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1

Introduction

Why Rethink Regionalism?

Since the return of regionalism in the late 1980s, there has been a global upsurge of various forms of regionalist projects. The widening and deepening of the European Union (EU) is the most prominent example, but there was a revitalization or expansion of many other regionalist projects as well, such as the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). More or less every government in the world is engaged in regionalism, but regionalist processes also involve a rich variety of business and civil society actors, resulting in a multitude of formal as well as informal regional processes in most fields of contemporary politics.

The basic motivation for this book is that more than six decades of academic debate has failed to generate satisfactory answers to questions about the origins, logic and consequences of regionalism. Regionalism means different things to different people in different contexts and time periods and, for some observers, regionalism may not mean much at all. There are also fundamental disagreements regarding how regionalism should be studied and compared, not least over whether regionalisms in different parts of the world are unique and discrete phenomena, or part of a broader and more universal logic.

This book seeks to rethink regionalism and so transcend the deep intellectual and disciplinary rivalries that have limited our understanding about what regions are, how they evolve and

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consolidate, how we should compare them and what significance they have in a world in flux. Any rethinking of regionalism is closely connected to the way we study, conceptualize and theorize regions and regionalism. This book offers a comprehensive yet general approach for thinking about regions and regionalism rather than a fine-tuning or ‘testing’ of dependent/independent variables within a parsimonious but often reductionist theory. The ambition is not to build a grand theory of regionalism, but to deal analytically and comparatively, in a non-reductionist way, with a multidimensional phenomenon.

The rethinking of regionalism offered here is built on four interacting perspectives: regionalism viewed historically, spatially, comparatively and globally. These four interrelated ways of rethinking regionalism are rooted in reflectivist and constructivist scholarship. The argument is not by any means that rationalist and mainstream theories are wrong. Rather, this book argues that formulating alternative perspectives is both possible and relevant, not least to provide answers to fundamental questions demanding alternative and arguably more creative answers. Prevailing rationalist theories, of course, are social constructions and are based on particular ways of theorizing, language, power and culture. By implication, there are always complementary ways to understand and explain regions and regionalism. Subsequent sections of this chapter outline and motivate the four components of rethinking regionalism. Before this, a few core assumptions and concepts need to be elaborated.

One weakness in previous scholarship (especially that rooted in liberal thought) is that too often regions are considered desirable and ‘good’. That regionalism can solve a variety of collective action dilemmas is indisputable, but it is equally clear that it may sometimes be exploitative, reinforce asymmetric power relations or lead to a range of detrimental outcomes. Hence different theories point in different directions and from a normative point of view it should not be assumed beforehand that regionalism is either positive or negative.

The concern of this book is with so-called ‘world’ or ‘international’ regions, which are viewed to be territorial (in contrast with non-territorial) units or subsystems larger than the ‘state’ but smaller than the ‘global’ system. Such regions come in many varieties and may group two or more countries and sometimes even whole continents, such as Africa or Europe. These world

regions should be distinguished from subnational regions that exist between the ‘local’ and the ‘national’ level, such as Flanders or Quebec.

‘Regionalism’ represents the body of ideas, values and policies that are aimed at creating a region, or it can mean a type of world order. Regionalism in the first sense usually is associated with a regional project or regional organization. ‘Regionalization’ refers to the process of cooperation, integration and cohesion that creates a regional space (issue-specific or general). In the most basic sense, it may mean no more than a deepening or widening of activity, trade, peoples, ideas, or conflict at the regional level (Fawcett 2005a: 25). There is a strong tendency in this field of study to focus on state-led regionalism and regional organizations in contrast to the processes of regionalization. This is problematic since there is a need to better understand the processes by which regions are made and unmade (i.e. regionalization and region-building).

In terms of scope, this book has the ambition to be relevant to a range of policy areas in most regions of the world – even if the concrete and empirical evidence necessarily is limited. In order to strike a balance between width, depth and focus, the main empirical illustrations deal with the policy fields of trade and development, peace and security, the environment and social policy in the most widely debated regions and sub-regions of the world, such as Africa, East and Southeast Asia, Europe, North and Latin America, and to some degree also the Middle East.

Rethinking Regional History

History is the first component of rethinking regionalism. Fawcett (2015: 1) is correct in that ‘work on regionalism rarely adopts a sustained historical perspective except in an introductory and incomplete way’. A common but misleading notion that regionalism is a phenomenon that ‘commenced’ in Europe after the First or Second World War has prevented scholars from understanding both its deep historical roots and its ‘global heritage’ (Acharya 2012). The short time horizon in most scholarship has exaggerated the role of formalized regional organizations at the expense of more fluid types of regionalization and region-building around the world.

