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## **The False Promise of Interregionalism? Assessing the Determinants of EU-ASEAN Complex Interregionalism**

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# The False Promise of Interregionalism? Assessing the Determinants of EU-ASEAN Complex Interregionalism

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the assessment of the determinants of complex interregionalism between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), specifically institutional proliferation on the levels of bi-regionalism, trans-regionalism and region-to-state relations.

The commonly proposed variable of actorship is tested, but fails to explain the institutional changes due to its epistemological constraints. Instead, this thesis puts forward structural interdependence and strategic agency on the part of both regional actors as the determinants of institutional proliferation in complex interregionalism.

The analysis suggests that levels of political and economic interdependence are low at the bi-regional level and higher at both the trans-regional and region-to-state levels. The assessment of the strategic agency of both regional actors leads to the conclusion that they are primarily concerned with relations in the East Asian region overall rather than with their bi-regional relationship. The investigation lends credence to the hypothesis that patterns of interdependence and strategic agency are capable of explaining change in EU-ASEAN complex interregionalism.

Key words

EU, ASEAN, Interregionalism, Actorship, Strategy, ASEM

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## Introduction

The interregional relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has a long and varied history. Of all interregional relationships, that between the EU and ASEAN is the oldest proper group-to-group dialogue (only preceded by the EU-African, Caribbean and Pacific Group [ACP] relationship) and likely the one that has attracted most of the scientific attention regarding interregionalism.

The relationship has seen much change over time, particularly after the end of the Cold War. Meanwhile, the EU and ASEAN have carried out considerable but qualitatively different internal reforms and have weathered several internal and external crises. All these developments have affected not only the internal workings of the two organizations, but also their external relations.

While there has been an increase in analytical interest in the relationship in recent years, researchers have been challenged by the very intangible nature of interregionalism, consisting of shallow institutions, diffuse objectives and a dense network of relations on several political levels. Combined with the tradition of Eurocentrism in the related study of regionalism, there is the added complication of understanding the regional project that is ASEAN and the motivations of its member states.

While a deepening of political or economic cooperation between the two regional organizations has not materialized, the most notable fact about the EU-ASEAN relationship is that the original group-to-group dialogue is increasingly being rivaled by other interregional linkages between the organizations; both trans-regional and region-to-state. Through the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the signing of Free Trade and Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (FTAs and PCAs) with individual ASEAN states, the group-to-group dialogue has little in the way of exclusivity in the realms of economic and political relations. Instead, both regional organizations are participants in a system of complex interregionalism in which they interact simultaneously on several levels.

Even though it is highly debatable whether the group-to-group dialogue has ever resembled a primary channel of communication, it currently appears that the relationship is facing strong competition from both above and below. This thesis sets out to analyze the causes for change in the EU-ASEAN relationship and the different institutional arrangements that have become a part of it. The research question of this thesis therefore is as follows:

**Which determinants can explain the institutional change in complex interregionalism between the EU and ASEAN?**

## EU-ASEAN Interregionalism – State of the Art

Given that interregionalism is a relatively new area of scientific interest, a respectable amount of research has been conducted on interregionalism in general and on the EU-ASEAN relationship in particular. As research exists in all major schools of international relations inquiry – Realism, Institutionalism and Constructivism – the field of interregionalism is no longer in its infancy but is moving towards a theoretical and empirical maturity – although it continues to have its detractors.

The literature concerning the EU-ASEAN relationship can be broadly classified into two sections: Conceptual works focused on the phenomenon of interregionalism in general and

studies concerned with the specific example of EU-ASEAN interregionalism. Both fields of study are worth considering since this thesis builds upon the insights of previous conceptual discussions as well as the state of the art of empirical EU-ASEAN interregionalism studies.

A recurring issue in the empirical literature concerning the relationship is the fact that they appear to be mainly period pieces concerned with the current state of affairs. Articles in this mold are those of Dent (2006), Gilson (2005), Lim (2012), Robles (2006) Ørstrøm Møller (2007) and Jetschke & Portela (2013). Hänggi et al. agree that the majority of articles are “*descriptive and policy-oriented in an often narrow and at times anecdotal way*” (2006, p. 7). Another feature of the existing literature is a preoccupation with possible future institutional dividends of interregional processes (Dent, 2006; Gilson, 2005; Robles, 2006), particularly connected to multilateralism. The neighboring research complex regarding the EU as a foreign policy actor (Börzel & Risse; 2004; Manners, 2002) has equally lofty expectations for interregional cooperation. Given these theoretical antecedents and the empirical reality of EU-ASEAN interregionalism, it is no surprise that Mathew Doidge’s (2012) latest article on EU-ASEAN interregionalism is entitled ‘Expectations Unmet’.

On the theoretical side, Roloff (2001) analyzed the causes of the emergence of interregionalism from an explanatory angle. For him, interregionalism is a tool for coping with the process of globalization in line with the processes of internal balancing, multilateralism and regionalism (Roloff, 2011). Roloff’s analysis is heavily focused on the competition between the regional triad of Europe, the Americas and the Asia-Pacific, a focus that is recurrent in research regarding East Asian interregionalism.

Just as the empirical phenomenon of interregionalism is intimately connected to the emergence of regionalism, so too are the academic discussions of both phenomena closely related. Early research on the interregional system was focused on the ‘hub-and-spokes network’ of the EU, as a central actor in interregionalism, and its partners (Edward & Regelsberger, 1990; Dreis-Lampen, 1998). The end of the Cold War brought with it a proliferation of interregional linkages outside the EU coupled with a newfound awareness of the phenomenon of new regionalism. This resulted in scientific interest in the impact of different kinds of regionalism (Söderbaum & Van Langenhove, 2005) or regionness (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000; Hettne, 2014) on the process of interregionalism. This tendency to regard regionalism and interregionalism as two phenomena ‘joined at the hip’ (Doidge, 2007) has remained central in the research discourse through the concept of regional actorhood.

Apart from the interest in interregionalism itself, an awareness of different interregional arrangements emerged throughout the late 1990s and 2000s. Particularly after the creation of the trans-regional arrangements of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 and ASEM in 1996, but also the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), researchers increasingly directed their attention towards differentiating between and comparing the objectives and functions of these arrangements. Most notably, Hänggi (2006) took stock of 82 interregional arrangements, many of which have since become dysfunctional or have disbanded. A common expectation in these new interregional arrangements at the time was that they would revive interregional cooperation that had stalled, most notably in the EU-ASEAN relationship. While this did indeed happen in some cases, the persistence and overlaps between different group-to-group and trans-regional dialogues have led to the employment of the term ‘complex interregionalism’ (Hardacre & Smith, 2009) to denote the permanently multilayered system of interregional relations.

Around this time, a popular concept was that of ‘multilateral utility’. This notion derives from the understanding that interregionalism functions as an interlocuting level of gover-

nance between that of regionalism and multilateralism, fulfilling a clearing house function for regional organizations in multilateral negotiations (Aggarwal & Kwei, 2006; Dent, 2006). Dent has defined it as “*the extent to which interregional frameworks help realize and even shape the indivisible goals of those institutions*” (2006, p. 121).

As the 2000s progressed, it became increasingly clear that both the existing group-to-group dialogues and the trans-regional forums did not provide the expected multilateral utility. Scientific attention then turned to other functions that interregional relationships could possibly fulfill, leading to a large amount of theoretical sophistication in the study of interregionalism. During this time, five functions of interregionalism were theorized, the origins of which lie in an eclectic understanding of international relations theory and consist of balancing (Realism), institution-building (Institutionalism), rationalizing (Institutionalism), agenda setting (Institutionalism) and collective identity formation (Constructivism) (Doidge, 2004; Rüländ, 2006). Most recent research in EU-ASEAN interregionalism is concerned with one or more of these functions, with the constructivist view taking a prominent role in recent years, particularly since the introduction of the ASEAN Charter (Nesadurai, 2009).

One body of work that bridges the gap between conceptual and empirical investigation is that of Doidge (2004, 2007, 2012), which has contributed a sound overview of the institutional development of EU-ASEAN interregionalism and has examined one determinant of how the functions of interregionalism are performed – that of actorness. While Doidge’s work remains valuable and thorough, it does not sufficiently consider the complexity of the EU-ASEAN relationship and other factors beyond actorness that may have affected it.

This is endemic in the research discourse overall. As Rüländ (2014) has noted, most work has been done either on regional actorness or on the functions performed by interregional relations, and often both at the same time. When he writes of “*the widespread impression in the international relations community that studies on interregionalism have obviously reached conceptual and empirical limits and thus ceased to improve our understanding of global governance and processes of multilateral policymaking*” (p. 15), he echoes the notion that all that can be said on the state of interregionalism and how the performance of its functions may be explained has already been voiced.

Despite these suggested conceptual limits, interregionalism research conspicuously lacks recent inquiries into the determinants of interregional arrangements. While theory building has focused on what happens inside interregional institutions and the empirical spectrum has widened to consider overlapping interregional arrangements, no one has thought to combine the two lines of inquiry beyond looking at the transition between EU-ASEAN group-to-group dialogue and ASEM (Doidge, 2004; Gilson, 2005). Hardacre and Smith (2009) commented on this phenomenon: “*Although the emerging importance and implications of interregionalism have been widely noted, most treatments have tended to be either one-dimensional or static. Focus solely on interregionalism has thus tended to obscure the coexistence of such processes and structures with trans-regional and other forms of hybrid structure; at the same time, these approaches minimize the importance of linkages between different interregional structures [...]*” (p. 171).

Theoretical background	Features of interregionalism analyzed	Notable works
Neo-Realism/Interdependence	Emergence, determinants	(Roloff, 2001)
Constructivism	Norm diffusion, institutional isomorphism	Jetschke (2009), Jetschke & Murray (2012), Manea (2008)
Eclectic	Functions, communication channels, determinants (actorness)	Doidge (2004), Rüländ (2001), Dent (2006), Gilson (2005), Maull & Okfen (2006)

Figure 1: Typology of previous investigations of EU-ASEAN interregionalism, author's own elaboration.

Figure 1 gives an overview of features of interregionalism that have been analyzed. Notably, only Roloff (2001) has tackled possible determinants of interregional relations, although he was focused on explaining their emergence and not their change. While recent works have been diverse in their analysis of the functions of interregionalism, no other study has since proposed alternative factors with a possible causal relationship to complex interregional arrangements.

In this context, it is difficult to accept the notion that the study of interregionalism is conceptually and theoretically underdeveloped, as Baert et al. (2014) have recently argued. In fact, the problem lies elsewhere. Overly narrow analytical focal points and theorizing of particular processes in interregionalism have taken attention away from the under-researched phenomenon that is the emergence and change of complex interregionalism on the macro level. The trans-regional forums that proliferated in the 1990s and 2000s have not replaced the existing group-to-group dialogues, and bilateral relations never fully disappeared despite the process of regionalism (Camroux, 2011). These overlapping channels of political cooperation compete with one another in their objectives, institutional setups and outcomes (Hardacre & Smith, 2009).

This thesis puts forward the following proposition: Existing theories of international relations are sufficient and indeed highly explanatory of the developments in complex EU-ASEAN interregionalism over time and consistent with the empirical findings of other, more eclectic approaches. In the following section, the theoretical approach utilized throughout this thesis will be delineated.

## Determinants of Complex Interregionalism

When it comes to the determinants of interregional arrangements, it makes sense to return to Roloff's argument. Under the conditions of power politics and the balance of threat, the forming of regions is similar to the forming of political alliances as an answer to structural insecurity. States do this with the expectation of increasing their influence politically and economically in the global concert of powers, with the aim of increasing their 'voice opportunity' (Grieco, 1995). Now, these regions (or alliances, in keeping with the neo-realist concept) are also in strategic competition on the economic and political sphere. In theory, this may lead to either a competitive interregionalism, in which regions are increasingly separated from one another and are in competition over relative gains, or a cooperative interregionalism in which the regions are in symmetrical relationships and regionalism remains open to global interdependence and absolute gains. These assumptions lead to the second part of Roloff's argument, that of structural interdependence. As with the classic work of

Keohane and Nye (1977), cooperation and the building of institutions follow structural interdependence between states and, in this case, regions. As Roloff correctly remarks, global interdependence is not a sufficient explanatory variable for the emergence of interregionalism, as the institutions for the management of global interdependence already existed in the form of multilateralism. Apart from globalization, however, regionalization and regionalism have led to the emergence of regional blocs in which internal interdependence is separated from global interdependence, leading to competition between the regional and the global level. To Roloff, interregionalism is the institutional response to these twin challenges as a way to ensure cooperation and avoid regional isolation from global processes. While his work is mostly focused on explaining the *raison d'être* of interregionalism, his hypotheses can easily be repurposed to explain not only the emergence but also the change in complex interregionalism over time and between levels of governance.

One of his hypotheses goes as follows: “*The interregional cooperation will change in intensity depending on the level of interregional involvement and interdependence. An increasing level of interdependence also increases the potential for confrontation, particularly if the interdependence is asymmetrical*” (Roloff, 2001, p. 120). Hänggi et al. (2006) complement this argument, writing that “[...] [T]he emerging regional blocs, however, are characterized by (economic) power disequilibria, to which regional organizations seek to adjust by institutional balancing. It is this management of interdependence and polarization through balancing and bandwagoning which in the first place give rise to the emergence of flexible interregional structures of cooperation” (p. 11). It seems clear that these arguments can be extended to explain not only the emergence of interregionalism but also its change. Interdependence affects the intensity and shape of the forums in which interregional relations are conducted, regional power disequilibria lead to institutional balancing inside the system of complex interregionalism.

