Chapter 3
Interregionalism and the European Union: Conceptualising Group-to-Group Relations

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3.1 Introduction

Interregional dialogues have been present in the external relations of the European Union (EU) for nearly half a century, for much of which period it seemed to possess exclusive rights to the concept. As a consequence, theorising on interregionalism has always been intrinsically linked to, and indeed dominated by, the study of the European Union. In short, this chapter explores the past, present and future of the study of interregionalism. Roughly two periods may be determined within the study of interregionalism from the Union's perspective: first the actor-centred 'old interregionalism' of the early years; and second the system-centred 'new interregionalism' of the post-bipolar period. The two are characterised by fundamental differences in the architecture of such group-to-group relations, and in their perceived significance in the international system.

The chapter begins with a quick definition of interregionalism. It then explores the way in which the old interregionalism was conceived within European studies, before moving on to the changes both to the architecture of interregionalism and to its conceptualisation in the post-bipolar period. The chapter then considers what models of the 'new interregionalism' tell us about the shape of European Union group-to-group relations, before questioning whether such patterns and expectations can be applied beyond this narrow focus. Can a framework generated within the context of studies of EU external relations apply to interregionalism more generally?

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F. Baert et al. (eds.), *Intersecting Interregionalism: Regions, Global Governance and the EU*, United Nations University Series on Regionalism 7,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-7566-4_3,

3.2 Interregionalism: A Quick Definition

At the most basic level, interregionalism may be defined as 'institutionalised relations between world regions' (Hänggi et al. 2006: 3). This, however, clearly leaves significant room for variation in typologies of interregionalism, necessitating at the outset of this chapter that certain clarifications be made (also see the Introduction and Hardacre and Smith in this volume). While regional organisations constitute the natural starting point in any definition, interregionalism being the product initially of the external relations of one such organisation—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 group-to-group structures that have emerged, particularly over the last two decades. At the same time, however, some level of regional organisation remains the foundation of any definition; to go beyond this region-to-region focus is to lose a certain amount of clarity. In this respect, Hänggi's (2006) 'borderline' or 'quasi-interregional' structures encompassing region-to-state (e.g. EU–Canada) and mega-regional institutions[1] are a step too far, effectively defining interregionalism as any external relationship in which a region (however defined) is engaged.

Rather, the favoured approach of this chapter falls between these two poles. Interregionalism is defined as institutionalised relationships between groups of states from different regions, each coordinating to a greater or lesser degree. This therefore spans the range from highly institutionalised regional organisations—most prominently the EU—to looser aggregations of states for which the engagement in a specific interregional dialogue is their *raison d'être* as a grouping—for example, the 'imagined' region that is the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States (Doidge 2011: 2). From this spine, three forms of interregionalism may be disaggregated. The first comprises those relationships between regional organisations. This is the classic type, characteristic of Rüland's (1999: 2–3) 'bilateral interregionalism', Aggarwal and Fogerty's (2004: 1) 'pure interregionalism' and Hänggi's (2006: 42) 'old interregionalism' (e.g. EU–Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), EU–Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)). The second type involves dialogues between a regional organisation on the one hand, and a more-or-less coordinated regional grouping of states on the other (e.g. the Asia–Europe Meeting, ASEM), while the third concerns engagement between two more-or-less coordinated regional groups (e.g. the Forum for East Asia–Latin America Cooperation, FEALAC). These latter two may be collectively termed 'transregionalism'.

3.3 Old Interregionalism and EU External Relations

Despite the early emergence of interregionalism, most prominently through the conclusion of group-to-group agreements with the Associated African States and Madagascar in the form of the two Yaoundé Conventions, it was initially accorded

[1] Institutions comprising states from two or more regions, but for which the organising principle is state-to-state rather than group-to-group relations (e.g. the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC).

little significance as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right. Rather, interregional dialogues were primarily understood as a means of expression of the then European Community (EC) as an external policy actor, a product both of the apparently *sui generis* nature of the Community itself, and of the nature of the interregional architecture that emerged roughly between the signing of the first Yaoundé Convention in 1963 and the ending of the bipolar conflict heralded by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It was rooted in the early distinctiveness of the European integration project from other regional constructions evident at the time that the interregional architecture was being established, and particularly during the period of growth of such dialogues from the mid-1970s and early 1980s. The two—the nature of the European construction and the emergent interregional architecture—were clearly interlinked.

