

Grand Theories of Integration and the Challenges of Comparative Regionalism

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Abstract

This contribution re-engages grand theories of integration that have been developed with the European experience in mind. We ask to what extent these theories travel beyond Europe. Standard integration theories, such as neo-functionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism, privilege economic interdependence as a key driver of regional integration. We map intra-regional trade as a proxy of economic interdependence against the density and strength of regionalism in major world regions demonstrating that there is little correlation. Building upon post-functionalism, we then develop our own comparative regionalist account encompassing three building blocks: first, functional demands for regionalism stemming mainly from security interdependence and the quest for regime stability; second, the supply of regional integration through elite efforts at regional identity construction resonating with mass public opinion; and, last not least, the diffusion of institutional designs across regions. We claim that this account even fits better the European experience than standard theories of integration.

Scholars of the European Union (EU) have been busy removing the dust from their integration theories in order to account for the multiple crises the EU has been facing ever since the Lehman Brothers Bank collapsed in 2008. This contribution adopts an outward looking perspective in re-engaging grand theories. We ask whether integration theories that have been developed with the European experience in mind can travel beyond Europe and shed light on regionalism across the globe.

Rather than treating regionalism in Europe as unique, the comparative perspective allows us to “de-center” Europe by asking whether European integration theories have any purchase with regard to the increasing efforts at regional institution-building across the world. In this spirit, the first part of this contribution deconstructs the liberal foundations of standard theories of European integration. We argue that particularly liberal intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism as the main contenders are equally informed by functionalist and pluralist thinking. Their ‘liberal’ bias privileges economic interdependence as a key driver or major consequence of regional institution-building. We then map intra-regional trade as a proxy of economic interdependence against the strength of regionalism in terms of the number of regional organizations and their level of integration in major world regions to show that there is little relationship between the two. Four major world regions depart entirely from the standard account of regional integration: Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America show low interdependence with strong regionalism while North America and East Asia present the opposite of high economic interdependence and low regionalism. Only in Europe, economic interdependence and strong regionalism go together, while the Middle East and South Asia exhibit low degrees of both (except for the League of Arab States). Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) display medium levels of economic interdependence and regionalism.

To account for the observed variation, the second part of the article presents our own attempt at theorizing regional integration, understood here as the pooling and delegating of authority in regional institutions. We build on post-functionalist theorizing as developed by Hooghe and Marks (see Hooghe and Marks 2009;) and argue that the *demand* for regional institutions that pool and delegate authority mainly stems from functional factors other than intra-regional economic interdependence. Among them are security interdependence as well as the quest for regime stability. However, this functional demand does not automatically translate into the *supply* of strong regional institutions. Regional integration requires elites with pro-regional identities to engage in community building that resonates with citizens’ identities and generates public support for integration going beyond intergovernmental cooperation. Last not least, diffusion approaches offer a plausible account for the *design* of (particularly supranational) regional institutions. Here, the EU model has been emulated in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and – at least to some degree – in Southeast Asia.

Regionalism and Interdependence

The liberal bias of standard integration theories

Integration theories took off in Europe, where regionalism¹ was meant to go beyond trade liberalization through inter-state bargains from the very beginning (Börzel 2013: 504-507). Initial attempts at theory building were not confined to Europe (Mitrany 1943; Hoffmann 1956; Haas 1964; Nye 1970; Schmitter 1970). However, they were increasingly refined to accommodate the dynamics of the European integration process and its supranational outcomes. Integration became practically synonymous with European integration, and the EU served as the yardstick for measuring regional integration in other parts of the world. Not surprisingly, students of regionalism outside Europe felt that EU research

had little to offer to them. Using European integration theories would amount to ethno-centrism imposing “Western” concepts, approaches and research agendas onto other regions and ignoring the distinct historical, cultural, social, political and economic context in which they emerged (Hettne et al. 1999; Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; Farrel et al. 2005; Acharya 2016; Söderbaum 2016). The “comparative turn” in area studies in the early 2000s has helped overcome the divide between EU studies and research on regionalism in other parts of the world (Söderbaum and Sbragia 2010; Warleigh-Lack et al. 2010). The emerging field of comparative regionalism takes it as an empirical question how far European integration theories travel in explaining the emergence of regionalism, its outcomes, and its effects in other parts of the world (Börzel and Risse 2016b).

Given the specific historical context in which the project of European integration emerged, it is indeed not obvious that grand theories of European integration have much to say about the creation of regional institutions in other parts of the world, where states are not necessarily advanced industrial democracies. This ‘liberal’ bias might confine the explanatory power of liberal intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism, or postfunctionalism to regions dominated by open economies and liberal democracies.

