

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

World regional social governance, policy and development

Book Section

How to cite:

Yeates, Nicola (2019). World regional social governance, policy and development. In: Midgley, James; Surender, Rebecca and Alfes, Laura eds. Handbook of Social Policy and Development. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, pp. 224–245.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2019 James Midgley, Rebecca Surender and Lauren Alfes



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.4337/9781785368431>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

12. World-regional social governance, policy and development

Nicola Yeates

REGIONALIZING SOCIAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

The key institutions, actors, processes and outcomes of social policy and development are traditionally conceptualized and theorized in relation to countries, and intra-national processes of development and change. An established body of literature considers how social policy and social development strategies, actors, institutions and outcomes in transnational contexts, emphasising how these are projected 'outwardly' and how policy formation transcends the realm of any individual country (Yeates 2014). This chapter considers one aspect of that, namely ongoing processes of regionalization and strategies to pursue regional cooperation and integration at the sub-global, transnational, level and how they relate to social policy and development.

For some time now, scholars, policy makers and activists have been alert to the topic of world-regional social governance, policy and development. This interest reflects the importance of strategies of state and non-state actors to 'lock in' internationalizing flows of trade and investment on a regional basis among groups of 'most favoured nations' and to forge institutions to strengthen economic, political and socio-cultural relations between groups of nations in contemporary national and global policy-making. Such regionalizing processes and the social actors mobilized around them are deeply embroiled in shaping the conditions for social development and the direction of national social policy. The archetypal example of an overtly world-regional approach to social policy and development is the European Union, around which a specialist field of academic study has grown. However, regionalizing processes, regionalist projects and regional forces of different kinds are not confined to the advanced industrialized countries. Indeed, they are evident across diverse development contexts worldwide. There are context-specific reasons for this overall impetus, but collective action on a regional scale is widely seen as a compelling means of tackling the cross-border nature of social, political, environmental and economic challenges arising from the greater cross-border connectivity and interdependence associated with globalization. Regional-level collective action can be easier to negotiate and conclude than at the global level; it can enable a more effective and coherent set of responses to pressing social policy issues than governments acting unilaterally or bilaterally; and it can sustain the interest of prospective partners outside the region (Yeates et al. 2010; Yeates 2017a).

This chapter explains and illustrates these propositions with reference to prevailing research approaches and perspectives as well as to policy discourses and practices drawn from instantiated cases from around the world. The focus lies firmly on transnational regions, otherwise known as world-regions, to distinguish them from subnational regions within a country which are not considered here. The chapter argues that world-regional cooperation and integration are vital components of contemporary global and national governance and policy landscapes. They are embroiled in the (re)making welfare capitalism and its governance, nationally and globally, across diverse development contexts.

The chapter starts from the observation that the relationship between regionalizing processes, social policy and social development has tended to remain implicit rather than be fully explicated. Regional governance and policy are often neglected in literatures on social policy, social development and global governance; while social policy and social development are overlooked by the burgeoning literature on comparative regionalism. Nevertheless, this chapter identifies key points of intersection between regionalism, social policy and social development, along with studies which are addressing these intersections. These pivot around the contested role of regionalism in shaping the conditions and prospects for socially-equitable social policies and inclusive social development. Three questions arise in particular. First, whether regionalism undermines or strengthens national welfare states and welfare systems. Second, whether regionalism undermines or strengthens global efforts in support of coherent and comprehensive social policies. Third, whether regional governance and social policy can be strengthened in the interests of inclusive social development and socially-equitable social policies.

APPROACHES AND DEBATES

Lexicons of Regions, Regionalism and Regionalisation

World-regionalism studies is a multidisciplinary field of academic study and research, spanning the disciplines of political science, geography, sociology and economics. This field is expansive and replete with different definitions, conceptualizations and theorizations (Börzel and Risse 2016; Söderbaum 2016a, 2016b). Here the notions of 'region', 'region building', 'regionalism' and 'regionalization', which are essential when relating this topic to the social policy–development nexus, are briefly reviewed.

A 'region' is a socio-politically constructed entity that 'makes references to territorial location and to geographical or normative contiguity' (Borzel and Risse 2016, p. 7). It includes three or more countries but can also be continental (as in Europe, Caribbean, South Asia) or transcontinental (Eurasia, transatlantic area, Asia-Pacific) in scale. Countries in a region are usually geographically proximate to one another, but there are exceptions. For example, Iran is an associate member of a South American regional grouping, ALBA. The location of a country within a geographical continent (for example, Europe, Asia) is not a definitive guide to the designation of what is a region. For example, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) spans Asian, South American and Oceanic countries; while the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region encompasses all countries located in Europe, Africa and Asia that share the Mediterranean coastline (*ibid.*). 'Region-building' refers to the process whereby social actors (state and non-state) create regional institutions and organizations, whether by building new ones or strengthening existing ones (Van Langenhove 2011).

