

Patterns of Engagement: Europe–Asia Relations and Comparative Interregionalism

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Abstract: *This paper explores the differing approaches to conceptualizing interregionalism that have stemmed from two distinct periods in the evolution of these group-to-group structures: the periods of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ interregionalism. It notes the gap evident in the field of interregionalism in the form of theory-guided comparative studies, and questions whether the field is yet in a position to begin filling this gap. In addressing this question, it explores the actorness–interregionalism framework of the post-bipolar period of ‘new interregionalism’, and the patterns of engagement that have begun to emerge in interregional EU–Asia relations, both in the bilateral interregional (EU–ASEAN) and transregional (ASEM) variants. It contends that these patterns are gradually becoming evident beyond the EU–Asia context, making the frameworks extrapolated from EU–Asia relations a potential foundation stone for the emergence of theory-guided comparative studies.*

Since their emergence with the conclusion of the first Yaoundé Convention in 1963, interregional relationships have become an increasingly common form of engagement, generating an ever-denser web of group-to-group dialogues. This has been reflected in a transformation in the structure of the interregional network (from the actor-centred ‘old interregionalism’ to the system-centred phenomenon that is ‘new interregionalism’), and an evolution in the way in which interregionalism has been conceptualized. From a starting point where, insofar as they were considered at all, such relations were seen as simply an offshoot of EC external relations, interregional structures have come to be theorized as occupying a distinct place in the international system.

This paper provides an overview of the theoretical structures through which the ‘old’ and ‘new’ interregionalism has been understood. In so doing, it acknowledges that much of the recent work conceptualizing interregionalism, which has accompanied the rise in significance of interregional structures, has been dominated by studies of EU–Asia relations – EU–Asia relations have, in many ways, been the crucible for theorising on interregionalism. What remains to be seen, however, is how far the lessons of EU–Asia relations can be applied elsewhere: can the frameworks and patterns of engagement identified apply beyond this specific instance? The paper addresses this by considering, in short form, whether the patterns of engagement evidenced in EU–Asia relations can (however tentatively) be identified elsewhere. Evidence that such may be the case provides a claim for the theoretical framework of EU–Asia relations to be a starting point for theory-

guided comparative studies of group-to-group structures, so far the uncharted territory of interregionalism studies.

Interregionalism: A Quick Definition

At the most basic level interregionalism may be defined as ‘institutionalized relations between world regions’ (Hänggi, Roloff and Rüländ 2006: 3), a definition that clearly leaves significant room for typological variation. The first step is therefore to provide some clarity and focus to this term. While regional organizations constitute the natural starting point in any definition, interregionalism being the product initially of the external relations of one such organization – the European Union – to define such dialogues exclusively as those between regional integration arrangements would be overly restrictive and not representative of the full range of structures that have emerged particularly over the last two decades. Nevertheless, some level of organization at the regional level remains the foundation of any definition. Thus, Hänggi’s (2006) ‘borderline’ or ‘quasi-interregional’ structures encompassing region-to-state (e.g. EU–Canada) and mega-regional institutions (e.g. APEC) provide too diffuse an understanding of interregionalism, effectively defining such structures as any external relationship in which a region (however defined) is engaged.

This paper charts a course between these two extremes. Here, interregionalism is defined as institutionalized relationships between groups of states from different regions, each coordinating to a greater or lesser degree. Thus we run the gamut from highly institutionalized regional organizations – most prominently the European Union – to loose collectivities of states for which the engagement in a specific interregional dialogue is their *raison d’être* as a grouping – the African, Caribbean and Pacific states, for example. From this spine can be disaggregated three basic forms of interregionalism. The first is the classic form of interregionalism comprising those relationships between regional organizations, variously defined as ‘bilateral interregionalism’ (Rüländ 1999: 2–3), ‘pure interregionalism’ (Aggarwal and Fogerty 2004: 1) or ‘old interregionalism’ (Hänggi 2006: 42). The second constitutes dialogues between a regional organization on the one hand, and a more-or-less coordinated regional grouping of states on the other (e.g. the Asia–Europe Meeting), while the third comprises relations between two more-or-less coordinated regional groupings (e.g. the Forum for East Asia–Latin America Cooperation). The latter two may be collectively termed ‘transregionalism’. In this view, therefore, transregionalism is simply a variant of the broader concept of interregionalism.

Old Interregionalism and EU External Relations

Despite its relatively early emergence, most notably through the conclusion of group-to-group agreements between the then European Community and the Associated African States and Madagascar in the form of the two Yaoundé Conventions, interregionalism was initially accorded little significance as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right. Instead, interregional dialogues, insofar as they were considered at all, were viewed simply as a tool of the external relations of the EC, a framework through which it could establish a position as an object of significance in the global arena. This was a product both of the place of the Community as the progenitor of interregional structures, and of the consequent shape of the interregional architecture which emerged roughly during the period from the signing of the first Yaoundé Convention in 1963 to the ending of the bipolar conflict.

By contrast to the other ‘old’ regional projects characterized by strict intergovernmentalism and a largely inward focus, European integration was concerned from

the outset with external engagement, underpinned by a progressive view on the cession or pooling of sovereignty in supranational structures and the (if not necessarily always successfully realized) assignation of certain external competences to those shared institutions. Tied to this was a desire, particularly strong among certain member states, to establish a global identity distinct from that of the United States (Smith 2002: 34), a response in part to Kissinger's 1973 'Year for Europe' speech which had firmly cast them as the junior partner in the US–Europe alliance, concerned only with issues of regional interest. Together, these helped to condition Europe's own view of its place in the world, embodied in a push to establish itself as an object of significance in the international system by developing a network of external relationships, of which group-to-group dialogues were one iteration.