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Even if the common distinction between old and new regionalism has inserted some historicity into the debate, there is considerable confusion in the study of regionalism about what is 'old' and what is 'new'. The distinction between old and new regionalism has been both badly misunderstood and misused, which has reinforced existing divisions in the field.

It is plausible to distinguish between old and new regionalism in a temporal, empirical, as well as theoretical sense (Söderbaum 2004). However, there are both continuities and similarities between 'old' and 'new' regionalism, which obviates rigid temporal distinctions. Many regional projects and regional organizations were initiated in the era of old regionalism (1950s–1970s) but were then renewed or re-inaugurated during the new regionalism (late 1980s–1990s), often under a new name or with an expanded membership. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to separate the historical from the contemporary. One of the pioneers of the study of new regionalism, Björn Hettne (1999: 8), argued that instead of identifying a new era or new wave of regionalism, 'I find 'the identification of new patterns of regionalization (coexisting with older forms) more relevant'; that is, new regionalism in the empirical instead of the temporal sense. A third meaning of new regionalism is related to theory. Often the adjective 'new' is added to distinguish theoretical novelties from older frameworks, as seen in the usage of 'new political economy', 'new political science', 'new security studies' and so forth. 'New regionalism' is employed by a wide range of scholars from different theoretical traditions (Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; Shaw et al. 2011), who try to move beyond 'old' (classical and orthodox) assumptions and methodologies. It follows that contemporary scholars who continue to draw on earlier and orthodox approaches only rarely adhere to this meaning of the new regionalism. Indeed, orthodox scholars sometimes seek to distance themselves from new regionalism scholarship.

As the next chapter makes clear, ideas and theories (and to some extent even concepts) of regionalism must be related to the political context in which they develop. Indeed, at least to some extent, theories of regionalism are historically contingent. For instance, neofunctionalism was the most influential theory during the old regionalism, and its origin should be understood in the context of two 'European' world wars and scepticism about the nation-state. This is not to deny the continued relevance of

neofunctionalism either in Europe or in a broader and comparative sense (Mattli 2005). Obviously, ideas and theories may diffuse through time and across regions.

Rethinking Regional Space

The second component of rethinking concerns space and scale. A territorial focus on the nation-state in mainstream thinking (i.e. methodological nationalism) has resulted in many superficial representations of spatial horizons and practices. Often, and especially in political science and economics, regions have been taken as pre-given, and in a rather reductionist sense, been reduced to states-led regional organizations and mechanisms.

The heavy focus on inter-state or supranational organizations is closely associated with rationalist and problem-solving research into what types of (pre-given) regions are the most functional, instrumental and efficient to ‘rule’ or ‘govern’. This perspective views regions and regional frameworks as ‘rational’ and interest-based responses to a number of ‘objective’ problems, such as security, development, trade or, more generally, globalization. Integral to this reasoning is the view that regions exist ‘out there’, identifiable through objective material structures, regional organizations and regional actors. This book by no means claims that pre-given regions and issues of institutional design are irrelevant. The fundamental problem is that the orthodox, fixed assumptions about regions and the prevailing, ‘problem-solving’ and ‘rationalist’ focus on regional organizations, crowd out alternative questions and answers as to how and why regions are formed, their inner logic and their significance for global politics.

Rethinking regional space implies transcending the simple view of regions as ‘aggregations of states’ sharing some degree of interdependence (Nye 1971). It also implies rejecting the view that regions are ‘containers’ or locations for social processes, dominated by state actors. One benefit of avoiding ‘the territorial trap of the state’ is that other spaces and scales receive more recognition (Agnew 1998: 2). Insights from critical geography and sociology teach us that regions simply are not backdrops, containers or locations, nor are they autonomous and fixed constructs operating above actors (Emerson 2014). Instead, regions are deeply embedded in the social dynamic of society: ‘They shape

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activities, ideas and decisions, which in turn shape conceptual and functional compartmentalizations of space' (Murphy 1991: 13; also see Paasi 2001). From this perspective, regions are constitutive of society itself, are viewed as social constructions and are held together by historically contingent interactions, shared beliefs and identities, norms and practices.