In contrast to other 'old' regional projects characterised by strict intergovernmentalism and a largely inward focus, European integration incorporated from the outset a (sometimes grudging) willingness to cede authority to supranational institutions, including the according of certain external relations competences (even if these were not always successfully realised). The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), for example, had taken the first steps towards an external role in being accorded legal personality with which to perform its core functions (including the promotion of international trade). Subsequently, the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the attribution of competences with an external component (agricultural trade and development, the common market), as well as the eleventh hour incorporation of relations with the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) into the Treaty of Rome, helped to turn the face of Europe outwards from the beginning. Further to this was a European desire, particularly strongly felt among certain member states, to establish a global identity distinct from that of the United States (US) (Smith 2002: 34). 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 resulting interregional architecture resembled an EC-centred hub-and-spokes system, 'a novel and specific mode of international cooperation developed and dominated by the most advanced regional organisation' (Hänggi 2006: 32). Studies of EC external relations reflected this novelty, with a focus on conceptualising or exploring the role of the Community as an international actor, and group-to-group dialogues—being seen as a largely European phenomenon of only limited significance to the international system (Regelsberger 1990: 14)—explored only as incidental to this focus. Sjöstedt's seminal work on conceptualising the external role of the EC, for example, touched on interregionalism only in passing, recognising that commercial negotiations between the Community and another grouping could be bilateral rather than multilateral in character where the partner grouping acted in a unitary fashion (Sjöstedt 1977: 34). In so doing, he was among the first to recognise the importance of actorness to interregional dialogues (also see Hettne in this volume). Regelsberger's 1989 study also saw interregional structures as largely incidental to the primary focus—the study of EC external relations—utilising

the EC–ASEAN dialogue as simply a framework within which to explore European Political Cooperation.

The first major study of the EC's group-to-group relations—Edwards and Regelsberger's (1990) edited volume on *Europe's Global Links*—was very much rooted in this approach. Its focus was almost exclusively on the European side of the group-to-group equation, with a series of largely descriptive and policy-oriented case studies lacking in a common theoretical foundation. This descriptive approach remained prominent among the literature on interregionalism that emerged over the subsequent decade.

The volume nevertheless raised a number of issues that have continued to impact studies of interregionalism today. 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 Community as an object of significance on the world stage: interregionalism, in Regelsberger's conception, as a mechanism for 'improving Europe's international profile' (Regelsberger 1990: 11). Two further elements are also identifiable 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 (Regelsberger 1990: 16)—the actorness 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 (Regelsberger 1990: 12), or the utilisation of interregional relationships to promote cooperation among the EC's partner states provide two such examples, both of which would gain greater prominence a decade later in the context of 'new interregionalism'.

What we see in early conceptualisations of interregionalism then, reflecting the group-to-group architecture of the period, is a focus on such dialogues as an expression of EC actorness. Insofar as theoretical considerations were present, these largely reflected this European focus, being characterised by their treatment of the European project and its external relations as *sui generis*. Nevertheless, by adopting an actor-centred framework, the studies of old interregionalism have been important in highlighting motivations underpinning interregionalism: if interregionalism is conceived as an expression of actorness, then there must by implication be some underlying intent in their establishment. Where this has flowed over into the modern period is in the focus on the utility of external relations frameworks such as interregionalism in establishing a global presence. Such a view was the antecedent to recent conceptualisations of interregionalism as a pragmatic strategy with the core objective of establishing the place of the EU as a global actor (Söderbaum et al. 2005: 373), and as a mechanism for maximising EU influence in the international system—an acknowledgement that, despite the rhetoric of equal partnership that characterises the EU's group-to-group engagement, interregionalism is not free from power politics (Aggarwal and Fogerty 2004: 12–14). Thus, Aggarwal and Fogerty (2004: 13), in

their analysis of EU trade strategies, have conceived interregionalism as a framework within 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. 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.

