



World Regionalization of Higher Education: Policy Proposals for International Organizations

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International organizations dealing with higher education should pay more attention to the rise of autonomous world regional processes and explore synergies. This article gives an overview of new macro-regional processes around the world. The European case is the most salient, but developments in America and East Asia are also noticeable. In the rest of the world there is potential for innovative regional schemes. The paper outlines policy recommendations to the main multilateral organizations concerned with higher education. It suggests that UNESCO should prioritize monitoring and coordination; that World Trade Organisation–General Agreement on Trade in Services acknowledge the benefit of open regional processes in higher education; and that the World Bank decentralize its work further to regional organizations.

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Introduction

The governance of higher education has undergone rapid global changes in the past few years as governments of both developed and developing countries have begun a re-regulatory drive in response to demands to make lifelong learning opportunities available to university students around the world (WTO, 1998; World Bank, 2002; UNESCO, 2003c). To adapt, universities and national systems are diversifying their financing, specializing in the type of content or mode of delivery, promoting evaluation and accreditation mechanisms, or fostering the mobility of students, faculty and staff, all with increasing international dimension.

Nowadays a global multilevel governance system in which world regions are becoming important is emerging. This ‘new regionalism’ paradigm is a multidimensional form of integration, which includes economic, political, social and cultural aspects and thus goes far beyond the goal of creating region-based free trade regimes or security alliances of earlier regional blocs. In



addition, the new regionalism seeks to promote certain ‘world values’ where a coherent mixture of policies to promote security, economic and social development and ecological sustainability is in the long-term overall more beneficial than laissez-faire globalism (Hettne *et al.*, 2001).

Europe (europa.EU.int) is often seen as the paradigm of new regionalism. The European Union regional process, originating in the 1950s among six countries, has recently extended from 15 to 25 member states. In June 2004, its leaders proposed a Constitutional Treaty to rationalize its institutions and manage better its many internal and external prerogatives in broad political, economic and social domains. Following the Dutch and French Referendums of May and June 2005, which rejected the proposed Constitution, the issue remains for the moment, in a state of creative suspension. However, the rest of the world is advancing towards various regional schemes to tackle political, economic and social issues, including higher education.¹ The next section will provide a global overview of these developments.

Global Overview of Regionalization in Higher Education

Developments in America

In 2002, more than one-fourth of the nearly 2 million students currently seeking education outside their home countries went to the US, contributing US \$12 billion to its economic output. The total number of foreign students for the year 2000/01 was over half a million in the US, over 200 thousand in the UK, 185 thousand in Germany, 135 thousand in France, and many thousands in advanced Asia-Pacific and European countries (Davis, 2003). There are indications that in the wake of ‘9-11’ the US has lost some ground. Prospective students nowadays consider studying in countries closer to home (Altbach, 2004). To maintain its high exports of higher education services, it is in US’ interest to promote new modes of internationalizing higher education around the world. For instance, leading companies in the education industry show increasing revenues and some profit especially in the physical (as opposed to virtual) foreign campuses of US firms.²

Part of the US strategy to maintain an open economic system relies on negotiating with groups of countries. Yet, success is limited. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA-sec-alena.org) since its inception in 1994 has focused on market opening mechanisms. Canada and Mexico, however, resist discussing higher education (Crespo, 2000). Higher education collaboration is limited to initiatives promoting university collaboration on a voluntary basis as is the case of the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC.org). More broadly, the Organisation of American States (OAS.org), although created in 1948 ‘to achieve an order of



peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their territorial integrity, and their independence' has not advanced towards a common higher education space beyond supporting the occasional network *pace* the Inter-American Organisation for Higher Education (OUI-IOHE.qc.ca) created in 1979. Certainly, the US-sponsored Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA-alca.org) at its 8th ministerial meeting in November 2003 attempted to uphold a political commitment to conclude negotiations by January 2005 despite the failure of World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Meeting in Cancun the previous September. Nevertheless, an earlier comprehensive FTAA agreement was subsequently scaled back in terms of rights and obligations, timing and participation and education issues excluded.³