The product, as far as interregionalism is concerned, was a hub-and-spokes structure gravitating around Brussels (Hänggi 2003: 198). Reflecting the centrality of Europe to this framework, the limited consideration of interregionalism that was undertaken fell under the umbrella of exploring the role of the Community as an international actor. Group-to-group dialogues, conceived as a largely European phenomenon of only limited significance to the broader international system (Regelsberger 1990: 14), were accorded only an incidental focus. Thus, for example, Sjöstedt's seminal piece conceptualizing the external role of the European Community touched on interregionalism only in passing, noting the potential for bilateral (rather than multilateral) commercial negotiations to exist between the EC and another grouping of states where that second grouping also acted in a unitary fashion (Sjöstedt 1977: 34). In so doing, Sjöstedt was among the first to recognize the significance of actorhood to interregional dialogues. Regelsberger's 1989 study similarly saw interregionalism as incidental to the primary focus of studying EC external relations, utilizing the EC–ASEAN dialogue as simply a framework through which to explore European Political Cooperation.

The first major study of the Community's group-to-group relations – Edwards and Regelsberger's (1990) edited volume on *Europe's Global Links* – continued the trend of viewing interregionalism largely in European terms, producing a series of descriptive and policy-oriented case studies which focused heavily on the European side of the equation and lacked a common theoretical foundation. This descriptive approach remained prominent within the literature on interregionalism that emerged over the subsequent decade. The Edwards and Regelsberger volume nevertheless raised a number of issues that have a continuing impact on studies of interregionalism. Most prominently, reflecting back on the Community's push to develop a global identity, was a recognition of the potential utility of group-to-group dialogues in establishing the place of the Community as an actor on the world stage: interregionalism, in this context, was viewed as a mechanism for 'improv[ing] Europe's international profile' (Regelsberger 1990: 11). It was seen to have, in other words, a symbolic or legitimizing function, allowing the EC to establish a claim of significance and lay down a marker of intent. Beyond this, two further elements can be identified in the volume, both of which have gained greater prominence in the post-bipolar period of the 'new interregionalism'. First, harking back to Sjöstedt, was a recognition that intra-regional structures of cooperation impact the utility of interregional cooperation (16) – the actorhood issue – though this was not subsequently to be taken up with any real focus until theories of the 'new interregionalism' had become firmly established. Second, though never conceived as such in the volume, was the prefiguring of a number of potential functions that interregionalism might perform in the broader architecture of global

governance. The cementing of group-to-group alliances to balance the influence of external powers, or the utilization of interregional relationships to promote cooperation among the EC's partner states provide two such examples (12), both of which would gain greater prominence a decade later.

So what is evident in early conceptualizations of interregionalism then, reflecting the group-to-group architecture of the period, is a focus on these dialogues as an expression of EC actorhood. Insofar as theoretical considerations were present, these largely conformed to this European focus, being characterized by their treatment of the European integration project and its external relations as *sui generis*. By adopting an actor-centred framework, the studies of old interregionalism were important in highlighting certain motivations underpinning interregional relationships: if interregionalism is conceived as an expression of actorhood, then some intent must, by implication, underpin their establishment. This is reflected in the modern period in those studies emphasizing the utility of external relations frameworks (such as interregionalism) in establishing a global presence. Such a view was, for example, the antecedent of conceptualizations of interregionalism as a pragmatic strategy for establishing the place of the EU as a global actor (Söderbaum et al. 2005: 373), and as a mechanism for maximizing EU influence in the international system – an acknowledgement that, despite the rhetoric of equal partnership that characterizes the EU's group-to-group engagement, interregionalism is not free from power politics (Aggarwal and Fogerty 2004: 12–14).¹ Within this body of work, interregionalism is viewed largely through the agency of the EU, with studies exploring, for example, the way in which one region (Africa, MERCOSUR etc.) is acted upon by the EU, or the manner in which European policy and preferences in its interregional relationships are formed.

New Interregionalism and the Five Functions

In the post bipolar period, interregionalism has gained greater recognition as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right, rather than as simply a tool of EU external relations, a product of the fundamental transformation in the architecture of interregionalism that has been evident as a result of the altered international system (conceptualized through the framework of globalization) and the attendant emergence and proliferation of new 'open' regional formations. As these new regional structures have become more internally coherent and institutionalized, they too have sought to express themselves more clearly in the external policy space with the result that this proliferation of new regionalisms has been accompanied by an expanding network of their external relations including, prominently, interregionalism. Thus the EU-centric hub-and-spokes architecture of the old interregionalism has progressively been replaced by one of multiple hubs, with ASEAN, MERCOSUR and the Andean Community in particular steadily developing their own group-to-group dialogues.

The transformation in the architecture of interregionalism produced a concomitant transformation in the way in which interregionalism is theorized. As the network evolved from the actor-centred structure of the old hub-and-spokes model to the system-centred framework of the new interregionalism (Hänggi 2006: 32), so too were theoretical conceptualizations of interregionalism forced to move beyond the actor-centred literature

¹ Thus Aggarwal and Fogerty (2004: 13), in their analysis of EU trade strategies, conceived interregionalism as a framework through which the Union may deploy its own economic and institutional strengths to establish itself as the senior partner in any group-to-group dialogue, impacting the nature of its trading relationships and the settlement of disputes.

of European external relations to draw on that of international relations more broadly. In this respect, the establishment of interregionalism as a seemingly indelible feature of the international system, existing beyond the agency of the European Union, has been conceived as the emergence of a new governance space, banded by institutions of regional and global governance (Rüland 1999, 2001). This space has been understood by reference to realist, institutionalist and constructivist literature of international relations, each offering a differing interpretation of the nature of interregionalism, and each contributing to a more complete understanding of the role and functioning of interregional structures in the global system. Thus realist theorizing on power and the pursuit of equilibrium in the international system (particularly among the Triad regions), liberal institutionalist concerns with cooperation as a mechanism for managing complex interdependence, and constructivist concepts of reflexivity and the constitution of identities, have all contributed to the post-bipolar framework of interregionalism. From these was generated a set of roles and functions which interregionalism was expected to perform: balancing, institution-building, rationalizing and agenda setting, and collective identity formation (see below).