3.4 New Interregionalism and the Five Functions

It is in the post-bipolar period that the study of the European Union's interregionalism has been subject to a greater awakening, a product of the fundamental transformation in the architecture of interregionalism that has been evident, resulting from an altered international system (conceptualised through the framework of globalisation) and the attendant emergence and proliferation of new 'open' regional formations. As these new regional structures have become increasingly internally coherent and institutionalised, they have in turn 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 ever-denser network of their external relations including, prominently, interregionalism. While the EU remains the primary actor in this emerging network, the EU-centric system has been replaced by one of multiple hubs, with ASEAN, MERCOSUR and the Andean Community (CAN) in particular progressively developing their own networks of group-to-group dialogue. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the process of globalisation (Ruigrok and van Tulder 1995: 151), and as a result the new regionalism, emerged and deepened first within the Triad of regions—North America, Europe and Asia. 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 (Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC). One consequence is that studies of European Union interregionalism have been dominated by those of Europe–Asia relations.

This transformation in the architecture of interregionalism produced a concomitant transformation in the way in which interregionalism is theorised. As the network evolved from the actor-centred framework of the old hub-and-spokes model to the system-centred framework of the new interregionalism (Hänggi 2006: 32), so too were theoretical conceptualisations of interregionalism forced to move beyond the actor-centred literature 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 differing interpretations 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 theorising 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, rationalising and agenda setting, and collective identity formation (also see Rüland in this volume).

Importantly, even as interregional dialogues and the corresponding set of functional expectations associated with them have been 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 conceptualisation of interregionalism has continued to be dominated by an EU focus. Thus, for example, the role of interregionalism in power balancing (Rüland 1996; Dent 1997–1998), in rationalising global *fora* (Maull 1997), and in the reflexive formation of collective identities (Gilson 2002) all saw early consideration in studies of Europe–Asia relations. 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).

3.4.1 Functions of Interregionalism

Stated simply, the balancing function of interregionalism involves two interlocking elements. The first involves the utility of such group-to-group structures for avoiding possible marginalisation through maximising autonomy and room for manoeuvre in an anarchic/self-help system (Faust 2004: 749). This self-focused component of balancing has found expression in the economic sphere, for example, in the push to increase regional competitiveness, or to diversify trade relationships as a means of reducing dependence on particular markets. Second is an externally-oriented balancing, in which interregionalism constitutes a mechanism for constraining other actors or ensuring their open and honest participation within the global multilateral framework, thus strengthening and stabilising these structures (Ferguson 1997). Such balancing may involve cooperation to ensure access to markets,[2] or efforts to prevent unilateral action by a specific power.

[2] Thus APEC has been seen as an attempt to keep the EU committed to open regionalism, while ASEM has similarly been conceived as a mechanism for ensuring ongoing US commitment to multilateralism (Segal 1997: 127).

Institution building recognises the way in which interregionalism, through the creation of structures and norms of cooperation, has a 'legalising effect on international relations' (Rüland 2001: 7) and a regularising 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 institutionalisation of international politics, helping to socialise states and groups of states into the web of rules, norms and values that facilitate and constrain global relations (Rüland 1999: 9; also see Rüland in this volume). 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 (as has largely been the case with East Asian integration as an outcome of ASEM), or it may involve exogenous contributions with the regional partner acting effectively as an external integrator (a role increasingly adopted by the European Union) (Doidge 2011: 37).

Of most interest to regional actors has been the potential contribution that interregional structures may make to overcoming the difficulties intrinsic to large-*n* multilateral negotiations (rationalising) 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 as they do a further level of interaction between the state and global multilateral levels, regularising contacts and facilitating the merging of actor expectations (Doidge 2011: 44). With negotiations between regional blocs being potentially more efficient than those between states, interregionalism is seen as serving a 'clearing house' function for global *fora* (Dent 1997–1998: 498; Maull 1997: 51–52; Rüland 1999: 7). Closely related to this rationalising 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 (1999: 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 (Campbell 1999: 9, 70–72) as it is of intra-regional state-to-state interaction. Interregionalism, as an increasingly densely institutionalised structure of region-to-region relations, provides a locus for regularised contact and a venue for socialisation. It provides, in other words, a framing context for the construction of regional identities and awareness (Doidge 2011: 46).

