

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Regional Universities: A New Normality of Higher Education?

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**Research Domain:** International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

**Abstract:**

The proposed article is devoted to a comparative analysis of a specific trend in higher education, which, in scholarly literature, is referred to as regionalism or regionalization. This trend, on one hand, has a long history, either of student and faculty staff exchange between neighbouring countries or of collaborative transnational research projects conducted by two or more universities. On the other hand, regionalization is also considered to be a trend with new and distinctive features, which are each demonstrated through the four different types of 'regional' universities currently in existence: European University Institute (EUI), the SCO Network University, BRICS Network University and the University of Central Asia (UCA). Through analysis of their regional mission objectives and key policy implementations, we can identify various contradictions between dominant visions of the modern university, oriented through their national, regional or global mission priorities, and identify core features of new regionalism in higher education.

**Paper:**

The foundation of modern universities coincided with the birth of modern nations (Bahti 1987). From the beginning, modern universities were an indispensable tool of nation-building. Industrial and economic development, political and social education, along the teaching of disciplines which enhanced the understanding of national identity became the three main contributions of the modern university to society. Of course, the national agendas served by the universities also incorporated imperial agendas. Colonialism, typified by the rapid and vast European colonial expansions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, undoubtedly represented an early form of globalization (Ferro 1997, p.86; Stråth and Wagner 2017, p. 92). However, colonial nationalism to some extent presupposed internationalization. In the half-century which followed the two World Wars, this national agenda was reinforced, especially in education. The Cold War saw the priorities, both of industrialization and national identity, gradually replaced by military industry, national defence and area/regional studies, but the general nationalistic framework of higher education remained largely untouched. The increasing involvement of nation-states in the research and higher education sector made the universities, in many respects, dependent upon nationalistic state priorities. The Cold War, however, also influenced internationalization. In a 45-year struggle between two 'peacefully co-existing systems', universities became important centres of soft power, value-export, and, often, of subtle propaganda and indoctrination. The colonial and Cold War models, as we have seen, connected the national and the global; internationalization, therefore, became an extension of national interests. That is why the export of higher education abroad has been often understood as 'soft' imperialism,

implanting European and Western values into a non-European and non-Western society. Universities in the colonial era were 'civilizing' instruments, whereas during the Cold War they became important propaganda machines between two competing global powers presenting alternate visions of how the world order should be.

The recent rise of the Global South has led to unprecedented growth in the number of students studying in foreign countries. A new pattern of internationalization brought about a consolidation of transnational educational capitalism, the establishment of centres of core power and the consequent formation of global educational peripheries. What resulted from this was that some contemporary universities appeared to become essentially global entities, while at the same time, they also maintained national identity and even local characteristics. They are, however, powerfully contested by two very important trends. Firstly, post-colonial studies, in their search for a decolonization of the curriculum, question the legitimacy of Western-centred systems of learning as these do not factor in the alternative developments of higher education in the Global South (for examples, see the very rich discussion of Indian and Chinese contributions to global higher education in Hayhoe 2019). Secondly, along with these types of internationalization, we observe other forms that cannot be interpreted within conventional frameworks. Therefore, one of the most important types of internationalization in this respect is undoubtedly *regionalization*, as it is a category that can frame both national interests and the global aspirations of higher education institutions.

The new regionalism comes in a variety of forms and gives rise to a variety of scholarly discourses and transnational programmes which are spearheading regional higher education development incentives. Examples of these include the Bologna Process in Europe, the Open Education Africa project, Campus Asia, the Latin America and Caribbean Area for Higher Education, the European University Institute (EUI), and are just a few cases of the powerful trend of regionalization. In terms of integration, they represent a whole spectrum: from loose networks of loosely connected institutions to well-organized universities as EUI in Florence (Italy). In terms of viability and sustainability, they also vary greatly. All of them, however, epitomizes a rapidly accelerating development of the regional educational institutions (Knight 2013, pp. 105-109; Jules 2014; Chao 2014 etc.).

Our understanding of the new regionalism takes for granted the plurality of paradigms and the co-existence of the new and old approaches, and, therefore, is engaged in the search for post-Imperial and post-Cold War structures disguised as new regional initiatives. We will, moreover, focus more broadly upon regional institutions and networks instead of analysing large-scale projects like the Bologna Process. Thus, our examples will range from the well-integrated transnational institutions, such as EUI Florence, and loose consortiums of national universities like the Network University of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to development-focused regional institutions like the University of Central Asia. A very different understanding of the region is incorporated in the concept of the BRICS Network University, which provides us with a useful contrast in relation to our main examples.

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