The two arguments cannot easily exist without one another. Neo-realist theory struggles to explain why interregional arrangements have not been more competitive in nature, even though power asymmetries exist between the regions. Interdependence theory, meanwhile, may explain the existence of interregionalism, but not convincingly so and struggles particularly with explaining changing interregional arrangements in the absence of change in structural interdependence. Although this thesis aims for a maximum of theoretical parsimony, certain theoretical additions are in order as classic neo-realist and interdependence arguments are no longer state of the art.

As Rüländ (2014) has noted, the concept of institutional balancing alone is outdated and needs to be complemented with the ideas of soft balancing or hedging. While the original concept of institutional balancing assumed that different forums would be balancing one another (such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact), modern institution building sees a horizontal overlap between institutions, which refutes the argument of competition. Rüländ (2012) has explained the proliferation of horizontally competitive institutions and the use of vertically nested arrangement as a strategy employed by actors in order to gain leverage in a multilateral institutional system that is seen as dysfunctional and asymmetrical. Particularly for smaller states, Rüländ’s idea of a wide institutional membership in order to employ the strategy of ‘forum-shopping’ mirrors Goh’s concept of hedging, which she defines as “*a set of strategies (or planning or contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning or neutrality. Instead they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side (or one straightforward policy stance) at the obvious expense of another*” (2006, p. 3). The processes of horizontal (use of forums that overlap in issue areas or membership) or vertical (use of different levels of the multilevel governance structure) institutional balancing therefore have to be understood as hedging strategies employed by small and relatively less powerful states.

## Methodological Considerations

### Research Design

This study attempts to test certain deductive hypotheses in the case of EU-ASEAN relations that are derived from existing theories of international relations. While mainly a case study, it attempts to draw lessons from comparative institutional arrangements and the larger governance context of ASEAN and the EU. While case studies on EU-ASEAN interregionalism and ASEM have been conducted before, complex interregionalism as a permanent feature has not yet been properly considered.

As interregionalism is mainly an institutionalist project, this thesis will focus on the creation and use of different interregional institutions. The noted functions of interregional dialogue are all theorized as occurring inside the institutional framework. Balancing is understood as occurring between and inside interregional institutions, rationalizing and agenda-setting are concerned with the external consequences of institutional dialogue, and collective identity formation is a cognitive process occurring inside a communicative institutional setting (Doidge, 2004; Rüländ, 2010).

The concept of complex interregionalism (Hardacre & Smith, 2009) – as opposed to pure interregionalism as relations between two customs unions – establishes a spectrum along which the complexity of an interregional arrangement can be distinguished. To avoid any confusion regarding the conceptual foundation of interregionalism, we will at this point establish that bi-regionalism denotes a relationship between two regional organizations, trans-regionalism denotes the relationship between regional organizations and members that are not part of a regional organization (examples are APEC and ASEM), while hybrid-interregionalism, finally, covers all other relations of regional organizations, most importantly for this project, region-to-state relations (Rüländ, 2014; Hardacre & Smith, 2009). A combination of bi-regionalism, hybrid-interregionalism and trans-regionalism constitutes a complex interregional arrangement. This complexity ranges (from a less to a more diverse set of parallel institutional arrangements) can be labeled governance complexity. In order to understand the full possible complexity that interregional arrangements may take, another dimension must be added to this analytical framework. Previous studies on the EU as an interregional actor have noted the presence of multiple channels of negotiations by different actors that are contained in the regional organizations. In the case of the EU, this would mean analyzing the different activities of the commission, the parliament and the council. But multiple channels of interregional relations may also be possible in the case of ASEAN, such as with the ASEAN secretariat and the member states. This analytical dimension may be labeled actor complexity. With these two dimensions, we arrive at the following methodological framework.



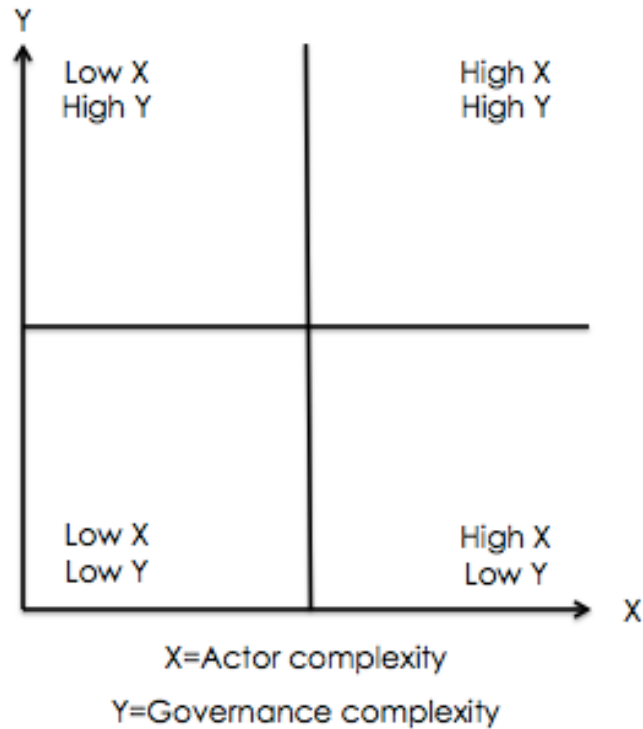


Figure 2: Dimensions of analytical complexity in complex interregionalism research, author's own elaboration.

As a full consideration of all possible factors in complex interregionalism is beyond the scope of this study, it will mainly focus on the complexity axis related to the multilevel governance structure of interregionalism. This puts this thesis in the upper left quadrant of the analytical spectrum. Still, actor complexity cannot be completely ignored, most notably in the case of ASEAN, which is an intergovernmental organization and as such is based on the actions of its constituent states. Even in the case of the EU, which has supranational elements in its organization structure, decisions are taken in a complex fashion. Given this actor complexity and the limitations of this thesis, the interests and strategies of the two actors are understood as arising from a complex intra-regional system that is treated as a black box.

## The State of the EU-ASEAN Relationship

As the oldest group-to-group dialogue on record, EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism has had ample time to develop political and economic institutions. While the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) remains the central pillar of EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism, a range of institutions have proliferated on the bi-regional as well as the trans-regional and region-to-state levels of interaction. This development can be divided into three phases: Pre-1990s bi-regionalism; a shift in objectives and the introduction of trans-regionalism throughout the 1990s; and a recent move towards economic bilateralism in the late 2000s. This part of the thesis will attempt to demonstrate that while the old bi-regional institutions remain in existence, we can observe a migration of political institutions towards the trans-regional level and a migration of economic institutions towards the region-to-state level. What has occurred in general is a 'hollowing-out' of the bi-regional EU-ASEAN dialogue to the benefit of the governance levels both above and below.

## Bi-regionalism's First Two Decades

Early political cooperation between the EU and ASEAN had its roots in ASEAN interest in wider economic cooperation. After the ASEAN Brussels Committee (ABC) was founded in 1972 to lobby for the status of ASEAN at the EU<sup>1</sup> level and to negotiate preferential treatment under the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP), ASEAN states quickly proposed a more institutionalized cooperation. The EU preferred a commercial cooperation agreement that would have been focused on trade and investment matters and would have been concluded with individual ASEAN member states. ASEAN, meanwhile, rejected the offer, wanting a regional agreement as well as a wider political dialogue. In hindsight, this has been interpreted as ASEAN's preference for recognition as a stable regional bloc to more easily face possible external threats (Doidge, 2004). Another factor was the impending accession of the UK to the EU, resulting in a loss of preferential trade policies for Malaysia and Singapore, who then sought similarly privileged positions in relation to the EU. After some political consultation, the two groups held the first AEMM in 1978 and signed a cooperation agreement in 1980, which was responsible for the founding of the Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) and a loose commitment towards engaging in some form of dialogue (Doidge, 2004). The institutional setup of a bi-regional dialogue with ministerial meetings at the center, supplemented by a coordinating committee, was a generic EU group-to-group policy (Hardacre & Smith, 2009) and not indicative of a privileged relationship between the two regional organizations.

After this start to the bi-regional relationship, an impressive array of institutions followed in its wake, both functionally and hierarchically differentiated. Besides the regular AEMM process, the bi-regional relations spawned three Eminent Persons Groups tasked with consultancy on the bi-regional relationship, an economic ministerial that was later consolidated as a meeting between the ASEAN economic ministers and the EU trade commissioner, several senior official meetings on matters ranging from drugs to security, as well as a vast number of capacity-building programs between the EU and the ASEAN secretariat. While the early institutional development of the bi-regional relationship appears impressive and suggests ever closer cooperation, it is necessary to strip down the institutional façade to look at the objectives and outcomes for both partners.

Through the GSP, ASEAN managed to extract some economic benefits from the interregional relationship through the negotiation of favorable conditions. Robles (2006) has noted that both the AEMM and the JCC were successfully used to lobby for the addition of several product groups of competitive ASEAN exports to the EU. Still, it was mainly Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand that profited from these processes in the 1980s. While ASEAN at some point commanded over 40% of the GSP, the member states never got as privileged a position as they were hoping for. From the EU's side, ACP was the main focus of GSP, a fact visible in the granting of an export stabilization scheme to ACP states, but not to ASEAN states despite heavy lobbying. Generally speaking, ASEAN failed in its main objective with regards to the EU, which was to negotiate a special relationship giving it preferential access to European markets. This can be seen as an early precedent for EU unilateralism, making ASEAN wary of the conditionality of EU market access and the difficulty of engaging in a bi-regional relationship.

Doidge (2004) concurs with the assessment that the promotion of a preferential trade and investment partnership failed in the early stages of bi-regionalism. This was due to several factors. First, economic matters were the responsibility of the JCC, which was organized on

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, EU refers to the different iterations of European integration, including the EC.

a technical level, not a ministerial one, and therefore was simply tasked with “*minor program development and tinkering*” (p. 171). Second, as mentioned before, there was no particular interest from the EC’s side in genuinely engaging in an intensive trade partnership beyond the GSP. With the EU heavily focused on its internal economic integration in the 1980s and 1990s, there was little beyond a diffuse interest to profit from economic dynamism in Southeast Asia.

Other aspects of the relationship, such as political and development cooperation, have also been called into question. The only two cases of overlapping political interests of the two regional organizations that are commonly cited are the joint statements on the invasion of Afghanistan and Cambodia (Doidge, 2004). Besides these, there is no significant evidence that the group-to-group dialogue created multilateral utility in the way of enhanced cooperation at the multilateral level. As for development cooperation, there was often a mismatch between ASEAN and EU expectations in terms of sectoral focus. Some of the earliest projects funded by the EU were focused on forestry and fisheries, a disappointment for ASEAN, which was hoping for more large scale infrastructure development. In 1985, it was decided at the AEMM that future projects would focus on industrial and service sector development with a focus on improving regional cooperation (Robles, 2006). Robles has noted that the development needs articulated by ASEAN member states were rarely met by the EU throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This mismatch became less central as the relationship between the EU and ASEAN changed from one clearly focused on development to one more concerned with political and economic cooperation as equals.

## Bi-regional Changes and Trans-regionalism

After the end of the Cold War, some changes took place in the behavior of both actors with regard to the bi-regional relationship, and the EU increasingly pushed for an upgrade in the relationship from the purely economic to the political. Starting in 1991, the EU attempted to integrate human rights issues into the AEMM. This led to a very strained relationship throughout the 1990s: The Indonesian occupation of East Timor prevented the signing of a new cooperation agreement in 1992 (Lim, 2012). The 1998 and 1999 AEMM and JCC sessions were cancelled due to human rights violations in Myanmar, which had acceded to ASEAN in 1997. This was a watershed moment for the bi-regional relationship, as ASEAN was under pressure from the political conditionality of EU market access while simultaneously being phased out of the GSP. The 1990s saw a full graduation of Singapore and a partial graduation of most other ASEAN member states in their most competitive sectors (Robles, 2006), which led to a reshuffling of economic relations between ASEAN and the EU. Where previously efforts were made to promote exports, the EU became more protectionist of some business interests and shifted towards a more equal relationship with the ASEAN states in order to tap into the economic dynamism of ASEAN and East Asia more generally (Mun, 2013).

Given the circumstances, there was growing disillusionment regarding the future of the bi-regional dialogue, which led many observers to see the emergence of ASEM in 1996 as a trans-regional forum as a positive development of EU-ASEAN interregionalism (Lim, 2012). While ASEM was at first credited with reviving EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism by opening a channel to address the Myanmar issue outside the narrow confines of the EU-ASEAN dialogue (Gilson, 2005), it has showcased similar institutional constraints to those affecting previous bi-regional institutional arrangements over time. While the first ASEM summit covered a wide range of political topics from environmental cooperation, through anti-terrorist measures, to science and technology, the second and third summits were overtaken by two events; the Asian Financial Crisis and the Korean peace process. The fourth and fifth

summits once more had political agendas, but were mostly concerned with replicating pre-existing talking points (Gilson, 2005).

While the EU became slightly more sensitive to ASEAN demands regarding its regional capacity-building needs, assisting at the supranational level on financial and monetary matters, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and contributing funding to the long demanded large-scale infrastructure projects (Robles, 2006), it appeared that ASEAN found it much easier to extract financial commitments through the ASEM process: Singapore was chosen as the headquarters of the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), the only physical organization tied to ASEM. Thailand was allowed to host the ASEM Business Forum, giving an advantage to its business community (Robles, 2006) and Malaysia secured a coordinating role in the trans-Asian railway project during the early stages of ASEM (Dent, 2006). Compared to the previous difficulties of ASEAN in extracting concessions through EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism, this was an improvement in their leverage.