Meanwhile, Latin-America countries are retrying to cooperate and develop at regional level on issues such as education in the hopes of accommodating to the pressures of economic liberalization from the United States. At the end of Cold War many countries faced balance of payments crises which forced them to rely on a US-backed, neo-liberal model of structural adjustments including economic deregulation and trade liberalization by substantially lowering tariffs. At present, over 30 new regional integration initiatives today compete for attention. Many pan-regional instances with an educational dimension have long sought to collaborate and to come up with common positions for themselves and for international organizations worldwide (Rodriguez and Alcantara, 2001). But sub-regional agencies tend to better complement and supplement their activities. The most prominent is the Southern Cone Common Market (Mercosur.org.uy) set up in 1995 among Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Peru, which recently signed a free trade agreement with the five countries of the Andean Community (ComunidadAndina.org) to take effect from July 2004. This may well be a step towards closer South American integration envisioned by the Rio Group, a channel for permanent political consultation and coordination created in 1986 by eight countries, now grown to 19. Recently, a number of arrangements for higher education collaboration at regional level, supported by UNESCO, have emerged. Among them, the *Instituto Internacional para la Educacion Superior en America Latina y El Caribe* (IESALC.unesco.org.ve), or Spanish-led initiatives, like the intergovernmental *Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura* (OEI.es) together with the private-led *Universia.net*. All build on a common regional spirit of earlier broad networks like the *Unión de Universidades de América Latina* (UDUAL.org) established in 1949, or subregional bodies, especially the *Convenio Andrés Bello* (CAB.int.co) created in 1970 to promote cultural, educational and scientific collaboration among the Andean Countries, as well as the association of autonomous public universities *Grupo Montevideo* (GrupoMontevideo.edu.uy) in Mercosur founded in 1991.



Initiatives in Europe

In Europe the intergovernmental process to promote higher education collaboration is dual and complementary, led on the one hand by the European Union, and the other close to the Council of Europe's vision of an enlarged Europe.

For almost two decades, the European Commission managed an increasing number of projects agreed by the EU ministers. These schemes originally focused on the mobility of students and, more recently, paid greater attention to the 'Europeanization' of courses and their content. The Directorate for Education and Training within the Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture proposes and manages a growing number of programmes and strategic initiatives. Among them is the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus). Established in 1987, the Erasmus programme was the first comprehensive action on interuniversity cooperation for student and faculty mobility. Socrates, a broader education programme, continued and extended the Erasmus action in higher education. Other education initiatives were complemented with various cross-sectoral actions like Lingua (language learning) and Minerva (open and distance learning and the use of information technologies). In addition, Socrates promoted a thorough comparative analysis of education systems and policies, the exchange of information and experience to help formulate and implement educational policies across the EU.

In Socrates' first phase (1995–1999) Erasmus managed some 200 projects going beyond the earlier networking between single university departments and promoting university mobility and curriculum innovation on a wide scale (Teichler, 2002). The Erasmus programmes already raised the number of intra-European university networks and associations which dealt with various aspects — broad as well as narrow — in higher education (Wächter, 2000). Nowadays, five key groups of universities stand out for their goals of collaboration in broad range of issues of internationalization.⁴ There are many other groupings focusing on a sub-region in Europe⁵ plus university associations of teachers, students, managers, rectors, many discipline-based associations (medicine, law, business, etc.), of technical colleges and, more recently, on institutions given over to online delivery, all trying to make some input to regionalization.

The second phase of Socrates (2000–2006) has a budget of 1850 M€ to cover eight actions/areas that reflect the individual's progression through learning from pre-school and school education (Comenius), on through higher education (Erasmus) and finally into adult education (Grundtvig), which is a new initiative. In Socrates II, Erasmus draws on 950 M€ to support both

physical exchanges of students and faculty (about 750 M€ for student grants), but also broadly to develop content. It places more emphasis on teaching staff exchanges, on recognizing the credits of taking similar courses in different countries, on cross-national curriculum development and on pan-European thematic networks. Hence, the EU seeks to change the national university systems to help Europeanize at home the majority of students who do not venture abroad.