Importantly, however, even as interregional dialogues and the corresponding set of functional expectations associated with them came to be conceived as a systemic rather than a specifically EU-centred phenomenon, and theoretical explanations have consequently been sought beyond the narrow framework of EU external relations theory, the EU has remained the primary actor in the emerging interregional network and the conceptualization of interregionalism has continued to be dominated by key EU relationships, and one set of relationships in particular. The process of globalization, and as a result the new regionalism, emerged and deepened first within the Triad of regions (Ruigrok and van Tulder 1995: 151) – North America, Europe and Asia. And it is correspondingly within this Triad that the new interregionalism has developed to the greatest extent, both in the forms of bilateral interregionalism (EU–ASEAN) and transregionalism (ASEM), as well as in the marginal cases highlighted by Hänggi (APEC). As a consequence, EU–Asia relations have dominated studies of interregionalism, providing the deepest and most densely institutionalized examples of both bilateral interregional and transregional structures and therefore the case studies around which theoretical conceptualizations of interregionalism have largely been built. Thus, for example, the role of interregionalism in power balancing (Rüland 1996, Dent 1997–1998), in rationalizing global fora (Maull 1997), and in the reflexive formation of collective identities (Gilson 2001, 2002) all saw early consideration in studies of EU–Asia relations. And indeed, the first aggregation of these theoretical insights into a single model of interregionalism was undertaken in the context of the ASEM and EU–ASEAN dialogues (Rüland 1999, 2001).

Functions of Interregionalism

Stated simply, the balancing function of interregionalism is seen to involve two basic interlocking elements. The first ‘self-focused’ element involves the utility of group-to-group structures for avoiding possible marginalization through maximizing autonomy and room for manoeuvre in an anarchic/self-help system (Faust 2004: 749). This has, for example, found expression in the economic sphere in the push to increase regional competitiveness, or to diversify trade relationships as a means of reducing dependence on particular markets. The second is an externally-oriented balancing element, in which interregionalism constitutes a mechanism for constraining other actors or ensuring their open and honest participation within the global multilateral framework, serving to strengthen and stabilize these

structures (Ferguson 1997). This form of balancing may, for example, involve cooperation to ensure access to markets, or efforts to prevent unilateral action by a specific power.

Institution building recognizes the way in which interregionalism, through the creation of structures and norms of cooperation, has a 'legalizing effect on international relations' (Rüland 2001: 7) and a regularizing effect on the external relations of regional groupings, facilitating dialogue between groups in a way not possible where engagement is only *ad hoc*. Further, such institutions strengthen the institutionalization of international politics, contributing to the socialization of states and groups of states into the web of rules, norms and values that facilitate and constrain global relations (Rüland 1999: 9). Similarly, interregionalism encourages regional norms of cooperation – intra-regional institution building – as a consequence of engagement with an external other. This process of 'regionalism through interregionalism' (Hänggi 2003) may be entirely endogenous, with regional partners acting as a passive influence, or it may involve exogenous contributions with the regional partner acting effectively as an external integrator (a role increasingly adopted by the European Union).

What has generated the greatest interest among regional actors, however, has been the potential contribution that interregional structures may make to overcoming the difficulties intrinsic to large-*n* multilateral negotiations (rationalizing) and as a means for pushing cooperative agendas at the global level (agenda setting). Regional actors already constitute important, albeit variable, mechanisms for the aggregation and reconciliation of state interests, such coordination being one of the motive forces underlying regional integration. Interregional fora are the next step in this process, constituting a median level of interaction between the state and global multilateral fora, regularizing contacts and facilitating the merging of actor expectations (Doidge 2011: 44). With negotiations between regional blocs offering the potential to be more efficient than those between states, interregionalism is seen as serving a potential 'clearing house' function for global fora (Dent 1997–1998: 498, Maull 1997: 51–52, Rüland 1999: 7). In a similar vein to this rationalizing role is the suggestion that smaller numbers and a greater sense of consensus and common interest generated through interregional engagement creates the possibility for collective agenda setting at the global level.

Finally, collective identity formation concerns the establishment of regional identities. Such 'regional awareness' is an intrinsic component of actorness, centred on 'language and rhetoric, means by which definitions of regional identity are constantly defined and redefined' (Eliassen and Børve Arnesen 2007: 206). As such, regional actors, as Campbell (1998: 11) notes of states, are the sum of the practices and interactions that express their existence, with regional identity the product as much of engagement with an external other (9, 70–72) as it is of intra-regional state-to-state interaction. Interregionalism, as an increasingly densely institutionalized structure of region-to-region relations, provides a locus for regularized contact and a venue for socialization. It provides, in other words, a framing context for the construction of regional identities and awareness (Doidge 2011: 46).

Integrating Actorness: Functional Varieties of Interregionalism

While a significant advance on the conceptualization of old interregionalism, this framework nevertheless provided only a set of expectations concerning the sort of activities likely to be seen in interregional dialogues. In so doing, it offered a useful mechanism for categorizing interregional behaviour, but gave little in the way of explanation as to why such functions were or were not performed in specific dialogues. It has been in theories of European Union

actorness, with their genealogies traceable to the work of Sjöstedt (1977) and the concern with conceptualizing EC external relations that was characteristic of the bipolar period, that an explanatory variable has been found. Again, however, this move in the theorizing of interregionalism was framed largely in the Triadic context, in EU–Asia relations (Doidge 2004b, 2007, 2008).²