From such a constructivist perspective, the research puzzle is to understand and explain the process by which regions come into existence and are consolidated – so to speak, their 'becoming' – rather than describing a particular set of (problem-solving) activities and flows within a pre-given region. In other words, in the rethought perspective offered by this book, there are no 'natural' or 'given' regions. On the contrary, they are porous and made as well as unmade – intentionally or unintentionally, endogenously or exogenously – by collective human action and by shared beliefs and identity formation.

Viewing regions as socially constructed implies simultaneously that they are politically contested. And because regions are political and social constructs, devised by human (state and non-state) actors in order to protect or transform existing structures, they may fail, just like other social projects. Regions can be disrupted from within and from without, often by the same forces that built them up. Such political dimensions of regionalism draw attention to agency, which is crucial for any understanding of region-formation (Lorenz-Carl and Rempe 2013). Regionalism may emerge in order to achieve and protect crucial values, such as economic development, ecology and peace. Sometimes regionalism will help states to protect and achieve such values, whereas at other times the values are not ensured by the state. As a result, the nation-state will not necessarily be the main or only object of political allegiance (although sometimes it may be).

Furthermore, acknowledging that there are both winners and losers from regionalism and that regions can be manipulated for private gain, both by state and non-state actors, is also crucial. This implies that regionalism becomes a political struggle between various social forces over the definition of the region, how it should be organized politically, and its insertion into the global order. Alternative, transformative and counter-hegemonic visions of regionalism may emerge in response, depending on the dominant form of regionalism and who sets the agenda. In turn, this implies that nearly always there are a multitude of strategies

and ideas about a particular region, which mingle, merge and clash. This book provides the tools to understand such heterogeneous processes.

Rethinking Regional Comparison

There is an urgent need to rethink how to compare regionalism. Despite a growing number of specific comparisons of selected aspects of regionalism (especially regional institutions, regional complexes and regional orders) in selected regions (principally Europe and Asia), there is only a weak intellectual debate about the fundamentals of comparative research in the field (see De Lombaerde et al. 2010; De Lombaerde and Söderbaum 2013; Börzel and Risse 2016). There are deep contestations of what to compare, how to compare, and even why to compare at all, which limit our understanding of regions and theoretical innovation as well as the generation of cumulative knowledge. One of the main problems lies in the unresolved tension between universalism and particularism, which too often has resulted in Eurocentrism and parochialism. The third element in rethinking regionalism offered in this book will transcend these two pitfalls in favour of a non-Eurocentric and non-ethnocentric approach to comparative regionalism.

Eurocentrism can be understood as one of the systematic weaknesses in the study of regionalism (Acharya 2012; Söderbaum 2013). During the ‘old regionalism’, regional integration theories were developed for and from the European experience and then more or less re-applied or exported around the world. Different types of Eurocentric generalizations continue to influence and shape the research field. To some extent, the widening and deepening of the EU has led to worse Eurocentrism in comparison to the old regionalism. For many scholars European integration in general, and today’s EU in particular, has become a marker, a model and a paradigm from which to theorize, compare and design institutions as well as policy in most other regions of the world.

Indeed, anyone engaging with literature and policy on regional integration will detect that too often many other cases of regionalisms are compared – implicitly or explicitly – against a backdrop of European integration theory and practice. From such Eurocentric

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perspective, European integration is usually considered as multidimensional, sophisticated and highly institutionalized – both a descriptive and prescriptive contention – whereas regionalism/regional integration elsewhere is seen only as atypical, weakly developed, weakly institutionalized and usually reduced to either an economic or security-related phenomenon (or an instance of ‘regional cooperation’) (Christiansen 2001a).

The Eurocentric bias lies in how underlying assumptions and understandings about the nature of European regionalism (which most often stem from a *particular* reading of European integration) condition perceptions about what regionalism in other parts of the world does and should look like. Indeed, heavy emphasis is placed on the economic and political trajectory of the EC/EU or on a particular definition of ‘regional integration’. Several realist or intergovernmental and liberal or institutionalist approaches subscribe to this perspective, which is often dominated by a concern to explain deviations from the ‘standard’ European case.

There are some legitimate reasons why these Eurocentric notions developed in the past and for their continued salience. Nonetheless, it is a fundamental problem that such ‘false’ generalizations and dualistic models of comparison continue to plague both academic and policy discussions, with the result that few concepts and theories generated in the study of non-European regions have been able to influence the study and comparison of regionalism. Not only has this prevented the development of more universal conceptual and theoretical toolboxes, but it also has limited our understanding of European integration itself. Hence, as this book attempts to show, more theory-driven studies of regionalism in the rest of the world will have a positive impact on the study of European integration.