'Regionalism' refers primarily to a 'top-down' statist process, whereby the state is the lead actor engaging in strategies to build and sustain formal regional institutions and organizations (Börzel and Risse 2016, p. 7). At least three states are needed to distinguish regionalism from bilateralism (which involves state strategies of two countries). Regional organizations lie at the heart of regional development governance. Country membership of such organizations spans nearly all countries in all continents of the world. Just as countries are members of multiple international organizations – the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO) – so many countries also belong to more than one regional organization simultaneously. For example, the Philippines is simultaneously a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East Asia Forum (EAF), and a partner of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The UN system has its own distinct regional structure, in the form of UN Regional Commissions and regional offices of UN social agencies; for example, World Health Organization (WHO) regional health organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), or the International Labour Organization (ILO) regional offices. Alongside these sit regional development banks with mandates to finance overall development in the continent in which they are embedded. Country membership of each of these different kinds of regional organizations differs. For example, country membership of the (UN) West African Health Organization is not coterminous with that of either the UN Economic Commission for Africa, or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Regional organizations are significant actors, as knowledge brokers, advocacy actors, training hubs and industrial coordinators within their respective regions (Van Langenhove 2011). Diverse drivers and logics of regionalist strategies give rise to and shape the institutional characteristics of the region and the strategies of any particular regional organization. Aspirations that international commercial and trade integration would render inter-state warfare illogical have been major drivers. Geopolitical considerations have also been important. ASEAN, for example, originated in the late 1960s as a Western-sponsored political alliance to counteract the 'communist threat' in the region perceived to emanate from China. Otherwise, different models of political cooperation and market-building are evident, even within the same region-building project over time. For example, MERCOSUR originated as a customs union and evolved as a commercial initiative aiming at the free movement of factors of production. The history of the EU similarly speaks to this dynamic, but it has gone further in creating a single market and common currency with substantial involvement in many other domains of social and public policy. It has also become a global political actor in its own right, with rights of representation and participation as a regional bloc in global institutions. UNASUR has ambitions to develop akin to the EU, including developing a presence on the global stage as a political actor. Major motivating forces driving regional organizations are increased international trade, and being able to take advantage of economies of scale afforded by integrated markets for production and trade. Accordingly, regional trade agreements are traditional cornerstones of regional cooperation and integration. In both 'developed' and 'developing' countries, regional trade agreements (RTAs) cover goods and services and they have become increasingly significant within the global economy, with over half of all international trade being conducted inside them. They have been instrumental in forging circumstances whereby neighbouring countries within regional groupings are often the most important trading partners.

Just as regionalist strategies are proliferating, so they are also undergoing consolidation. 'Mega-regions', involving regional groupings of 20-plus countries, are emerging, as are trans-regional groupings involving cooperation between existing regional blocs (for example, EU–MERCOSUR; MERCOSUR–Southern African Customs Union; SAARC–ASEAN). Alongside this, we need to keep in mind existing 'clubs' to which members of regional groups are also party to. The BRICS and CIVETS groups are notable in this regard. BRICS is a group of large, middle-income countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) which have sought alliances with each other, while CIVETS is an assigned group of emerging market economies (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa). Of note is that South Africa is a member of both BRICS and CIVETS, as well as a member of SADC and the AU. It sees no incompatibility in these multiple memberships of regional and trans-regional groupings.

‘Regionalization’ refers to a more diffuse, bottom-up set of social processes, involving ‘processes of increasing economic, political, social or cultural interactions among geographically or culturally contiguous states and societies’ (Börzel and Risse 2016, p. 8). Emphasized are a variety of non-state actors organized in formal and informal networks, and the transnational relations between social actors such as business, labour, social movements and non-governmental organizations. In these processes, such actors may be important drivers of region-building projects; sometimes they may exceed states in their significance in promoting regional identity and solidarity. The outcomes of such regionalizing processes may include formal institution- and organization-building, but this is not always the case. For example, sub-Saharan Africa exhibits comparatively strong regionalism without pronounced economic regionalization, while strong economic regionalization in East Asia has not yet led to strong regionalism in the form of robust supranational regional organisations (Börzel and Risse 2016, p. 8).

Around the world, then, there are different sorts of regionalization processes and regionalist strategies, combining in complex ways to produce different regional orders and regional modes of governance (Börzel and Risse 2016, p. 9). At this juncture it is worth emphasizing the wide range of social actors coexisting within any given region at any given point in time. Although not all of them are immersed in region-building, many of them are, by virtue of the intense links, alliances and coalitions they form with others in proximate countries in the region (as well as in other regions of the world). Also, not all of these policy actors are necessarily of, or from, the region. For example, international donors are highly engaged in the provision of development aid directed at countries within a lower-income region, or at regional organizations themselves. Similarly, philanthropic actors can have a major presence in political economies of social policy and development in any given region. For example, the Gates Foundation is a major provider of health-related development aid across Africa and Asia. The value of its donations may exceed the official development assistance (ODA). From the perspective of an individual country, then, this regional perspective brings into sharp relief the realities of ‘complex multilateralism’.

Regional orders are the outcome of markedly different histories. Whereas regional integration is often pinpointed to the post-World War II period, and in particular to the origins of the European Union, regional integration as an ambition and as a political practice in fact dates back much further in history. It is linked to histories of colonialism and liberation movements (Yeates 2014; Söderbaum 2016a). The former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) instantiates an early example of world-regional social policy. Its model of communist social policy and development contrasts sharply with contemporary models of regional social policy which mainly revolve around variants of social liberalism and conservatism. Regional orders are, then, the result of different political contexts and modes of organization. A central feature of these are welfare arrangements and systems. This point is overlooked by comparative regionalism literatures, which rarely focus on social policy or social development issues. The tendency to focus on ‘developed’ regions, notably the European Union, to the neglect of middle- and lower-income countries has further marginalized the critical role that social policy and development discourses and debates are actually playing in region-building processes there. These and other points are elaborated during the course of the chapter.

