

IDE Research Bulletin

Research project summary based on papers for academic journals
with the aim of contributing to the academic community

Leadership and Regional Organizations

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Because a region is a subsystem under the global system, we should always have relative perspectives when analyzing it. First, any region is accompanied by higher and lower level of regions; hence, vertical relations between regions become important. In this context, we note that recent regionalism studies, especially those on Asia, emphasize the fact that the regional system is “multi-layered,” going beyond early literature on (European) regionalism that takes it for granted that uncontested regions exist. Second, any region cannot exist in isolation; every region has some external linkages. In this regard, existing literature often emphasizes inter-regionalism, namely, region-to-region mechanism, with the majority of them dealing with the European Union (EU)’s relations with other regions. However, the EU is unique, because its external policy is centralized in Brussels. Inter-regionalism naturally plays a dominant role in forming the EU’s external relations, leaving other forms of across-regional cooperation behind.

This study analyzed whether inter-regionalism is a substitute or a complement to other forms of cooperation such as extra-, cross-, trans-, and pan-regionalisms, using the case study on the relation between Southeast and South Asia as well as that between Southern America and Southern Africa. Three patterns are identified regarding the relationship among the five types of across-regional cooperation, based on the two case studies above, although they are subject to further examination of more case analyses in future. First, inter-regionalism and regionalism are complementary. Second, inter-regionalism and cross-regionalism between key states in respective regions are complementary. Third, inter-regionalism on the one hand and trans-regionalism and pan-regionalism on the other seem to be substitutes.

The real world is much more complex because the horizontal relation and vertical relations of the regional system are tangled. For example, on top of the several cooperation mechanisms across regions between ASEAN and SAARC, we should add the layers of East Asia and Asia-Pacific as meta-level region of ASEAN, and the layers of Mekong and Indochina as its sub-regions (there are meta- and sub-region for SAARC, too). Furthermore, one may argue that BIMSTEC and IORA may constitute the relation of meta- and sub-regions, which may compete with each other. The bottom line is that the EU is too unique for both regionalism and inter-regionalism studies, and we should regard inter-regionalism as a means of cooperation across two regions. Extra-, cross-, trans-, and pan-regionalism play some roles outside Europe. Because of the dynamism between several cooperation mechanisms across regions, which may be complementary or substitutes, actual relations between regions outside Europe

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are much more complex than European experiences.

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