

Comparative Environmental Regionalism

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Shaun Breslin**

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1 Researching comparative regional environmental governance

Causes, cases and consequences

Lorraine Elliott and Shaun Breslin

Introduction

The study of comparative regional integration has come a long way – breaking free from the dominance of the European experience (and from deploying theories drawn largely from studying the European case) to become much more comprehensive in coverage. To be sure, when it comes to which regions are being compared, then it is still most common to find Europe as one of the comparators – the European Union (EU) compared to somewhere else rather than two non-European cases being compared to each other. And there still often seems to be an implicit understanding that the end point of any “successful” project of regional integration will end up looking something like the EU. Thus, for example, there is considerable talk about the *prospects* of regionalism in East Asia, when in reality there are already many existing forms of regionalism there – they are just not EU style regionalism.¹ Despite this, and in terms of the scope of coverage and comparison as well as through the development of broadly defined “New Regionalism” theories and approaches, we can say that the study of regions has gone global.

Our intention here is to build on this scholarship – and at times to challenge parts of it. In keeping with these developments in the literature, this collection starts from the understanding that the EU remains highly significant. This is partly because as the most institutionalized regional organization it provides a solid example of actual regional governance. It is also because the experience of the EU informs policy debates elsewhere over how to emulate the successes and/or avoid some of the problems of Europe in the construction of regional forms. And it is also because, through contingent aid and “interregional” partnership arrangements, there is a deliberate and active attempt to promote the EU “model” of regional governance in other parts of the world (Farrell 2009; Börzel and Risse 2009).

Nevertheless, we also start from the assumption that there is much more to regional governance than Europe, and other cases (including other processes of regional governance that go beyond a relatively narrow EU definition of what is Europe) should not be overlooked. Moreover, whilst one of our objectives is to search for any signs of convergence in forms of governance, we are also

interested in identifying and explaining difference; difference in terms of forms of governance and also in the extent to which something called "the region" is the locus of environmental governance in the first place. What we really want to know is whether the very existence of other regional arrangements and cooperative efforts is sufficient to explain some of the differences that we find in the case studies in this volume. Those differences are manifest not just in institutional form but also in the *kinds* of policies that are adopted to address what are often similar problems across regions. What, for example, explains why both the EU and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have moved towards harmonization of standards, albeit at different speeds, whereas these have been resisted in North and South America?

The first aim of this collection is quite simply to provide a range of case studies from across the world to provide a rich resource base for comparative analysis. Having done this, we are in a position to move to our second and third objectives. Scholars of regionalism have alluded to the potential efficacy of regional level solutions to transnational environmental issues (for example, see Hettne 2005: 549). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has also observed that regions have become "more visible" in the broader terrain of global environmental governance (UNEP 2007: 29). Yet while (some) regional theorists think that the environment is important, and (some) environmental governance specialists think that the regional level is important, this apparent importance is not matched by a wealth of comparative studies of regional environmental governance. Thus, our second aim is to bring a regional dimension to the study of environmental governance, while our third is to bring the environment into the study of regional governance.

(Identifying) the case studies

As the chapters in this volume show, environmental issues are not only important in their own right (in terms of finding common regional responses to shared transnational environmental challenges), but they also impact on an array of other policy arenas that are at the heart of the study of regionalization, regionalism and governance. If we need to "learn more about the 'whys' and 'hows' of regionalisms" as Hettne and Söderbaum suggest (2000: 458) (recalling our second objective) and think of the role of regional institutions as an "important component of the global architecture for environmental governance" (Alagappa 2000: 255) (this being our third goal), then clearly we need to study actual cases of regional environmental governance. Yet, with the exception of extensive studies of the European Union, detailed analysis of regional environmental arrangements is a fairly new and thinly populated area of academic investigation.

Thus, as noted above, the first and most important goal (and contribution) is to provide detailed case studies that can form the basis for comparison. Identifying what exactly those case studies should be is not as easy as it might seem. This project is part of a wider, tripartite study of different dimensions of

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important goal (and contribution) is the basis for comparison. Identify- e is not as easy as it might seem. study of different dimensions of

comparative regional governance that also considers economic and security dimensions.² Each of the sub-projects is designed to work as a comparative study in its own right, whilst also ultimately allowing for comparisons across the three issue areas. Thus, while each issue-based project needs its own framework for comparison between regions, the broader project as a whole needs to be able to compare similar regions across these different issue areas as well. That is, the broader comparative project will also explore how forms of environmental, economic and security governance differ from each other in any given region.

To complicate matters even further, this is not a study of regional *institutions* but of forms of regional *governance*. Drawing on a range of standard definitions, governance is broadly accepted by the authors in this volume as referring to structures of authority that manage collective environmental problems and resolve conflicts between stakeholders. This focus on forms of governance allows us to consider the variety of processes, mechanisms and actors at play in regional environmental arrangements in addition to formal institutional cooperation. This means that modes of governance will be both vertical and horizontal, the former articulated through conventional multilateral and intergovernmental arrangements and the latter through a multiplicity of transnational public and private authority arrangements and networks.