Drawing on a range of theorists from Sjöstedt (1977) to Bretherton and Vogler (2006), a simple definition of regional actors may be conceived involving identity, presence and actorness. Identity is that which distinguishes the actor from its external environment, and informs and structures its external action. Presence (Allen and Smith 1990) acknowledges the passive impact of regional identity on the external environment. It acknowledges, in other words, that regions may be consequential even when not acting, or indeed not capable of acting. By contrast, actorness concerns agency in the international arena – it designates the ability to act in purposive fashion in the pursuit of given goals and interests (informed by a region’s identity). It is a function of the ability to formulate coherent policies, and to pursue them effectively in the international system. As such, it is impacted by the nature of regional institutions³ – norms and structures of decision-taking (including the flexibility of these structures), the nature of authority and so on (Doidge 2011: 18–26). This is not to say, however, that such institutions and norms need conform to a certain type. We must not fall into the trap of taking the European Union, or at least the integrative path it appears to be following, as the paradigmatic case for regional actors, and as a consequence simply measuring all other iterations of regionalism against it. Indeed, it is not difficult to conceive alternative frameworks and scenarios whereby a regional actor may be considered strong while not conforming to the Union’s Cartesian legalist model. Something resembling a hegemonic leadership model of organization on a regional scale may, for example, produce a high level of actorness. Similarly, a grouping premised on informality, with an emphasis on intergovernmental bargaining rather than the exercise of supranational authority, and avoiding EU-style legalism need not necessarily equate to low actorness. Strength of regional identity, or a sufficiently strongly-held conception of the need for a collective regional response, facilitate decision-taking and action in regions with low levels of institutionalization in the same way that their lack may undermine such cooperation in highly institutionalized organizations.

It is not necessary to rehearse in detail the full case for the impact of actorness on the identified functions of interregionalism, this argument having been made elsewhere (Doidge 2004b, 2007, 2008). It is sufficient simply to acknowledge that, drawing on the experience of the EU–ASEAN dialogue and the ASEM process, actorness relates to these functions in three ways. First, for those externally-oriented functions of interregionalism, directed towards the global multilateral level and involving purposive activity – external balancing, rationalizing and agenda setting – a high level of actorness on the part of both groupings is necessary. These functions are dependent on the ability of regional groupings to coordinate intra-regional positions with sufficient flexibility to negotiate at the

² With case studies of the bilateral interregional EU–ASEAN dialogue and the transregional ASEM process.

³ Drawing on Grieco (1997: 165), institutionalization may be seen to involve three dimensions:

1. *Locus of institutionalization*: the legal basis on which the regional actor is built;
2. *Scope of activity*: the extent of regional cooperation; and
3. *Level of institutional authority*: whether organizational principles are supranational or intergovernmental.

interregional and subsequently global levels. In short, the greater the actorness of the partner groupings, the greater the potential to perform these functions.

Second, for those internally-oriented functions directed downwards towards the regional level – intra-regional institution building, collective identity formation – it is the comparative difference in actorness that is significant. Thus, for example, intra-regional institution building – regionalism through interregionalism – is more likely to occur in situations where a comparatively weaker regional actor is confronted by a comparatively stronger external other.

Finally, actorness is only tangentially important to functions such as interregional institution building. The establishment of most formal structures of cooperation (working groups, joint projects, networks etc.) is a phenomenon largely independent of the discussions or activities undertaken within those institutions: dialogue may be more or less substantive depending upon the level of actorness of participants, but institutions, the formal structures within which this dialogue occurs, may be created with little strategy or effort.⁴

In short, those facets of interregionalism that involve an ‘internal’ impact downwards to the regional level are linked to a comparative asymmetry in actorness between the partner groupings. By contrast, those high-end functions of interregionalism conceived as having an ‘external’ impact upwards to the global multilateral level are linked to the strength of actorness of both partners (and *ipso facto* greater symmetry between them). The recognition of this variable impact of actorness allows a rearticulation of the understanding of interregionalism, with the identification of two functional varieties: (i) an internally-focused, capacity building interregionalism; and (ii) and externally-focused, globally active interregionalism.

The capacity building role for interregionalism, the product of qualitative differences in actorness between partner groupings, sees it directed largely towards the strengthening over time of regional actorness. This is expressed in two ways: (i) through the building of intra-regional institutions or norms of cooperation within the ‘weaker’ partner as a consequence of the need for greater coordination in the dialogue process; and (ii) through the formation/strengthening of regional identities as a product of engagement with a more coherent external other. Both components are strongly associated with regional actorness. By contrast, the globally active form of interregionalism is concerned with the expression of interregional cooperation on the global stage. It is about the pursuit of agreed goals and interests in the international system and global fora.

Patterns of Engagement in EU–Asia Relations

This framework – aligning the concept of actorness with the framework of functions linked to the conceptualization of new interregionalism – provides a useful tool for considering the shape of EU–Asia interregionalism. When viewed through the lens of actorness–interregionalism and the functional varieties outlined above, a clear pattern of engagement is evident in the European Union’s relations with Asia. Three elements are identifiable: (i) the importance of balancing motivations; (ii) aspirations towards a globally active; and (iii) interregionalism the delivery of capacity building functions (Doidge 2011: 171–175).

⁴ One consequence of the ease with which such structures of dialogue can be established is that, in the absence of substantive cooperation, institutional proliferation can become a simple means for demonstrating progress in group-to-group relations (Doidge 2007: 243).