In their introduction to this special issue, Hooghe and Marks point to the deep influence of democratic pluralism and rationalist functionalism on neofunctionalism (Hooghe and Marks 2019; see also Haas 1964). But this is also true for other integration theories, such as liberal intergovernmentalism, which derive from classical cooperation theories in international relations or share their functionalist assumptions that “complex interdependence” (Keohane and Nye 1977) among states fosters cooperation and integration (see e.g. Keohane 1989; Martin and Simmons 1998). As Keohane put it in 1984: “Institutionalists could interpret the liberal international arrangements for trade and international finance as responses to the need for policy coordination created by the fact of interdependence” (Keohane 1984, 8). Or, in a most recent overview of neofunctionalist theories, “interdependence requires that they (political actors/ authors) act collectively in order to resolve some mutually recognized problem ...” (Niemann et al. 2019, 44). States share an interest in dealing with the multiple ties between them, which entail scale economies but also give rise to conflict. International institutions help to realize economies of scale and to manage conflicts among states. As Moravcsik put it, “cooperation is a means for governments to restructure the pattern of economic policy externalities – the pattern of unintended consequences of national economic activities on foreign countries – to their mutual benefit” (Moravcsik 1998, 35). The opportunities and risks associated with interdependence intensify within regions due to geographic proximity. Increased transborder mobility and economic linkages are less cumbersome to deal with at the regional than at the global level.

Liberal theories of international cooperation also provided the basis for the democratic pluralism inscribed in theories of European integration (Milner 1997; Mansfield and Milner 1997). Economic and social actors that operate within states demand regional institutions to advance their interests in gaining access to foreign markets or fighting transboundary environmental pollution. Depending on their access to the domestic decision-making processes and their action capacity, interest groups may be more or less successful in making their demands heard. For liberal intergovernmentalism, states are the masters of regional institutions and gate-keep access to regional decision-making. Neofunctionalism and multi-level governance approaches, in contrast, emphasize that domestic interests form transnational alliances with like-minded groups from other states and ally with regional actors thereby bypassing national governments. Despite their disagreement on the channels through which domestic actors advance their demands for regional institutions, many theories of European integration presuppose liberal democracy and advanced market economy as context conditions for regionalism to unfold.

Domestic actors are unlikely to form and be able to mobilize in favour of regional institution-building in authoritarian countries with economies controlled by the state and/or low levels of economic and social exchange with other countries in the region (Haas 1961; Haas and Schmitter 1964). How then do we account for “autocratic regionalism,” such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO; even though India joined recently) or the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU; see Hancock and Libman 2016)?

Economic interdependence and regionalism

As argued above, standard theories of European integration expect economic interdependence to go together with regionalism since regional institutions help solve likely conflicts, enable (further) economic exchanges, and insure credible commitments (Haas 1958; Moravcsik 1998; Stone Sweet and Caporaso 1998; Mattli 1999). While economic interdependence is not unique to industrial democracies, advanced capitalist economies tend to be more open to trade liberalization generating the domestic demand for regional institutions to which democratic governments are more likely to respond. Conversely, the absence of these liberal context conditions would explain why regionalism was less prevalent in Latin America or Africa (Haas 1970).

Indeed, Europe appears to be a textbook case of economic interdependence and regionalism being strongly interrelated. In order to evaluate whether this interrelationship travels beyond Europe, we map ten regions across the world using economic interdependence, on the one hand, and the density of regional organizations (ROs) and their level of integration, on the other. Focusing on the quantity and the quality of regional institutions allows us to distinguish between the emergence of regionalism and its institutional design. It is one thing for states to set up regional institutions and another how much authority is pool and/or delegated (Börzel and Risse 2016b). Economic interdependence has implications for both dimensions of regionalism, which, however, are not equally addressed by standard theories of integration. They do not explicitly theorize differences in the degree of pooling and delegation beyond the expectation that a higher degree of economic interdependence requires a strengthening of regional institutions to settle conflicts and facilitate decision-making (Mattli 1999; Stone Sweet and Caporaso 1998). Related factors that foster pooling and delegation are the levels of uncertainty, the type of collective action problem, the number of states, and the asymmetry between them (Lenz and Marks 2016).

It is not easy to find time-series data on the number of regional institutions and the economic interdependence among their members. Existing datasets vary with regard to the composition of regions, which renders cross-regional comparisons difficult. Schneider, for instance, distinguishes six regions lumping together North and South America into “America” and combining South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia into “Asia” (Schneider 2017). North America often excludes Mexico.

We measure regional density by the number of ROs in a region using the most recent *Correlates of War 3 International Governmental Organizations* dataset.² To capture the strength of existing regional institutions, we draw on the distinction between regional cooperation and regional integration. Regional *cooperation* concerns primarily intergovernmental relations to solve collective action problems that do not entail a significant transfer of authority to the regional level. In contrast, regional *integration* entails the transfer of at least some authority, if not core state powers, to regional institutions. This is what the literature refers to as supranationalism. It involves the *pooling* (e.g. majority decisions) and/or the *delegation* of authority to supranational bodies (e.g. courts; cf. Hooghe and Marks 2015; Lenz and Marks 2016). The *Measuring International Authority* dataset compiled by Hooghe, Marks and collaborators (Hooghe et al. 2017) provides a measurement for pooling and delegation in the major

regional organizations (ROs) around the world. We added the standardized values for pooling and delegation for each RO for 2010, the last year that the data are available. The possible range is from 0 to 2.0, but not even the EU scores above 1.0.