While ASEM, replacing the bi-regional dialogue, was a boon to both parties, it did not push the interregional relationship in the direction of fostering closer cooperation between the two regions. Given the usual Western benchmark of institutional deepening and rulemaking, ASEM is not an improvement on the previous bi-regional relationship. Gilson (2006) is correct in assessing ASEM as a forum which “[...] plays a greater role in disseminating information than in making decisions” (p. 323). Dent (2006) also noted the passive nature of the ASEM dialogue in relation to multilateral processes. Instead, it has contributed to complex inter-regionalism in different fashions.

What ASEM has been mostly credited for is its function as a forum for Asian states to broker common positions which can then be articulated to actors outside the region. Dent (2006) mirrors this sentiment in his view that ASEM functions as a “constant reminder to the two regions that their relationship is part of a larger framework” (p. 119). The function that ASEM appears to fulfill from the vantage point of EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism is that of an alternative venue that helps avoid gridlock in the dialogue in the event of a conflict of objectives or values. Still, ASEM has not proven completely immune to gridlock due to political disagreements, as can be seen in the 2005 boycott of an economic ministerial by ASEAN ministers due to an issue concerning Myanmar (Mun, 2013). Apart from this, there may be discursive dividends associated with ASEM as both an intra-Asian channel of communication and one between Asia and Europe.

The creation of multilateral utility inside ASEM, however, does not appear to have been superior to the rather dismal record of EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism. ASEM has often mirrored the same points of conflict between the EU and ASEAN states as found in both the bi-regional and multilateral dialogues. During the 1999 and 2001 WTO ministerial summits, both sides clashed over the general process of WTO negotiations (Dent, 2006). While there have been cases of cross-pollination between the bi-regional and trans-regional dialogues, such as in the 2002 case of the AEMM setting up renewed WTO consultation and negotiation (Dent, 2006), ASEM usually functions as a reactive forum which commonly takes its agenda from multilateral dialogues and does not proactively create common interregional positions to be transferred into the multilateral process (Dent, 2006). Beyond brief discussions of deeper economic integration such as the setting up of a Eurobond market in East Asia in 2002, the trans-regional cooperation has provided few institutional dividends beyond contributing to collective identity formation in East Asia (Doidge, 2004) and a rather open-ended political dialogue. Maull and Okfen (2006) describe ASEM as a disappointment from the perspective of a more deeply institutionalized interregional cooperation: “Today, there is much disappointment, on the European side, about the vacuity of the political dialogue: from their

*point of view, the really important issues still cannot be discussed openly and frankly. The statements which emanate from the summits and the ministerial meetings address a plethora of issues, none of which, however, is pursued in a sustained and politically meaningful way. This suggests that there is no meaningful political cooperation. While political impulses are formulated at the top of the process, they do not percolate down into the political machinery for cooperation. In this sense, the ASEM political dimension remains symbolic and rhetorical. Even at that level, there have never been common positions and compromise formulae beyond a lowest common denominator” (p. 226).*

Apart from the transition from bi-regionalism to complex interregionalism, the late 1990s brought about political change in East Asia and more specifically to ASEAN. The fallout of the Asian Financial Crisis led not only to a significant democratic development in Indonesia but also to new initiatives with the aim of keeping ASEAN relevant. This, however, has mostly been interpreted as an internal development and not strongly reliant on ASEAN-EU cooperation (Mun, 2013). In fact, the EU’s behavior during the Asian Financial Crisis left ASEAN disappointed, as both ASEM and the EU-ASEAN dialogue failed to contribute in a meaningful way (Dent, 2006). EU measures to counter the crisis were underwhelming and if anything, mostly focused through multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), contributing little in the way of interregional cooperation.

### Third Wave Interregionalism

While the EU may not have bolstered its relationship with ASEAN through its behavior during the Asian Financial Crisis, the interregional relationship has resulted in both a reinvigoration of ASEAN integration initiatives, primarily the adoption of the ASEAN Charter in 2005, and the adoption of a more pragmatic approach by the EU. The EU softened its negotiation strategy on the issues of human rights with a more pronounced focus on the promotion of its trade and investment relations in relation to both ASEAN and East Asia as a whole (Robles, 2006; Mun, 2013). This has also been publicly acknowledged by the organization through the publication of its communication ‘A New Strategic Partnership with Southeast Asia’ in 2003, which addresses a more flexible engagement and a stronger focus on matters of trade and investment (Mun, 2013).

Following the Asian Financial Crisis and the adoption of the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN became more open to EU integration support (Mun, 2013). The ASEAN Regional Integration Support Programs (APRIS) I & II, which were concerned with the transfer of technical know-how to the ASEAN secretariat came at a cost of €130 million, while the ASEAN states themselves only contributed €70 million in the same timeframe (Jetschke & Portela, 2013). Financially speaking, the EU has contributed a significantly larger amount toward ASEAN integration than all of ASEAN’s member states combined. Still, it is doubtful whether this has resulted in any actual leverage on the part of the EU, particularly since the EU model of regional integration has been called into question by ASEAN leaders following the persistent economic crisis (Jetschke & Portela, 2013). Despite the vast range of capacity-building programs funded by the EU (Lim, 2012, has counted more than 10 programs), they are focused on the ASEAN secretariat and not the member states.

The key development of the complex interregional relationship throughout the 2000s has been the emergence of FTA negotiations at different levels between the EU and ASEAN. The idea of a region-to-region FTA was first mooted in 2005, and in 2007 the EU council allowed the commission to enter into negotiations with ASEAN. After two years, the negotiations were interrupted in 2009 and the EU announced the launch of bilateral negotiations shortly thereafter (Lim, 2012). While there had been strong support from the EU parliament for a

region-to-region agreement (Lim, 2012), several points of conflict convincingly explain the failure of the FTA negotiations.

The bilateral agreement with Singapore was completed first, in 2010. Negotiations with Malaysia, Thailand (paused due to the military coup) and Vietnam are ongoing. Additionally, the EU is currently assessing the scope of possible agreements with Indonesia and the Philippines. The negotiation of free trade agreements is not completely independent of political conditionality, however. The EU follows the practice of negotiating PCAs in combination with FTAs, even though the failure to sign a PCA does not bar the conclusion of an FTA, as the case of Singapore has shown. The official EU objective is the eventual negotiation of a region-to-region FTA.

Another notable recent development in the interregional relationship is EU membership of an increasing range of East Asian institutions. While the EU is already part of the ARF, it has been attempting to become a member of the EAS, which was founded in 2005. As a precursory commitment to ASEAN, the EU signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2012. Jetschke and Portela (2013) have highlighted the signing of the treaty as a sign of a positive turn in political relations between ASEAN and the EU, as ASEAN had to adopt a special protocol in order for the EU to sign the treaty as a regional organization.

## Conclusion

Over time, the bi-regional dialogue between the EU and ASEAN has been complemented by the trans-regional forum that is ASEM. The political and economic dialogues appear to exist side-by-side. The only exclusive function of the bi-regional relationship are the EU's capacity-building programs for the ASEAN secretariat. At the same time, relations at the region-to-state level have become more visible through the failure of the bi-regional FTA and the succeeding negotiation of bilateral PCAs and FTAs with individual ASEAN states.

The persistent institutional shallowness of the interregional dialogue explains the disappointment with its progress in academia. It appears that both actors have had trouble fulfilling their objectives in the bi-regional relationship, a fact which may explain the proliferation of institutions at other levels. Another feature that this analysis has identified is the exclusivity of legal relationships at the region-to-state level and their absence at the other levels of complex interregionalism.

## Lessons from the Governance Context of Complex Interregionalism

One of the reasons why the reality of EU-ASEAN interregionalism has possibly failed to fulfill the potential anticipated by academics in previous decades is the fact that insufficient attention has been paid to the governance context of the EU-ASEAN relationship. As has been asserted by Rüländ (2014) and demonstrated by Maull and Okfen (2006), a comparative perspective can contribute to our understanding of institutional arrangements in interregionalism by way of highlighting differences and similarities.

At first sight, an obvious case for comparison would be APEC, a competing institutional arrangement to which EU accession as an observer was declined in 1993. But in order to get a grasp on comparative aspects of interregional institutional proliferation in East Asia, regional institutions need to be considered as well. The reason for this is that most regional institutions in East Asia, with the exception of the APT, exhibit features that make them similar to trans-regional institutions. The most notable regional institutions in East Asia

such as the ARF and the EAS contain members outside of the East Asian region, making these institutions trans-regional by definition. Additionally, Ba (2009, p. 350) states that “[...] ASEAN is more normatively established – it is a region with internal recognition and is thus understood as deserving to exist, not subsumed as a subregion – recent East Asian regionalism efforts are being critically shaped by the negotiation between ASEAN and East Asia as a whole,” a view which shows that even relations between ASEAN and its East Asian neighbors may be classified as hybrid-interregional.

An examination of ASEAN’s governance context in East Asia provides us with a comparative perspective that highlights certain regularities in ASEAN’s interregional relations. First of all, ASEAN has become a pillar of East Asian regionalism initiatives, which has led, as Ba (2009) argues, to the adoption of the ASEAN Way, with its focus on consensus-based, informal negotiations, by all institutional arrangements of which ASEAN is a member. This means that engagement with the East Asian region brings external parties into contact with ASEAN norms, even in the absence of an explicit group-to-group relationship. Second, the patterns of complex interregionalism which have been identified in the previous section can also be observed in ASEAN’s other interregional relationships.

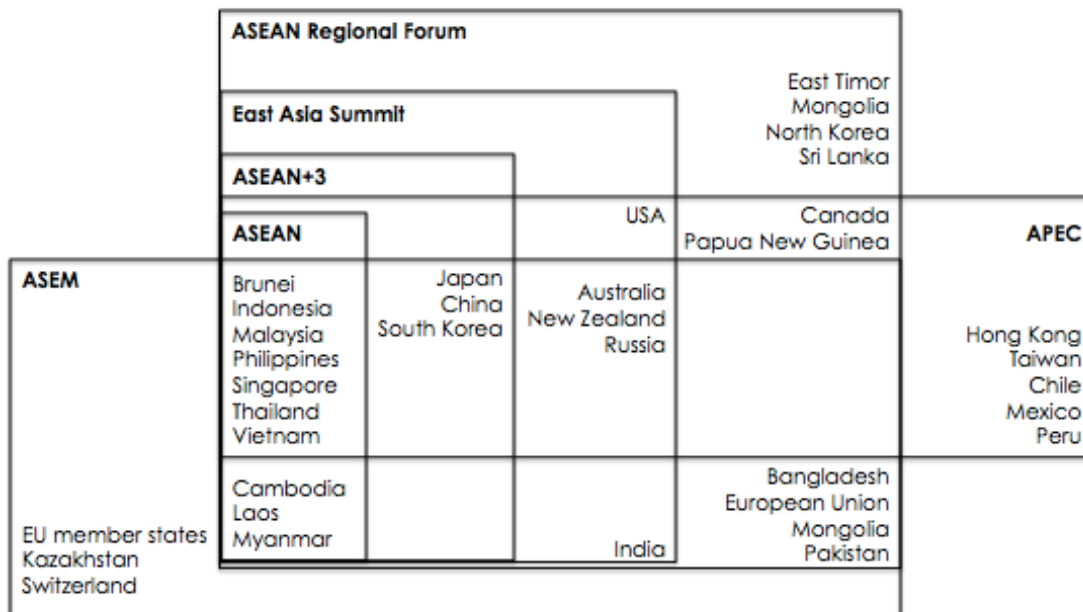


Figure 3: ASEAN centrality in its governance context, author’s own elaboration.

In terms of legalization, all East Asian institutions, as well as APEC, have been criticized for their shallow institutionalization (Aggarwal & Kwei, 2006). Dissatisfied with the unilateral exercise of US power inside APEC, ASEAN has used ARF and the EAS as competing forums based on ASEAN norms to keep the US engaged in the region (Ba, 2009; Beeson, 2013) and has strengthened military ties on the bilateral level (Goh, 2007). The institutional relationships with the US partially overlap in terms of issue-focus as well as membership, making them horizontally and vertically competitive. The same principle applies to ASEAN’s behavior inside the region, which has seen a proliferation of institutions centered on ASEAN. The fact that ASEAN was the only actor in East Asia that could credibly propose institutions for regional cooperation without igniting fears of hegemonic ambitions has been remarked upon by several authors (Beeson, 2013). As Emmers (2003) has noted, ASEAN’s central role in the architecture of the ARF was due to the fact that “no other regional player was in a posi-

tion to propose the development of a multilateral security dialogue” (p. 31). For better or worse, an engagement with East Asia and its regional institutions such as APT, ARF or the EAS therefore entails interaction with ASEAN and the norms it has embedded in these institutions. Taking ARF as an example, shallow institutionalization has also been a contested issue. Tasked with confidence-building and preventive diplomacy, ARF has seen little progress in the way of solving any contentious issues in the region such as the South China Sea issue, which cannot even be openly discussed in the forum (Weber, 2009). Several participants in ARF such as the US, Australia, the EU and Japan have voiced dissatisfaction with regards to the institutional progress of ARF, while China and ASEAN appear to be content with the current institutional shallowness of the forum. Goh (2007) interprets ARF as ASEAN’s tool of choice for ‘superpower entrapment’, that is, ensuring the continued presence of the US as a security actor in the region.