The chapters in this book focus primarily on the former, seeking to make sense of the often complex ways in which governments have moved to construct institutional arrangements and rule systems on environmental problems. This is not because we think that the more informal, networked, horizontal modes of governance are unimportant. It is rather to draw some analytical boundaries to enable these first steps in building a comparative approach. But, crucially, the contributing authors also recognize that the region under investigation in any particular case is not defined solely by any existing regional organization. Indeed, a key research question for the three sub-projects as a whole is whether the region under investigation changes (or should change) on an issue-by-issue basis or, to put it another way, should the regional form and definition be shaped by its function?

As part of the planning for this larger project, to establish which case studies were either required or appropriate, we took a pragmatic approach and divided the world into four major areas – Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East, and Asia – and asked specialists on each of these areas to tell us what the region (or regions) for investigation within those areas should be. To ensure coherence and to allow for comparison both within the environmental cases and across the three subject areas that together constitute the larger project, each individual chapter writer was asked to address a common set of questions, but with freedom to emphasize which deserved most attention in the specific case at hand. In addition to identifying and defining the "boundaries" of the region itself, and explaining the environmental (or other) challenges facing that particular region, the authors were tasked with identifying the key regional actors with a particular emphasis on those who were the key drivers and promoters of the regional level as an effective form of governance. In some of the studies, this

translated into a specific focus on the role of "great powers" and their attitude to (and policies toward) regional governance. While "great powers" in this sense refers primarily to the more/most powerful powers within the region itself, the role and significance of extra-regional powers also proved to be a key concern.³ As the chapters here show, those extra-regional actors, and drivers of regionalism, include not only states but regional banks, global institutions, and inter-regional actors like the EU. Finally, the authors were asked to identify what had been done in concrete terms to establish regional forms of governance and what this might mean for our understanding of "region" defined variously in terms of actual institutional *de jure* cooperation, coordination and organization, informal *de facto* integration, and/or the creation of a shared understanding of what the region (as well as "a" region) is or should be.

Regionalizing the study of environmental governance

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the findings of this collection is that there is no single approach to regional cooperation and governance. Rather, there is a multiplicity of intergovernmental regional environmental efforts, some highly institutionalized and others not; some embedded in broader regional efforts and others specific only to environmental policy; some fragmented and some coherent; some constrained by the efforts or demands of individual regional powers – hegemonic regionalism – and others more equitable or balanced.

What the chapters also show is the difficulty in finding what Young (2002) called the right "fit" – what is the most effective site of authority for environmental governance. Notwithstanding the many differences in neofunctional, intergovernmental and (neo)liberal institutional theories of regionalism, there is something of a consensus in the regionalism literature that regions emerge and cohere through the search to find collective answers to common problems in a world of "complex interdependence" (Keohane and Nye 1977) where national level legislation and action alone cannot attain (contested understandings of) national objectives. As Ralf Nordbeck puts it in his chapter in this volume: "The rationale for 'going regional' is linked to the belief that the right combination of country-based and transnational measures in turn leads to outcomes that are superior to those that are achievable based on national measures alone."

Implicit in this is an understanding that for a range of reasons, such effective collective action cannot always take place at the global level. Or put another way, when the global seems to fail (or, at least, is not an appropriate level to deal with collective action problems) and states simply cannot solve their own environmental problems through unilateral action or where scaling up has the potential to deliver more effective outcomes, then the "goldilocks principle" kicks in; regionalism becomes attractive as it is neither "too hot" nor "too cold" but "just right" (Katzenstein 2002: 104).

To return to the specific environmental case, it is not too controversial to argue that, on some environmental issues at least, attempts to construct binding

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and effective forms of governance at the global level have been less than wholly successful. But though the global might not always seem to function as an effective level of governance or site of authority, identifying the most effective alternative "fit" is far from easy. Using a functional approach, Young argued that there could be multiple sites of authority depending on the specific environmental issue at hand – some "above the local level but below the national level" or "above the national level but below the global level" (Young 2002: 11).⁴

And another conclusion that can be drawn from the contributions here is that if the region might be the solution, identifying which level of region remains hugely problematic both in terms of policy-making and in terms of our research focus. In particular, there remains a tendency – not everywhere but widely enough to warrant comment here – for environmental governance regions to be shaped (or perhaps trapped) by pre-existing understandings of region that have been established and/or defined by other means and issues. This can result in the region (often then defined in institutional as well as geographic terms) being too big, too small or simply inappropriate and ineffective for dealing with regional environmental challenges and transboundary externalities. In short, there can be something of a mismatch between the *de jure* region of cooperation and institutionalization, and the *de facto* region of actual shared environmental challenges that require transnational solutions – an issue to which we return towards the end of this introduction.

There is also much more to understanding the genesis of regional cooperation on environmental issues – or what we have called the "rationale for going regional" – than regional actors establishing the right size and fit. In addition to establishing what the region level actually is in each case study, the authors focus on the (largely institutional) form that cooperation takes at that level of "region" and, on the assumption that things are likely to change over time, the trajectory of regional environmental governance. This depth of investigation enables us to consider the extent to which environmental governance is region-specific, and the extent to which factors such as the nature of environmental problems and the international and global political drivers of regional policy efforts result in similar rule systems across regions.