To measure economic interdependence within a region, we use the intra-regional trade share, i.e. the volume of trade within a region as percentage of the region's volume of total trade.³ The data are drawn from the *United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics* database (UNCTADSTAT) and cover the period of 1995 to 2017.⁴ In composing the regions, we follow the classification of UNCTAD, with the exception of North America and the Middle East.⁵

We do not have to conduct sophisticated statistical analyses to see that economic interdependence and regionalism are not interrelated. It suffices to map density and depth of regionalism in the major world regions against the economic interdependence among their member states (figures 1 and 2). Europe is the only region in the world where high economic interdependence goes together with a high number of ROs. The EU picks up most of the intra-regional trade with its single market and common currency. It is also the regional organization with the highest levels of pooling and delegation. Northern Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Asia are roughly located on the regression line of more or less similar low levels of interdependence and regionalism. The density of regional organizations is low. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the South Asian Association of Cooperation (SAARC), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have the lowest level of both intra-regional trade and pooling and delegation. ASEAN's and Mercosur's medium levels of intra-regional trade match their medium levels of pooling and delegation.

Yet, in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, both the density of ROs and their levels of pooling and delegation are much higher than their intra-regional trade. The finding is more pronounced for the depth of regionalism, since Latin America and the Caribbean are not lumped together with North America. The African Union (AU), the East African Community (EAC), West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Andean Community (CAN), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are among the top poolers and delegators worldwide. So is the League of Arab States (LOAS), which is an outlier among Arab ROs. Its high pooling and delegation scores are driven by the broad use of majority voting on membership accession and suspension or the budgetary allocation,⁶ and the Arab Investment Court, which can issue binding judgements to adjudicate disputes over government procurement rules.

It has been argued that trade interdependence in Sub-Saharan Africa is much higher, if one accounts for informal trade (Foroutan and Pritchett 1993).⁷ This might well be the case, but it does not affect our argument. According to functional integration theories, formal (regional) institutions are meant to deal with conflicts emanating from formal trade interdependence. They might also turn informal trade relations into formal ones. In any case, we should either observe increased (formal) trade leading to regional institution-building or informal trade increasingly turning formal and showing up in official statistics following efforts at region-building. Neither is the case for Sub-Saharan Africa.

While Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa are characterized by low (formal) trade interdependence and high regionalism, the opposite is the case for North America and East Asia, the two regions with the highest levels of economic interdependence after Europe. While the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA; now the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement/USMCA), picks up the entire intra-regional trade in North America, it exhibits only low levels of pooling and delegation. China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan lack proper formal institutions to manage their high economic interdependence – except for their participation in the ASEAN Plus Three formats.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