3.4.2 *Integrating Actorness: Functional Varieties of Interregionalism*

While a significant advance on the conceptualisation of old interregionalism, this framework nevertheless established little more than a set of expectations concerning the sort of activities likely to be seen in interregional dialogues. As such, while formulated within the context of the study of the European Union, it was sufficiently flexible to be used as a lens through which to view essentially any group-to-group dialogue process. In so doing, it provided a useful mode of categorisation of interregional behaviour, but it offered little in the way of explanation as to why such functions were or were not performed in specific dialogues. It was in theories of European Union actorness, with their genealogies traceable to the work of Sjöstedt (1977) and the concern with conceptualising EC external relations that was characteristic of the bipolar period, that an explanatory variable was able to be found, and in so doing something of a link between the studies of the old and new interregionalisms provided. Again, this move in the theorising of interregionalism was framed largely in the Triadic context, in Europe–Asia relations (Doidge 2004a, b, 2007, 2008).

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 (also see Hettne in this volume). *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 on 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 institutions[3]: norms and structures of decision-taking, the nature of authority and so on (Doidge 2011: 18–26).

It is not necessary to rehearse in detail the case for the impact of actorness on interregionalism, this argument having been made elsewhere (Doidge 2004a, b, 2007, 2008). It is sufficient simply to acknowledge that actorness relates to the functions of interregionalism in three ways. First, for those externally-oriented functions of interregionalism, directed towards the global multilateral level and involving purposive activity—external balancing, rationalising and agenda setting—a high level of actorness on the part of both groupings is necessary. Such functions are dependent on the ability of regional groupings to coordinate intra-regional positions with sufficient flexibility to negotiate at the interregional and subsequently global levels.

[3] Drawing on Grieco (1997: 165), institutionalisation may be seen to involve three dimensions: (i) *Locus of institutionalisation*: the legal basis on which the regional actor is built; (ii) *Scope of activity*: the extent of regional cooperation; and (iii) *Level of institutional authority*: whether organisational principles are supranational or intergovernmental.

The greater the actorness of the partners, the greater the potential for performing such functions (see Hettne in this volume).

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 where a comparatively weaker regional actor is confronted by a comparatively stronger external other. Finally, actorness remains of only tangential importance to functions such as interregional institution building, it requiring little strategy or effort to establish most formal structures of cooperation (working groups, joint projects, networks, etc.).[4]

In short, those facets of interregionalism involving 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). Such a recognition allows us to rearticulate our understanding of interregionalism, identifying two functional varieties: first, an internally-focused, capacity-building interregionalism; and second, an externally-focused, globally active interregionalism.

The capacity-building role for interregionalism, the product of qualitative differences in actorness between interregional partners, sees it directed largely towards the strengthening over time of regional actorness. This is expressed in two ways: first 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 second through the formation and strengthening of regional identities as a product of engagement with a more coherent external other. Both components are strongly associated with regional actorness. The globally active form of interregionalism, by contrast, 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*. It is with this actorness-interregionalism framework and the attendant functional varieties that the remainder of this chapter will engage.

3.5 Patterns of Engagement in EU Interregionalism

This framework—aligning the literature of EU actorness with the framework of functions linked to the conceptualisation of new interregionalism—provides us with a useful tool for considering the shape of EU interregionalism. When applied to the

[4] One consequence 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).

Europe–Asia relationship, a pattern in three parts emerges involving: first, motivations; second, the delivery of capacity-building functions; and third, aspirations towards a globally active interregionalism (Doidge 2011: 171–175).

3.5.1 Motivations

A constant factor underpinning the EU's choice to pursue interregionalism has been the potential for interregionalism to assist in establishing the Union as an object of significance in the international system. Beyond this, however, the balancing function has gained increasing prominence. While again this has always been present,[5] in the post-bipolar period it has become the primary motivation for the establishment of bilateral interregional and transregional processes. Concern with the failure to gain sufficient traction in the 'Asian miracle' markets, for example, has been a key factor behind the drive to revitalise Europe–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), a concern translated into the Southeast Asian context with 1996s *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).

3.5.2 Capacity-Building Interregionalism

The second element in European Union interregionalism is the visibility of capacity-building, a product of the asymmetry of actorness present between the Union and its dialogue partners. Importantly, particularly evident in the post-bipolar period has been the engagement in purposive forms of capacity-building in the context of bilateral interregionalism as the Union's partners themselves establish clear integrative goals towards which EU activities can be directed. The EU's promotion of regionalism stems from two motive forces. 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). Integration promotion is an extension of this, serving to regularise and structure interactions between states. Second, drawing on its own history, is the conviction that regionalism delivers clear benefits to its constituent members, a belief that

[5] Thus, for example, a concern that it would be marginalised from economic dialogue has been highlighted in relation to the launching of relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1973 (Nuttall 1990: 148).

found early expression in the preambles to Cooperation Agreements with ASEAN in 1980, the Andean Pact in 1984, and the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1989.

