actually get in the way of finding new forms of regional governance. This occurs when the original region was defined around one policy/issue area, while the “new” policy area/issue suggests a different configuration or members and different ways of doing things. Third, this is

most likely to be a problem when the nature of the region itself is contested. And indeed, in most parts of the world contestation is indeed the order of the day. Regions are not only fluid and changeable, but competing conceptions of what regions should look like are often designed as part of power politics (balancing) considerations. As such, the emergence of a single and accepted form of region remains a distant prospect in much of the world.

What this suggests is that power matters. And the fourth conclusion is that attitude of regional powers is crucial in deciding whether the region should be a site of governance in the first place, what the region should be, and what form regional governance should take. Hence the importance of projects that consider the nature of regional leadership and how this helps us understand the evolving nature of a multipolar world.

## **Appendix – The Case Studies**

**Environment** *Lorraine Elliot and Shaun Breslin*

European Union Environmental Policy *John Vogler*

Pan-European Environmental Cooperation: Achievements and Limitations of the "Environment for Europe" Process *Ralf Nordbeck*

East Asia and Sub-Regional Diversity: Initiatives, Institutions and Identity  
*Lorraine Elliott*

South Asia, its Environment and Regional Institutions *Ashok Swain*

Sub-Saharan Africa: Fragmented Environmental Governance without Regional Integration *Daniel Compagnon, Fanny Florémont and Isabelle Lamaud*

The Middle East and North Africa: Sub-Regional Environmental Cooperation as a Security Issue *Dora Kulauzov and Alexios Antypas*

Under Construction: Debating the Region in South America  
*Kathryn Hochstetler*

The North American Case *Debora L. VanNijnatten*

**Security** *Shaun Breslin and Stuart Croft*

Security Governance in the EU Space *Jolyon Howorth*

The Other Europe: Regional Security Governance in Europe's East *Andrew Cottey*

East Asian Regional Security Governance: Bilateral Hard Balancing and ASEAN's Informal Cooperative Security *Hiro Katsumata*

Regional Security Governance: The Case of South Asia *Ted Svensson*

Regional Security in Sub-Saharan Africa *Paul Jackson*

MENA Region: Security and Regional Governance *Anoushiravan Ehteshami*

Creating Multilevel Security Governance in South America *Daniel Fletes and  
Michael Radseck*

North American Regionalism in Defence *Chris C. Demchak and Stéfanie von  
Hlatky*