Regional Development

Regional actors and projects of region-building are not always considered as factors shaping the conditions of social development. Scholarly literatures on regional development governance prioritize issues of economic development and a narrow range of public policy measures (notably, trade, investment and state security) (see, e.g., Bruszt and Palestini 2016). The prevailing narrative in those literatures locates historical waves in which the link between regionalism and economic development has been constructed. Typically, three main waves are identified. The first wave was in 1940–1970, when statist developmental models prevailed, underpinned by the idea that under conditions of trade imbalances with ‘core’ countries, regionalist state strategies in the South could support the process of economic transformation from agrarian and primary economies to industrialized and high-tech ones. In the second wave, from 1980, during the period termed ‘open regionalism’, regionalism was associated with progressing market integration through free-trade agreements, customs unions and common markets. Region-building was about regional market-making where the allocation of economic assets and economic outcomes were left to the investment and trading decisions of private actors. In the third wave, since 1990, the regional development paradigm is said to have shifted towards forms of regional governance that could reconcile potential conflicts between the requirements of regional market-making and economic development. International competitiveness in this era is seen as the outcome of capacity-building initiatives to upgrade institutions and provide regional public goods such as transport and telecommunication connectivity, energy integration, capacity building and human resource development (Bruszt and Palestini 2016). The identification of historical waves of regionalism is a useful heuristic device, but in practice the lines are less clearly drawn. Thus, throughout the most recent period we continue to see open regionalism alive and thriving, while regional public goods provision is unevenly taken up by region-building projects around the world.

For all their differences in approach, regional development initiatives have tended to assume that social development would flow on from economic transformation. Comparative regionalism studies, as a field of

academic study and research, has not explicated this point, let alone problematized it. As such, there remains a great deal of scope for context-specific social policy–development research that is purposively directed at surfacing the social and political conditions underpinning regionalizing economic transformations and the consequences of regional development governance for social welfare. Crucially, any assessment of a social policy or social development ‘turn’ in regionalism needs to verify whether and how official discourses and mandates are being carried through into practice; that is, whether tangible, robust and effective initiatives that are capable of, or are actually, raising social standards, providing public goods and improving social provision are actually being implemented.

For the purposes of this chapter, and this *Handbook* more generally, the following observations are pertinent. Regional trade policy (and its variants) is underpinned by particular conceptions of society and social development, even though scholarly literatures on comparative regionalism do not explicate them. Regional economic integration initiatives, particularly those revolving around commercial trade and investment, articulate certain cultural values underpinning social relationships (individualism, accumulative acquisition, competitiveness) and social models of production and exchange (as in factors of production that are sold on the market at market-determined prices, instead of being allocated according to principles of need, redistribution or reciprocity). The societal model underpinning regionalist economic development strategies, in particular open regionalism, is often criticized for its far-reaching impacts upon national social systems of welfare production and distribution, livelihoods and the provision of many kinds of public goods. A key question here is: do regional agreements strengthen or undermine state capacity as an agent of social development? Advocates of such agreements argue that they bolster national welfare systems and social innovation by virtue of the economic growth and transformative effects on services organization and delivery which they enable, and that there are clear ‘social development dividends’ in the form of jobs, tax revenue, increased productivity and greater efficiency. Critics argue that without embedding strong social regulation, such agreements exert a competitive downward pressure on social standards, and contribute to the ‘hollowing out’ of the state, and the erosion of state autonomy and its redistributive powers (Holden 2014). Most research in regional studies has focused on the European Union, and there has been far less attention to the impacts of its external development, trade and social policies on non-EU countries or to the social policy consequences of regional trade agreements adopted by regional groupings in different development contexts.

Regional trade agreements incorporate sectors of direct relevance to social policy. Health services is an exemplar in this regard. For example, SADC governments have identified medicines development, production and supply as part of their regional trade-based integration plan, while ASEAN governments have identified healthcare as a priority sector for region-wide integration based on liberalizing trade in services (Arunanondchai and Fink 2006; Penfold 2015). Advocates argue that increased intra-regional health services trade (such as in telemedicine, health worker training, medicine production) presents opportunities for greater efficiency, cost savings and access to better-quality care. However, there are real risks from including health services in regional trade agreements. Regional trade agreements intervene in the domestic politics of policy making, influencing trade-offs involved in healthcare policy-making (Arunanondchai and Fink 2006). Also, such agreements provide little if any incentive to governments to properly fund health services in the interests of social equity, and they risk reducing governments’ policy space to respond effectively and comprehensively to public health issues (Holden 2014). The concern is that social development imperatives become subordinated to commercial trade and investment ones. Such concerns about regional agreements that incorporate education as a tradeable service have also been raised (see Education International, www.ei-ie.org; Robertson 2017).

Regional Social Policy

An established body of social policy literature considers the extent to which world-regional development and public policy actors and initiatives are manifestly engaged with questions of social regulation, redistribution, reproduction, representation and rights (Yeates and Deacon 2006; Deacon et al. 2010; Yeates 2007, 2014, 2017b; Yeates and Riggiozzi 2015; Bianculli and Hoffman 2016). World-regional social policy is broadly defined as cross-border public interventions on a (cross-border) regional scale that directly affect social welfare, social institutions and social relations.

