

Susan L. Robertson, Kris Olds, Roger Dale and Que Anh Dang (eds.),

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Global Regionalisms and Higher Education. Projects, Processes, Politics (eds. Susan L. Robertson, Kris Olds, Roger Dale and Que Anh Dang) is without a doubt a fundamental tool for higher education (HE) analysts and the general public interested in the transformations HE is undergoing all over the world.

This is an ambitious book, notable for having brought together a prestigious group of researchers from different countries and regions, each one in their own way describing diverse changes to HE as a result of globalization, regionalism, and international agreements. The eight pages of acronyms that precede the work are alone an indication of this diversity.

The great richness of this collective work lies in providing the reader with a fairly exhaustive overview of the regional processes of transformation of HE in recent years, from which it is possible to take in interesting and rich comparisons, such as diverse mobility programmes for students and teachers, the development of different quality assurance instruments, the introduction of credit systems for students in certain cases, and other aspects.

Using a variety of research techniques and theoretical perspectives, the different articles in the book bring together elements of analysis of different processes of regional integration and/or international cooperation in HE that can be divided into three levels: macro, meso, and micro. In the first instance, the macro level deals with major supra- and inter-regional agreements that would enter into the concept of inter-regionalism, such as the Bologna Process, which exceeds the boundaries of Europe, or the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

In the second instance, at meso level we could place those studies characterized by the analysis of the impact of regional integration processes on HE or regionalism, such as the cases of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the MERCOSUR.

In the third instance, at the micro level we can place the studies that aim at a lower scale, such as international cooperation agreements as a product of territorial proximity, such as in the Barents region, the case of South-South integration between Brazil and Venezuela, or the case of the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA).

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As the authors say in the introduction, this book intends to make up for many lost opportunities, through the existence of a double gap: “scholars of regionalism have ... paid insufficient attention to the role of HE in regionalizing, whilst scholars of higher education have for their part given inadequate attention to the theoretical resources from the different intellectual fields concerned with understanding regions and regionalizing” (p. 15). The divorce between the two fields is a missed opportunity for complementarity that could contribute to strengthening both. In the authors’ words: “to see education as a particular kind of sectoral regional project and space, and from there, to appreciate how the study of HE regional projects – sectorally and institutionally – generate new theoretical insights into regional projects, their cultural, political and economic dynamics, as well as logics, mechanisms and outcomes. And whilst functionalist explanations likely do not sit well with those offered by regulatory regionalists, in truth each of these perspectives offers important insights into processes of regionalizing for scholars of higher education” (*Ibid*).

Starting from the macro level, in the first chapter Robertson, Dale and Mário Luiz Neves aim to show from a critical perspective “the ways in which education is being drawn into the logic of capitalist expansion and world market-making” (p. 25). In this regard, the United States’ and Europe’s declining share of goods production globally seeks to be offset by the expansion of “the global services economy including the restructuring of HE as a market, as an engine for innovation, and as a key sector in developing new forms of intellectual property” (p. 30).

Taking into account the new regionalism approach, the second chapter, written by Susana Melo, tackles what is undoubtedly the great protagonist of the moment: The Bologna Process. In the author’s words, its emergence “can be seen as a first sign of a consensual way of reasoning regionalization as instrumental to globalizing HE, attuned to the vision of the making of a European common market” (p. 59). In this regard, the experience of European regionalization imposes itself with continuity, engaging a diversity of stakeholders and using trade as a general stage for this.

The mark left by the Bologna Process, its direct and indirect effects and its planetary ramifications are so powerful that—even though it wasn’t the explicit goal—it is the central pillar that ties together this collective work. What happens in most regions could be defined as the Bolognaization of the world, taking into account that most of the articles refer to the influence that the Bologna Process has had in national and/or regional transformations that HE has gone through in each territory. According to Robertson, Neves and Dale, “Bologna offers a different kind of imaginary, creating a regional HE architecture which offers the possibility for a single market for HE services and the potential to improve future employability” (p. 40). Different chapters in the book can be included along this line, such as chapter 3, in which Dale analyzes the Erasmus Mundus programme, taken as an “extreme case of regionalism”. Or the following chapter, in which Jean-Émile Charlier, Sarah Croché and Oana Marina Panait, taking from various works by these authors, analyze the impact of European policies and the Bologna Process on HE in Africa, showing the major contradictions between the supposed universalization of this process and the lack of dialogue with African players. As if emulating the colonial past, the African countries adapt more quickly to the Bologna Process than the European countries themselves, adopting a process

that does not respond to local needs or contribute to solving their problems, in which they do not have a voice but which implies major consequences for HE in these countries. This process of transfer from Europe to Africa, according to the authors, implies that “Bologna now displayed a dual face, of both governmentality and sovereignty, as a result of its territorial extension from Europe into Africa” (p. 93).