However, a broader intergovernmental forum — the ‘Bologna process’ — began in 1998/1999. It includes over 40 countries that look forward to a broad European Higher Education Area towards the end of the current decade. Education ministers of the four largest European countries commemorating in 1998 the 800th anniversary of the establishment of the University of Paris raised a set of basic principles for common development of higher education, and committed themselves ‘to encouraging a common frame of reference, aimed at improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as employability’. Education ministers signed the ‘Sorbonne’ declaration, and a year later Ministers of 29 European countries meeting in Bologna signed a detailed *magna charta* aiming to establish a European Area of Higher Education (EAHE) by 2010. This implies adopting a range of measures dealing with all key aspects of mobility of higher education:

- (1) Easily readable and comparable degrees (through an explanatory European degree supplement);
- (2) Two main cycles (undergraduate of at least 3 years, and postgraduate of master and/or doctoral degrees);
- (3) A system of credits based on students’ work (such as the European Credit Transfer System);
- (4) Promotion of mobility of students and teachers (through programmes, and through the removal of barriers);
- (5) Promotion of cooperation in quality assurance (including in curricular development);
- (6) Promotion of the European dimension (including inter-institutional cooperation); The Bologna process now advances through biennial summits of Education ministers from a growing number of European countries. In 2001 ministers from 30 countries meeting in Prague refocused some topics, and added three action lines:
- (7) Promote lifelong learning;
- (8) Open the policy process to higher education institutions and students;
- (9) Further promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA.

In September 2003, ministers from 40 countries (the majority of the Council of Europe –(COE.int)) met in Berlin (Bologna-Berlin 2003.de). They agreed to speed up the development of the EHEA by making their academic degrees



comparable by 2005, and to focus on increasing the quality of higher education. They also added a new action line on Doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and ERA (European Research Area). It all was further advanced in the 2005 Bergen ministerial.

The rise of East Asia

The political rhetoric behind the East Asian (ASEAN + 3) regional process is advancing surprisingly fast to present another model of regional higher education. The 9th Association of the now 10 Southeast Asian Nations (ASEANsec.org) Summit held in Bali in October 2003 adopted the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II which established the goal of creating an ASEAN Community supported by three pillars to be put in place ideally by 2020: the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Although results have been relatively weak compared to Europe's, ASEAN's external relations towards Japan, the PR of China and South Korea, are key in maintaining momentum in all three pillars. The leaders of the 13 countries, meeting in the 7th ASEAN + 3 Summit held on the margins of the 9th ASEAN Summit, reaffirmed their cooperation and partnership, welcomed and firmly supported the ASEAN Concord II, reiterated their determination to intensify joint efforts in combating terrorism, reaffirmed their commitment to a peaceful solution of the nuclear issue facing the Korean Peninsula through dialogue, endorsed the Implementation Strategy of the Short-Term Measures of the Final Report of the high-level East Asia Vision and Study Groups (which explicitly included higher education), held discussions on the progress of the Initiative for Development in East Asia, explored the feasibility of an East Asia Free Trade Area, and committed themselves to sustaining an overall joint process for broader and deeper cooperation.

ASEAN has for several decades explored collaboration in higher education, increasingly in conjunction with Northeast Asia. The first regional initiative came through the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL.org), founded in 1956 at a meeting in Bangkok by the heads of eight state universities in the region. ASAIHL nowadays includes many Asian members, as well as others from developed countries.

The next regional development came from UNESCO, which established in 1961 in Bangkok an Asian Regional Office for Primary and Compulsory Education, which in 1987 became the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (unescobkk.org). It is now developing a new regional education strategy 'to interpret global priorities and goals in a regional context' and 'to adapt broad institutional strategies to achieve the regional goals'.