The national, the regional and the global

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the case studies here is that the drivers of regional efforts on environmental governance are rarely entirely local or endogenous, even though the specific forms of those governance arrangements are influenced by local and region-specific political and social factors (an issue to which we return below). Almost all of the case studies explored here suggest that regional efforts have been influenced by the changing global context of environmental politics. Indeed, it is notable that even in those cases where "region" has taken on some degree of formality, few of the founding documents have included references to environmental protection or to sustainable development.

Environmental regionalism is predominantly a post-Stockholm phenomenon. As the chapters here reveal, there were few regional policy efforts on environmental protection prior to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in the Swedish capital. The 1972 Stockholm Declaration noted in passing that a "growing class of environmental problems, because they are regional ... in extent ... [would] require extensive cooperation among nations ... in the common interest" (United Nations 1972a). The Stockholm Action Plan for the Human Environment made various references to the importance of regional efforts on environmental protection. It recommended, among other things, that governments be encouraged to "consult ... regionally whenever environmental conditions or development plans in one country could have repercussions in one or more neighbouring countries" (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment 1972: Recommendation 3) and it identified a range of issue areas to which regional efforts could make a contribution.⁵ The UN General Assembly Resolution that established the United Nations Environment Programme at the end of 1972 on the recommendation of the Stockholm Conference spoke of the "particular need for the rapid development of regional cooperation" on environmental issues (United Nations General Assembly 1972: para. IV.4). It also decided that the new Environment Fund established under UNEP auspices would be used, among other things, to fund regional monitoring and to provide assistance to regional environmental institutions.

Since Stockholm, the practices and procedures of international environmental diplomacy and negotiation have become marked by the expectation that "regions" are a logical and "natural" location for policy responses and government action, and that they also serve to expand opportunities for political debate. This emphasis on regional bodies was picked up in *Our Common Future*, the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Report). The Commission proposed that existing regional organizations should be strengthened in their ability to deal with environmental degradation and unsustainable development and suggested that "in some areas ... especially among developing countries, new regional ... arrangements will be needed to deal with transboundary environmental resource issues" (WCED 1987: Chapter 12, para. 29). In contrast to the Stockholm Declaration, the 1992 Rio Declaration adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) made no mention of regional arrangements. This is perhaps not surprising as the Declaration's primary concern was with principles rather than processes. In Agenda 21, the lengthy program of action adopted at Rio, references to regional level actions appear in each of the environmental issue chapters but this takes the form, in the main, of a checklist of scales of activity rather than reflecting any particular attention to the importance of regional organizations and arrangements. Even Chapter 38, which deals with international institutional arrangements, talks about "regional economic and technical cooperation organizations," "regional and subregional organizations" and the UN regional commissions only in the most general of terms.

a post-Stockholm phenomenon. International policy efforts on environmental issues were noted in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, which noted that environmental problems, because they are global, require cooperation among nations ...

The Stockholm Action Plan for the 1990s stressed the importance of regional environmental cooperation, among other things, that environmental problems often arise only when environmental protection could have repercussions on other regions. The World Commission on Environment and Development identified a range of issue areas for regional environmental cooperation.⁵ The UN General Assembly Environment Programme at the Stockholm Conference spoke of the "importance of regional cooperation" on environmental issues (UNEP, 1972: para. IV.4). It also noted that regional initiatives under UNEP auspices would be used to monitor and to provide assistance

to developing countries. The importance of international environmental cooperation is marked by the expectation that regional environmental policy responses and governance will be developed and opportunities for political action will be picked up in *Our Common Future*. The Commission on Environment and Development proposed that existing regional initiatives be strengthened in their ability to deal with environmental issues and suggested that regional environmental cooperation among neighboring countries, new regional ... (UNEP, 1972: para. 29). In contrast to the Stockholm Declaration adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) made no mention of regional environmental cooperation, it is not surprising as the Declaration's focus was on global processes. In Agenda 21, the Commission on Environment and Development's references to regional level actions are scattered throughout the chapters but this takes the form, in general, of reflecting any particular regional environmental organizations and arrangements. The Commission on Environment and Development's regional institutional arrangements, such as regional environmental cooperation organizations," and the UN regional commissions

The Johannesburg Plan of Action prepared for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development improves on this generic approach to regional institutions in two ways. Chapter XI includes an (admittedly short) section – four paragraphs – on the importance of strengthening institutional arrangements for sustainable development at the regional level. It calls for better coordination, improved capacity-building, and adequate financing for the implementation of regional sustainable development programs. Two further chapters are devoted to specific regional programs: Chapter VIII on Africa and Chapter IX on "other regional initiatives" covering Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, West Asia and Europe.