With regards to the EAS, the newest forum in East Asia, ASEAN has once again taken a central position in the institutional architecture. This time, however, it has required the explicit subscription by outside powers to ASEAN norms by way of requiring that they sign the TAC, which is the key document regarding ASEAN’s norms that inform its institutional set-up. Starting in 2003, external actors have begun signing the TAC in order to gain access to the EAS as well as in connection with their FTA-negotiation with ASEAN, starting with China and India in 2003, followed by Japan, Russia and South Korea in 2004, Australia in 2005, the US in 2009 and the EU in 2012.

Looking at FTA negotiations, the region has followed the so-called ASEAN+1 logic, which refers to the centrality of ASEAN in regional economic integration activity (also visible in APT, which contains both the Chiang Mai initiative and the Asian Bonds Market Initiative). This is also visible in the relatively slow progress of FTAs that do not include ASEAN, such as the Japan-China and later the Japan-China-Korea FTA. To draw even more parallels to EU-ASEAN complex interregionalism, ASEAN FTA negotiations have usually been preceded by bilateral FTAs, with Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia leading the way (Goh, 2007).

FTA Partners	Year concluded	Year effective
ASEAN-China	2004	2005
ASEAN-Korea	2007	2007
ASEAN-Japan	2008	2008
ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand	2009	2010
ASEAN-India	2009	2010

Figure 4: Timing of FTA negotiations with ASEAN, author’s own elaboration.

Regional free trade initiatives should be seen critically, given the progress of AFTA. Formed in 1993, the goal of AFTA to reduce levies to a maximum of five percent has partly been reached (Jones & Smith, 2009) but is overshadowed by the non-tariff barriers put in place by the ASEAN states. There are other reasons to be critical of AFTA, as intra-ASEAN trade has only increased from 21.4% in 1993 to 24.3% in 2013 (IMF Directions of Trade Statistics), which is not indicative of a shift in ASEAN’s economic interdependence.

Still, the lack of internal cohesion of ASEAN as an economic bloc has apparently not led to a



devaluation of its central role in the region.

What lessons can we draw from the investigation of ASEAN's governance context? Institutional shallowness has been a pervasive feature of all of ASEAN's institutional arrangements, which should make us wary of explanations that see the shallowness of EU-ASEAN cooperation as a case-specific feature. Additionally, ASEAN has had a significant impact on East Asian regionalism, which highlights the fact that ASEAN's agency in the creation of its multiple institutional arrangements should not be undervalued. As a last point, the ASEAN-US relationship has shown that a system of multilayered interregional relationships is the rule and not the exception.

## **Assessing the Determinants of EU-ASEAN Complex Interregionalism**

### **Actorness**

The most commonly named determinant of interregional relations is that of actorness. While there is a large amount of research focused on how regional organizations may or may not be analyzed as actors in the international sphere, the conceptual background of actorness is rather dated, stemming from Sjöstedt's (1977) investigation of EU external policies. While there have been several updates on actorness theory, the basic tenets of the concept of actorness have remained the same. The central question is whether or not regional organizations can act in a purposive manner, while the range of empirical features on which actorness may be contingent has constantly widened. While Sjöstedt was mostly focused on the existence of external agents and channels of communication, as well as internal decision-making mechanisms, Allen and Smith (1991) widened the understanding of actorness by theorizing that presence – which is contingent on both material and immaterial factors – is an important feature of actorness and may affect the influence an actor has in the international arena. Herrberg (1997) and Jupille and Caporaso (1998) widened the analytical spectrum of actorness even further by asserting that regional organizations may have a complex agency structure, as well as demonstrating that external recognition may also provide an organization with actorness. Generally, what has been established in actorness research is that this type of research requires “[...] an approach to actors that recognizes they may be a complex system rather than a hierarchical unitary structure in a state-like sense” (Doidge, 2004, p. 32). To do this ambition justice, Doidge employed a theoretical framework consisting of three features which can be used to judge an actor. The ability to set goals (Action Triggers), the ability to take decisions in relation to these goals (Policy Structures) and the ability to pursue the policy decided upon in relation to said goals (Performance Structures). Taking all aspects together, he identifies the EU as a supranational regional actor and ASEAN as an intergovernmental regional actor. While Doidge's theoretical treatment of actorness is sound, his analysis overly emphasizes policy structures and the coherence of ASEAN policy in the interregional relationship. This leads to his employing a rather simplistic continuum of actorness, on which the EU and ASEAN occupy more or less opposite sides.

While there are considerable differences in the coherence of the EU policy process and its outcomes depending on the policy field, there has been a tendency towards more policy coherence over time (Doidge, 2004). The EU has shown a preference for legalization of norms and processes, primarily in its internal integration efforts, with the nation states tolerating a significant amount of interference in their national policies by supranational institutions. What Doidge highlights particularly is the EU's capability to formulate common positions

internally, which are then brought into the interregional relationship. This observation rings true with a range of researchers who have observed that the EU has very solid policy positions with regards to ASEAN (Dent, 2006; Robles, 2006). Doidge (2004) highlights the phenomenon of political conditionality as clear evidence of a high degree of purposive action in the behavior of the EU in the interregional relationship, tying market access to the acceptance of human rights documents.

ASEAN, meanwhile, is widely characterized as an intergovernmental regional actor (Jones & Smith, 2009). The primary feature of regional cooperation is the primacy of the sovereign nation state. Both economic and political processes of integration have remained thinly legalized and are generally non-binding or at least without a system of enforcement in place (Jones & Smith, 2009). Cases of interference in the sovereignty of ASEAN states have been highlighted (Jones, 2012), but a non-confrontational and shallow dialogue remains the norm in ASEAN's internal and external relations. The policy coherence of ASEAN has swayed in both directions over time, being rather coherent on some issues and rather less so on others. Doidge (2004) highlights a high coherence in the early stages of ASEAN development amongst a 'like-minded' membership during the Indonesian invasion of Cambodia in the Third Indochina war. Over time, however, many examples of a lack of coherence in the ASEAN policy process have cropped up, not least during the EU-ASEAN dialogue. This has often lead to a lack of external action, due to the impossibility to find common ground on certain issues, most recently the South China Sea conflict.

This difference in actorness has been highlighted by several academics as the main determinant of EU-ASEAN interregionalism. Generally, the reasoning centers on the argument that the two policy approaches of the regional organizations are incompatible, hampering an effective dialogue between the two groupings. Focusing on the failure of EU-ASEAN trade to significantly increase following the renewed interest in ASEAN as a growth region before the Asian Financial Crisis, Doidge argues that insufficient progress is the result of ASEAN being unable to sufficiently legalize the economic relationship beyond voluntary targets and verbal commitments. As Doidge argues, the failure of the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship to legalize more thoroughly in this regard is attributable to the fact that “[...] ASEAN as a regional grouping, premised as it is upon intergovernmentalism, is currently incapable of collectively achieving set targets. The result is that the speed of the relationship between the Union and the Association is reduced to that of the slowest partner” (2004, p. 152).

Even inside the institutions that have been created in the interregional relationship, Doidge focuses on actorness asymmetry as the deciding determinant of interregionalism. Beside the fact that some institutions such as the JCC were equipped with little decision-making power to begin with, the higher up meetings suffered from dissatisfaction on both sides: The EU, pursuing a strategy of legalization, often found its partner non-committal and too divergent in its outlook. This is exemplified by the following conclusion drawn from Doidge's interviews: “Union officials have criticized ASEAN as not being an ‘interesting partner,’ a hurdle that could be overcome were they to offer the support of ‘a real bloc, ten countries really of the same opinion.’ ASEAN officials, too, acknowledge this failing, noting that ASEAN's weak negotiating capacities constitute one of the main obstacles to convergence of policies with the EU” (Doidge, 2007, p. 238).

In line with this, the reactive nature of ASEAN as an external actor has often been highlighted as being at odds with the EU's more proactive foreign policy. Conversely, ASEAN officials have often lamented the inflexibility of the EU dialogue partners, which were often bound on common positions and unable to flexibly negotiate their positions at the ministerial meetings (Doidge, 2004). An example of this is the case of the politicization of

the AEMM throughout the 1990s and the focus on a small number of political issues, such as the cases of Cambodia and Afghanistan, and later issues of counter-terrorism, with the resultant sidelining of economic issues, which were seen as being under the purview of the EU commission.

Additionally, Doidge laments the lack of a common action trigger for ASEAN and the EU, meaning that there have been no significant political issues that managed to unite the positions of the two regional organizations, prompting “[...] a situation where this dialogue was unable to deliver more than relatively clean declaratory cooperation” (2004, p. 181). He adds: “This in turn was further exacerbated by a dissonance of interests within the regions themselves, and the effect this had on the ability of each group to formulate a policy” (p. 181).

Doidge is not alone in his judgment that an asymmetry between actors may lead to the non-performance of certain functions of interregionalism and to a generally shallow and reactive institutional framework. Roloff (2001) highlights the comparative advantage of EU-US interregionalism in policy areas where EU actorness is high compared to those where EU actorness is low. This conclusion is not limited to interregionalism either. McCall Smith (2000) makes a similar point about regional trade agreements, where he observes shallow legalization in cases of high actor asymmetry. Ultimately, this stance is summarized by Doidge’s assertion that the general shallowness of the EU-ASEAN dialogue is a result of having ASEAN’s norms of intergovernmentalism as a lowest common denominator: “Despite more than three decades of interaction between the partners, the strength of the Association as a regional actor has increased relatively little, largely as a function of the continuing emphasis given by member states to the indivisibility of state sovereignty” (Doidge, 2004, p. 44).

Doidge’s use of actorness as the single mediating variable of interregionalism can be criticized empirically from two angles. First, it is possible to criticize Doidge’s proposal on its own terms: There are several cases where EU-ASEAN interregionalism, and particularly the shallowness of its institutionalization, can be explained by factors other than an asymmetry in actorness. But, and more importantly for this thesis, the perspective of ASEAN’s larger institutional context calls into question the actorness argument even further, given the fact that there are striking similarities between ASEAN’s institutional arrangements outside its interregional relationship with the EU. Looking at the agency that has been attributed to ASEAN in the creation and maintenance of institutions in East Asia and beyond, there is reason to believe that the structure of complex interregionalism is not simply a result of a lowest common denominator with a weak regional actor, but is actually dependent on a certain type of purposive action that is qualitatively different from what interregionalism researchers expect in the case of the EU.

The first point can actually be illustrated using Doidge’s own empirical findings: Throughout his analysis, he mentions purposive action of ASEAN without properly integrating it into his system of analysis. For example, he mentions the fact that the trade partnership between the EU and ASEAN was never properly legalized – an outcome of the preoccupation of the EU with its internal market and of ASEAN’s interest in building its domestic economies. This is clearly a case of shallow institutionalization not simply due to actorness asymmetry, but due to the different strategic interests of the EU. Another case is the rejection by ASEAN of political conditionality of EU market access following pressure from the EU in the 1990s. Here, ASEAN’s unwillingness to engage a partner intent on interfering with its domestic political system has been noted (Doidge, 2004; Lim, 2012; Jetschke & Portela, 2013).

Looking at the larger system of complex interregionalism, Doidge's argument becomes even more tenuous. When looking at the institutional transition between bi-regionalism and ASEM, ASEAN preference for a larger Asian grouping has been well documented (Doidge, 2004; Gilson, 2004). The joint benefit of forming a group similar to that of the envisioned East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), as well as another opportunity to engage with North-east Asian states, has been a noted objective of ASEAN. The fact that the EU also supported ASEM, for somewhat different reasons – mainly its dissatisfaction with ASEAN bi-regionalism, as well as a preference for engagement with China and East Asia more generally – does not negate the fact that the institutional transition between bi-regionalism and ASEM appears to be a product of strategic preference rather than actorness asymmetry.

When it comes to the case of economic hybrid-interregionalism, the actorness argument appears to have more merit. After all, isn't the fact that ASEAN states are seeking individual economic relationships evidence of the shallowness of regional actorness? While it is true that the conclusion of these region-to-state agreements has been a result of ASEAN's insufficient economic integration, the fact remains that the EU is the only other group with which ASEAN has not concluded a region-wide agreement (having done so with Australia and New Zealand, China, Japan and Korea). But much more importantly, the actorness argument comes up short when it comes to explaining the timing of these hybrid-interregional institutions, as the EU could have concluded region-to-state FTAs at any other point in time given the consistency of ASEAN's lack of regional actorness over time.

All in all, the criticism of Doidge's approach on empirical terms highlights a large issue with using actorness as a single determinant of complex interregionalism: It imposes certain epistemological restraints on interregionalism research that exclude a consideration of instances of interregionalism in which ASEAN agency has an impact on the institutional outcome. In the case of Doidge, it leads to an analysis that systematically undervalues ASEAN's contribution to its relationship with the EU because it is viewed as the weaker link.

This leads us to another line of criticism that can be held against the actorness argument: The fact that it is not a good explanatory variable due to its unchanged nature over time. Particularly in the context of complex interregionalism, institutional changes are indisputable. As for the variable of actorness, there is a case to be made that while the actorness of the EU and ASEAN are different from one another, their characteristics have been stable over time and are more closely related to the regional organizations' strategic culture or underlying norms than to their development along some linear spectrum of actorness ranging from intergovernmental to supranational.