In this context, it also bears mentioning that the policy debate about regionalism in the developing world is plagued to a large extent by ‘false universalism’ and Europe-centred beliefs about what these regional organizations can and should achieve. For instance, the EC/EU’s integration path (and its institutional trajectory) is considered as the most viable route for a wide range of other multipurpose regional organizations such as SADC, ECOWAS, AU, Mercosur and ASEAN. This despite the fact that there are no convincing arguments as to why other regions would (or should) follow the EC/EU’s historical path (Katzenstein 2005). In policy-making circles this often leads to the rather naive

conclusion that remedying the lack of success and poor implementation of regional organizations in the developing world requires the strengthening of regional organizations to make them more similar to the EC/EU's institutional structure.

If the mainstream literature on regionalism has favoured generalizations from the case of the EU, a more or less reverse tendency is apparent in the more critical scholarship on regionalism in the developing world. Many critical scholars and policy analysts have tried to reject Eurocentrism or tried to avoid it, and numerous innovative attempts to develop a regional approach specifically aimed at the developing world (or particular regions) have evolved from this work (Axline 1994a; Bach 1999a; Bøås et al. 1999). On the one hand, there are good reasons for taking stock of this research on non-European regions and for being cautious regarding the mainstream domination of EU-style institutional perspectives. On the other hand, much of this scholarship and policy tends to mirror the Eurocentric view by taking the EU as an 'anti-model' and by celebrating the differences in theory and practice of regionalism in Europe and in the developing world. This has resulted in a failure to engage European integration theory and practice, while emphasizing that regionalism can be more or less tailor-made to suit specific regional realities and contexts.

At an empirical level, many scholars in the field specialize in a particular region, which quite often is viewed as 'special', even *sui generis* (Söderbaum 2009). Too many scholars offer the mantra-like suggestion that 'my' region is distinct, special or unique and too complex for comparison. When the uniqueness of a given region is emphasized or when other cases are considered to be too different to allow comparison, regional specialization easily becomes parochial. To be fair, some of the best studies in the field of regionalism are case studies. Certainly, detailed case studies are necessary and relevant; they identify historical and contextual specificities and allow for a detailed and intensive analysis of the dynamics and logic of regions and regional organizations (according to mono-, multi-, or interdisciplinary studies). As such, case studies and regional specialization may not necessarily constitute a scientific 'problem'. Yet, too many case studies remain atheoretical, descriptive or, in the worst cases, even parochial, which makes them less relevant for non-specialists of a given region. Despite many good exceptions, there is a strong tendency in the field for regional specialists not to contribute to comparative and general

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debates (Söderbaum 2009). This book adopts the stance that a more advanced debate about comparative regionalism will not be reached simply by celebrating differences between European integration and regionalism in the rest of the world, or by painting all regions as unique. The proposed way forward for a more integrated debate about regions, regionalism and regional organizations is the integration of the case of Europe within a larger discourse of comparative regionalism, built around general concepts and theories whilst still showing cultural and contextual sensitivity.

The eclectic approach offered in this book is built around the richness of comparative regionalism. Regions and regionalism come in many guises, and there are also many different forms of comparison (in time, across space as well as between different types of organization). Conceptual and methodological pluralism is not necessarily problematic: the fundamental challenge is to be clear about the research questions and what constitutes appropriate case selection, all the while maintaining conceptual clarity and sharpness. The eclectic perspective outlined here charges that it is possible to compare both the comprehensive and multidimensional regions at various scales (such as regions or subregions in Africa, Asia, Americas, Europe, and so forth) and the more distinct types of regions and regionalism (such as trade blocs, security regions, cognitive regions, river basins). As an example, the EU as an object of research can be studied in different ways and its comparability, or not, depends on the issue studied. As all other aspects of the social realm, a case such as the EU has simultaneously both specific features and general characteristics that it shares with other regions and regional political communities. It may also be relevant to compare the EU with federations such as the US or Germany, or even other nation-states around the world.

Rethinking Regions in Global Perspective

Since regions are not formed in a vacuum, the region in itself cannot be the only unit of theory-building. Rethinking regions in global transformation denotes approaching regions from a ‘global’ perspective. Somehow, a more ‘global’ approach to the study of regionalism needs to be built. Much effort is being made to do so, but what is lacking still from most approaches is a global perspective that also takes into account regional particularities and contexts.