None of the declarations and programs adopted at Stockholm, Rio and Johannesburg are legally binding on governments and while they refer in various ways to the importance of regional institutions and cooperative efforts, they do not mandate such efforts. Several of the chapters in this volume point to the importance of international environmental legal frameworks, particularly the so-called Rio conventions, as drivers of some of the earlier attempts to develop regional environmental cooperation. In perhaps the most extreme case, Dora Kulauzov and Alexios Antypas argue that there have been virtually no indigenous drivers of regional environmental governance, with the initiatives being almost entirely externally driven. The external drivers of regional cooperation have also come through the influence of donor governments and organizations either as supporters of regional efforts or as *demandeurs* of such efforts. This is perhaps most clearly shown in the EU's initiatives beyond the boundaries of the organization in the "European Neighborhood." But, as Ashok Swain notes, regional efforts in South Asia have been all but dependent on funding from external donors as well – not least because of India's apparent preference for bilateral rather than multilateral action, and fear on the part of the region's smaller states of being dominated by India.

While external drivers have clearly been influential in the genesis of at least some of the regional efforts on environmental cooperation explored in this volume, factors local to regions should not be overlooked. External drivers rarely lay down a solid basis for a framework of regionalization. Increased awareness of the nature and extent of environmental degradation within regions clearly drives demands for cooperation among governments as a way to provide better environmental outcomes, to avoid or minimize transboundary externalities such as pollution, and to manage the allocation of shared resources. Avoiding tension and conflict over scarce resources and/or responsibility for transboundary pollution has also been an important factor in the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Turkey, South Asia, Africa and the Middle East and, to a lesser degree perhaps, in East Asia. In these regions (or parts thereof) at least, it is not so much a case of the environment presenting a new security challenge – although it often does – as the environment also being very much central to "old" security concerns such as border disputes and war.

Several of the chapters in this volume also suggest that environmental impacts have not always been the only or even, sometimes, the primary driving impulse for regional cooperation. Yet this is not to suggest that environmental concerns

have been epiphenomenal. Indeed one of the key findings in this volume is that even when the initial impulse for regional cooperation on environmental issues is tied up with other demands, such as those associated with security or with peace processes, environmental arrangements frequently become increasingly authoritative, legitimate and important in broader region-building efforts.

This suggests that while understanding the initial drivers is important, the continuation and expansion of regional environmental cooperation involves a more complex set of assessments. As Kulauzov and Antypas observe in Chapter 7, intergovernmental cooperation is often a challenge, even in issue areas such as the environment that are often thought less likely to provoke animosities and rivalries. In effect, then, we need to ask what the pay-off is for governments in continuing to engage in regionalism and intergovernmental cooperation on the environment. From an institutionalist perspective, the rationale for "going regional" is assumed to be a functionalist one, based on claims about the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperative endeavors for dealing with transboundary environmental challenges and with shared problems of environmental degradation, habitat and species protection and conservation. Collective regional responses that can facilitate knowledge transfer, build expertise and reduce transaction costs are perceived to confer efficiency advantages. Thus Burchill argues that "the relatively small geographical areas involved with a regional arrangement allows for a more efficient allocation of resources and delegating of tasks when it comes to problem solving procedures" (2007: 3). At the same time, countries within a region are assumed to have common histories and shared cultures and values that will make cooperation among them easier and more likely. Strand suggests, for example, that regional governance arrangements are better able to specialize in the kinds of environmental problems that face countries with "shared interests that are based on a shared geography" (2004: 5).

There is a normative dimension to this efficiency argument as well. On one level, regional arrangements have, in theory at least, the potential to be more legitimate – and therefore more efficient – than global ones because of their proximity to those who are either expected to comply with rule systems (the rule-followers) or who are affected by the implementation of those rules, standards and various programs and project activity. On another level, we noted above the broad agreement that regions seem to work best when they are seen to offer the right "fit" in between the national and the global. For Mattli (1999), in terms of economic regionalism at least, integration is most likely to occur (and cohere) when the supply of intergovernmental institutions on the part of regionalizing political elites meets the demand for regional level coordination and action from below.⁶ Crucially, the regional level is often seen as more legitimate than other (i.e. global) forms of regulation. For example, students of Europe have argued that its legitimacy in part stems from the protection that EU level regulation provides for European social welfare models to persist despite the liberalizing and privatizing edicts of neoliberal globalization (Hay and Rosamond 2000). Thus the EU acts as a "filter for globalisation" (Wallace 2002: 149).

In a similar vein, proponents of the idea of "regulatory regionalism" argue that regionalism has gained legitimacy as a consequence of the failings of both unregulated global capitalism as epitomized by economic crises and global level action to respond to those crises (Jayasuriya 2004). Moreover, there is a sense that the solutions suggested and in some places imposed by the Bretton Woods organizations after the various regional crises of 1997 and 1998 represented an attempt to impose the power, values and ideologies of the West on recalcitrant regions and states that had strayed away from the "correct" Western mode of neoliberal capitalism. To make matters worse, many of those Western states themselves did not seem to adhere to the same levels of freedom and liberalization to which they were insisting developing states adhere (Higgott 1998).