Without discussing the actual merits of the concept of indigenous Asian values, it is fair to accept that ASEAN *de facto* operates under the norms of “*personalism, pragmatism, flexibility, informality, consensual decision-making, lean institutionalization, intergovernmentalism and the non-interference principle*” (Hänggi et al., 2006). It is apparent that some of these features overlap strongly with the expectations of what Doidge would call an intergovernmental regional actor. The connection between actorness and the normative inclination of regional organizations has been convincingly made by Wunderlich (2012) in his assessment of the comparative actorness of the EU and ASEAN. His findings strongly suggest that the ASEAN Way's method of intergovernmental decision making and the EU's preference for legalization and supranationalism are the product of historic experiences, which have ingrained into the regional organizations a particular kind of strategic culture. To him, taking ASEAN's state as a region of developing and vulnerable nations into consideration “[...] goes a long way toward explaining ASEAN's version of institutionalization and its avoidance of supranationality” (p. 664). While this in itself is no new fact, Wunderlich is successful in highlighting

that actorness is not a spectrum along which regional actors will necessarily develop over time. While ASEAN has made some moves towards a stronger legalization with the adoption of the ASEAN Charter, an actual change in ASEAN strategic culture and actorness is not inevitable. Taking a diachronous perspective on both actors, it becomes apparent that actorness in regional organizations in the most general sense (their preference for supranational or intergovernmental policy mechanisms and soft or weak legalization) seems rather stable over time.

Employing the rationalistic principle that a constant cannot explain a variable, it is highly debatable whether actorness is a sufficient determinant of complex interregionalism. The fact that the actorness perspective of EU-ASEAN complex interregionalism reduces both actors to two asymmetrical partners suggests that the relationship can be viewed in abstract terms without losing any empirical detail. In fact, it seems that the individual positions of both regional organizations in the international system, as well as their agency, has an impact on interregionalism that is undervalued by the simplistic symmetrical/asymmetrical dichotomy of the actorness hypothesis.

While actorness does have a place in the explanation of the functions performed in interregionalism, it is an insufficient variable for explaining the change in the EU-ASEAN relationship and particularly the institutional changes in complex interregionalism. While the argument of a capacity-building interregionalism between the EU and ASEAN due to actorness asymmetry is convincing, the developments in the larger interregional context of both organizations do not appear to follow the same logic.

While the principles underlying Doidge's argument of weak actorness, a lack of economic and political coherence, and mechanisms for policy formation and implementation will be present in the following analysis on interdependence and strategic agency, it is not simply a rehash of the actorness argument in other words. Even though there are some parallels in how intergovernmental actors may generally behave given certain external factors, there is still considerable slack for agency, both as a reaction to outside processes (as Doidge admits) and as a result of internal strategic preferences.

Due to the fact that the institutional proliferation and use of complex interregionalism go beyond the explanatory reach of the actorness argument, this thesis will now consider two theoretical approaches that have the capacity to explain the observed changes: Interdependence and strategic agency.

## Interdependence

The patterns of interdependence are the outside-in factors seen as determining the complex interregional relationship by influencing and restraining the actors' agency. The fact that interdependence has been a factor influencing the patterns of interregional relations has been widely acknowledged (Hänggi et al., 2006; Doidge, 2004; Jones & Smith, 2007; Baert et al., 2014; Roloff, 2001). Still, it is mainly used as an explanatory factor in the emergence of interregionalism and lacks application as a variable explaining the changes in complex interregionalism.

Keohane and Nye's classic work on interdependence remains the dominant reference point when approaching the topic theoretically. In its simplest form, Keohane and Nye (1977) defined structural interdependence as a relationship in which interactions cause mutual costs. It is different from interconnectedness, as the key criterion for the existence of interdependence is the fact that its absence would entail negative consequences for one or both actors and that the relationships can be used by both actors to reap rewards.

As Keohane and Nye were not concerned with interregionalism, there is the challenge of applying the logic of interdependence to a different object of analysis. Roloff (2001) has delivered convincing arguments on how interdependence has contributed to the emergence of interregionalism. This thesis follows the same logic, assuming that a sound explanation of the emergence of a phenomenon may also be useful in explaining its change.

To Roloff, interregionalism is an institutional response to the twin challenges of regionalization and globalization. Regionalization and regionalism, the underlying galvanization of regional economic relations and closer political cooperation on the regional level, respectively, were the first movers in the chain of events that led to the emergence of interregional institutions. Roloff (2001) defines regionalization thus: “*A process both of intensification of interdependence as well as a process of separation from the global system as a whole*” (p. 77), while regionalism is defined as “[...] *an instrument for nation states, a conscious policy of creating, controlling and manipulating the process of regionalization through international cooperation, the building of regimes or of international and/or supranational institutions*” (p. 78).

From the perspective of regionalism and globalization as competing phenomena, interregionalism emerged as an institutional response for managing interdependence between regions that may have otherwise become competitive in the global sphere, both economically and politically, which is mirrored in the concept of regional ‘fortresses’ that separate from the global system of interdependence (Roloff, 2001). While multilateralism has been the tool of managing global interdependence and regionalism has played the same role for regionalization, interregionalism would likewise be the tool for managing interdependence in a world of regions.

As for the relationship between interdependence and institution-building, Keohane and Nye (1977), and Roloff (2006) have theorized that the intensity of interregional institutionalization is contingent on the degree of interdependence. Roloff illustrates this point by highlighting the strong institutions of trans-Atlantic interregionalism as opposed to the relatively weak Eurasian and trans-Pacific linkages, which he chalks up to different levels of political and economic interdependence. At the time, however, Roloff was expecting an increase in interregional cooperation between all regions in order to coordinate policy between the regional and multilateral levels. This concept is known by the moniker of multilateral utility, which essentially sees interregional cooperation as a clearing-house process engendering interregional cooperation between regional blocs inside multilateral forums.

Since Roloff’s theoretical elaboration, however, the ideas of multilateral utilities and more deeply legalized interregional cooperation have not materialized and have been intensively scrutinized as a product of wishful thinking (Robles, 2008; Rüländ, 2011). The previous investigation of both EU-ASEAN and trans-Pacific interregionalism has shown that there is a dubious record of multilateral cooperation between the regions beyond institutional proliferation in both the political and economic spheres.

Keeping with the argument that political interdependence affects the degree of institutionalization and interregional cooperation, it may be that the patterns of structural interdependence do not run between EU and ASEAN as has been expected. Given the context of complex interregionalism, a re-investigation of the interdependence argument along the lines of bi-regionalism, trans-regionalism and region-to-state relations is therefore in order. In practice, this means a comparative analysis of interdependence between the EU and three different sets of actors. First, the individual ASEAN member states (hybrid-interregionalism), second, ASEAN as a regional grouping (bi-regionalism), third, ASEAN plus other East Asian states (trans-regionalism).

## Political Interdependence

Taking Keohane and Nye's definition of interdependence (interconnectedness that puts actors into a relationship of mutual gains and costs that have to be negotiated through cooperation) at face value, we are confronted by the conceptual issue of deciding what political interdependence actually means in the case of EU-ASEAN interregionalism. As Gilson (2005) has noted, "*there is a lack - with the exception of human rights issues in Myanmar and, to a muted extent, China - of contentious issues related to the region*" (p. 318). Robles (2008) adds to this that both ASEAN and the EU have had difficulties establishing precisely what role their political interdependence may play. Furthermore, there is the fact that the EU only plays a marginal role in the security architecture of Asia, as it is not perceived as a security actor and security issues are insignificant in the dialogues concerning the EU (Jetschke & Portela, 2013). Under these conditions of rather low political interdependence, multilateral utility has emerged as the main feature embodying political interdependence between the EU and ASEAN. Generally speaking, this supposes that the two regions cooperate politically to find common ground on topics addressed by multilateral negotiations, such as the UN and the WTO processes.

Empirical evidence of interregionalism as a multilateral utility is scant, however, and both the bi-regional and trans-regional levels provide very few examples of interregionalism actually leading to cooperation on political issues with a connection to the multilateral level. The two cases that are usually cited as examples of a convergence of political interests between the EU and ASEAN are the joint critique of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in the 1980s (Doidge, 2004; Robles, 2006). Beyond Robles' example of the EU-led implementation of the agreement on Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which was a result of GATT negotiations, there are no additional clear-cut cases in which the interregional relationship provided a common negotiation position or policy outcome in multilateral organizations contingent on the interregional dialogue. This is no surprise given the competing interests of ASEAN and the EU as developing and developed countries in the WTO and as regional groupings with different agendas with regards to the process of supranational governance and political norms in the UN.

The first conclusion of this assessment of political interdependence is therefore that the failure of political cooperation at the bi-regional level is a result of a lack of overlap in the political interest of the two regions in multilateral dialogues.

Casting the analytical net a bit wider to consider competing interregional and trans-regional arrangements, the lack of multilateral utility as an outcome of interregionalism is not limited to EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism. Forums such as APEC and the EAS, as well as ASEM, have also failed to provide much in the way of multilateral utility. This is no surprise given the even more heterogeneous membership of these forums: APEC, maybe the most diverse forum of all, includes a dazzling array of states, many of which have no history of economic or political cooperation. ASEM, with its membership drawn along the lines of Asia and Europe instead of developed and developing countries (Gilson, 2005), has also not contributed to multilateral negotiations in a tangible fashion. This observation highlights two points: First, the potential for a convergence of political interests at the interregional level has been overstated in the past. Given the observed sample of institutions in this thesis, this may be due to a lack of political interdependence between the members of these interregional arrangements. Second, multilateral utility may be the wrong metric by which to judge interregional institutional arrangements.

Two other types of political interdependence at the interregional level which have more merit with regards to empirical evidence still need to be investigated: Social interaction and collective identity building, as well as legalization and political conditionality.

A point that has been demonstrated several times over is that interregional forums function as channels of communication and as vehicles for the collective identity formation of the regional actors involved (Doidge, 2004). Both the EU and ASEAN derive discursive benefits from these forums by way of being recognized as actors in their own right, which has an impact on their internal dynamics and strengthens their identity as regional actors. As has been shown previously, it has been something of an agenda for ASEAN to be present in as many forums as possible, a fact which has been attributed to the aim of creating ‘clout’ for the regional organization (Personal Communication). Likewise, it has been noted that the EU also derives a benefit from being present at political dialogues and being perceived as a globally active actor (Söderbaum et al., 2005). Social interaction and collective identity formation are two separate features that are served by the same institutional arrangements. Social interaction denotes the process of lifting a political dialogue beyond an ad hoc basis (Roloff 2006). Goh (2007) described this process as a coordination “[...] *between small, medium and large states in the region, with benefits in improved information flows, personal interaction between officials, and the development of confidence building and function cooperation, as well as norms of discussing and managing conflicts*” (p. 131). Collective identity formation, meanwhile, describes the effect of interregionalism on the structure and values of the regional organizations, both internally and externally. As a complete discussion of the analytical concept cannot be carried out at this point, it must suffice to state that the most obvious way in which collective identity formation has taken place in EU-ASEAN interregionalism is through a reactive response by ASEAN, solidifying its own values in opposition to those of the EU (Doidge, 2004), most notably through the advocacy of the ASEAN Way. As has been noted, the solidification of its individual identity is one, and perhaps the main, objective of ASEAN as a regional organization. As Doidge asserts, “[...] *the process of interaction outlined by constructivist theory as so intrinsic to identity formation is enhanced by the dense network of ties characteristic of inter- and trans-regional dialogues [...]*” (2004, p. 320 ff.). From this statement, it is obvious that the processes of social interaction and collective identity formation are not exclusive to the bi-regional process. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that this type of political interdependence is more valuable in forums that contain larger groups of members, as the recognition of the EU and ASEAN as actors in their own right affects a larger set of states. At the very least, trans-regional forums can complement the process of social interaction and collective identity formation at the bi-regional level. More regular social interaction may result in greater socialization and collective identity formation without incurring obvious costs, as the complementary forums are all shallowly institutionalized and do not compete in a legal sense. The institutional layering of bi-regionalism and trans-regionalism can therefore be explained by the perceived discursive benefit of interacting and socializing with a larger set of external actors.

The second form of political interdependence between the EU and ASEAN is more densely legalized and is closely connected to the EU strategy of political conditionality. To get closer to a useful conceptualization of political interdependence in this case, we have to consider Keohane and Nye’s view that interdependence relationships are usually asymmetrical, one partner being more sensitive to changes in the relationship than the other. As has already been noted, the EU as a rule has utilized its relative economic strength and its attractiveness as a consumer market to introduce political conditionality clauses into concessions on investment and trade. This effectively ties economic interdependence with the EU to a political dimension, making political engagement with the EU a necessity for ASEAN in order



to avoid a possible negative impact on economic interdependence. This type of interdependence is qualitatively different from that of social interaction and collective identity building as it entails the application of the EU's principles, implementing a higher degree of political interference and legalization on the political relationship.

The political conditionality clauses that the EU has advocated in the past have always been geared towards individual adoption and the recent cases of individual states signing Partnership and Cooperation agreements with the EU highlight that the policy of targeting states individually remains in operation.

In 1996, after some failed negotiations to revise the EU-ASEAN Trade and Cooperation Agreement of 1980, which remains the key document in the bi-regional relationship, the EU chose to put forward a Joint Declaration that included a human rights clause. Due to gridlock in negotiations on human rights clauses as a part of the GSP and the suspension of the JCC due to the issue of the membership of Myanmar, the EU moved towards bilateral agreements containing the human rights clause. Most notably, the EU required the new ASEAN members to sign bilateral agreements prior to letting them accede to the 1980 Cooperation Agreement. *“Vietnam signed a bilateral agreement with the EU on 17 July 1995, became a member of ASEAN on 28 July 1995 and then acceded to the 1980 agreement in 1997. Cambodia signed its bilateral agreement with the EU on 29 April 1997, became a member of ASEAN on 30 April 1999 and acceded to the 1980 agreement in 2000. Laos signed its bilateral agreement with the EU on 29 April 1997. It became a member of ASEAN on 23 July 1997 and acceded to the 1980 Agreement in 2000”* (Lim, 2012, p. 49). Following the failed negotiations of the EU-ASEAN FTA, in which the inability to come to terms on political conditionality and the exclusion of Myanmar was a recurrent issue (Lim, 2012), the EU has once again moved relations to the region-to-state level with its current joint negotiation of PCAs and FTAs with individual ASEAN states.