UNESCO works in tandem with the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO.org), set up in 1965 as a result of a meeting held in Bangkok between the education ministers of Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the then Republic of (South) Viet Nam, the chairperson of UNESCO national commission of Philippines, and a special adviser to the US president. SEAMEO has a wide remit to promote cooperation in education, science and culture but it has linked outside the region to prosper. Currently, it includes the 10 ASEAN countries as regular members, while a few Western countries are associate members; the International Council for Open and Distance Education is an affiliate; and Japan is a donor country. All meet annually, and it shares its headquarters in Bangkok with the regional office of UNESCO. SEAMEO has grown into a network of regional centres to promote training of specialists, including the Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development (RIHED). Independently founded in 1970, and reconstituted under SEAMEO after a period of inaction in 1985 (Wongsothorn, 1997), nowadays RIHED 'responds to needs related to policy and planning, administration and management of higher education'.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEANsec.org) has been trying to find a niche in higher education and, after two decades of irregular discussions and small pilot projects, ASEAN countries launched a regional university network. ASEAN was formed in 1967 when five non-Communist countries grouped to deal mainly with security issues. Only in the late 1980s did it address economic and social matters more seriously. A first ASEAN Committee on Education meeting took place in Manila in 1975. At a second in 1977 it defined four 'problem areas' (manpower development, teacher education and training of other education personnel, education system and special education) and even proposed establishing an ASEAN University. The Manila meeting of the ASEAN Ministers of Education in 1977 broached several issues in pre-university education but not higher education. Finally, the Agreement on the Establishment of the ASEAN University Network (AUN.chula.ac.th) was signed in November 1995 by the heads of 11 participating universities. The AUN has a secretariat at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok and manages collaborative programmes (studies, short-term exchanges of students and faculty and scholarships), information networking, and collaborative research. Also included is an Asean Virtual University (aunvirtualu.dlsu.edu.ph) managed from Manila that created a first ASEAN studies course syllabus. Given the slow progress towards a fuller-fledged regional university system, AUN has reached to other countries, especially China, Japan, Korea, the EU, India and Russia.

During the 1990s, East Asian countries linked to America and Europe to explore further liberalization. Since 1993, University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP.org), a voluntary association (with a minor secretariat in



Tokyo) of governments and non-governmental representatives seeks to increase the mobility of university students and staff. UMAP's limited supranational experience is complemented with narrower associations.⁶ It defines itself as 'a vehicle for governments and regional organizations interested in supporting the UMAP vision'. With the creation of the ASEAN University Network, the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme was launched in 2000 to enhance cooperation between higher education institutions, promote regional integration within ASEAN countries and strengthen the mutual awareness of European and Asian cultural perspectives. It is complementary to the Asia-Link Programme, an initiative of the European Commission to promote regional and multilateral networking between higher education institutions from the European Union, South Asia, South-East Asia and China. In developing an East Asia higher education core, Singapore has been particularly active in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEMinfoboard.org) created in 1996 between EU and East Asian countries, which is increasingly attentive to higher education initiatives, often through the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF.org).

Building on these regional and inter-regional initiatives, the countries of Southeast and Northeast Asia are now coming together to advance higher education. The East Asia Vision Group (EAVG), established in December 1998 through the initiative of the South Korean government under President Kim Dae-Jung, is so far the closest to a preliminary constitutional effort to consolidate the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, South Korea). A total 20 intellectuals (two by country) gathered several times before submitting in 2001 a landmark prospective report with recommendations to favour educational cooperation were later fed into an East Asia Study Group which submitted its own report in Cambodia in November 2002 (East Asia Vision Group, 2001; East Asia Study Group, 2002). The EAVG short-term recommendations call to 'Provide assistance and cooperation in ... human resources development ...', and to 'work together with cultural and educational institutions to promote a strong sense of identity and an East Asian consciousness'.

Japan brought together an 'ASEAN + 3 group to facilitate and promotion of exchange of people and human resource development' which met three times in 2003 to prepare a report for the October 2003 summit.⁷ The final report accepted by the ASEAN + 3 leaders in October presented 14 recommendations on economic, educational and social/cultural sectors. The educational recommendations covered lifelong learning programmes; credit transfer systems; scholarships and exchange programmes for students, faculty, staff; research and development cooperation; 'centres of excellence' including e-learning; and curricular development as bases for common regional qualification standards among interested centers/institutions.