The issue of legitimacy is crucial in the environmental sphere as well. This is a long-standing debate at all levels of governance including global and regional. As we saw at the fifteenth Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009, deep divisions remain over who should take the primary responsibility for global environmental issues: those who have caused problems in the past or those who are causing them now and/or in the future; those who are causing the problems but trying to develop or those who have already developed and have the wherewithal to do something about it. This official Chinese report on Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's speech at the Copenhagen summit provides a good snapshot of the ways in which many developing countries have pursued the question of responsibility, and therefore legitimacy, at the global level:

Developed countries account for 80 percent of the total global carbon dioxide emissions since the Industrial Revolution over 200 years ago. If we all agree that carbon dioxide emissions are the direct cause for climate change, then it is all too clear who should take the primary responsibility. Developing countries only started industrialization a few decades ago and many of their people still live in abject poverty today. It is totally unjustified to ask them to undertake emission reduction targets beyond their due obligations and capabilities in disregard of historical responsibilities, per capita emissions and different levels of development.

(Bi 2009)

The contributions to this collection show that in general, there is a widespread acceptance that environmental challenges are real, clear and present dangers. Perhaps not surprisingly, the more local and visible those dangers are, the stronger the commitment to do something – and do something quickly. But the recognition that less tangible environmental challenges need to be met is also more or less entrenched. Nevertheless, the contributions also show that there remains a feeling in at least some of the regions under discussion that both global discourse and policy are being driven by the most powerful actors/states to suit their own interests, to prevent the emergence and development of weaker and less powerful states, or both. Thus, the regional level can be seen in some

cases to be a more legitimate site of authority and less subject to the power and will of the West than either regulation at the global level, or engaging in bilateral aid programs with major environmental donors in the West.⁷

Shared views about identity and cultural values also influence modes of regionalism. This is most prominent in Southeast Asia where the so-called ASEAN way of diplomacy relies on claims about the social practices and mores of Southeast Asian village life that are projected into the realm of the international or multilateral. This allows member states to claim a common and shared socio-cultural history to justify their approach to regional cooperation based on consensus and quiet diplomacy, non-interference, disapproval of open criticism, and a reluctance to move forward until all participants are comfortable in doing so. As Lorraine Elliott argues in her chapter on East Asia, this has been a driving force behind the soft institutionalism of Southeast Asia and has imposed restrictions on the extent to which regional environmental policy is regulatory rather than advisory.

The chapters in this volume reveal that "going regional" can also be a function of both political and normative drivers. We can categorize these, for analytical purposes, in reactive and proactive terms. Some of those reactive impulses have been explored above, where regional efforts can deliver material gains in response to the expectations of donor governments and organizations. Reactive approaches to environmental regionalism are also bound up in a kind of status game to demonstrate that "we too" have regional institutions. In other words, states sometimes move towards regional governance arrangements for status gains. The normative and political impulses that encourage governments to take (proactive) steps to cooperate on environmental issues are associated not just with the need to avoid environmental externalities but with building regional identity, with building trust and with enhancing social capital within a region sometimes in the context of other kinds of political tensions or even outright conflict. Kulauzov and Antypas draw particular attention in their chapter to environment arrangements in the Middle East where governments otherwise very much at odds, to put it mildly, sit around the same table.

Form, function and efficacy

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that regions are also "increasingly ... place[s] where business gets done" (Fry 2000: 123). Indeed, this "doing of business" is one of the main themes in the chapters in this volume. The institutionalist approach to regionalism characterizes governance arrangements primarily in terms of the key functions that they perform. Those functions fall into three broad categories: regional organizations and institutions act as knowledge-brokers to set the regional environmental agenda, as negotiation-facilitators to shape environmental cooperation, and as capacity-builders to make regional environmental cooperation work (see Biermann and Bauer 2005). To varying degrees, the regional arrangements explored in this volume undertake all these functions although the *extent* to which they do so and the extent to which they

y and less subject to the power and global level, or engaging in bilateral efforts in the West.⁷

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are successful is influenced by issues of capacity and issues of politics, to which we return below.

The chapters in this volume show that problems of capacity – ranging from material resources through to knowledge and expertise – clearly have some impact on what governments are able to achieve through regional environmental arrangements. Kulauzov and Antypas suggest that without the capacity provided by external funding arrangements in at least parts of the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it is doubtful that cooperative efforts would be sustained. Elliott also points to the challenges for regional arrangements in Northeast Asia that come with reliance on the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). In conditions where there is an absence of technical capacity for implementation and monitoring, for example, we might hypothesize either that governments are less likely to adopt regional rule systems that involve robust harmonized standards or that those rule systems are less likely to be successfully applied. As well as providing some basis for understanding difference, comparative regionalism also points to the rather tantalizing functional–institutional issue of trans-regional policy convergence. This raises the question about whether there is something particular about environmental problems, and the global context within which those problems are constructed and addressed, that inspires initially discrete regional cooperative arrangements to converge around similar policy options.

The extent and nature of regional governance on environmental issues will also be influenced by collective views among member states about the nature and purpose of multilateralism in intra-regional diplomacy. The norms of inter-governmentalism – or what Zürn (2004: 268) characterizes as a traditionalist approach to multilateralism – translate to thinner forms of regionalism in which the values and practices of sovereignty remain central to regional arrangements. Crucially, these norms or approaches to multilateralism are not “democratic,” in that the position of major regional powers or regional hegemons matter more than those of others. We see this particularly in the role of India in South Asia, Brazil in South America, and the US in North America.