Key questions inspiring this literature include the following. How extensively are questions of social policy taken up in region-building projects? How are representation and participation of social policy actors structured in regional policy making and governance? What kinds of institutional responses to them result? How broad and deep is regional social policy in practice: is regional action confined to a narrow range of social sectors or is it more wide-ranging? What kinds of policy approaches and instruments are used to achieve identified goals? What is the significance of world-regional social policy for global social governance and policy, as well as for national social policy making? Because of the discipline’s dominant focus on highly institutionalized forms of social provision, the lion’s share of attention tends to be dedicated to regional organizations’ social policy discourses, mandates, policy instruments and social programmes of provision.

Region-building strategies at lower levels of formalization, and regionalization processes as they relate to and influence social policy making, have received much less attention.

World-regional cooperation and integration is a fertile terrain upon which scholarship in social policy and development studies meet. Arguments in favour of more coherent regionalist forms of cooperation and integration have been advanced in response to the perceived threats to public social provision at the national level resulting from global competition, the stalling of (failure to produce) global agreements in which social policy and social standards are embedded and which have ‘teeth that bite’. Such arguments emanate from those in the Global South and those in the Global North concerned with socially-just models of social policy and development. The point, it is argued, is not so much to reform and strengthen extant ‘global’ institutions that are controlled by and operate in the interests of the North, but to create countervailing and pluralistic sources of power properly serving the interests of the Global South and to generate greater policy space for governments and civil society in diverse development contexts to make their own policy choices. The implication of this is that the focus should be on building several regionally-based social policies of redistribution, regulation and rights as part of a more general strategy of global and national social governance in the interests of social equity (Yeates and Deacon 2010).

Although the aim of increasing intra-regional trade, finance and investment occupies the preponderant share of regional policy making and initiatives, region-building is increasingly embracing other public (social) policy goals. Region-building has gone beyond its traditional purview of trade and economic integration, while questions to do with social development are increasingly present on research and regional policy agendas. Scholars, policy makers and activists are confronting key social policy questions, such as: how to forge an appropriately-balanced relationship between trade and social (labour, welfare, health) standards in region-building projects? How can regions maintain levels of taxation and progressive tax structures in the face of international competition to attract and maintain inward capital investment? And how to balance national risk and resource pooling systems and mechanisms with world-regional ones.

There are in principle several advantages to a comprehensive world-regional social policy. First, regional groupings can offer their member access to broader social policy options attuned to their specific contexts. Because they consist of fewer countries with more similar cultural, legal and political characteristics, they offer greater ease and pace of agreeing on common social policies, including greater possibilities for advancing their own regionally-defined social standards. More developed countries can force social standards upwards in the poorer members, while smaller countries can have a strong blocking effect on the liberalizing ambitions of larger ones (or vice versa). Second, regional groupings can offer members enhanced access to, and influence over, global policy. Countries acting through regional associations can have a louder voice in global arenas instead of acting alone. Regionally-coordinated responses can overcome the limitations of small scale initiatives, and are more likely to sustain the interest of prospective partners outside the region.

Third, regional strategies can protect, promote and reshape a regional division of labour, trade and production in support of social policy objectives. Common regional trade and tax rules can help to support and build fiscal capacity in the region that can be used to support collectively-defined regional social policy priorities. Fourth, regional social policy can enable economies of scale and the pooling of risks and resources among member countries. Regional action plans, regulatory frameworks and partnerships can potentially address intra-regional imbalances in education, health and welfare provision through, for example, facilities sharing arrangements. The limitations of small-scale social insurance schemes can be addressed by pooling and spreading risks regionally, akin to a regional social protection fund. Regional coordination offers the possibility of more effective preparedness for and response to disasters and other calls on aid. Fifth, regional groupings can provide donors and partners with a single point of contact for discussions relating to member countries. Regional groupings can provide a channel through which to disburse development aid according to regionally-defined social policy and development priorities. For example, the disbursement of donor aid among West African states under the EU’s Aid for Trade programme is coordinated by the West African regional grouping, ECOWAS (Yeates and Deacon 2006, 2010; Yeates 2014, 2017a, 2017b).

These in-principle arguments have been advocated by various international agencies amongst others over the years, and increasingly frequently since 2016 when the Sustainable Development Goals incorporated regionalization, regional institutions and regional actors as key means of implementing the goals. However, such arguments raise the question about why countries should be compatible and able to take collective action just because they are geographical neighbours to each another. In this regard, the war-averting origins and ambitions of regional integration in Western Europe are clear enough. But we find that regional relationships that may make sense in principle may in practice be strongly inflected, even weakened, by unresolved historical issues. The border conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has not prevented these countries from joining SAARC, for example, but it is an impediment to more concerted forms of regional cooperation and integration in the domain of social policy. In East Asia, Japan’s imperialist history and the spectre of it dominating ASEAN are factors inhibiting closer collaboration among ASEAN member states. This also helps to explain their adherence to the ‘ASEAN way’: the principle of national sovereignty and non-interference in all matters of

public policy. That said, recent years have witnessed ASEAN pressing ahead with initiatives to regionalize its economies by encouraging greater goods and services trade among its member states. Although ASEAN regional policy making tends to be glacial in pace it has nevertheless adopted a regional social charter and is increasingly active in matters of social and cultural affairs. At another level, it is not necessary for countries to have the same welfare types, compatible legal systems or similar economic systems in order to join a regional grouping; although it is clear that the greater degree to which they do will have a bearing on how far relatively loose forms of regional cooperation can move towards deeper forms of regional institutional integration. Thus, pronounced differences in welfare types or stark inequalities in wealth, income and development between member countries will not prevent regional groupings from being formed, but these will condition the social politics of region-building, including the development of regional social policy. Moreover, it is debatable how far those extant differences and inequalities can be smoothed through regional agreements and membership of regional ‘clubs’, at least on the terms that have prevailed to date.