Figure 1: Regional density and economic interdependence, 2010

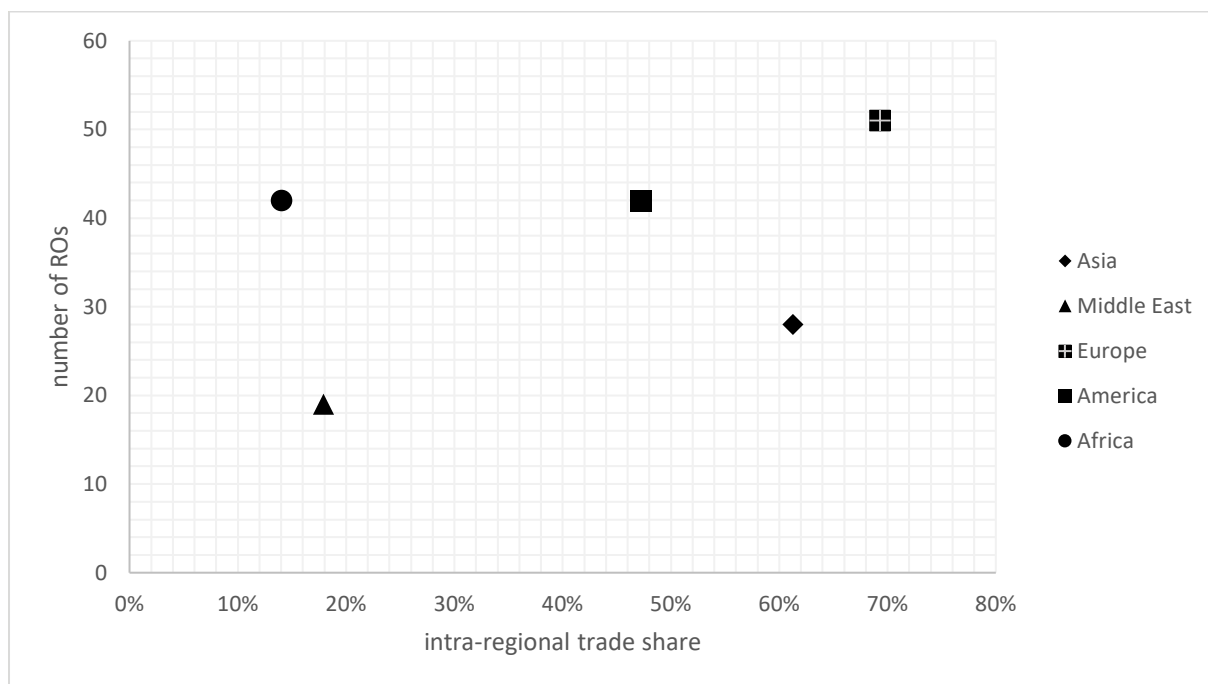
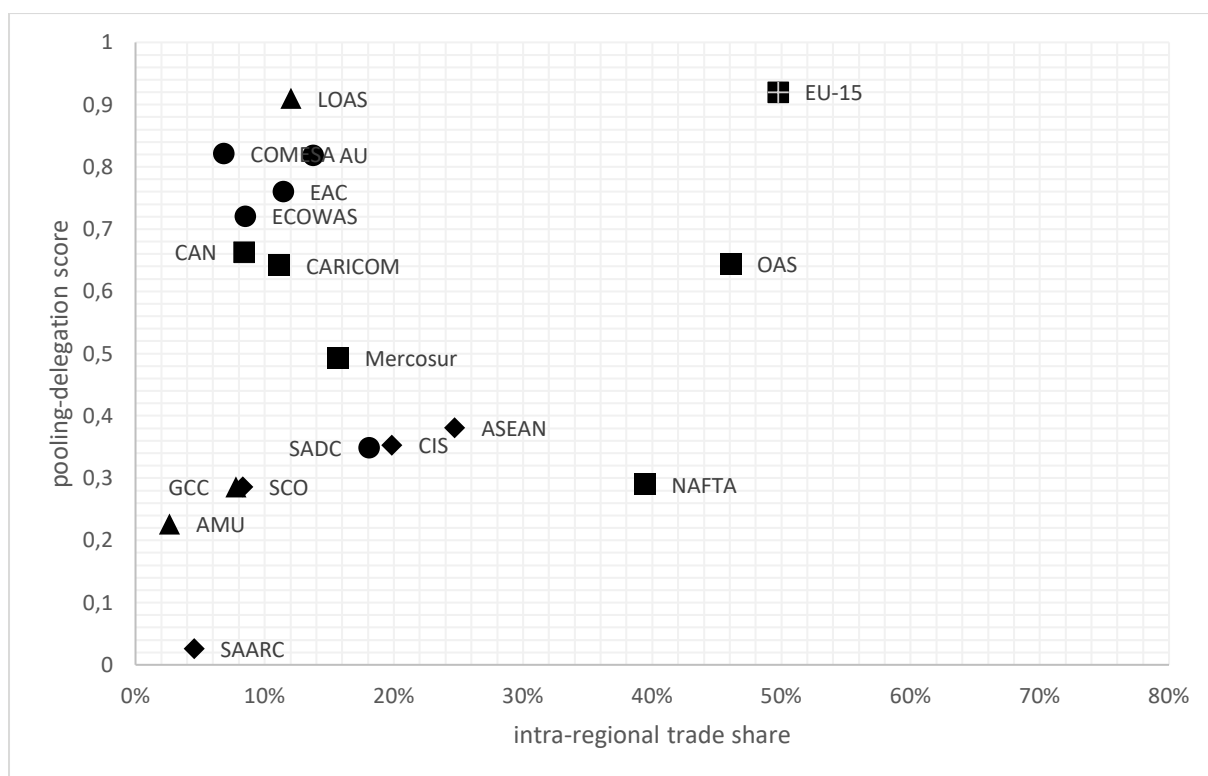


Figure 2: The depth of regionalism and economic interdependence, 2010



The year 2010 (see figures 1 and 2 above) only provides a snap shot of the density and depth of regionalism around the world. Yet, the overall picture does not change much over time. Africa, Europe, and Latin America have seen the strongest growth in regional organizations after the end of the Cold

War (Börzel 2013; Schneider 2017). Only a few regional organizations experienced substantial increases in their levels of pooling or delegation over the past two decades. Most of them are again in Africa (ECOWAS, EAC) and Latin America (CAN) – without any (preceding) changes in intra-regional trade.