Indeed, perhaps the single most important collective conclusion is that power in regional environmental governance remains asymmetric, and the asymmetric distribution of power really does matter. This finding fits with considerations of the significance of hegemons in the wider literature on what drives and obstructs regional integration (Hurrell 1995b). Put bluntly, the political expectations and interests of regional powers or hegemons are often a key factor influencing the shape and extent of regional environmental cooperation. Most often, as in the examples of India, Brazil and the US above, the focus is on regional powers as impediments to the creation of effective regional environmental governance. But as Daniel Compagnon, Fanny Florémont and Isabelle Lamaud observe in their chapter on Sub-Saharan Africa, regional leadership can also result in more effective environmental governance schemes when that regional leader is committed to the project. The same is true (in a sense) of the impact of the EU’s commitment to finding collective solutions to environmental issues on accession

states, and the wider European neighborhood. Thus, we might suggest that if regional powers/hegemons are crucial determinants of the success or failure of regional initiatives, persuading the hegemon might be an effective way of promoting effective governance in the region as a whole.

Towards (divergent) convergence?

As each of the chapters here show, regional environmental governance is not static. Institutional forms can change, new policy and new policy models can be adopted, regional governance arrangements can become more (or possibly less) institutionalized and the focus of regional policy arrangements can expand to include new actors and participants. From an institutionalist perspective, this is a managerial and policy-driven process which raises broader questions about the "road to regionalism" or even to integration. This is an inquiry of long standing. Perhaps most famously, in the 1960s Balassa (1962) proposed a four-step model of integration beginning with a free trade area, leading to a customs union that would transform into a common market, then an economic union and finally full integration. We do not suggest here that there is a single path towards regional governance (or indeed, that Balassa was right), but there are some signs at least of a form of convergence within regions on the policies that governments adopt to address environmental issues.

For example, Adelina Kamal, a senior officer with the ASEAN Secretariat, has traced five "regionalizing" steps: comparing national experiences and disseminating knowledge on best practice; bridging national capacity gaps by providing technical assistance; developing standards and procedures to construct a coherent regionwide management regime; achieving regional economies of scale; and finally building regional institutions (Kamal 2004). In this volume, Debora VanNijnatten offers a similar five-step typology that anticipates a deepening of governance arrangements and practices, starting with information-sharing and moving through consultation, cooperation, and harmonization to integration. At the moment, it is simply too early to tell the extent to which these stages will form the basis of integrating moves across the world but in all of the case studies discussed in this volume – even those where there appears at first glance to be little actual regional institutional regulation and governance – we can identify at least the first three of these. And of course, even where there may be similar paths, this does not mean that there will necessarily be identical or even similar *forms* of consultation, cooperation and so on. As such, diversity and convergence may not be the contradiction in terms that they appear to be at first sight: convergence in process (stages of regional interaction) but continued divergence in types of regional arrangements at similar stages.

Despite the often different impulses for cooperation, the varied institutional and policy forms that characterize regional efforts and the quite different pace of intensification of regionalism, the case studies in this volume reveal a surprising coherence in the expectations that governments have of their cooperative efforts. The processes often start with fairly generic declarations of principles usually

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adopted by ministerial meetings. They then move to broad-based “action plans” that call initially for sharing of information on areas of common concern and then move, at different paces, to more robust efforts to pool rather than simply share experiences, to harmonize national programs and, in the most regionalized of cases, to establish regional standards and indicators and regional authorities to oversee and manage them. Along with this, one sees a burgeoning of working groups, meetings of senior officials, and other standard mechanisms of diplomatic engagement and cooperation. As VanNijnatten observes in her chapter on North America, and as Elliott explores in Northeast Asia, even in the absence of regional institutions and the presence of considerable caution about modes of engagement, an increasingly dense set of arrangements at the bilateral, trilateral and cross-border regional levels begin to connect in meaningful ways to construct a regional environmental “regime” of sorts.

Rethinking regionalism through an environmental lens

The final aim of this collection, but the starting point for the broader project of comparative regional governance as a whole, is to allow for a rethinking of understandings of region, regional integration, and regionalism per se. Isolating a single issue – be it the environment in this volume, or security or economics in the second and third volumes in this series – clearly puts us in a position to isolate the causes of and obstacles to “going regional” in that specific issue area. It also allows us to revisit some of the most basic questions in the study of regionalism. In some respects, to start to address these questions we have to return to the very beginning of this chapter and consider the development of theories of regionalism and the significance of the European experience.

When it comes to thinking about and studying the “European” region, then there is often an assumption that we know what the region actually is: the EU. But even here the identification of the EU as “Europe” does not wholly capture the full complexity of regional processes in Europe. Many European states are not members of the EU and membership of the EU can change, thus changing the parameters of the understanding of region.⁸ There are also different levels or constellations of integration within the EU itself – the Schengen Zone and the Euro Zone at the “national” level, and cross-border cooperation between local governments in Spain and France (Morata 1997) being just three examples. And despite the move towards a Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Lisbon Treaty, the “security region” in Europe has never wholly mapped onto the “region” defined institutionally as the EU.