The fact that this cooperation occurs at the region-to-state level is less a matter of conscious agency than one of inevitability. Until recently ASEAN lacked a legal personality and was therefore unable to enter into agreements with external partners, leaving it to its member states to sign agreements with partners. Even with the ASEAN Charter in place, the signing of individual agreements will likely continue, as legalization on the regional level remains questionable. Additionally, the bi-regional level has never been conducive to the EU's political conditionality clauses, as the failed GSP negotiations in the 1990s highlighted (Doidge, 2004). Furthermore, the hard-line approach with regards to Myanmar brought about a slew of issues in the bi-regional relationship which ultimately led to a withering of the interregional relationship and led to both the EU and ASEAN welcoming the addition of ASEM in the 1990s. As a more diverse and less asymmetrical forum, ASEM provided a way out of the bargaining gridlock of bi-regionalism in which the EU and ASEAN could not come to terms.

To sum up, we can make two observations about political interdependence as political conditionality: First, despite negotiations at the bi-regional level, the strategy of political conditionality led to regular regression to the region-to-state level of interregionalism. Second, the addition of a trans-regional forum has offered both groups a way out of their bargaining gridlock, bypassing the issue of Myanmar and making the interregional relationship less sensitive to political impasses.

While these two features of political interdependence are the most salient ones in the inter-regional relationship, there is one feature that has received very little academic attention due to its opaque nature: The process of capacity building from the EU towards ASEAN. It has been noted that the EU remains the largest financial contributor to the ASEAN secretariat. Additionally, the EU has capacity-building programs with regards to regional inte-

gration support (APRIS), economic integration support (AEISP), and FTA negotiation capacity building, in addition to smaller projects such as statistical support and air transport integration support (Lim, 2012). It is hard to establish the degree of political interdependence that emerges from this relationship, as institutional dividends from the capacity-building programs are unclear and there remains the question of how ASEAN reciprocates this capacity building. At the very least, the relationship may be indicative of the EU seeing itself in the position of an external federator engendering institutional change inside ASEAN, which would classify this relationship as a strategic investment in possible future bi-regional interdependence.

## Economic Interdependence

While ASEAN as a regional grouping has been successful in retaining a central position in EU-Asia trans-regionalism and East Asian regionalism institutionally, the case for ASEAN as an economically interdependent entity is less convincing. In fact, it has often been acknowledged that ASEAN states are competitive rather than complementary, which has led to very slow progress in the economic integration of the region, embodied in AFTA.

Additionally, the Asian Financial Crisis highlighted competition even beyond ASEAN, with China competing for investment and trade with the ASEAN economies and Japan taking a more restrained approach towards investment in Southeast Asia. After the Asian Financial Crisis there was a heavy downturn in intra-Asian FDI, which has led to EU FDI now making up over 40% of total ASEAN FDI stock (Mun, 2013), a fact which is, however, less indicative of a particular European interest in the region than of an exodus of capital from other Asian states (Robles, 2006). What has been observable in ASEAN's economic relations after the Asian Financial Crisis is a diversification of its trading partners combined with stronger economic interdependence with China. In terms of economic interdependence, ASEAN has reduced its mutual dependency with regards to all actors apart from China.

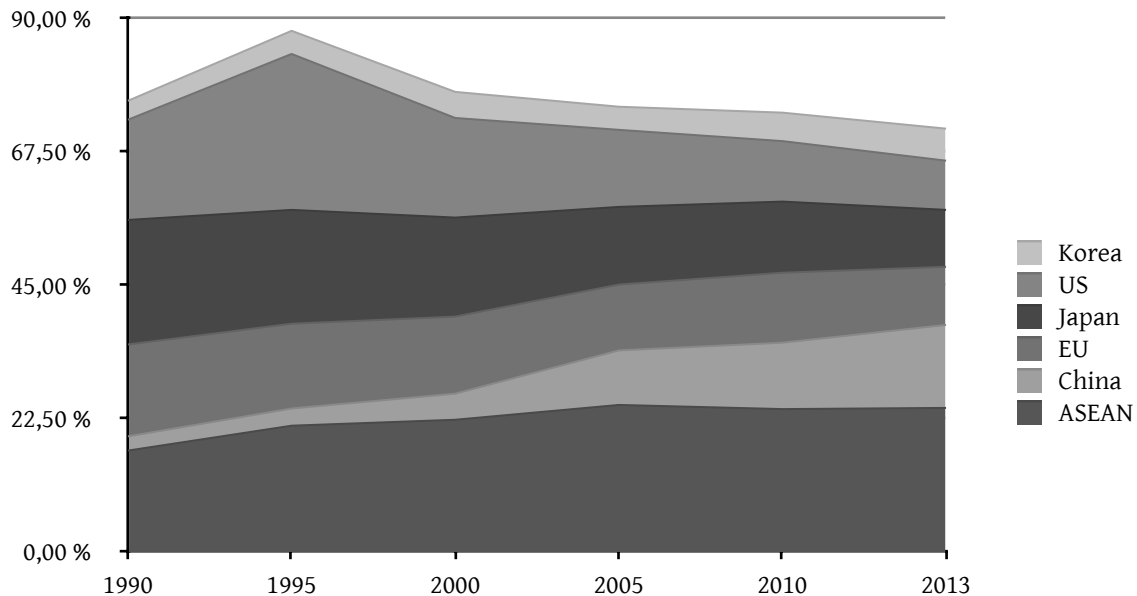


Figure 5: ASEAN trade by partner as percentage of total trade, author's own elaboration (Source: IMF Directions of Trade Statistics).

As Robles (2006) notes, “ASEAN's inability to constitute a regional market has made it dependent on markets outside the region” (p. 103). This is a clear-cut characterization of the way economic

interdependence runs in the EU-ASEAN relationship. While ASEAN states do have limited trade with one another today, around 22% in recent years, external trading partners are very important for the economic stability and progress of the region. Famously, a driver of initial EU-ASEAN bi-regionalism was Malaysia and Singapore's wish to find an adequate replacement for their commonwealth trade preferences in the aftermath of the UK joining the EU. Since the beginning of EU-ASEAN economic relations, however, and despite an increase in ASEAN trade as a percentage of the EU total, the more significant trend is the increase of economic interdependence between the EU and East Asia generally, as well as the overwhelming increase in economic interdependence with regards to China.

Even considering ASEAN on its own terms, ignoring the fact that it is embedded in the EU's more significant East Asian economic interdependence, bi-regional economic relations appear tenuous. When we untangle the EU-ASEAN economic relationship, it becomes apparent that not all ASEAN member states are created equally. The overwhelming majority of EU trade goes to a select few ASEAN states, namely Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, all states with which the EU is currently negotiating FTAs. While it is possible for this to occur in the other direction as well (ASEAN states being mainly economically interdependent with individual EU member states), this is less of an issue as the EU is a common market and therefore there is no possibility to negotiate as individual states.

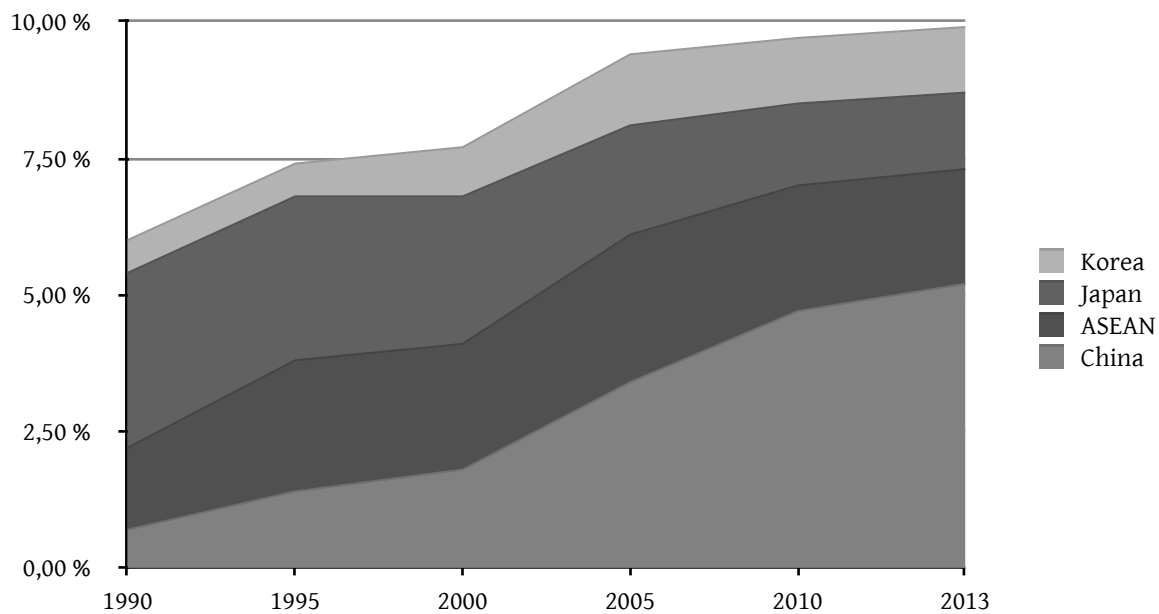


Figure 6: EU trade by partner as percentage of total trade<sup>2</sup>, author's own elaboration (Source: IMF Directions of Trade Statistics).

<sup>2</sup> For better readability, this graph excludes EU internal trade, which was between 60% and 62% over the period, and EU-US trade, which was between 6% and 9%.

	2000	2010	Growth rate	Share of total 2010
ASEAN	€ 41,856	€ 60,634	31.0%	100.0%
<i>Brunei</i>	€ 273	€ 238	-14.4%	0.4%
Indonesia	€ 4,551	€ 6,372	28.6%	10.5%
Cambodia	€ 117	€ 153	23.6%	0.3%
Laos	€ 45	€ 101	55.5%	0.2%
Myanmar	€ 118	€ 83	-41.9%	0.1%
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>€ 8,526</b>	<b>€ 11,243</b>	24.2%	18.5%
Philippines	€ 4,509	€ 3,736	-20.7%	6.2%
<b>Singapore</b>	<b>€ 15,800</b>	<b>€ 24,042</b>	34.3%	39.7%
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>€ 6,628</b>	<b>€ 9,992</b>	33.7%	16.5%
<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>€ 1,291</b>	<b>€ 4,672</b>	72.4%	7.7%

Figure 7: ASEAN exports to the EU in 2000/2010 (million), bilateral FTA-negotiations bold, author's own elaboration (Source: Eurostat).

	2000	2010	Growth rate	Share of total 2010
ASEAN	€ 75,386	€ 86,374	12.7%	100.0%
<i>Brunei</i>	€ 174	€ 8	-2153.1%	0.0%
Indonesia	€ 11,547	€ 13,729	15.9%	15.9%
Cambodia	€ 361	€ 877	58.8%	1.0%
Laos	€ 139	€ 170	18.3%	0.2%
Myanmar	€ 413	€ 161	-156.3%	0.2%
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>€ 18,326</b>	<b>€ 20,701</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>24.0%</b>
Philippines	€ 9,201	€ 5,379	-71.1%	6.2%
<b>Singapore</b>	<b>€ 17,390</b>	<b>€ 18,704</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>€ 13,545</b>	<b>€ 17,212</b>	<b>21.3%</b>	<b>19.9%</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>€ 4,290</b>	<b>€ 9,431</b>	<b>54.5%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>

Figure 8: ASEAN imports from the EU in 2000/2010 (million), bilateral FTA-negotiations bold, author's own elaboration (Source: Eurostat).

A calculation reveals that states with which FTAs have recently been negotiated (Singapore) or are in the process of being negotiated (Malaysia, Thailand<sup>3</sup> and Vietnam), encompass the majority of the ASEAN economy that is relevant in terms of trade with the EU. As a percentage of total ASEAN trade, the four FTA partners account for 82.4% of total EU-ASEAN exports as well as 76.5% of total EU-ASEAN imports.

Jetschke and Portela (2013) made the observation that further region-to-state FTAs are underway with Indonesia and Brunei, which would put the amount of region-to-state trade at 87.1% and 86.2% of bi-regional exports and imports respectively. Furthermore, Jetschke and Portela have remarked that given the publicized EU policy of negotiating Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and FTAs in unison, the Philippines would be another candidate for an upcoming region-to-state FTA. It is telling that the Philippines, despite its democratic credentials, is the last potential candidate for a region-to-state FTA, highlighting the EU's touted pragmatic approach towards the region, putting economically relevant states before those that may fulfill the criteria of political conditionality.

Another pattern of economic interdependence that is independent of bi-regionalism is the FDI that the EU has located in Southeast Asia. While the EU makes up a large part of FDI in ASEAN, only 3.9% of total EU FDI is located in the region. Of this, 2.5% was located in Singapore, 0.5% in Indonesia, 0.5% in Malaysia and 0.3% in Thailand, all other states falling below this threshold (Eurostat, 2013). Singapore is even more central in terms of inward FDI. Out of 1.9% of total inward FDI to the EU, 1.8% come from Singapore. Again, this point does not indicate a high degree of bi-regional institutionalization due to economic interdependence and rather shows a trans-regional and region-to-state approach to economic institutionalization.