To sum up: Our data challenge the argument of functional theories of regional integration that economic interdependence and regionalism are interrelated (cf. Hooghe et al. 2019). Four of the world's major regions substantially deviate from an imagined regression line, which appears to be anchored in Europe as an extreme case of both strong interdependence and strong regionalism. If economic interdependence was a driver or a consequence of regionalism, we should see strong regional organizations in East Asia and North America, two of the world's most economically integrated regions. Conversely, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America should not feature so many regional organizations with relatively high levels of pooling and delegation given that states appear to do trade more with states in other regions than within their own region. Finally, membership in the AU, ECOWAS, EAC, COMESA or CARICOM is too heterogeneous to blame the lack of a relationship between economic interdependence and regionalism on regime type. If democracies are more likely to create regional institutions to facilitate the trade with each other, why have the U.S. and Europe failed to set up a transatlantic economic organization similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization? Shortly after the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) established a Single Market among Russia and its neighbours in 2015, the U.S. and the EU shelved even plans for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Beyond Standard Integration Theories: Explaining Regionalism

How can we explain the variation in the density and strength of regionalism around the world? Why is regionalism stronger in Europe, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa than in North America, the Middle East and Asia? In the following, we cannot provide a fully empirically tested new theory of integration. Rather, we suggest that such a theory – in the post-functionalist tradition (Hooghe and Marks 2009;) – has to rely on three building blocks accounting for the demand for as well as the supply of regional institutions:

- Functional *demands* for regionalism endorsing a broader concept of interdependence that is not confined to economic interactions;
- elite efforts at regional identity-building resonating with the various publics;
- diffusion of institutional designs adapted to particular regional circumstances.

(Functional) demands for regionalism

We do not want to deny that functional theories, such as (neo-) functionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism, are irrelevant for explaining regionalism. However, they need to broaden their understanding of interdependence issues to encompass extra-regional economic relations, security externalities, as well as regime stability.

First, the functional demand for regionalism is often driven by extra-regional economic interdependence. Particularly in the global South, states have used regional institutions to gain leverage in international negotiations on market access in the global North or to signal foreign donors and investors their credible commitment to trade liberalization, political stability and the rule of law in order to attract foreign aid and trade (Krapohl and Fink 2013; Börzel and van Hüllen 2015). However, this trend is counter-acted by the tendency of regional hegemons, including South Africa and Brazil, to strike their

own bilateral trade deals with the global North rather than binding themselves to regional organizations (Lorenz-Carl and Rempe 2016).

Second, demands for regionalism arise in order to cope with negative security externalities produced by neighbouring countries. Flows of refugees or rebel forces often challenge the stability of an entire region. The (re-) establishment of Sub-Saharan African ROs in the 1990s was at least partially an attempt to deal with the negative externalities of civil wars in West, Central, and East Africa (Hartmann 2016: 276). In Latin America, ROs have sustained peace in the region and helped to build and consolidate a pluralistic security community (Kacowicz 2005; see also Kacowicz and Press-Barnathan 2016). African and Latin American leaders have supported regionalism as a way to control, manage and prevent regional conflicts and to deal with non-traditional security threats (cf. Graham 2008; Caballero-Anthony 2008; Herbst 2007; Okolo 1985; Barnett and Solingen 2007). In a similar vein, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines created ASEAN to maintain peace and stability amidst their disputes over inter-state borders and external interferences in domestic conflicts (Nesadurai 2008). Regionalism has served as a tool for settling conflicts and securing peace among (former) rival nations (Oelsner 2004; Acharya 2001; Francis 2006; Gruber 2000). What national governments lose in authority to regional institutions, they gain in legitimacy and problem-solving capacity, particularly since many societal problems and non-traditional security threats, such as environmental pollution, pandemics, drug trafficking or migration, are no longer confined to the boundaries of the nation-state (cf. Börzel and van Hüllen 2015).

A third functional demand for regionalism stems from the need to secure regime stability or “regime boosting” as Söderbaum has suggested for Sub-Sahara Africa (Söderbaum 2004). Regime-boosting concerns the consolidation of political regimes and of statehood through building and joining regional organizations. African, Latin American, Arab, and Asian leaders have supported regionalism as a source of domestic power and consolidation of national sovereignty (Herbst 2007; Okolo 1985; Nesadurai 2008; Barnett and Solingen 2007; Morales 2002; Hancock and Libman 2016; Valbjorn 2016). Moreover, as Acharya argues, seeking autonomy from domestic constraints is a powerful incentive for incumbent regimes to engage in regionalism in many parts of the world (Acharya 2016). His argument resonates with liberal intergovernmentalism, which explains the pooling of national sovereignty at the European level with national governments seeking to isolate political decisions with redistributive consequences from particularistic domestic interests (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2019; cf. Milward 2000). Regime-boosting through building regional institutions is not confined to authoritarian regimes, but can be equally utilized for the consolidation of democratizing countries. Liberalizing states tend to “lock in” democracy and human rights through regional institutions in order to consolidate regime change (Pevehouse 2005; Pevehouse 2016; Moravcsik 2000; Ribeiro Hoffmann and van der Vleuten 2007). Once again, Latin American and Sub-Saharan African region-building serve as prime examples (Bianculli 2016; Hartmann 2016).