Regional initiatives in the developing world

Although Russia seeks greater international recognition by being part of the European 'Bologna process' for a common higher education space, a renewed regional process in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS.minsk.by) may create another higher education regional process in the Eurasian landmass. For a long time the CIS was lukewarm towards upholding former Soviet ties despite regular summits and a Secretariat in Belarus. CIS has been ineffective in maintaining peace or economic and social development, and Central Asia has once more become a cauldron of geopolitical hostilities. But Russia has recently been shoring up the CIS bilaterally through a treaty creating a Common Economic space between Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan based on a shared tax code and a customs union. If these developments advance, it is possible that the countries' higher education systems will experience greater cooperation led by Russia's new internationalization drive. The Russian Minister of Education recently announced plans to increase exports of higher education by '1,000 per cent' over the next few years by establishing abroad branch campuses of Russian higher education institutions.⁸

In South Asia, India's long tradition of state-sponsored elite universities has given way in the 1990s to a slightly more liberal system with a growing number of higher education institutions (Powar, 2001). As their quality is uneven many have to link abroad to prosper, but relations with neighbouring countries have for several decades been very difficult. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC-sec.org) process, officially born in 1985 to jointly advance in economic, social and cultural development was long hampered by the rule of unanimity, by its slow and non-binding procedures, by a lack of trade promotion objectives (until the entry into force in 1995 of a preferential trading arrangement), and by the tension between Pakistan and India. Its summit declarations regularly incorporated education and even created a human resources centre in Islamabad in 2002. As India and Pakistan declared on the margins of the 12th SAARC summit meeting early in 2004 their interest to peacefully resolve their disputes, SAARC now has a chance to advance the parallel agreements reached them towards a free trade area (effective from 2006), and education aspects further reinforced by a social chapter which includes education as a means to alleviate poverty.

There is since 1969 a University of the South Pacific (USP.ac.fj) of 12 member island countries. Yet, formal cooperation remains within basic education in the Pacific Islands Forum (forumsec.org.fj) that groups scattered Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian island states along with Australia and New Zealand.

Regional cooperation in education based on ethnic/linguistic affinities is not strong in the League of Arab States (ArabLeagueOnLine.org). Created in



1948, its 22 members usually underline nation building and self-sufficiency over long-lasting regional cooperation. At the UN's Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education at Beirut in 1998, Ministers agreed on a 'resolution calling for the establishment of a regional mechanism for quality assurance and accreditation under the auspices of the Association of the Arab Universities...' (UNESCO, 2003b). Yet, in 1981, six rich oil and gas-producing countries formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC-sg.org), which since 1985 has pushed for cooperation in education, including the exchange of faculty and students in higher education.

South of the Sahara, several regional linkages based on colonial legacies are also suffering problems of competition or coordination. Few have the resources to tackle alone higher education alone, although it has long been debated. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC.int), created in 1992 to advance economics, politics and social issues in 1997 signed a Protocol on Education and Training that includes higher education (articles 7–8). SADC may have the potential to develop a free trade area and greater cooperation in higher education with the recent adhesion of South Africa and the approval in 2003 of a long-term Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan and a Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, although a number of alternative scenarios are possible (Hahn, 2004; Schoole, 2004). Despite the many constraints on higher education cooperation, Africa long maintained regional links with a range of partners in the rest of the world, most of them in the International Network for Higher Education in Africa, sponsored by Boston College's Centre for International Higher Education. Yet, perhaps the Africa-Union.org, created in 1999 on the wake of the ineffective Organisation of African States, will advance higher education. Its goals are to accelerate social, economic and political integration. It also manages the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD.org), a uniquely consensual way for Africans to find their best development path and ways to cooperate with external partners.

Global overview

In sum, Europe is the main model of new regionalism in higher education, often contrasted with the United States efforts to promote an open economic environment in the sector. Initiatives for regional collaboration in Latin America are slowly consolidating with external help. Recent developments in East Asia to mobilize sub-regional and inter-regional processes in higher education are moving faster. Sub-regional collaboration among the Gulf Countries and in Southern Africa may spur greater collaboration in Arab countries and the African continent. I summarize the main elements of regional collaboration in higher education around the world in Table 1.