As a consequence, the promotion of regionalism has become entrenched in the Union's interregional relations. Thus, for example, has been the establishment in 1995 of the Institutional Development Programme for the ASEAN Secretariat, and in 2004 of its successor ASEAN Programme for Regional Integration Support. These reflect the goal, stated explicitly in the 2001 *Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*, to 'provide active support for reinforced regional integration' (European Commission 2001: 22). Indeed, they constitute a particularly overt form of integration promotion: by offering capacity-building and technical assistance programmes modelled on the Union's own experience, the Commission is helping to influence the integration debate within the Association. Specifically, these programmes are helping to define an appropriate role for the ASEAN Secretariat within the broader integration project, seeking to remedy an acknowledged weak point in the EU–ASEAN relationship—that 'the ASEAN Secretariat is really a secretariat' (Commission official, quoted in Doidge 2004a: 202). Aside from such overt measures, also evident in the ASEM context has been a process of intra-regional institution building within the Asia grouping as a consequence of engagement with a more coherent external other, a process considered in detail by Hänggi (2003).

3.5.3 Globally Active Interregionalism

The third element in European Union interregionalism has been the importance accorded to the globally active form. It is in this variety, premised upon active engagement at the global level, where the Union's greatest interest lies, the establishment of 'effective multilateralism' (European Council 2003: 9) and participation in global *fora* being the 'defining principle' of its external relations strategy (European Commission 2003: 3). With the increased emphasis on multilateral governance institutions and on multilateral solutions to global problems that has been characteristic of the post-bipolar period, the need for external cooperation to achieve global goals has become firmly entrenched in the EU's interregional relationships, at least in a declaratory form. The utility of interregionalism as a mechanism for facilitating effective global engagement has been increasingly highlighted, with Commission President Prodi, for example, arguing that effective multilateral institutions require 'co-operation between strong and integrated regional entities', and that 'global governance can emerge only from such interregional cooperation' (Prodi 2000: 5).

Such goals have been prominent in Europe–Asia relations. The first ASEAN–EC Ministerial Meeting in 1978, for example, highlighted the need for cooperation in international *fora*, pointing to the imminent United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1979 and the push for a New International Economic Order. In the post-bipolar period, the need to cooperate to achieve global multilateral goals (particularly in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations system) has become a significant element in the relationship, at least

in declaratory form, appearing in all Commission strategy documents and Chairman's statements of EU–ASEAN *fora*. ASEM *fora* too, since the launch of the process in 1996, have routinely expressed a similar ambition. A rhetorical commitment to a globally active form of interregionalism has therefore been a key component of Europe–Asia relations, helping to structure expectations for engagement in both the EU–ASEAN and ASEM *fora*.[6]

Despite rhetorical commitment to such partnership, what has been largely absent is any substantive delivery of these functions, 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' (Commission official, quoted in Doidge 2004b: 50).[7] The delivery of such functions is similarly difficult to find in the transregional ASEM process, again a function of the inability of intra-regional structures of cooperation to overcome the diversity of Asian viewpoints (Doidge 2011: 125).[8]

3.5.4 Capability-Expectations Gap

This tripartite pattern defies the apparent logic suggested by the functional varieties of interregionalism. Despite the very different demands that these functional varieties make of the regional actors involved, raising the expectation that they would form two poles of a *continuum* charting a transformation in the nature of interregional dialogues as the actorness of the engaged groupings increases (Doidge 2011: 52), they are clearly not treated discretely by the European Union. Rather, they co-exist in the Union's goal-setting for its interregional relationships, with high-end aspirations for a globally active partnership appearing alongside capacity-building activities, raising the spectre of a certain dissonance in the Union's approach. In conceptualising this dissonance, the study of the EU's external relations again provides a framework, in the form of Hill's (1993) capability-expectations gap. Hill's approach, part of a tradition of theorising on European Union underperformance in the international arena, is particularly relevant to interregionalism. What we clearly see in the EU's emphasis on a globally active interregionalism is a mismatch between its expectation of what can be achieved, and the capability of itself and its

[6] Indeed, said one Commission official, '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'(quoted in Doidge 2007: 243).