<a>EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL SOCIAL POLICY IN PRACTICE

Social policy considerations are framing debates and agendas as to what the purpose of regional integration should be and what kinds of governance arrangements and policies are needed to support region building. Regional organizations’ mandates and competences have extended to reflect this wider agenda.

Regional action on health and disease control has become a significant area for international cooperation, as public health threats from communicable diseases, pollution and antibiotic resistance, for example, cannot be addressed by countries working alone in an increasingly interconnected world. With regional labour mobility being incorporated into regional economic integration projects, regional mechanisms to uphold labour rights and allow social protection portability are also the subject of regional policy making. Regional initiatives are also increasingly embracing diverse other areas such as professional qualifications, workforce training, food security and child trafficking, amongst others (Deacon et al. 2010; Yeates 2014). Regional action in the higher education sector is also an important sector, especially for more developed economies worldwide, through which to resolve bigger challenges of global competitiveness (Robertson et al. 2016). Regional road maps for social development more generally are also emerging (Yeates 2017b). The latter reflect the growing interest of UN Regional Commissions in the possibilities of a more concerted regional approach for stimulating social development.

A variety of instruments are used to develop and realize regional social policy mandates and objectives (Table 12.1). The table shows the variety of differences between regional organizations as to when and how regional social policy mandates and programmes have developed, together with what has been developed and how it is institutionalized.

<Table 12.1 near here>

Table 12.1 Regional social policy instruments and examples from five continents

1. Instrument	2. Functions to . . .	3. Examples
Regional forum	Share information for mutual education, analysis and debate; promote shared analyses and create epistemic communities and networks that can inform policy debate and provide a platform for collaboration	Capacity building on communicable diseases: CARICOM Regional compact (e.g., peer review mechanisms for country development plans): PIF Regional health think tank: UNASUR
Social standard setting	Define international social standards and common frameworks for social policy (e.g., human rights charters, labour, social protection and health conventions)	Social Charter: SAARC, EU, SADC Constitutional treaty enshrining common normative framework: UNASUR Development Goals regional road map: ASEAN Regional framework on people trafficking: ASEAN
Resource mobilization and allocation	Provide resources supporting policy development and provision (e.g., stimulus finance, technical assistance, policy advice and expertise)	Regional social humanitarian fund: CAN Anti-poverty projects, social and solidarity economy trading schemes: ALBA Food security schemes: ASEAN, SAARC Regional think tank facilitating institutional reform, professionalization and capacity-building in health services: UNASUR

Regulation	Regulate in the interests of health and social protection; regulatory instruments and reform affecting entitlements and access to social provision	Regional court of justice adjudicating on labour rights: ECOWAS, EU Removal of work visa requirements for migrant workers from other member states: CARICOM, ECOWAS, EU, SAARC, SADC Mutual recognition agreements (of professional and educational qualifications and educational institutions): ASEAN, CAN, EU, MERCOSUR Social security portability entitlements: EU, GCC, MERCOSUR, CARICOM, SADC
------------	--	--

Source: Yeates (2017a).

Policy approaches vary between regional organizations. For example, Amaya et al.'s (2015) review compared ASEAN, UNASUR, SADC and the EU in terms of how each of these regional organizations frame health as a policy issue, and how this framing in turn shapes their prioritization of policies. ASEAN's struggle with re-emerging diseases has engendered an approach to health framed as a matter of regional (and domestic) security. The EU approaches health as a cross-cutting, intersectoral policy issue. SADC frames regional health cooperation as a driver for development. UNASUR's distinctiveness lies in its rootedness in addressing the social determinants of health as an ethical imperative (ibid.)

Another approach has been to ask whether there are regional social policy regimes. Drawing on the international study by Deacon et al. (2010), Van Der Vleuten (2016) suggests there are four such regimes. Her classification is based on social regulation (labour rights, occupational health and safety, gender equality and other forms of non-discrimination), social protection policies aimed at social inclusion and poverty reduction) and social redistribution (regional assistance programmes). However, it *excludes* a range of policy sectors, including the very significant ones of health and education in which regional policy has been highly active. The regional regime types she identifies are as follows. First, an individual rights regime which engages in social standard setting but not in social protection or redistribution, where the rights they enshrine are based on individual entitlements (for example, CoE, OAS). Second, a market integration regime, whose focus lies with the elimination of unfair competition arising from, for example, gender inequality, rather than with fundamental social rights (CAN, EU). Third, a developmental regime, which is state-led, and puts the promotion of social equality before market integration goals. Weak on regional social regulation, preferring non-binding declarations and dialogue, regional developmental regimes enshrine principles of social redistribution and solidarity (ALBA, SADC, ECOWAS). Fourth, are conservative regimes whose social policies preserve and enshrine existing societal inequalities, with weak commitments to principles of social rights, equality and international social (labour) standards (ASEAN, SAARC, GCC). Only individual rights and market integration regimes have enforcement mechanisms, through court systems or complaints systems. Any regime type analysis necessarily masks differences and exaggerates similarities. We can take issue with the categorization of regimes, the characterization of regime types, and the location of cases within particular categories. The original findings of Deacon et al.'s (2010) study certainly suggests that there is scope for such adjustments. Classifications of regional welfare regimes will undoubtedly continue to be the subject of ongoing research.