In fact, the history of European integration also resonates with demands for coping with security interdependence as well as locking in democracy (see Börzel and Risse forthcoming). If we take the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 1951 rather than the European Economic Community of 1957 as the starting point of European integration, securing US funding for the reconstructing of Europe’s economies, collective security, as well as locking in the new (West) German democracy also assume front and center. The history of the ECSC demonstrates that overcoming a common history of destructions related to two World Wars rather than the functional demand for regional institutions to manage economic interdependence united the founding fathers of the European integration project (cf. Loth 2015; Milward 2000: 318-344). The ECSC was primarily about containing post-World War II

West Germany and providing security for its neighbours, most notably France. Chancellor Adenauer accepted the deal in exchange for regaining West German sovereignty (Baring 1969; Doering-Manteuffel 1988). It also helped to satisfy US expectations of close collaboration among European states in return for their participation in the European Recovery Program.

A broader understanding of interdependence carries explanatory mileage within and beyond Europe. However, if extra-regional economic relations, regional security, and regime stability are important drivers of regionalism, why is it so weak in East Asia, a region that heavily trades with the US and the EU and is characterized by some of the most troublesome security dilemmas in contemporary international relations (territorial conflicts in the South China Sea, North Korean nuclear armament, etc.)? We argue below that it requires community-building by elites who share a common identity to translate functional demands for regionalism into the supply of regional institutions, particularly if they higher levels of pooling and delegation. The lack of such an identity helps explain why regionalism is so weak in East Asia.

The supply of regional integration I: community building and elite identities

Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks have put forward a compelling (post-functionalist) argument according to which substantial pooling and delegation of authority presupposes at least some sense of community among the contracting parties in order to be sustainable (; Hooghe et al. 2019). Their claim puts Haas's neo-functionalism on its head. While Haas defined regional integration as the transfer of loyalties to the supranational level, he saw this as the endpoint rather than the start of integration processes (Haas 1958). At the same time, transactionalism of the Karl W. Deutsch variety always argued that integration required a sense of community to foster a minimum of trust necessary to set up common institutions (Deutsch et al. 1957; Adler and Barnett 1998; Acharya 2001; Fligstein 2008). However, the empirical evidence is still sketchy whether collective identity is a cause, an indicator, or an effect of regional institution-building (for an excellent survey of the literature see Checkel 2016).

To begin with, efforts at regional institution-building are almost always accompanied by social constructions of regional identities. While Checkel (2016) is skeptical about the causal link between elite identities and region-building, Spandler has recently made a similar argument with regard to the normative justifications for regionalism undertaken by elites which then explains the differences between ROs such as the EU and ASEAN (Spandler 2019). But it is Acharya who has made the strongest claim with regard to the Southeast Asian experience (Acharya 2009; see also Katzenstein 2005). The "ASEAN way" exemplifies an elite identity construction that was set up against the European experience of strongly legalized as well as supranational regional institutions. The strong emphasis on diversity as well as on informal networking and communication has been enshrined in ASEAN's institutions. Acharya's argument is corroborated by Katzenstein and Hemmer's account on why there is no NATO in Southeast Asia (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2003). Accordingly, the U.S. preferred multilateralism in Europe based on a strong sense of community, while it opted for bilateral security ties with Asian states during the Cold War, in the absence of collective identities.

A similar identity-related story can be told with regard to Africa. OAU was created based on a strong post-colonial elite identity emphasizing African independence and a strong non-intervention norm (Williams 2007; for the following see Checkel 2016, 562-563). The OAU charter already contained the catch-phrase in its preamble: "Try Africa First." After the Somalia disaster in the early 1990s, Ghanaian economist Ayittey coined the phrase "African solutions to African problems" (Ayittey 2009) which also

became the slogan of the newly founded AU in 2002. AU interpreted the post-colonial norm of sovereignty differently, though. Rather than relying on external interventions to solve its security problems, the AU embraced the possibility of military intervention in its member states to deal with war crimes or coup d'états (see Williams 2007; Tieku 2004; Söderbaum 2004). It is hard to see how the latter norm would have been conceivable without a sense of common identity among African elites based on post-colonialism giving content to regionalism. In a similar way, the League of Arab States (LOAS) was built around a sense of shared Pan-Arabic identity (Barnett 1998).