In the 1950s and 1960s, most classical regional integration theorists (especially the functionalists and neofunctionalists) concentrated mainly on the endogenous processes of region-formation and paid little attention to the external and 'global' environment. Contemporary regionalism from the mid-1980s onwards largely emerged in response to exogenous forces, not the least of which was globalization. There were many studies of regionalism and globalization (between the 1990s and the 2000s) and regionalism and global governance (from the 2000s) but still there remains a deficit of knowledge regarding how regions are made and unmade by forces both external and internal, and also how regions, in fact, are shaping global transformation. This book contends that the external projection of regions and their role in global transformation is tied closely to their manner of social construction by both endogenous and exogenous forces and actors (state as well as non-state). This requires that we rethink the way we study and approach the role of regions in global perspective. In this regard, this book draws particular attention to regions in interregionalism and in global governance.

Increasing contacts between different regions are a logical outcome of increasing regionalism, and these increasingly have become important in recent decades. However, interregionalism is a still poorly understood phenomenon. Scholars and policy-makers devote too much attention to institutionalized relations between two regional organizations (so-called 'pure interregionalism'). In contrast, this book 'unpacks' and problematizes the region, the driving actors and institutions that are engaged in interregional relations.

Regionalism and multilateralism are essential ingredients of global governance. At various junctures during the last century, the relationship between regionalism and multilateralism was discussed intensively. The long-standing, prevailing view is that regional institutions should be subordinated to multilateral agencies (such as WTO/GATT or UN Security Council). Yet, linear developments are the least likely outcome, as multilateralism and regionalism produce their own counterforces with mixed results in different regions. Any static dichotomy between multilateralism and regionalism needs unpacking and rethinking. A telling indicator that global governance is not a singular, universal project was the apparent revival, as well as redirection, of regional and interregional projects towards the end of the last century; clearly, alternative reactions and directions were possible. This

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book underlines that regions are fundamental in this regard. The main point is that contemporary global governance has regions as an essential ingredient, albeit not always the most important one.

The Organization of the Book

Chapter 2 (Learning From History) traces the origins and evolution of regionalism as an object and as a field of study. Progress in the study of regionalism requires a better understanding of the intellectual roots of the field; it also requires that academics acknowledge the fact that there are many types of regions in many different historical contexts, thus rejecting firmly the simple notion that regionalism ‘started’ in Europe after the end of the Second World War. The chapter describes the historical evolution of the field, identifying four main phases: early regionalism, old regionalism (in both Europe and the developing world), new regionalism, and the current phase of regionalism, referred to as comparative regionalism.

Chapter 3 (Learning From Theory) provides an overview of the most important schools of thought in the field in terms of theoretical and conceptual formulations as well as empirical focus. The review highlights the richness of regionalism theory, spanning a variety of new regionalism and reflectivist approaches along with realist and intergovernmental approaches, functionalism, liberal institutionalism and neoclassical economic integration theory. The chapter pinpoints that different theorists are engaged in different kinds of knowledge production and that they also focus on different research questions, a fact that previous debates tended to overlook, and that has created unnecessary divisions in the field. The chapter concludes by identifying the theories that are most useful for rethinking regionalism along the four lines presented in this book.

Chapter 4 (The Richness of Comparative Regionalism) departs from the fact that comparison often is suggested as a useful point of departure for studying and theorizing regionalism. A fundamental disagreement about how to and what to compare is the problem here, and to a large extent this is related to contestation about European integration theory and practice, as well as the inherent tension in the field between regional specialization and theory-driven comparative research. Rethinking regionalism needs to escape Eurocentrism/anti-Eurocentrism and instead

insert European integration theory into a comparative perspective, whilst still maintaining cultural sensitivity.

Chapter 5 (Obviating the Gap Between Formal and Informal Regionalism) begins by clarifying why some theories are so heavily geared towards formal regionalism, while others are much more focused on the formal-informal nexus, or even informal regionalism *per se*. The chapter then describes how the formal-informal nexus is played out in the debates about regionalism in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. This examination of the regional debates illustrates how the dominant emphasis on formal regionalism can be replaced by a perspective that allows that regions are made and unmade by a combination of formal and informal actors and institutions.

Chapter 6 (Organizing Regional Space) reveals the many types of regions and above all, the many ways of organizing regional space. This analysis emphasizes the increasing heterogeneity of contemporary regionalism and the fact that a variety of state, market, civil society and external actors are involved in a series of overlapping, contradictory and sometimes competing organizations, networks and modes of governance, all of which coexist, overlap, intersect and sometimes clash.