Two key issues follow from this. First, where established regional organizations exist, security and economics have been the dominant drivers.⁹ Regional environmental cooperation thus either has to fit into pre-existing forms that might not be the best “fit” (as discussed above) or break the mould by creating something new and different – not an easy task. Second, in large parts of the world (and maybe even in Europe), identifying what the region actually is or should be remains very much a work in progress. For example, is the “region”

the Americas, with North America as a sub-region? Or is North America the most effective site of regional governance? If the latter, where does North America start and end? Add these two issues together and we come to an understanding that while continents may be created by nature, regions are formed by people; they are politically and socially constructed, changed, deconstructed and abandoned "subjects in the making" (Hettne 2005: 548). And these political constructs are as likely to subdivide continents as they are to work on continent-wide levels. When it comes to the environment, there can often be a disjuncture between the parameters of ecologically and politically defined loci of influence and action.

Perhaps the single biggest question for students of environmental regional governance (and the single biggest challenge for those who are trying to create it) is to ask whether it is best to try to solve common environmental problems within the parameters of existing institutions where means of managing transnational issues, a sense of "regionness"¹⁰ and trust already exist. Or whether solving common environmental challenges requires environment specific institutions where the nature of the region is shaped by the environmental challenges at hand.

In the search for answers to these questions (and many of the chapters in this book suggest that both approaches are pursued), we go back to some of the earliest thinking on the nature of regional integration in Europe in the postwar era – and it is worth reminding ourselves that the initial moves towards competing forms and conceptions of regionalism in postwar Europe were driven by considerations of preventing yet another major war on the continent more than anything else. Indeed, even before the end of World War II, the debate over the future of international organizations was taking shape, with Mitrany (1943) calling for form to follow function. International organization should not seek the "federal fallacy" (Mitrany 1965) but instead be characterized by multiple different organizations, with the membership, structure and form of each being defined by its purpose or function, taken forward by those with technical expertise in the specific area of concern.

Of course, this functional approach lost ground to the federal ambitions of people like Jean Monnet (sometimes referred to as the "father" of European unity) and Robert Schuman (see, for example, Schuman 1950), and the apparent inevitability of "spillover" through the evolution of earlier forms of functional cooperation into the EEC, the EC, and EU, and more recently through the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Yet this apparent "orthodoxy" was subsequently itself challenged as "new regionalism" scholars moved beyond the European case and rejected the necessary and inevitable spillover into an EU style form of regional governance in all cases. Thus, by focusing on the possibility of multiple forms, layers and levels of integration, new regionalism scholarship in some ways repeated some of the basic questions that informed the "old" debates of the 1940s and 1950s in Europe.

We have identified a number of key and basic questions relating to the study of regionalism in general. How do we identify the parameters of what a region

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is, should be or might be? Does the understanding of “region” differ according to the issue under consideration? Can we identify spillover from one functional area to another? In the specific case of the environment, we can add two other questions: is establishing environmental regional governance aided or constrained by the existence of “other” forms of regionalism? And does the environment play any role in establishing or deepening regional identities?

Predictably, but still in some ways disappointingly, the answers to these questions are somewhat mixed in the chapters in this collection. There does seem to be evidence to suggest that the existing mechanisms of regionalism, the legitimacy of working at the regional level, and a related shared regional identity have contributed to the establishment of environmental governance in Europe. In other parts of the world, the lessons are much less clear cut. For example, the logic of building a number of separate environmental regional mechanisms in the Americas is, at best, questionable. As with a number of other regions, the understanding of where North America starts and stops does not seem to have much in common with the sources of and potential solutions to transnational environmental challenges, but is instead defined by other criteria. It might be a cliché to say that transnational environmental challenges do not have much regard for political boundaries – but clichés often persist because they are based in truth. While governments and laws can establish the boundaries of an economic region, this is much less possible in ecological terms. While this might suggest that the subdivisions of, say, Asia into South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Central Asia (and so on) create regions that are too small, they also in some respects create regions that are too big, with some of the most effective cooperative mechanisms being established at “sub-sub-regional” levels to manage specific and discrete issues.

The chapters also show that environmental cooperation is not always just a derivative of some other regional initiative. In some cases, the environment can actually be a spur to cooperation where other forms of regional interaction are at best sparse. Perhaps the most extreme example is the Middle East, where the environment provides just about the only issue that will lead to regional leaders putting their (considerable) differences aside and sitting round the same table. A number of the authors in this volume also explore whether the challenges of climate change, worsening desertification and water scarcity create a momentum for greater intra-regional engagement. Here, there is a parallel with the focus on economic crises as a driver of regional integration in the “regulatory regionalism” literature, and the need to build a regionalist Europe to make sure that the conditions that gave rise to World War II could never exist again.