Motivations

Balancing concerns have been a key motive force in EU–Asia relations, underpinning the establishment and renewal of bilateral interregional and transregional processes. Within the EU–ASEAN dialogue, economic balancing motivations in particular have been evident since the outset. From 1971, ASEAN began to push for the establishment of a formal relationship with their European counterparts, a move that can be primarily credited to concerns stemming from the then forthcoming accession of the United Kingdom to the European Community which would lead to an effective dismantling of the system of Commonwealth trade preferences to which Malaysia and Singapore were party. Allied to this were fears as to the diversionary impact on trade and investment of the UK’s adoption of the Community’s Common Commercial Policy, to which it was required to have aligned its internal policies by 1972. The concern with establishing an economic foothold in Europe was reinforced through the 1970s and 1980s as the increasingly protectionist behaviour of the EC – a response to the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, the devaluation of the US dollar and the oil shocks of 1973–1974 – raised the prospect of a ‘Fortress Europe’. Finally, the member states of the Association had become concerned with the increasing economic prominence of the US and particularly Japan (raising memories of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere) in Southeast Asia (Lukas 1989: 104), and therefore aimed to diversify their dependence by getting the EC more closely involved in the region – a classic balancing goal.⁵

Similar balancing motivations, underpinned by a fear of economic marginalization, were also evident on the European side of the equation, becoming particularly prominent in the post-bipolar period. Concern with the failure to gain sufficient traction in the ‘Asian miracle’ markets, for example, was a key factor behind the drive to revitalize EU–Asia relations. The 1994 *New Asia Strategy* raised ‘as a matter of urgency’ the need ‘to strengthen its economic presence in Asia in order to maintain its leading role in the world economy ... [and] to ensure its interests are taken fully into account there’ (European Commission 1994b: 1), making clear that ‘the main thrust of the present and future policy in Asia is related to economic matters’ (3). This concern was translated into the Southeast Asian context with 1996’s *New Dynamic in EU–ASEAN Relations*, which posited the European Union as ‘a counterbalance to the presence of Japan and the United States’ and expressed the fear that the EU would be ‘shut out of the region by the dynamic action of other great economic powers’ (European Commission 1996: 10).

In addition to the EU–ASEAN dialogue, the concerns expressed in the *New Asia Strategy* provided the context for European interest in the Asia–Europe Meeting, underpinned by events elsewhere. The strengthening of Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation with the convening of the first Summit in 1993 further reinforced balancing motivations, forcing the EU to revisit its prior lack of concern at its exclusion from the forum. The Seattle Summit was a first step beyond a purely consultative process, with reciprocal trade concessions for the first time being agreed among APEC members, leading in 1994 to the tabling of plans for the formation of a Pacific Free Trade Area which raised the possibility of

⁵ It must also be noted that, alongside these economic imperatives, ASEAN also evidenced a desire to balance its politico-strategic relationships. In the context of the Cold War and the ongoing threat of spillover from the Vietnam conflict, key events such as the 1969 US proclamation of the Guam Doctrine (placing greater emphasis on indigenous forces for their own security and defence) and the UK’s 1971 withdrawal of military assets east of Suez, forced the member states of the Association to begin thinking in terms of new patterns of regional and extra-regional engagement (Harriss and Bridges 1983: 7).

significant diversionary effects at Europe's expense (Dent 1996: 6). When combined with the signing of the NAFTA Agreement by the US Congress a few days prior to the Summit, the Seattle meeting 'sent shock waves through Europe ... seem[ing] to symbolize a downgrading of America's Transatlantic interests and a shift towards the Pacific' (Rüland 2002: 51). These European fears of marginalization were further heightened by the rejection of the Union's request for observer status in APEC (Jung and Lehmann 1997: 50, Forster 1999: 748).

On the Asian side, fears of a European fortress were reinvigorated in the early 1990s as the Single Market Project reached completion, added to which was the turning of the EU face increasingly toward its neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe.⁶ The EU did little to allay this, and indeed its approach to the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations seemed to confirm perceptions of an inward-looking and protectionist construction (Jung and Lehmann 1997: 50). Fears of potential trade diversion resulting from the turn eastwards raised the particular concern within ASEAN that this would lead to the loss of the Union as a potential counterweight against the US and Japan in Southeast Asia (Chambers 1993). Interestingly, the reinvigoration of APEC also raised some concerns among ASEAN member states. Only reluctant participants in APEC in the first place (Rüland 2002: 48–49), ASEAN states evinced a number of concerns, including the fear that the Association would be diluted as a consequence of absorption into the larger bloc, and a view that the forum might simply be a tool of United States foreign policy which would be used both to leverage the liberalization of Asia–Pacific economies in sectors advantageous to US interests (Soesastro 1997: 177), and to censure ASEAN states on human rights and labour standards (Awanohara 1993: 18).

These various concerns therefore provide an important context for Goh Chok Tong's proposals for Asia–Europe engagement, and primary motivations for the establishment of the ASEM process. For the Europeans, ASEM was seen as offering a potential balance to US–Asia linkages, and as an important mechanism for protecting European economic interests in the Asian region. Similarly, ASEAN concerns to engage Europe more closely as a balance to the economic influence of the United States, alongside reservations about the APEC process, led to an increased willingness to explore other possibilities for partnership, particularly with their European counterparts.

Globally Active Interregionalism

The second element in EU–Asia interregionalism has been the importance accorded to the globally active form. For the European Union, for example, effective engagement in multilateral fora is a central pillar of its external relations strategy,⁷ with interregional structures seen as a means to achieving this end.⁸ Such goals have been prominent in EU–Asia relations. The first ASEAN–EC Ministerial Meeting in 1978, for example, highlighted the need for cooperation in international fora, pointing to the imminent UNCTAD conference in 1979 and the push for a New International Economic Order. By the second Ministerial in

⁶ Between 1990 and 1995, for example, EU exports to the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) increased by 135 per cent, while imports from the region increased by 93 per cent. By 1995, 10.1 per cent of EU exports were destined for the CEECs, while 8.7 per cent of imports had their origin in Central and Eastern Europe (EUROSTAT 2001).

⁷ The establishment of 'effective multilateralism' (European Council 2003: 9) and participation in global fora being asserted as the 'defining principle' of the Union's external relations strategy (European Commission 2003: 3).

⁸ For example, Commission President Romano Prodi's advocacy of 'co-operation between strong and integrated regional entities' and view that 'global governance can emerge only from such inter-regional cooperation' are indicative (Prodi 2000).