Post-colonial experiences also appear to have shaped regionalism in Latin America. It played a role in the discourse surrounding the formation of the Andean Community of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru in 1969. Tussie has argued that a strong sense of “othering” – against the U.S. and the neoliberal Washington consensus – has accompanied the formation of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) in 1991 (Tussie 2009). Likewise, leftist elites that came into power in the 2000s promoted the Bolivian Alliance for the Americas/ALBA and the Union of South American Nations/UNASUR as post-neoliberal integration projects (Bianculli 2016).

EEU was legitimized in identity terms as a regional alternative to the EU (notwithstanding its copying of the EU's institutional design, see Hancock and Libman 2016). In contrast, the lack of a collective elite identity might explain the absence of regionalism in East Asia despite high economic interdependence and a manifest security dilemma. Unsolved issues of historical justice and restitution have prevented China, Japan, and South Korea from forming a regional identity, e.g. based on a shared memory, which could have provided the necessary trust to build regional institutions (Ikenberry and Moon 2007; Morris-Suzuki et al. 2013). With regard to North America, the U.S. has never engaged in strong regional community-building which might explain why NAFTA and now the USMCA agreement lacks supranational institutions.

In sum, identity discourses referring to particular regional experiences and histories have been present in almost every instance of regional cooperation and integration. Regional elites and political leaders appear to believe that their identity narratives resonate with citizens and that their identity discourse might sway public opinion (for a similar claim with regard to normative arguing see Spandler 2019). Otherwise, they could simply justify their decisions on economic or security grounds. In other words, elites, even if they are not motivated by identity beliefs, still assume that their efforts at community-building generate public support for regionalism. As we have shown elsewhere, public opinion data from the World Value Surveys indicate that this assumption might not be ill-founded but that elite-led community-building indeed generates public support for regionalism (Börzel and Risse forthcoming).

The European experience serves as strong evidence that elite identities matter for regional institution-building (cf. Risse 2010; see Börzel and Risse forthcoming, for the following). While security issues were front and center at the beginning of European integration (see above), elite identities were crucial to overcome the legacies of two world wars. The history of the ECSC demonstrates that the sharing of a common history of destructions united the founding fathers of the European integration project (Stevenson 2012; Loth 2015: 1-19). The ECSC was not only and not primarily about fostering economic integration but to cement the reconciliation of two historic enemies, France and Germany.

From the beginning of the European integration project, the various elite narratives constructed the EU as a community of shared values of human rights, democracy, and market economy – against Europe's own past of nationalism, militarism and (world) wars as the temporal “other” (for details see Risse 2010, ch. 3). Yet, the most recent European experience shows that identity politics can also be

an inhibitor of integration. The mobilization of nationalist identity constructions allows to sway public opinion against the transfer of national sovereignty to the European level (Börzel and Risse 2018).

The European experience also demonstrates that elite efforts at regional community-building resonate with mass public opinion. For decades, European leaders were able to relate their community narrative to majorities in public opinion across the EU with inclusive national identities who added “Europe” as a secondary identity to their national loyalties (details in Risse 2010, ch. 2). This created the “permissive consensus” (Hooghe and Marks 2009) of mass public support for ever more integration. Recently, (mostly right-wing) populist and Euro-sceptical parties started mobilizing the considerable minorities across Europe with more exclusive and nationalist identities, thereby converting attitudes into political behaviour. This division of mass public opinion between those identifying with their region as a secondary identity, on the one hand, and those holding exclusive national identities, on the other hand, also travels beyond Europe, as data from the World Value Surveys show (Börzel and Risse forthcoming; for a similar argument see Roose 2013). In sum, elite efforts at mobilizing regional identities are not in vain, but appear to resonate with mass public opinion and to generate support for regional integration. At the same time, exclusive nationalist identities can also be mobilized against regional integration, as the most recent European experience shows.

The supply of regional institutions II: The diffusion of institutional design

Our third building block of a theory of regional integration in the post-functional tradition concerns the institutional design of ROs (see Risse 2016 for the following). How is it to be explained that there are now more than ten copies of the European Court of Justice (Alter 2012; Alter and Hooghe 2016) and that parliamentary bodies related to ROs have spread around the world, even in authoritarian contexts (Lenz 2013; Rüländ and Bechle 2014; Rittberger and Schroeder 2016)? Particular features of the EU’s common market have been emulated by the South African Development Community, by EAC, by Mercosur as well as CAN (Lenz 2012; Risse 2016, 98). The EU’s institutional design has been copied by the EEU (see Hancock and Libman 2016) and even in part by ASEAN (Jetschke and Murray 2012), although the latter RO has been reluctant to pool sovereignty and to delegate authority. Yet, while the EU serves as a powerful model of institutional diffusion, it is by no means the only one. With regard to Preferential Trade Agreements, Baccini et al. have shown that there are distinct clusters of similar institutional design (Baccini et al. 2015; Baccini et al. 2014), with the EU providing only one model.