The chapters also show that environmental issues can be extremely important in establishing or reinforcing regional identities, in building trust and in enhancing social capital. Within the broader literature on regional integration, there is a general consensus that identities matter – either as a source of driving demand for regionalism in the first place or as something that binds a region together and makes it cohere and work once the region has been established for other reasons. Whose identity matters (or matters most) remains open to question. Much of the

identity debate in both the early debates over Europe and new regionalist conceptions focuses on political and economic elites rather than popular opinion. But the establishment of an idea of "who we are" – or perhaps self identification of the region based on a common conception of "who we are not" – is generally thought of as an essential component of region-building. Efforts to identify the basis of regional identities have typically focused either on common histories, cultures, and experiences within a given area, or on the identification of common enemies and challenges – the "other" (Adler 1997). It is in the latter – the "other" – that the environment seems to have most significance in terms of identity formation; on the one hand the immediacy of challenges engendering a feeling of "all being in the same boat," and on the other (in some parts of the world at least) uniting to resist the imposition of dominant "Western" norms.

This suggests that environmental issues are, or at least can be important in giving meaning and purpose to regions. In this view, "going regional" and establishing regional environmental governance arrangements is a form of performativity, a way of "being" a region rather than just "becoming" one. It contributes to the process of what Väyrynen calls filling the region with substance (2003: 39). In a number of the case studies, the authors note that environmental issues often become part of key high-profile regional visions. This is certainly the case in parts of the MENA region, in South America and in East Asia. As Elliott points out, the declaration by the member states of ASEAN that the region is a "single ecosystem" does not stand up to scientific scrutiny. But it demonstrates a regional claim to authority over policy areas and claiming the right to decide what happens in that geographic space. There is not just a sense of "we-feeling" as Deutsch (1954: 45) put it, but also a sense of we (as region) "doing." Thus, while identity might be important in establishing the basis of regional action, conversely action itself is likely to build identity and produce a perception of common destiny or what Khong Yuen Foong refers to as "regionness" (1997: 322).

Conclusion: glass half full or half empty?

We seem to see a growing awareness of the importance of the regional level as a site of environmental governance – indeed, we should say regional levels (as plural) given the activity that is taking place at sub-regional levels (however defined). We also seem to see environmental issues as contributing to the sense of regionness that might ultimately spill over into other forms of regional activity in those parts of the world where conflict, rather than cooperation, have dominated regional relations. If the glass is not half full – then at least it seems to be in the process of being filled.

But of course, that is not the only story, and it would be wrong to conclude this introductory chapter on a wholly optimistic note – not least because the chapters that follow collectively point to a range of obstacles to the establishment of effective regional governance mechanisms. Perhaps most clearly of all, there is an obvious gap between the ambitions and success of environmental

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cooperation because of a number of crucial deficits. These include a lack of resources, technology and expertise; a lack of capacity (including the capacity to implement rules and guidelines and the capacity for environmental bureaucrats to act as policy entrepreneurs); and a sometimes limited understanding of how environmental issues link with a whole range of other policy areas. There is also a lack of will or, at very least, uneven political will. Security and economic issues still dominate when it comes to coordinating transnational relations, whilst considerations of domestic political stability and legitimacy in both democratic and authoritarian states still often means that environmental issues are put to one side entirely or, at least, relegated to lower priority on the public policy agenda. As already noted in this chapter, if dominant regional states are not prepared to act, then this can be a powerful determinant of what will happen in terms of regional environmental governance (or perhaps more correctly, the lack of it).

It is salutary to remember that attempts to find new effective forms of governance have historically typically followed the failure of the previous order to prevent catastrophe. From the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück that attempted to create a Westphalian Peace based on a new secular statist conception of international relations and international order after the 30 and 80 years wars through to the formation of the G20 in the wake of the global economic crisis of 2008, the “never again” principle has been a central component in the reorganization of global governance. As we have noted, this was also the basic founding principle in seeking to build a regionalist Europe in the 1940s and 1950s – a Europe that had been in almost constant turmoil and conflict since at least the French revolutionary wars turned into the continental Napoleonic Wars at the end of the eighteenth century (if not before). It would be deeply worrying (and quite possibly irredeemable) if the world had to suffer from similar levels of environmental catastrophe before effective forms of governance are created at the regional level.

Notes

- 1 A point often made in presentations by Professor Wang Zhengyi of Beijing University.
- 2 This project was funded by the GARNET Network of Excellence on Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation, which is in turn funded by a grant under the EU Framework VI programme. For more details see www.garnet-eu.org/.
- 3 Of course in North America, the global great power is also the regional great power.
- 4 Young’s functional institutionalist, and somewhat vertical approach to what constitutes the “global” differs from the normative and horizontal approach advocated by scholars such as Lipschutz (see Conca and Lipschutz 1993 for example) and Shiva (1993, 2000).
- 5 These included pest control, livestock management, tropical forest management, preservation of genetic resources, fisheries, shared water resources, water pollution and waste management.
- 6 As Mattli was concerned with economic drivers of regionalism, his focus was primarily on the demand for regional level governance from non-state economic elites.
- 7 At other times, the regional can also become a microcosm in which broader fears about dominance, interests and power are played out – an issue we return to when we discuss regional powers and hegemony below.

- 8 Perhaps at some point to include Turkey – including those parts of Turkey that have commonly been thought of as lying outside the continent of Europe.
- 9 Security defined here in traditional terms of preventing inter-state war rather than conceptions of “new” and/or “human” security.
- 10 Defined by Hettne as “how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of a region” (2005: 544).