Table 1 Regional processes touching on higher education

<i>Geographical region</i>	<i>Regional process</i>	<i>Attention to (higher) education</i>
America	Organization of American States	Inter-American Organization for Higher Education since 1979
	North American Free Trade Agreement	Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration since 1990s.
	Latin America	<i>Instituto Internacional para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura.</i> <i>Unión de Universidades de América Latina, 1949</i>
Africa	Andean Pact	<i>Convenio Andrés Bello</i> since 1970
	Mercosur	<i>Grupo Montevideo</i> since 1991
Arab world	Southern Africa Development Cooperation	Protocol of Education and Training since 1997
	African Union	Not yet
Europe	League of Arab States	Not yet
	Gulf Cooperation Council	Since 1985. Exchange of faculty and students
East Asia	Council of Europe	Suggesting education collaboration since 1949
	'Bologna Process' (over 40 countries)	Ministerial meetings since 1998
	European Union (now 25 countries)	Yes, Treaty of Rome of 1957 on education Ministerial meetings to supervise the Erasmus programme of the European Commission since the 1980s
<i>East Asia's inter-regional dynamics</i>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	South-East Asia Ministers of Education Organization since 1960s Regional Institute for Higher Education and Development created in 1970 ASEAN Ministerial meeting in 1971 ASEAN University Network since 1995
	ASEAN + 3 (China, S. Korea and Japan): goal of East Asia Community	ASEAN+3 leaders' political declaration (including education) in October 2003 and subsequent working group
	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation	University Mobility of Asia and the Pacific to promote mobility and credit transfer, since 1993
	Asia Europe Meeting	Asia-Europe Foundation with some higher education activities, since 1997
Eurasia	Commonwealth of Independent States	Signs of recent Russian expansion into Central Asia
South Asia	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	Human Resource Development Centre in Islamabad, since 2002
South Pacific	Pacific Islands Forum	University of South Pacific, since 1969



Proposals for Multilateral Organizations

This section reviews recent developments of the multilateral regulatory organizations dealing with higher education. It suggests some avenues to create synergies with regional organizations. Starting with UNESCO, part of the United Nations System (UNSystem.org), it moves to the WTO and the World Bank. In UNESCO governments advance cooperative agreements and ventures that may be reversed. In the WTO, countries commit themselves to irreversible liberalization (Barblan, 2002). The World Bank aims to promote overall development.

Adapting UNESCO's regional strategy

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO.org), created in 1946, is the only UN body with an explicit mandate to support national capacity-building in all forms of education. UNESCO's capacity to promote the development of higher education has been relatively small within its overall education remit. Its limited budget and personnel have always concentrated on primary and secondary education.

During the 1970s and 1980s six 'Conventions of a Standard-Setting Nature adopted under the auspices of UNESCO solely or jointly with other International Organizations' dealt with the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees of higher education.⁹ These conventions assumed a grandiose macro-regional approach — largely ineffective beyond promoting the occasional network, report or conference especially where regions are a collection of countries rather than a new mode of governance. The conventions address only very general issues, are not binding and, more crucially, in most cases have not been wholly ratified (see Table 2).

Table 2 UNESCO's regional conventions: participation of countries

	<i>Year adopted</i>	<i>Number of countries</i>	
		<i>Participating in various stages of the ratifying process</i>	<i>Fully ratified</i>
Latin America and the Caribbean	1974	18 (includes four from Europe)	12 (two later denounced)
Mediterranean	1976	11	6
Arab States	1978	14	14
European Region	1979	44	30
	Revised 1997	41 (including the US)	3
African Region	1981	21	19
Asia Pacific	1983	18	3

Yet, UNESCO is drawing up new strategies for higher education to address globalization, including a general decentralization and a review of all regional conventions ‘to respond to new needs and to represent international standards in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) framework. The specific focus will be on issues of recognition of cross-border higher education provision, strengthening mechanisms to assure quality and emphasizing reliable, transparent and coherent criteria for assessment of qualifications. In addition, the feasibility of establishing an international framework will be explored that will cover both the issues of the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance and accreditation’ (UNESCO, 2003a: 25).