Chapter 7 (Multidimensional Regionalism) shows that regionalism has no single cause, but rather emerged under the influence of a number of problems, 'interests', 'ideas' and 'identities', usually varying in importance in different geographical areas and in different policy fields. The chapter illustrates the multidimensionality of contemporary regionalism, in particular focusing on security regionalism, economic and development regionalism, environmental regionalism and social regionalism.

Chapter 8 (Civil Society in Regionalism) seeks to expand how we understand and study civil society actors during the making and unmaking of regions. Civil society somewhat surprisingly is often neglected in the study of regionalism, considering the emphasis it receives in the study of 'national' and 'global' politics. Drawing upon Africa as a 'least-likely case', the chapter argues that regionalization of civil society in Africa is quite vibrant and comes in many different forms. In addition, the chapter reveals that regional civil society contains several internal paradoxes and conflicts, resulting in a variety of complex links between civil society actors and political regimes as well as external powers and donor agencies.

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Chapter 9 (External Actors in Regionalism) focuses on the roles of external actors in the making and unmaking of regions. External actors usually interact strongly with state and non-state actors in a range of policy areas and have varied impacts on region-building, both positive and negative. This chapter also draws heavily on the case of Africa, exploring the ways whereby external actors engage in the making and unmaking of regions in the fields of regional market-building, transboundary waters and security regionalism.

Chapter 10 (Regionness: The Solidification of Regions) offers an analytical tool to better grasp the ways by which the many varieties of regionalism and regional agencies consolidate and converge within a particular region. Regionness is designed to capture the fact that when multidimensional regionalism has been set in motion, it appears that different logics begin to develop, resulting in a consolidation and solidification of the region – ranging from regional space, regional complex, regional society, regional community to regional institutionalized polity. Regionness is not intended as a parsimonious theory. It should be understood as a heuristic and conceptual tool for improving our thinking about the ways whereby multidimensional regions are made and unmade by different agents and institutions and processes. Increasing regionness describes the transformation of any region from object to subject, with a certain actor capacity in its external relations. The external dimension is linked to the fourth component of rethinking regionalism.

Chapter 11 (Regions in Interregionalism) shows that as regions consolidate internally, they have increased impact externally. A logical outcome of increasing regionalism is increased inter-regional (region-to-region) relations, which increasingly have become important in recent decades. Nevertheless, most observers misunderstand the logic of interregionalism as well as its significance for global politics. Much of the problem arises because interregionalism is analyzed through the prism of narrow and particular understandings of state-led regional organizations and their secretariats. In contrast, keeping with the approach of this book, the chapter ‘unpacks’ and problematizes the region, the driving actors and institutions that all are engaged in a multitude of interregional relations: for example Heads of State, Ministerial Councils, Regional Secretariats, Regional Parliaments, Regional Courts of Justice, individual member states as well as a range of

economic and social actors. The result is a patchwork of interregional and transregional relations, tied to bilateral, regional and multilateral practices and processes.

Chapter 12 (Regions in Global Governance) deals with the role of regions in global governance through a comparative assessment of the policy fields of security, trade, health and the environment. From a global perspective, there still is a striking ‘governance gap’, which has to do with the transformation of the Westphalian nation-state and the move in many policy fields and parts of the world from government to governance. Key here is not whether Westphalian bilateralism, regionalism or multilateralism will dominate, but rather an understanding of the essential role of regional governance as one crucial element in the reorganization of multi-layered global governance.

Chapter 13 (Conclusion) presents the main theoretical, methodological, and empirical conclusions of this book. It emphasizes that the four elements of rethinking outlined in this book will help us to a better and more comprehensive understanding of regions and regionalism in today’s global politics. By implication there is a need for ‘global social theory’ that takes regional peculiarities into consideration, since regions cannot be understood merely from the point of view of the single region in question. Global social theory means a comprehensive social science that abandons state-centrism and methodological nationalism in an ontologically fundamental sense, yet one that goes beyond the mystifications of the concept of globalization and global governance. The emerging ‘multiplex’ world order simultaneously involves a range of actors, institutions and processes interacting at a variety of interconnected levels (global, regional, national and local levels) (Acharya 2014). Even if it is not possible to identify which scale is dominant, because actors and processes at various levels interact and their relative importance changes in time and space, this book makes it clear that regions and regionalism have moved into centre place in international theory.

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