1980, on which occasion the Cooperation Agreement was signed, these global ambitions for the relationship had become firmly entrenched. The need to cooperate to resolve issues in international organizations, particularly UNCTAD, UNIDO and GATT, had become a key pillar of engagement between the Community and Association, while a political statement released at the meeting made clear a desire for the two to coordinate on international political and security issues (AEMM 1980). While similar commitments were routinely reiterated in subsequent Ministerial Meetings, it is in the post-bipolar period, that this dimension of cooperation has come to the fore. The increased emphasis on multilateral governance institutions and on multilateral solutions to global problems that has been characteristic of the post-bipolar period, has led to the entrenching, at least rhetorically, of the need for cooperation to achieve global goals in EU–ASEAN dialogue, and indeed in the ASEM process. Chairman’s Statements of the various EU–ASEAN and ASEM fora routinely reference the need to cooperate to achieve global multilateral goals in institutions such as the WTO and UN.⁹ Indeed, the role of these fora in performing rationalizing and agenda setting functions for the global level has routinely been recognized by those engaged as a key element justifying such relationships, one Commission official, for example, commenting that ‘if there is any value in having a relationship with ASEAN, or a relationship in ASEM ... then it is as a clearing-house in which you try to get an agreement ... And that’s also what ASEAN said to us’ (Commission official, cited in Doidge 2007: 243).

Nevertheless, despite the importance accorded such functions, what has been largely absent is the substantive delivery of globally active cooperation, a product largely of asymmetries in actorness undermining the capacity of these dialogue structures to deliver all that has been envisaged (Doidge 2011). Practitioners within both the Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat, for example, have attributed this failure in the EU–ASEAN relationship to the inability of the Association to achieve intra-regional positions enabling it to ‘offer the support of a real bloc, [with] ten countries [having] the same opinion’ (Commission official, quoted in Doidge 2004b: 50).¹⁰

As with EU–ASEAN dialogue, the Asia-Europe Meeting has also routinely emphasized the need for cooperation in multilateral institutions, most notably the WTO – a function of the centrality of concerns over trade to the emergence of the ASEM process. And yet, as again with EU–ASEAN relations, its dialogue has failed to deliver much in the way of substantive cooperation, producing instead general declarations designed to paper over differences between partners. Comprehensive discussions on WTO matters were held for the first time at the ASEM Senior Officials Meeting on Trade and Investment in 1996, and have since become a routine matter of dialogue in a range of ASEM fora. Consensus, however, is rarely achieved, with acknowledgement among participants that the most that has been possible is a common understanding on very broad interests, again a function of the inability of intra-regional structures of cooperation to overcome the diversity of Asian viewpoints (Doidge 2011: 125). Robles (2008) highlights a similar failing in cooperation on the launching of WTO negotiations. As a consequence, consensus agreements reached as part of the ASEM dialogue routinely broke down at the WTO as one or another member state chose to go its own way. The weakness of the cooperative architecture within Europe

⁹ The *New Dynamic*, for example, re-stated such commitment in relation to the WTO, asserting that ‘Europe and ASEAN must also continue to cooperate very closely in developing a broader WTO work programme ... in order to prepare the further negotiations that will be needed before the end of the century’ (European Commission 1996: 14).

¹⁰ The irony that this is often more than the Union itself is able to deliver should not be lost.

and Asia, in other words, limited the possibility for substantive and effective cooperation, undermining the potential for ASEM to act as a clearing-house for WTO negotiations. Thus apparent consensus agreements prior to the launching of the Doha and Cancún WTO Ministerials regarding the priority to be given to negotiations and agenda items to be pursued were undermined when key countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand) took contrary positions in the WTO itself (85–86).

Capacity Building Interregionalism

Finally, capacity building functions, associated with the promotion of regional integration and the strengthening of regional actors over time, have been particularly evident in EU–Asia relations. As noted, this form of interregionalism is associated with an asymmetry between regional actors, a situation that has characterised both the EU–ASEAN dialogue and the ASEM process. What we have seen, therefore, is a situation in which the European Union has, either purposively or non-purposively, impacted upon integration in its partner groupings.

Notable in EU–ASEAN relations in the post-bipolar period has been an emphasis on purposive forms of capacity building, an element that has become progressively more prominent as the Association has clarified its own integrative goals towards which EU activities might be directed. For the Union, an interest in the capacity building form of interregionalism has been underpinned by two motives. The first has been an ongoing drive to promote stability in the international system, and the associated preference for positing its own external relations within settled frameworks (Hill and Smith 2005: 12), of which both regionalism and interregionalism are exemplars. The second, drawn from its own experience, is the conviction that regional integration provides a mechanism for achieving peace and prosperity,¹¹ a belief that found early expression in the preamble to the 1980 EC–ASEAN Cooperation Agreement, and subsequently also in those with the Andean Pact in 1984, and the GCC in 1989. In this respect, a strand of thought that has become increasingly evident is the contention that the European model itself is worthy of emulation.¹²

The consequence is that integration promotion has become firmly entrenched in the Union’s interregional relations, and has been particular evident in the EU–ASEAN relationship. From the EU offer at the tenth ASEAN–EC Ministerial Meeting in 1992 ‘to share its experiences from the European economic integration process and to provide technical assistance to strengthen the institutional capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat’ (AEMM 1992: Art.6), Union support for capacity building within the Association became an integral element in the Joint Declarations of ministerial meetings, and subsequently a key

¹¹ Thus, for example, Javier Solana, then High Representative of the CFSP, asserted in 2005 that ‘In Europe we have learned the hard way that sustainable peace and security require regional co-operation and integration... That is why supporting regional co-operation is such a ‘growth area’ in our efforts. The African Union, Mercosur, Asean: these are all examples of strengthening regional regimes, explicitly taking their inspiration from the EU. We are deepening our relations with these other regional players and, where possible and relevant, we are giving our support for their further development. In the years ahead, these inter-regional dialogues will steadily reshape the nature of international politics and forge new mechanisms to manage global interdependence and tackle cross-border problems’ (Solana 2005: 3).