The diffusion of regional institutional designs constitutes a powerful explanation for the supply of regional integration. While functional accounts assume independent decision-making in regional bodies, diffusion theories posit interdependent decision-making through direct and sender-driven influence mechanisms or through recipient-driven emulation (see e.g. Gilardi 2013; Strang 1991; Strang and Meyer 1993). As to the first mechanism, inter-regional cooperation appears to be a powerful way for the spreading of institutional designs to other regions of the world (De Lombaerde and Schulz 2009; Baert et al. 2014; Ribeiro Hoffmann 2016). Recipient-driven emulation works through lesson-drawing, competition, and sometimes outright mimicry.

The diffusion of regional institutional designs combined with elite efforts at community-building might, thus, explain the Latin American as well as Sub-Sahara African cases of regional integration in the absence of strong economic interdependence (see figure 2 above). But diffusion does not imply institutional convergence. Most regional organizations emulate selectively, thereby adapting, transforming and “localizing” (Acharya 2004) particular institutional models into specific regional contexts.

Conclusions

In this contribution, we have put various theories of European integration to a test exploring how well they travel beyond the European experience. First, we have shown that economic interdependence goes together with regional integration in less than half of the world's regions. Moreover, even in Europe, which is often considered the text book case of high degrees of interdependence as well as high levels of regional integration, it remains unclear what is cause and what is effect. These findings challenge standard theories of integration such as liberal intergovernmentalism or even neo-functionalism, which assume economic interdependence as a major driver of integration.

Second, we do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater and deny the plausibility of functional explanation of regionalism. Yet, from a comparative regionalism perspective, extra-regional economic relations, security interdependence, and the quest for regime stability (whether democratic or authoritarian) appear to be more important drivers for regionalism than intra-regional economic interdependence. We argue that the Latin American, Sub-Saharan African, Southeast Asian, and even the European experiences can be explained on these grounds.

Third, however, functional demands are insufficient to account for the supply of regional integration around the world. We submit that the pooling and delegation of authority in regional institutions require sustained efforts at community-building by political and other elites. Collective regional identity narratives resonating with the citizens seems to be crucial to generate sufficient support for building strong regional institutions that cross the boundaries between intergovernmental cooperation and supranational integration. The lack of strong integration efforts in East Asia and North America despite high degrees of economic interdependence and in the absence of elite identity discourses supports our claims. So far, our account corroborates post-functionalist reasoning (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hooghe et al. 2019).

Fourth, we add a further component to a theory of regional integration that travels beyond Europe. We argue that diffusion approaches help explain the striking similarities in the institutional design of ROs across the globe including the emulation of EU-like institutions. Diffusion rarely results in "copy and paste," but in the selective adoption and transformation of models of pooling and delegating authority, of which the EU arguably is the most prominent one.

Functional demands, elite identities, and diffusion constitute the three building blocks for a theory of regional integration that is able to account for the variation in regionalism across the globe and goes beyond standard theories of regional integration. This short article could only sketch out the theoretical components without going into detail with regard to specific hypotheses that could be tested empirically. Comparative regionalism has a long way to go, before it generates empirically validated theories of regional integration replacing the standard accounts, which have been built with the European experience in mind.

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Notes

- ¹ We understand regionalism as “a primarily state-led process of building and sustaining formal regional institutions and organizations among at least three states” (Börzel and Risse 2016a, 7).
- ² We are grateful to Jon Pevehouse for granting us access to the *Correlates of War 3 International Governmental Organizations Data Set Version 3.0*. The expanded version 3.0 updates version 2.1 (Pevehouse et al. 2004) to provide membership information from 1816 to 2014. We created a subset of regional organizations and assigned them to the ten regions. The dataset does not include ROs formed by existing international organizations (emanations) or regional trade agreements that have only two member states (preferential trade agreements).
- ³ We also used different measurements for intra-regional trade interdependence, including the Symmetric Trade Introversion Index by Iapadre (Iapadre 2006). It does not change our overall findings (see also Hooghe et al. 2019).
- ⁴ <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/>, last access December 20, 2018. To include Mexico in North America, we have used data from the *World Integrated Trade Solution* database (<https://wits.worldbank.org/>, last access December 20, 2018).
- ⁵ http://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Classifications/DimCountries_Geographics_Hierarchy.pdf, last access December 20, 2018. Data for the Middle East are only available since 2001. We therefore combine North Africa and Western Asia. The two regions together include the countries that are part of the Middle East and only a few more, such as the Southern Caucasus, whose trade volume, however, is too marginal to skew the overall level of intra-regional trade.
- ⁶ Hooghe et al. acknowledge that unanimity is the preferred voting rule. Moreover, decisions are not binding for member states that dissented. They still opted for majority voting because the treaty provides for the possibility of majority decisions (Hooghe et al. 2017: 657, Fn, 29).
- ⁷ We thank an anonymous reviewer for alerting us to this point.