While all these points suggest the prioritization of the region-to-state level over the bi-regional level, there is also a case to be made for the trans-regional level being more relevant than the bi-regional dialogue. Taking into consideration trade and FDI with East Asia more generally, it becomes clear that the ASEAN states the EU is economically interdependent with are eclipsed by the larger economic interdependence with East Asia overall.

## Conclusion: Interdependence

Besides the ongoing capacity building between the EU and the ASEAN secretariat, there are no other clear-cut cases of political or economic interdependence at the bi-regional level. Instead, both the region-to-state and trans-regional levels appear to provide the correct venues for the legalization and negotiation, respectively, of interdependence. At the very least, the proliferation of institutions at both the bi-regional and trans-regional levels means that the negotiations between the EU and ASEAN are less prone to gridlock, which is beneficial to both actors.

The conclusion to be drawn from the analysis of economic interdependence is that ASEAN is not a significant economic player in East Asian regionalism, but is a key element in the political interdependence of the region. This puts it in the odd place of being a notable actor in one arena, but not in another. Still, this finding is consistent with the observation of institutional migration to the trans-regional and region-to-state levels of governance. The patterns of economic and political interdependence are well mirrored by the institutional arrangements that have been identified in the previous parts of the analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> While the FTA negotiations between the EU and Thailand have been suspended in the aftermath of the coup of 2013, this does not take away from the fact that there has been a more active policy on the region-to-state level as opposed to the bi-regional level

Nonetheless, interdependence is not a complete explanation for the development of EU-ASEAN interregionalism. While it explains the underlying background that supports the buildup and use of trans-regional and region-to-state institutions, it does not fully explain the timing of the migration of the bi-regional EU-ASEAN relationship into other institutional arrangements, as the political and economic structural interdependences have been persistent over time. This point will be addressed in the following section on hedging and the strategic agency of both regional organizations.

## Strategic Agency

The concept of strategic agency is the inside-out perspective that will allow us to draw full conclusions from the lessons of interdependence in order to explain the timing of institutional proliferation and migration in complex interregionalism. The hedging argument that will be made in this section is essentially an extension of the refutation of actorness as a single determinant in explaining the behavior of ASEAN as opposed to the EU. The purpose of this analysis is to investigate which changes in complex interregionalism are contingent on a strategic choice by either the EU or ASEAN rather than just the lack of actorness on ASEAN's part.

As Jones and Smith (2009) have shown convincingly, the internal process of ASEAN, even after the introduction of the ASEAN Charter, remains deeply intergovernmental. Still, the centrality of ASEAN in the system of East Asian trans-regionalism is puzzling given the fact, as Jones and Smith (2007) would have us believe, that ASEAN is subject to the interests of its more powerful partners such as China and the US. The investigation of the larger context of East Asian governance has shown that there are several clear cases of ASEAN strategic agency with regards to both the EU and East Asia.

What can be observed is that the actions of ASEAN inside complex interregionalism and within East Asian regionalism appear to be coordinated, or in other words “[...] *facilitating a preferred vision of regional order*” (Goh, 2007, p. 132). Goh further asserts that “*Southeast Asian states are more active strategically than one would expect from small, constrained states trying to maximize room for maneuver*” (p. 133). The following analysis will show that the developments in EU-ASEAN complex interregionalism is consistent with the strategies that ASEAN is employing in the East Asian region.

On the other side, the EU has widened its interregional approach from bi-regionalism towards a larger focus on East Asia more generally. Additionally, there has been a noted pragmatism (Doidge, 2004; Lim, 2012) in the EU's interregional policies, which has also had an effect on developments in complex interregionalism.

## ASEAN's Strategic Agency

To make judgments about ASEAN's and the EU's political strategies with regards to one another, we must first assess what objectives both actors have been trying to accomplish. Starting with ASEAN, we see three key elements that have featured prominently in its regional and interregional strategies: First, the principle of omni-enmeshment of potentially hegemonic actors. Second, the principle of horizontal and vertical institutional balancing or hedging, allowing for more room in negotiations when faced with asymmetrically distributed institutional power. Third, the logic of relative institutionalization with the objective of preventing a supersession of ASEAN's internal institutional mechanisms through external institutions.

As Goh (2007) has noted, the changing distribution of power after the end of the Cold War led to discord inside ASEAN as perceptions of threat differed between ASEAN states. While states like Indonesia and Malaysia were more concerned with China, Singapore had stronger concerns about a reemerging Japan. A point on which ASEAN positions galvanized, however, was the desire for a continued US presence in the region. These conflicting interests led to what Goh describes as a strategy of omni-enmeshment of the US and ASEAN's powerful Northeast Asian partners China and Japan. This move towards East Asian regionalism has been interpreted by several researchers as serving the purpose of involving more powerful states with the objective of *“socializ[ing] these countries into embracing the principles and norms of the institution, [...] sovereignty, noninterference in domestic affairs and peaceful resolution of conflict”* (Goh, 2007, p. 123).

As has previously been noted, ASEAN was the only party in East Asia that could credibly propose institutions for regional security cooperation without igniting fears of hegemonic ambitions (Beeson, 2013). A similar logic applies in the field of economic and financial cooperation inside the APT, as well as in the more general East Asian dialogue EAS (Beeson, 2013). While there are conflicting interpretations about the reasons for the emergence of this system, it is an indisputable fact that ASEAN has become a pillar of East Asian regional institutions. As a hedge against its more powerful neighbors, ASEAN has supported the institutionalization of interregional relations with the intention of enmeshing other actors into the East Asian hierarchy of powers (Goh, 2007). ASEAN use of APEC (Ravenhill, 2007), as well as US involvement in ARF and EAS, have commonly been interpreted as hedges against China, ensuring continued US security interests in the region. The involvement of Australia and most recently India, shows that ASEAN continues to expand the number of actors in order to contribute to stability in the region. Rhetorically, this strategy has been described best by Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Llong (2006): *“[...] the region should be kept open and all the major powers should have stakes in Asia [...] as this is most likely to produce a stable, predictable regional order in which countries big and small can prosper together.”*

The question of how the EU fits into this equation of regional stability, given its lack of a security presence in Asia, remains. But the fact of the matter is that the EU does not need to be a security actor to play an important role in ASEAN's hedging strategy. The prevention of aggressive behavior in the region and the drawing in of the US by means of institutional involvement may also be achieved by way of having non-security actors present in institutions, to give legitimacy to the presence and principles of ASEAN and to criticize non-conforming behavior by third states in the event of conflict. In any case, the presence of the EU in a forum centered on ASEAN membership may be used to raise awareness of ASEAN's legitimacy as an actor in its own right. Conversely, ASEAN has always been most opposed to institutions marginalizing its relevance as a regional organization, such as APEC, which excluded some of its membership. Asserting that collective identity formation is not only an internal process but also includes the formation of identity towards others, ASEAN's move from bi-regionalism to trans-regionalism must also be understood as a function of this strategy.

What is important to note is that the omni-enmeshment strategy of ASEAN with regards to the EU works both ways: On one hand, ASEAN sees the EU as a partner in its enmeshment of other powers like the proximate threats of China and Japan, as well as the US. On the other hand, ASEAN attempts to enmesh the EU in its institutional framework in order to hedge against unilateral action by the EU in relation to ASEAN, as has previously occurred in the bi-regional dialogue. It has been noted that ASEAN requires EU market access in order to ensure its economic stability. Additionally, it is wary of EU unilateral action related to political conditionality leading to gridlock in the interregional relationship. The alliance-build-

ing along the lines of Asia inside ASEM illustrate how ASEAN may build an enmeshment and hedging coalition in order to increase its leverage against an actor that is perceived as acting unilaterally. The absence of economic bargaining power due to the lack of internal integration puts constraints on ASEAN's strategic options in the economic sphere. Still, as Goh (2007) has noted, ASEAN appears to pursue a strategy of economic diversification aimed at reducing dependence on individual actors as well as inducing competition in its trade and investment partners. This has been particularly notable in the recent growth in trade interdependence between ASEAN and China. Following the signing of the ASEAN-China FTA, which is expected to further increase trade between the two and crowd out trade with other partners, ASEAN has extended offers for closer economic cooperation with the US, Japan and, to a certain degree, the EU (Goh, 2007). This development has again been led by individual states keen on diversifying their trade relations, with Singapore and Thailand being amongst the first states to sign FTAs with outside actors such as Australia and India (Goh, 2007). While not all FTA negotiations of statist actors have been successful (the US-Thailand and US-Malaysia FTAs are still being negotiated), this again signals the state level as the forerunner for trade and investment strategy at the regional level.

While the discussion of hedging and enmeshment has so far focused on the trans-regional level, ASEAN also pursues the strategy below the bi-regional level. Goh (2007) has highlighted the strategy of individual states like Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam in strengthening individual security ties with powers outside the region such as the US and Australia. Singapore has also been active in enmeshing several competing actors in its security activities, having provided facilities and carried out exercises with the US, India and China. Since ASEAN is not a security actor in its own right, its member states provide the strategic impetus towards engaging certain partners. Again, this tendency is also visible in the relations between ASEAN and the EU, although it is restrained by the fact that the EU has established criteria for cooperation that are tied to political conditionality. As recent developments have shown, ASEAN member states inclined to cooperate with the EU politically have signed PCAs on a region-to-state level. This can be seen as an inducement to keep the EU engaged in the region, if only as an institutional presence contributing to ASEAN's omnimeshment strategy.

Moving on to the second aspect of ASEAN strategy, the next point of investigation is vertical and horizontal institutional balancing as an objective of the regional organization. As Rüländ (2012) has noted, the crisis of multilateralism has brought about so-called 'forum shopping' behavior, which denotes the use of vertically or horizontally competitive forums in order to avoid the exercise of institutional power in asymmetrical institutional arrangements, as well as the attempt to open up opportunities for the realization of political aims through parallel negotiations. Rüländ has already observed the behavior particularly in the case of East Asian states, which have considered themselves to be in a weaker position in multilateral negotiations than their Western counterparts. Rüländ's argument can be transposed to explain ASEAN's strategy of horizontal and vertical balancing which is present in the context of both East Asian governance and EU-ASEAN interregionalism. The ASEAN-US relationship within APEC developed a security element over time and was ultimately complemented by the ARF process, which rivaled the US military dialogue and cooperation at the trans-regional level. This was widely interpreted as a move by ASEAN away from an asymmetrical relationship with the US through APEC in which the US used its security presence to coerce ASEAN into political commitments on financial matters, migration and economic reform (Maull & Okfen, 2006). At the same time, military linkages between individual ASEAN states and the US added a vertical dimension to the interregional relationship. Closer cooperation is reserved for the bilateral level, as several ASEAN states have



strong military links with the US that are hard external balancing responses to the Chinese threat. These relationships are much more densely institutionalized, with significant military aid from the US to the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia (Goh, 2007). Again, this highlights the fact that the trans-regional level is used for the enmeshment and socialization of external actors, while the bilateral level is used for more practical and consequential cooperation.

A similar logic of horizontal balancing applies to the rival bi-regional and ASEM processes in EU-ASEAN interregionalism. In order to combat the perceived asymmetry in the bi-regional dialogue, ASEAN follows a strategy of horizontal institutional balancing in order to create alternative venues for negotiation. It is important to note that ASEAN has not been the only beneficiary of horizontal balancing in the interregional relationship. As Maull and Okfen (2006) have noted, the addition of trans-regional forums such as APEC and ASEM has opened different channels for actors to extract political commitment through the employment of institutional balancing within and across regimes. The different alliances made possible through ASEM's diverse membership may make it easier for groups to coalesce around common interests. When we look at complex interregionalism more generally, both the EU and ASEAN have at times managed to extract commitments despite the low level of institutionalization and opposition from the other party. The EU has successfully pushed for the implementation of TRIPS stemming from the GATT process in the ASEAN states through the bi-regional dialogue (Robles, 2006) and had some success with its strategy of political conditionality throughout the 1990s. ASEAN, meanwhile, has successfully used the transfer of dialogue from bi-regionalism to the ASEM process to push for certain material concessions, such as infrastructure projects which it never managed to extract from the bi-regional relationship. There are risks attached to this strategy of horizontal and vertical institutional balancing. As Roloff (2001) has noted, the proliferation of institutions across different levels of governance combined with low degrees of institutionalization may lead to an 'interlocking trap' in which no single level has the authority to engender any real function. Given the questionable institutional dividends, particularly at the trans-regional level, this appears to be a very real risk to an institutional hedging strategy.

However, looking at the third feature of ASEAN strategy with regards to interregionalism may dispel fears of a permanent interlocking trap of horizontally and vertically competitive institutions. The principle of relative institutionalization refers to the fact that ASEAN appears to have implemented the ASEAN Way as the *modus operandi* in institutions it is a member of as a way of safeguarding its relevance as a regional organization.

Through the central position of ASEAN and its interests in preserving its norms and values in the face of the powerful influence of China, Japan and the US, ASEAN put great value on the ASEAN Way being the normative underpinning of its institutional network. Particularly following the Asian Financial Crisis, the *raison d'être* of ASEAN was called into question and there was a sense of risk concerning ASEAN's potential submersion in a larger East Asian regional order (Beeson, 2013). During the following establishment of East Asian regional institutions, ASEAN placed particular value on looser forms of diplomatic exchange and an avoidance of legalization, a feature which was particularly welcomed by China (Jones & Smith, 2007). Beeson (2013) eloquently states the outcome of this strategy: "*This pattern of leadership by default continues to explain ASEAN's prominence in regional forums; it also explains the fact that the price for its 'leadership' has been the adoption of the 'ASEAN Way,' even for institutions that are not exclusively East Asian*" (p. 312).