¹² The *Laeken Declaration*, for example, saw European integration as ‘point[ing] the way ahead for many countries and peoples’ (European Council 2001). Indeed, so entrenched has the notion of integration promotion become, that political elites from states not usually highly supportive of EU external activities have also emphasized this process: British Foreign Secretary David Miliband’s (2007) assertion that ‘the EU will never be a superpower, but could be a model power of regional cooperation ... It can chart a course for regional cooperation between medium-sized and small countries’, being one such example.

component of EU–ASEAN interregional engagement. Such support was first put into practice following a request from the ASEAN Secretariat for assistance in increasing its own actor capacity and, as a consequence, the actorness of the Association more broadly. The *Institutional Development Programme for the ASEAN Secretariat* (IDPAS) was launched in 1995 with the express goals of enhancing the professionalism of Secretariat staff, and of developing the Secretariat into a central institution within ASEAN, to be achieved by familiarizing Secretariat staff with relevant organs and operating procedures within the Commission. IDPAS was succeeded in 2004 by the first iteration of the *ASEAN Programme for Regional Integration Support* (APRIS), the focus of which again was to promotion regional cooperation and enhance the role of the ASEAN Secretariat (European Commission 2002: §2.2), enabling it to push for a ‘supranational rather than intergovernmental approach to an issue’ (Commission official, cited in Doidge 2007: 241).

These programmes are a reflection of the intent, explicitly stated in the 2001 *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*, to ‘provide active support for reinforced regional integration’ (European Commission 2001: 22). They constitute an overt form of integration promotion: the EU’s approach is one which, in offering capacity building and technical assistance programmes, explicitly sought to apply the lessons of its own integration experience to the Association as a means of building its ability to act collectively by targeting an acknowledged weak point in the EU–ASEAN relationship – that ‘the ASEAN Secretariat is really a secretariat’ (Commission official, quoted in Doidge 2004a: 202) – and transforming this common institution into an effective intra-regional actor.

Nevertheless, while these efforts have been held by participants to have been broadly successful,¹³ they have not produced any fundamental transformation in the Association. There is, for example, no clear evidence that a deeper level of integration, more closely resembling the highly institutionalized EU, has been achieved. Indeed, ASEAN, when drafting its 2008 Charter to provide a firmer legal and institutional foundation for cooperation, eschewed the bolder recommendations of its Eminent Persons Group for deeper integration more closely resembling the Union, to instead pursue a more limited evolution premised on the maintenance of intergovernmental and sovereignty-centric norms. Rather, the results of these capacity building initiatives have been incremental and limited, addressing very basic issues concerning the functioning of central institutions, though (initially at least) lacking an over-arching strategy.

Where the EU–ASEAN dialogue demonstrates overt capacity building in instances where asymmetric actors meet, the ASEM process demonstrates the non-purposive form, with interregionalism providing an intensification of a passive stimulus to integrate. Within ASEM, the exigencies of dialogue with a more coherent European other is seen to have necessitated increased Asian cooperation to coordinate positions, leading to the establishment of norms and institutions of intra-regional cooperation. Thus Hänggi (2003) has explored the way in which the Asia–Europe Meeting has made a reality of earlier unsuccessful proposals for regional integration, with the emergence in 1997 of the ASEAN+3 as a framework for Asian coordination within the forum and its subsequent institutionalization to the point where it is now viewed by the participants as ‘the main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community’ (EAC 2007: §III(A)(1)), a process referred to as ‘regionalism through interregionalism. Similarly, Gilson’s

¹³ See, for example, the view of the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEAN 1999).

(2001) consideration of ASEM looks at the way in which interregional engagement reinforces and helps to constitute regional identities.

Beyond EU–Asia Relations

As de Lombaerde *et al.* (2010: 733) have previously acknowledged, ‘the role of comparison is underdeveloped in the field of regionalism compared to most other fields within the social sciences’. No less is true of the study of interregionalism, with theory-based comparative studies of group-to-group structures largely absent. While the actorness–interregionalism framework outlined above seemingly provides us with a useful tool for the exploration of group-to-group dialogues, offering an explanatory framework for the shape those dialogues take, it is also the case that it has been conceived and tested almost exclusively within the context of EU–Asia relations, a situation not altogether surprising given the long standing and breadth of engagement that these relationships have involved. The question, in other words, remains as to whether this framework, derived as it is from studies of the EU–ASEAN and ASEM structures, is applicable beyond these narrow cases: can the lessons drawn from them serve as the foundation for studies in comparative interregionalism? Are there points of comparison between EU–Asia structures, and those of other interregionalisms? As is outlined below, two preliminary investigations suggest that the tripartite pattern identified in the EU–Asia context are evident elsewhere, at least at a basic level, raising the possibility that the framework drawn from EU–Asia relations may indeed provide a foundation for further theory-guided comparative study.

EU–MERCOSUR

Within the EU–MERCOSUR relationship, characterized again by asymmetric actorness, can be found clear suggestions that the tripartite pattern of engagement highlighted applies beyond the instance of Europe–Asia relations. The EU’s push to extend its relationship with MERCOSUR, for example, was motivated again by balancing motivations stemming in large part from the hemispheric free trade negotiations that emerged out of President George H.W. Bush’s 1990 *Enterprise of the America’s Initiative*, concretized in the 1994 proposal for a Free Trade Area of the Americas. The EU’s 1994 *The European Community and MERCOSUR: An Enhanced Policy* document must be read in this context, signalling as it did a re-orientation of the relationship with MERCOSUR towards greater economic engagement, highlighting the economic potential of MERCOSUR integration (European Commission 1994a: 8) alongside the concern that a failure to respond to hemispheric initiatives would impact the Union’s market share (11–12). A similar balancing motivation may be found on the part of MERCOSUR itself, with an interest in diversifying political and economic linkages beyond the North American region as a mechanism for counterbalancing US influence (Milliot 2004: 78), combined with a concern as to the diversionary impact of the Union’s eastern enlargement, the candidate countries being competitors in agricultural trade and certain manufacturing sectors (e.g. auto parts) (Bulmer-Thomas 2000: 9).