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

[8] Some suggestive hints of progress in rationalising may be found in the ASEM process, though these constitute limited success at a lowest common denominator level (see, for example, Doidge 2011: 123–127).

partner groupings to deliver these results. There is a clear disconnect between, on the one hand, the Union's investment in capacity-building interregionalism, acknowledging implicitly as this does a perception of the limitations of its partner groupings to act intra- or extra-regionally, and, on the other, the expectation that these interregional partnerships will deliver high-end globally active functions.

3.6 Beyond the European Union

The theorising of interregionalism has been dominated by the place of the European Union as its primary interlocutor. And while there has been a significant evolution in the way in which it has been conceived—from an actor-centred to a system-centred phenomenon—it remains the case that studies of interregionalism have continued to be dominated by this European focus and indeed, as far as interregional structures go, have been conceived almost exclusively within a Triadic setting in the form of Europe–Asia relations, a situation not altogether surprising given the long-standing and breadth of engagement that these relationships have involved. This narrow focus raises the question as to whether the actorness-interregionalism framework and the pattern of engagement outlined above apply beyond the European Union or indeed beyond Triadic interregionalism. Is, for example, the small-*n* problem that has routinely bedevilled integration theory also a difficulty when conceptualising interregionalism? When we consider interregionalism, is the EU a *sui generis* case? Does it represent an *n* of 1?

One clear failing of the literature of interregionalism is the absence of theory-based comparisons of intra- and extra-Triadic structures. One of the few attempts to conceive such is Dosch's (2005) typology, which makes a clear distinction between Triadic and peripheral, or first and second order, interregionalism. Whereas the former, in Dosch's conceptualisation, engages 'primary actors', involves a high degree of institutionalisation and is directed towards order-building and the management of the global system, the latter, as a consequence of the engagement of 'secondary actors' (lower-medium and small powers), involves a low level of institutionalisation and is not directed towards altering the international system or impacting global governance (Dosch 2005: 185–186). This would suggest, then, that the pattern of engagement in Triadic Europe–Asia relations would not be present in peripheral interregionalisms involving partnerships between the Union and secondary actors, or indeed in structures which exclude the EU entirely. Two preliminary investigations of peripheral interregionalisms, however, suggest the contra case.

3.6.1 EU–MERCOSUR

Within the EU–MERCOSUR relationship, characterised again by asymmetric actorness, clear suggestions can be found that the tripartite pattern of engagement highlighted inheres beyond the Triad. The EU's push to extend its relationship with MERCOSUR,

for example, was motivated in large part by the emergence of hemispheric free trade negotiations stemming from George H.W. Bush's 1990 Enterprise of the America's Initiative, concretised in the 1994 proposal for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The EU's 1994 *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) along with the concern that a failure to respond to hemispheric initiatives would have adverse consequences for the Union's market share (European Commission 1994a: 11–12; also see Santander in this volume). A similar balancing motivation may be found on the part of MERCOSUR itself, with an interest in diversifying away from a situation of dependence on US markets, combined with a concern with 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 organisations' (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 organisation has lacked the agency to make such an interregional partnership work (Commission official in Doidge 2011: 156; also see Santander in this volume).

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 organisation. In the following year this was formalised 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 in a series of institution building and technical cooperation programmes.

3.6.2 Forum for East Asia–Latin America Cooperation

In the 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, with Goh's (1999) initial proposal for the forum

mirroring his earlier ASEM initiative in positing Asia–Latin America relations as a 'missing link'. 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). 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.

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*.

3.7 Conclusion: The Future Study of Interregionalism

From a situation of relative indifference, interregionalism has come to occupy a greater place in the study of the European Union. Indeed, the conceptualisation of interregionalism is a process that has taken place largely within the confines of the study of the EU. In a period when interregionalism is increasingly seen as a systemic rather than EU-centric phenomenon, this raises the difficulty that the theoretical models that have emerged are too EU-specific. 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 Triadic Europe–Asia case is also present in non-Triadic EU interregionalism, and in interregional structures excluding the European Union entirely. This suggests, therefore, that the framework outlined may be a useful starting point for this undertaking. The challenge is twofold. 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 it 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 Europe–Asia relations, and indeed beyond the European Union entirely. More must be done to explore the peripheral 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* in the study of the European Union.

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