There are several overall points worth highlighting. First, the diverse origins, forms and logics of regional organizations, and the region-building project of which they are a part, are reflected in their varied social policy mandates and objectives. The depth and scope of regional social policy varies considerably between regions. Many are confined to specific social sectors or issues, while (fewer) others have a broader mandate. Some are limited to regional cooperation (in the form of information exchange, policy learning and dialogue) rather than pursuing deeper integrationist ambitions.

Second, the extent and nature of institutionalization varies considerably. Regional social policy includes exhortative as well as legislative approaches to standard setting, alongside practices of policy cooperation and coordination pursued and achieved to differing degrees of formalization. No other regional formation comes close to the EU in terms of the extent of institutionalized regional social policy. Other regional groups have instituted cooperation in social sectors and mechanisms for lesson-learning on a cross-border basis; thereafter, they have instituted to varying degrees different elements of regional redistribution, regulation, provision and rights. Many associations have regional social funds of some kind, but most do not have forms of social regulation and social rights backed by the force of law. (A notable exception is ECOWAS, which has a regional labour court.) There is a reluctance by regional groupings of governments to enter into legally-binding agreements backed by robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Indeed, regional social policies have

tended to progress faster as exhortative declarations of aims and principles rather than as binding regulatory or redistributive mechanisms.

This preference for non-binding forms of international cooperation, it should be said, is part of a more general trend in global policy making, and it is not specific to regionalist forms of collective action and policy making. Although exhortative policy may not have ‘teeth’, it can be a precursor to the development of more substantial social policies. Indeed, it is this sustained, incrementalist, long term project involving the participation of labour, development and civil society groups alongside governments and business interests that, in the Western European context, gave rise to the transformation of a customs union with limited labour mobility rights, into an economic and political union with (by contemporary world standards) a relatively substantial regional social policy with regional mechanisms of social provision, redistribution, regulations and legally enforceable rights of citizenship (Yeates 2014). However, we cannot assume this trajectory in other parts of the world. As regional organizations do not command control over resource generation or have independent revenue-raising powers they are dependent on member states or international donors for funding, and this can limit their capacities to pursue regional policies and programmes of redistribution, regulation and rights.

Third, the dynamics of regional social policy development differ considerably, temporally and geographically. In all groupings we find labour, development and civil society groups, business interest groups, political parties and governments, but in many developing-country contexts, regional social policy actors also include those that are external to the region: for example, international donors acting unilaterally (such as UKAID, USAID, the Gates Foundation) or through multilateral forums (such as the OECD, EU, World Bank); regional development banks also play a critical role in the development of social policy reforms in Southern regions. One concern is that international donors’ preferred social policy models take precedence in shaping the policy approach and directions of social policies, and that regional priorities coming from within the region are unable to be fully developed. This concern was a major impetus behind the origins and development of UNASUR, which sought to eschew extra-regional influence from international donors on the development of its social policy mandate and programmes of social action. This is similarly the case for ALBA.

In any case, it is important to be alert to different combinations of regional social policy actors, and political and institutional dynamics in different contexts, which will vary according to the issues at hand. Indeed, the opportunity structures available for social policy actors to exert influence over the course and direction of regional social policy varies considerably. Most regionalist projects are state-led integration processes, and afford only limited participation (if at all) by civil society in policy making. The struggle to establish a formal right of representation and participation in regional governance and policy making is one shared by many social movements and civil society groups (Berrón et al. 2013; Olivet and Brennan 2010). That said, in practice, the non-state groups pursue their social policy models and goals in relation to region-building projects in the domestic arena as well as in the regional one, influencing state decisions in numerous areas. This raises the question of how institutional regimes of regional governance structure representation and participation in social policy making. What kinds of governance arrangements are conducive to, or closed to, democratic representation and participation? And how does this impact upon the scope and depth of regional social policy in different contexts?

Fourth, region-building strategies do not steamroll over national differences. They contribute to diversity within a region and at the level of global policy making. This diversity can compound complexity in policy making, but it can also generate welcome policy debate. Policy models promulgated through regional fora and by regional organizations can provide an alternative to those espoused by powerful global policy actors such as the World Bank. Teichman (2007), for example, notes that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) enjoys closer and more cooperative relationships with Latin American governments than the World Bank. The IDB’s borrower members and majority shareholders are Latin American governments, and they enjoy a shared ‘cultural understanding’ with the IDB – unlike the World Bank. In the context of conditional cash transfers policy, the closeness of the IDB to governments in the region meant that the IDB did not push civil society participation on reluctant governments through its loan facilities, in contrast to the World Bank which became more intensively engaged with civil society organizations in pressing for their participation (ibid.). Thus, the presence of regional entities stimulates discussion within the region and beyond about what kind of development is desirable, the basis on which it is built, and how it can be realized through context-specific responses. Powerful regions are also capable of providing direct ‘competition’ to ‘external’ global agencies and alternative sources of development financing.