“Bolognization” expands across practically all the continents, whether the European players encourage it or not. In chapter 7, starting from an interesting study that focuses on direct observations, documents and personal interviews with key actors, Dang analyzes the emergence of the ASEM Education Area as “hybrid sectoral regionalism from within” (p. 143) between the Bologna Process and Asian experiences, in which activities are grouped around the issue of mobility.

At meso level, firstly in chapter 5 Morshidi Sirat, Norzaini Azman and Aishah Abu Bakar analyze the possible harmonization of HE in the ASEAN and its obstacles, taking the European experience as a source of inspiration. Then in chapter 6, Roger Y. Chao Jr also focuses on HE in the ASEAN and describes the changes that come about in the discourse in parallel to globalization and regionalization, especially in parallel to the Bologna Process, highlighting the intervention of certain players, such as the ASEAN University Network (AUN). In contrast, in chapter 8, which also refers to the ASEAN, Anthony Welch takes China’s southern borderland as an illustration of wider China-ASEAN regionalism in HE, to show the “great potential for deeper and wider relations in regional HE and that such a development could also help break down barriers of understanding, and contribute to deepening regionalism” (p. 184).

Secondly, in what is a fairly provocative article in chapter 10, Tavis D. Jules analyzes the coordination of HE activities across the Caribbean community (CARICOM). For this, he starts from the basis of distinguishing between “‘immature regionalism’, where decisions made at regional level were not necessarily implemented at the member state level; and [...] what is referred to as ‘mature regionalism’ [which] has emerged as a governance mechanism aimed at ensuring that decisions are implemented at the national level” (p. 277). In this line of reasoning, the model of excellence for ‘mature’ integration would be that of the European Union (EU), characterized by supranationality. Despite not including this type of institution, the author highlights that “the changing nature of regionalism in the Caribbean, with the proliferation of new political projects regionally and hemispherically, means that HE regulations now have to be standardized, coordinated and regionalized” (p. 223).

Thirdly, in chapter 11, Daniela Perrotta argues that “the development of MERCOSUR’s regulations for HE has shaped at least three contesting projects of governance” (p. 230): 1) in aiming to strengthen the common market, 2) in seeking to ensure a quality certificate for the region for HE institutions (HEIs) and 3) in terms of academic mobility, which would lead us to describe this process, rather forcedly, in terms of the “Bolognization of MERCOSUR”.

Finally, in chapter 14 Tahani Aljafari explores “the ways in which the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have put into place a number of strategic internationalization

activities in HE in order to foster the countries' movement from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy" (p. 291).

At micro level, firstly in chapter 9, Marit Sundet uses various interviews to analyze educational cooperation between HEIs in Russia and Norway and the degree to which this contributes to developing a sense of community in the Barents Region. To do so, the author shows that there is an indispensable construction of informal international ties committed to the network of HEIs, "a connection of cultural translators, social designers and talented practitioners from the HEIs involved", which would not happen at institutional level alone.

Secondly, in chapter 12 Thomas Muhr approaches the changing geometries of Latin America-Caribbean regionalisms through "the lens of South-South cooperation and the role of university education in the construction of a Brazil-Venezuela cross-border sub-region termed 'Special Border Regime'" (p. 253). From a critical perspective, as original and interesting as it is overlooked by English-language literature, he argues that a South-South cooperation counter-space "is being produced in which university education is sought to be re-established as a fundamental right and state responsibility" (p. 253).

Lastly, in chapter 13, Paulino Motter and Luis Armando Gandin analyze the UNILA project. This initiative differentiates and distinguishes UNILA from other Brazilian public universities in its regional focus and international scope, but at the same time the planning of UNILA "underestimated the challenges of creating a transnational and multicultural higher education setting" (p. 286).

The greatest weakness of this ambitious collective work—something fairly common to most works of this kind—is that there are major disparities between the various articles that make up the book, hindering comparability between regions. Some of the chapters can be extremely descriptive and/or highly self-referential, which contrasts with the major analytical and conceptual effort of much of the book where various theoretical tools are used. The same contrast can be appreciated depending on the methods chosen by each author: while the book contains important and very rich field studies written by a good number of these researchers, other articles—to be fair, only a few—are closer to essays than scientific work. Despite this, most of the chapters constitute a great, consistent contribution of critical, serious readings, essential for analyzing regionalisms and HE.

Furthermore, as a result of the importance of some processes, in this book it is possible to verify that there is a regional imbalance. Although we can find an over-representation of some processes such as that initiated by the EU and the ASEAN, and to a lesser degree the MERCOSUR, both the African process and that of the Middle East appear to some degree under-represented, which in turn contrasts with the absence of literature on Oceania and North America. This does not take anything away from the vast effort made by the compilers in condensing into the book a considerable global representation of the regional processes in HE.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that this book constitutes an indispensable tool both for analysts and researchers from the field of HE, and for those interested in the processes of

regional integration, international cooperation and “internationalists” in general, for whom this will be essential reading.