Also evident in this relationship is the clear aspiration for a globally active engagement. The *Enhanced Policy* made this explicit, calling for greater cooperation and envisaging ‘the coordination of positions in some multilateral organizations’ (European Commission 1994a: 10). Nevertheless, the relationship has failed to deliver such cooperation, a matter attributed to MERCOSUR’s own limitations. An inability to overcome intramural differences within the grouping, alongside a lack of commitment – notably on the part of Brazil and Argentina – to a regional approach to multilateral fora, has meant that the

organization has lacked the agency to make such an interregional partnership work (Commission official in Doidge 2011: 156).

Where aspirations for a globally active interregionalism have remained unfulfilled, capacity building has continued apace. While such Union goals have a long history in its relations with Latin America, they were given added impetus with the emergence of MERCOSUR, an integration arrangement consciously modelled on the Union itself. Only months after the launching of MERCOSUR, the EU had established an accord under which it would provide administrative support to the organization. In the following year this was formalized through the conclusion of an *Inter-Institutional Cooperation Agreement* between the Commission and the Common Market Council, the underlying intent of which was to develop MERCOSUR sufficiently to act as the key interlocutor in the Union's relations with the common market countries (Santander 2005: 291). These early efforts have been further entrenched in the 1996 *Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement*, and subsequently in a series of institution building and technical cooperation programmes.

Forum for East Asia–Latin America Cooperation

In FEALAC, a transregional framework exclusive of the European Union, a similar *prima facie* case can be made. Balancing motivations again underpinned the establishment of the dialogue – Goh's (1999) initial proposal for the forum, for example, mirrored his earlier initiative for ASEM in positing Asia–Latin America relations as a 'missing link'.¹⁴ Given the ambitious economic integration goals of both ASEAN and MERCOSUR, this situation was seen as untenable, the case being clearly stated by Singaporean Foreign Minister Shunmugan Jayakumar at the first forum meeting in 1999 with the assertion that a failure to fill this gap 'would prevent both regions from mutually exploiting their enormous economic potential' (quoted in Low 2006: 87).

Similarly evident is a rhetorical commitment to the globally active functions of interregionalism. FEALAC's 2001 *Framework Document* made clear the need to leverage cooperation on the global stage in defence of common interests (FEALAC 2001: §4), interests coloured by the largely South–South nature of FEALAC. Routinely highlighted, therefore, has been a need to ensure an open and non-discriminatory global trading regime to more equitably share the benefits of globalization, the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and so on. Notably lacking, however, is any movement towards achieving such aspirations. As with ASEM, the non-binding nature of the forum has mitigated against establishing collective goals, with the role of regional coordinators (replicated from ASEM) proving insufficient to generate cohesion within the two groupings. Neither East Asia nor Latin America as constituted within FEALAC are regional actors, and in the absence of effective mechanisms for intra-group cooperation, national interest has continued to dominate. Added to this, the forum lacks a Summit-level Heads of State and Government meeting to provide direction to the process, further impacting the ability to generate collective interests.

¹⁴ Said Goh (1999) 'A sense of global cohesiveness, of interconnections between regions, must be encouraged. Several such multilateral structures are already in place. APEC has linked both shores of the Pacific for a decade. Trans-Atlantic links between Europe and North America are even better established. North and South America have the Organization of American States (OAS) and deeper interdependencies will be built by the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Four years ago, I drew attention to the need to bridge the gap between Asia and Europe. ... The missing link is now between Asia and Latin America. In a global economy, such a gap inhibits relations. It is for this reason that I proposed the formation of an East Asia-Latin America Forum (EALAF) last year'.

In contrast, however, to the EU interregionalisms outlined, FEALAC shows little evidence of capacity building. Again, this would seem to be a product of the lack of integration and actorness on the part of both groupings – a lack of sufficient asymmetry and the corresponding weakness of the concept of an external ‘other’, combined with the low density of engagement, serves to undermine potential integrative responses. Further, overt integrative behaviour of the sort associated with the EU seems to be precluded by a lack of financial resources, and more importantly by an emphasis on such regulative principles as non-interference. Insofar as capacity building may be seen in the framework, it is in the low-level identity building associated with the establishment of membership criteria, the decision to incorporate (or exclude) specific states, and in the importation of the ‘Asian way’ of cooperation into the forum, and the reinforcement of such principles in the *Framework Document*.

Conclusion: The Need for Comparative Research

As already stated, the great absence in the study of interregionalism has been of theory based comparative studies, and it is toward filling this gap that studies of interregionalism must now be directed. What seems at least presumptively clear from the above is that the pattern of engagement generated by application of the actorness–interregionalism framework to the EU–Asia case is also present beyond this instance. This suggests, therefore, that the framework outlined may be a useful starting point for this undertaking. The challenge is two-fold. First, further attention must be given to the framework of actorness. Drawing as it does on theoretical models of the European Union as an international actor, the risk is present that the understanding outlined early in this paper is not sufficiently nuanced to reflect the diversity of integration arrangements. It may, in other words, presuppose to an extent the form an actor should take, impacting on its use as an explanatory variable in comparative analyses. A greater cross-pollination between the study of interregionalism and of comparative regionalism is therefore necessary.

Second, and more generally, is the need for further studies of interregionalism representing the full array of relations on offer, moving beyond EU–Asia relations, and indeed beyond the European Union entirely. More must be done to explore other interregionalisms, to test whether the *prima facie* case for a broad similarity in patterns of engagement outlined above is more than simply a passing resemblance, and to test whether differences may be explained within the actorness–interregionalism model outlined. If theoretical and empirical work is not extended in such a way, interregionalism runs the risk of becoming little more than a cul-de-sac, largely confined to the study of the European Union.

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