Fifth, the extent to which regional social governance is substantially challenging the prevailing trade and economic development paradigm is far from clear. This is despite the fact that region-building projects have demonstrated themselves capable of going beyond social liberal and conservative models to press more socially transformative, developmental social policy agendas. In this sense, regionalism may be a bulwark against the excesses of free trade agendas; albeit, it seems, only in some cases and under certain conditions.

<a>PROSPECTS AND AVENUES FOR REGIONAL SOCIAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

Regional organizations are actively involved in social policy making, from framing the definition of issues through to the implementation of programmes of social action, and monitoring and evaluation of their effects and outcomes. While what can be achieved in theory and in principle may fall short of what happens in practice, there is nonetheless a significant international impetus driving the development of regional social governance and policy. The topic and issues discussed in this chapter are highly significant for the global and national politics of social policy and development.

In particular, there is an international impetus behind a reformed system of global governance built on stronger regions, underpinned by greater levels of regional cooperation and integration. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) incorporate regional cooperation and integration as key means by which socially-developmental policy objectives can potentially be achieved (Yeates 2017b). This may present more of a challenge for UN organizations than for the World Bank. This is because the latter has for some time been alert and open to regional (economic) development and the ways in which regional groupings of countries can harness their collective power in support of that (Yeates 2014). For UN organizations this regional turn in the international development agenda may require a significant shift in its approach to social policy and development. There are some signs that its Regional Economic Commissions and other UN social agencies are starting to consider the benefits of stronger regional governance. However, whether this will take the UN beyond its own extant regional structures and propel it to engage more with regional groupings of states and regional development banks remains to be seen. In any case, the incorporation of regions as implementing partners in the SDGs is a highly significant shift in the global social policy and development agenda which will play out in dynamic and variable ways over the coming years. In principle, it raises the prospects of further ‘thickening’ of regional social governance and policy. In this context, a key question is whether the purposes, methods and means for generating significant inclusive development dividends can be achieved through region-building projects as they have been conducted to date. Evidence from regional social policy studies and other areas suggest that radical shifts are needed in the ways that social development agendas are made visible within broader development agendas, globally, regionally and nationally.

Given the difficulties besetting global policy making, and the obvious advantages of collective action beyond unilateral or bilateral responses, it is likely that regional governance will continue to be a favoured mode of global governance. In this, ‘soft law’ will likely play a leading part, not least to anticipate objections to highly formalized kinds of institutional integration and to circumvent accusations of regional organizations encroaching into the sovereignty of nations. Soft law is more acceptable to many governments because it does not legally bind them to a set of norms or fixed rules, and allows them greater flexibility. The problem is that social progress through soft law is subject to the pitfalls of international agreements based on voluntaristic compliance. Soft law is also less likely to be able to challenge trade and investment agreements, which tend to be enshrined in ‘hard law’. It is this inequality between soft (social) law and hard (commerce) law that lies at the heart of the challenge for advocates of comprehensive welfare systems founded on the principle of universalism, social equity and social rights.

A further issue relates to trends for countries to simultaneously be members of different regional organizations. Regional groupings have different institutional logics. As we have seen, some are no more than arrangements to set rules around trade and tariffs for participating countries; while others have gone beyond this level of cooperation, embarking on a more substantial integrationist agenda involving social, environmental and human rights issues and a degree of pooling of sovereignty rights. How these different and sometimes overlapping regional institutional regimes play out within any given country poses a number of challenges. For example, how does support for and commitment to a more substantial regional social agenda in relation to one grouping sit alongside a commitment to a ‘thin’ trading regime in another? Does multiple membership of regional groupings and support for different modes of region building increase the prospects for negotiating better domestic social policy and development outcomes?

A further question concerns whether regionalist, mega-regionalist and trans-regionalist groupings premised on open regionalism will enhance or diminish prospects for a coherent regional or national social policy aligned with inclusive development. The adverse effects on national economic and social development was a major concern arising from the mega-regionalist free trade project involving 34 countries, US-led Free Trade Association of the Americas (FTAA). The FTAA was ill-fated, but such issues recur as new trans-regional trade agreements are agreed (for example, TPP, signed in March 2018 by 11 governments). To what extent can social policy regimes, founded on the principle of protection and social cohesion, and pursuing strategies to lock in the benefits of intra-regional trade and resourcing, be sustained by such mega-trade agreements founded on open regionalism?

This chapter has drawn attention to the complex multi-institutional, multi-level framework within which social policies in any one country and part of the world develop, opening up welfare state and system research in new directions. Social policy agendas including regional approaches to social policy are embedded in regional political economies of welfare and wider regionalization processes, yet these regionalization and

region building processes have not yet received as much attention as they merit. There is considerable scope for research that illuminates how the social relations of welfare, and the governance of territories and populations, are being remade over larger integrative scales, and with what effects and outcomes. This can in turn generate new scholarly inquiry capable of incorporating substantive issues associated with the consolidation of regional organizations into literatures on national welfare restructuring and social policy change. Examining the interactions between regional and national-level social policy governance as well as between regional and global social policy governance may provide crucial avenues through which we can gain a better understanding of the contemporary condition of social policies, the state of welfare, and the possibilities for inclusive social development in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

<a>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author was Principal Investigator of an ESRC-DfID grant on world-regional social governance and policy (Grant Ref. ES/L005336/1) from which this *Handbook* chapter arises (see <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/prari/>). The chapter does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ESRC.