This point is closely connected to the collective identity of ASEAN, particularly in relation to its East Asian neighbors. Despite its regionalism initiatives with East Asia, the ultimate

goal of ASEAN is to safeguard its own political independence, freedom from economic and military threats and non-interference from its political partners. The persistence of these principles has only recently become a matter of debate within ASEAN and remains central to the functioning of the organization, even after the introduction of the ASEAN Charter. In order to ensure the preservation of these norms, ASEAN cannot simply enter into institutional arrangements that are further along the spectrum towards hard law, because its internal rules, decision making and implementation mechanisms continue to be soft. But again, while this may be the prevailing strategy at the regional level, individual ASEAN states have the opportunity to bypass ASEAN norms in order to politically intervene in other ASEAN states, as some have done notably in the past (Jones, 2007). The cases of ASEAN-internal intervention that Jones has highlighted always emerged as a function of the interests of individual states. Again, this assessment lends further weight to the hypothesis that the region-to-state level remains the major pathway to a deeper legalization of cooperation with ASEAN states. Meanwhile, given the integration pressures that exist inside and outside ASEAN, the future logic of relative institutionalization may move further in the direction of hard law. Should ASEAN integrate further economically or politically, it would be able to enter into regional or interregional agreements without jeopardizing its legitimacy as a regional actor.

### The EU's Strategic Agency

Having discussed ASEAN's strategy with regards to the EU, the opposite perspective needs to be considered. Coincidentally, EU strategy towards ASEAN interregionalism also has three dimensions: First, there has been a move towards pragmatism in the relationship with ASEAN in order to maintain engagement in the region with regards to competing actors. Second, the EU has refocused its regional relations from bi-regionalism to East Asia more generally, with an increasing focus on China. Third, there is the continuing application of capacity building with the aim of future political interdependence at the bi-regional level.

The limited institutional dividends in the 1990s and a general reframing of EU foreign policy from a strong normative inclination towards a more pragmatic approach has also had an effect on the EU-ASEAN relationship. Particularly after the completion of the EU common market, the EU came to be increasingly eager in seeking foreign growth markets as opposed to its previous preoccupation with internal economic integration (Doidge, 2004). Obviously, Southeast Asia has some of the highest regional growth rates in the world and therefore has been a key area of competition for states seeking investment opportunities. The rapid increase in extra-regional FDI inflow in ASEAN is an indicator of how economically attractive and competitive the region has become: Extra-regional FDI increased from \$36 billion in 2005 and \$63 billion in 2010 to \$100 billion in 2013. Meanwhile, the composition of investors has remained much the same, indicating that investors are increasing their stakes in ASEAN economies. This observation of economic competition echoes Roloff's (2006) notion of the 'balance of economic challenge', which has been theorized as pushing actors towards engagement with one another in order to balance against other interregional economic linkages.

Goh (2007) has also noted an eagerness and competition between outside powers to sign trade and investment agreements with ASEAN throughout the 2000s. As has been mentioned before, there is a correlation in the timing of region-to-state FTAs between ASEAN and its partners, with China taking the lead, followed by Japan, South Korea, Australia and even India (currently in negotiation). It is notable that these economic agreements only materialized after the signing of the TAC (with the exception of China), a fact that speaks for

ASEAN's strategic preference of ensuring the commitment to ASEAN-led East Asian regionalism prior to accepting economic cooperation. The response of outside powers to this requirement has been described by Goh (2007) as 'competitive ascription'. Considering that the TAC has been the key ASEAN treaty since 1976, the fact that only in 2003 did external states start signing up to the TAC makes clear that ASEAN's recent position in the regional order has had an impact on the regional strategies of other actors. The EU's signing of the TAC, which has been tied to the expectation of membership in the EAS (Jetschke & Portela, 2013), is also indicative of a more pragmatic EU strategy with regards to subscribing to ASEAN norms with the intention of ensuring engagement in the regional order. The EU's willingness to subscribe to ASEAN's norms in the East Asian region implicitly acknowledges the relevance of ASEAN's norms as a part of the regional order, which contributes to the shallow institutionalization of the institutions ASEAN is a part of. The emergence of ASEM as a trans-regional forum has also widely been interpreted as a response to the institutional challenge that the US posed by way of its engagement with the region through APEC (Dent, 2006). EU support for ASEM as a way of engaging with the region to face US competition has also been interpreted as a response to APEC's refusal to admit the EU as a member (Gilson, 2005), a fact which further supports the view that EU strategy is concerned with institutional and economic competition in the region.

Apart from the political sector, EU pragmatism with regards to its competitors has also been significant in FTA negotiations with ASEAN states. As Lim (2012) has noted, communications from EU parliamentarians urging the negotiators of the ASEAN FTA to fast track negotiations made reference to the need to stay ahead of the US, South Korea and India, which were also negotiating FTAs at the time. This eagerness to deepen economic ties in the region has also led to the undermining of the bilateral level through the negotiation of PCAs and FTAs. While it has been noted that the EU signing political agreements on the region-to-state level is not a completely novel strategy, the speed at which the negotiations of bilateral agreements were announced after the failure of the bi-regional dialogue was telling with regards to the strategic urgency of strengthening ties with the region. Another fact that highlights the economic pragmatism of the EU is the choice of partners with which it has or is currently negotiating region-to-state FTAs. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, the first states with which the EU entered into negotiations, have collectively outperformed ASEAN as a bloc in the growth of imports and exports from and to the EU between 2000 and 2010. They had an average export growth of 41.4% and an average import growth of 23.6% between 2000 and 2010 compared to ASEAN in general, which posted growth of 31% and 12% respectively during the same timeframe. It is particularly striking that Vietnam was chosen as an initial partner in the FTA negotiations over states with higher democratic credentials. In fact, Indonesia and the Philippines had already signed region-to-state PCAs containing human rights clauses in 2009 and 2012 (Jetschke & Portela, 2012), while negotiations over PCAs with Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are still outstanding. This situation suggests that the EU is willing to put economic matters before issues of political cooperation in the recent climate of economic challenge in Southeast Asia.

Still, it must be noted that a modicum of political conditionality remains in the EU-ASEAN bi-regional relationship. It has commonly been accepted that the reason for the failure to conclude a bi-regional FTA has been the inability of both regions to settle on human rights issues in Myanmar. While other competitors in the region such as China, Japan, Australia and South Korea did in fact negotiate FTAs with ASEAN as a region (although exceptions remain in all cases), the EU apparently refused to settle for a bi-regional agreement due to the non-fulfillment of a certain threshold of political conditionality on the bi-regional level. This suggests that the EU still has certain strategic objectives in mind for its future relation-

ships on the bi-regional level, a fact which will be further addressed in the EU strategic agency relating to capacity building inside ASEAN.

A shift towards more pragmatism in EU strategy throughout the 1990s was complemented by another strategic change: The embedding of the EU-ASEAN relationship into the EU's larger strategy on East Asia. While the EU has realized the need to increase its economic engagement in Southeast Asia in order to take advantage of its economic dynamism, the same strategic refocusing has been undertaken with regards to China. While the EU had weak personal and business network links in Southeast Asia compared to the long-present competitors of China, Japan and the US (Beeson, 2013), this was arguably more the case in its relationship with China. Starting in the 1990s, the EU therefore faced the twin challenge of engaging ASEAN and China economically in order to profit from East Asia's high growth. This has been clearly visible in EU strategies related to ASEAN and East Asia, which have charted the development from bi-regionalism towards a more trans-regional approach.

In the case of the EU, the first steps towards political relations with East Asia more generally were apparent in the EU's New Asia Strategy of 1994, which laid out a plan for engagement with East Asia and defined the EU-ASEAN relationship as a 'cornerstone' in the EU's larger Asia policy. Doidge (2004) describes the strategy as a rather disappointing document from the perspective of ASEAN as it did not appear to put much value on heightened cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. Tellingly, this announcement of strategic priorities happened at the same time as the emergence of ASEM, conferring merit upon the argument that the widening of the interregional dialogue was also done with the aim of facilitating interaction with the East Asian region. Seven years later, in its policy paper 'Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework' which was published in 2001, the EU laid out its Asia strategy in terms that superseded the EU-ASEAN relationship as the main channel of interaction with East Asia. While it does identify ASEAN-led initiatives such as ARF as relevant to the security-governance of the region, its economic objectives were clearly related to a closer relationship with China (Dent, 2006). The trans-regional engagement makes even more sense when one considers the current dynamics of East Asian economic integration, which imply that ASEAN is in the process of being integrated into the Chinese production chain as the origin of raw materials and heavy manufacturing, with China taking the role of interlocutor between ASEAN and the global economy (Beeson, 2013).

Apart from the economic ambitions of the EU in East Asia, ASEM must also be seen as a tool for engaging Asia politically. For the EU, the creation of a trans-regional forum was an opportunity to galvanize disparate dialogues into a common bloc, originally staying with the regional definition of East Asia as containing China, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN. The fact that ASEM is a symptom of the strategy of engaging with East Asia as a bloc instead of relying on disparate dialogues becomes even more apparent when one considers the reaction of other actors to the forum. Notably, Japan was opposed to the emergence of ASEM as it was perceived as a downgrading of EU-Japan relations (Gilson, 2005). The fact that no similar reaction has been noted in the case of ASEAN lends support to the view that the EU strategy of regional engagement was consistent with the objectives of ASEAN.

What may come as a challenge to EU-ASEAN interregionalism and ASEAN leadership in East Asian regionalism is the recent announcement of the EU strategic partnerships, one of which is with China. Although the potential of these partnerships is as yet unclear, it can be expected that the EU is seeking closer economic and political ties with regional powers (the other strategic partners are Brazil, Canada, India, Mexico, South Africa, Russia and the USA).

The fact that ASEM contains three of these strategic partners may not bode well for EU-ASEAN complex interregionalism, as this could result in ASEAN being marginalized in the dialogue.

The last strategic dimension of EU behavior in complex interregionalism is that of capacity building at the bi-regional level. While it has been remarked that the actual process of capacity building has been rather opaque, Doidge (2004) and Lim (2012) have remarked on the nature of capacity building and its effects on the bi-regional relationship.

The process of cooperation between the EU and the ASEAN secretariat, the main recipient of capacity-building measures, has mainly been interpreted as the transfer of know-how on regional integration in different sectors, ranging from the political, through the economic, to negotiation capacity in external relations (with regards to FTAs). This strategy seems to align with the theoretical expectations of the behavior of an external federator, which has been described by Doidge (2004): “[...] [B]y framing the areas of debate through which a collective identity will be established, the strong actor is significantly affecting the nature of the collective identity itself” (p. 319).

This view of the objective of capacity building at the bi-regional level also makes up for the paradox of bi-regional cooperation despite a lack of bi-regional economic or political interdependence. It appears that the EU is investing in possible future bi-regional interdependence. Capacity-building programs can therefore be seen as an EU strategy for influencing ASEAN identity with the objective of making it a more suitable partner for the EU in the future.

## Conclusion: Strategic Agency

The analysis has shown that strategic agency on the part of both the EU and ASEAN is a powerful explanatory variable with regards to the changes in complex interregionalism. The ASEAN strategies of omni-enmeshment, horizontal and vertical balancing, and the logic of relative institutionalization are strongly correlated with the development of the complex interregional system, with its shallow institutions on the trans-regional level that enmesh the EU and other actors in a complex system of interaction and dialogue. Additionally, the fact that closer institutional cooperation generally occurs at the sub-ASEAN level is consistent with the observations on EU-ASEAN interregionalism.

From the perspective of the EU, a more pragmatic approach with regards to ASEAN, as well as the intention of engaging East Asia overall instead of just the regional organization, also supports the observations about changes in complex interregionalism. Continued EU support for bi-regional capacity building explains the paradox of continued cooperation at the bi-regional level given the theorized role of the EU as an external federator.

## Conclusion

To conclude this thesis, I will return to the original research question, which is as follows: **Which determinants can explain the institutional change in complex interregionalism?**

As the analysis of actorness, interdependence and strategic agency has shown, we can differentiate between less and more powerful explanations of complex interregionalism. Actorness, while certainly applicable in other aspects of the interregional relationship, has epistemological limitations which lead to a bias in the interpretation of cases in which the EU and ASEAN have shown agency in reaction to the international structure, particularly

related to political and economic changes in East Asia. Additionally, the observed actorness in the EU and ASEAN can be better characterized as a constant rather than a variable. The rigidity of actorness over time simply does not match the indisputable institutional change in complex interregionalism.

The perspective of political and economic interdependence, meanwhile, highlights the underlying patterns in the relationship between the EU, ASEAN and East Asia more generally. Besides the ongoing capacity building between the EU and the ASEAN secretariat, there are no other clear-cut cases of political or economic interdependence at the bi-regional level. Instead, both the region-to-state and trans-regional levels appear to provide the correct venues for legalization and socialization, respectively, in the system of mutual interdependence. These underlying patterns have led to efforts by both actors in reaction to their structural environment.

ASEAN has employed a strategy of omni-enmeshment, and horizontal and vertical balancing, all the while pursuing the principle of relative institutionalization in its bi- and trans-regional relations. The EU, on the other hand, has pursued a pragmatic approach in relation to ASEAN as a reaction to economic competition from other actors. Additionally, it has widened its regional focus from Southeast Asia to East Asia more generally in reaction to changes in economic interdependence. The paradoxical EU support for bi-regional capacity building can be explained with the theorized role of the EU as an external federator.

The title of this thesis provocatively asked the question of whether interregionalism offered false promise. This investigation has shown that complex interregionalism is no more and no less than the sum of its parts: A concerted institutional response to underlying patterns of political and economic interdependence.

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