<a>REFERENCES

- Amaya, A., S. Kingah and P. de Lombaerde (2015), 'What's in a word? The framing of health at the regional level: ASEAN, EU, SADC and UNASUR', *Global Social Policy*, **15**(3), 229–260.
- Arunanondchai, J. and C. Fink (2006), 'Trade in health services in the ASEAN region', *Health Promotion International*, **21**(1), 59–66.
- Bianculli, Andrea C. and Andrea R. Hoffman (eds) (2016), *Regional Organisations and Social Policy in Europe and Latin America*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Berrón, Gonzalo, Jenina Joy Chavez, Cecilia Olivet and Graciela Rodríguez (eds) (2013), *Rethinking Regionalisms in Times of Crises: A Collection of Activists' Perspectives from Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Amsterdam, Netherlands; Bangkok, Thailand: Transnational Institute, Instituto Equit and Focus on the Global South, as part of the initiative People's Agenda for Alternative Regionalisms (PAAR). Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/rethinking-regionalisms-in-times-of-crises>.
- Börzel, Tanja A. and Thomas Risse (eds) (2016), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bruszt, Laszlo and Stefano Palestini (2016), 'Regional development governance', in Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 374–404.
- Deacon, Bob, Maria Macovei, Luk Van Langenhove and Nicola Yeates (eds) (2010), *World-Regional Social Policy and Global Governance: New Research and Policy Agendas in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Holden, Chris (2014), 'International trade and welfare', in Nicola Yeates (ed.), *Understanding Global Social Policy*, 2nd edition, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 105–128.
- Olivet, Cecilia and Brid Brennan (2010), 'Regional social policy: reclaiming regional integration: social movements and civil society organisations as key protagonists', in Bob Deacon, Maria Macovei, Luk Van Langenhove and Nicola Yeates (eds), *World-Regional Social Policy and Global Governance: New Research and Policy Agendas in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 63–81.
- Penfold, Erica (2015) 'Regionalism in the southern African development community: integration for better health?', PRARI Working Paper 15-11, Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Robertson, S.L. (2017), 'Making education markets through global trade agreements', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, **15**(3), 296–308.
- Robertson, Susan L., Kris Olds, Roger Dale and Que Anh Dang (eds) (2016), *Global Regionalisms and Higher Education: Projects, Processes, Politics*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Söderbaum, Fredrik (2016a), *Rethinking Regionalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Söderbaum, Fredrik (2016b), 'Old, new, and comparative regionalism: the history and scholarly development of the field', in Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 16–37.
- Teichman, J. (2007), 'Multilateral lending institutions and transnational policy networks in Mexico and Chile', *Global Governance*, **13**, 557–573.
- Van Der Vleuten, Anna (2016), 'Regional social and gender governance', in Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 405–429.
- Van Langenhove, Luk (2011), *Building Regions: The Regionalization of the World Order*, Farnham: Ashgate.

- Yeates, N. (ed.) (2007), Special Issue on the Social Policy Dimensions of World-Regionalism, *Global Social Policy*, 7(3), 251–385.
- Yeates, Nicola (2014), ‘The socialisation of regionalism and the regionalisation of social policy: contexts, imperatives and challenges’, in Alexandra Kaasch and Paul Stubbs (eds), *Transformations in Global and Regional Social Policies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 17–43.
- Yeates, N. (2017a), ‘Southern regionalisms, global agendas: innovating inclusive access to health, medicines and social protection in a context of social inequity’, PRARI Policy Brief No. 8, Milton Keynes: Open University. Freely available at: http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/prari/files/policy_brief_8_en.pdf.
- Yeates, N. (2017b), ‘Beyond the Nation State: how can regional social policy contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?’, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Issue Brief no. 5. November, 4pp. Geneva: UNRISD. Available at: <http://www.unrisd.org/ib5>.
- Yeates, N. and B. Deacon (2006), ‘Globalism, regionalism and social policy: framing the debate’, United Nations University Centre for Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) Occasional Papers 0-2006/6. Bruges: UNU-CRIS. Available at: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/13183/1/20060418154630.O-2006-6.pdf>.
- Yeates, Nicola and Bob Deacon (2010), ‘Globalisation, regionalism and social policy’, in Bob Deacon, Maria Macovei, Luk Van Langenhove and Nicola Yeates (eds), *World-Regional Social Policy and Global Governance*, London: Routledge, pp. 27–39.
- Yeates, Nicola, Maria Macovei and Luk Van Langenhove (2010), ‘The evolving context of regional social policy’, in Bob Deacon, Maria Macovei, Luk Van Langenhove and Nicola Yeates (eds), *World-Regional Social Policy and Global Governance*, London: Routledge, pp. 191–212.
- Yeates, N. and P. Riggirozzi (eds) (2015), Special Issue on Regional Health Governance, Policy and Diplomacy, *Global Social Policy*, 15(3), 212–354.

<new page><a>APPENDIX 12.1ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ALBA – Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas

AU – African Union

CAN – Andean Community

CARICOM – Caribbean Community

COE – Council of Europe

EAF – East Asia Forum

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

EU – European Union

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

MERCOSUR – Southern Cone Common Market

OAS – Organization of American States

PAHO – Pan American Health Organization

PIF – Pacific Islands Forum

SAARC – South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SADC – Southern African Development Community

UNASUR – Union of South American Nations