Thus, UNESCO has a window of opportunity to give more weight to new world regional developments in its drive to find compatible system-level and strategic indicators (Kaiser and Yonezawa, 2003). It could start focusing on basic regional indicators like stocks and flows of people (students, professors, researchers), institutions (universities, networks), content (degrees and credits), political agreements (laws, regulations by ministries and government agencies). If UNESCO found that autonomous and flexible regional processes in higher education provide better higher education services, it could then explore decentralizing and coordinating its regional conventions with these processes rather than trying to impose its regional vision of the world.

Open regionalism through WTO–GATS

The WTO (WTO.org) is a key multilateral venue in promoting a liberal version of global governance in higher education services. The WTO’s GATS includes education among its 11 broad internationally tradable sectors. Higher education is one of five sub-sectors within education.¹⁰ The GATS addresses four modes of supply affecting different aspects of the service: cross-border supply of mainly online and posted content (Mode 1); consumption abroad and the acceptance of foreign students (Mode 2); commercial presence allowing foreign academic institutions to establish themselves on the national territory (Mode 3); and natural persons mainly the inflow of foreign faculty (Mode 4).

Although the United States is pressing for liberalization, higher education is one of the least liberalized sub-sectors in GATS. By early 2001, only 30 areas (the enlarged European Union counting as one) in the WTO club had presented market access commitments to liberalize any aspect of education services. Only 21 focused on modes of supplying higher education. As the majority of the commitments were partial and referred only to the movement of content or students, not to free establishment of higher education institutions, countries remain quite free to regulate the sector overall.

In the preparation for the failed WTO Cancun ministerial of September 2003, a ‘record’ number of 39 members had presented additional requests and



offers.¹¹ The few that became publicly available overall indicated little liberalization.¹² Even the US, already committed to minor aspects of adult and 'other' types of education but not to higher education liberalization, tabled a general request to greatly liberalize the sector, although it stated in its initial offer many limitations that could greatly discriminate foreigners. Similarly, the EU, which had in the 1990s liberalized minor aspects of higher education, did not table a substantial liberal proposal. And in East Asian countries only a few countries are part of the WTO, so general liberalization of higher education is also out of the question. Japan had liberalized some aspects in the past, but the new initial offer did not advance beyond suggesting constructing an information network to better research the sector.¹³ Meanwhile, China, in preparation for its entry to the WTO in 2002, had made full commitments in Mode 2 (students), but partial commitments in Mode 3 (commercial presence).

The small prospects for further effective liberalization of higher education in the short- and medium terms are further diminished as the whole WTO shakes when addressing larger issues like agriculture, subsidies in key industrial sectors, intellectual property and the so-called Singapore issues (investment, competition law, etc.) that aim to enlarge the cross-border trade remit of the organization.

Thus, the WTO sees how the explosion of smaller free trade agreements, often at the regional level (allowed if they open markets beyond the WTO's agreements), are gaining ground, and wonders how they may somehow be globally accommodated. The WTO has received notification of some 250 regional (actually, many are bilateral) trade agreements under GATT's Article XXIV (Territorial Application — Frontier Traffic — Customs Unions and Free-trade Areas), and is aware of some additional 70 estimated to be operational although not yet notified. Yet, they do not have real bearing on the provision of higher education as GATT deals only with tangible goods, and not with services, which is a matter for GATS' article V (Economic Integration), and article V-bis (Labour Markets Integration Agreements). Indeed, the WTO Regional Trade Agreements Committee since 1995 'has failed to complete its assessments of whether individual trade agreements conform with WTO provisions' because of the interpretation of the controversial wording of WTO rules. So, the Doha declaration of 2001 was aiming at 'clarifying and improving disciplines and procedures under the existing WTO provisions applying to regional trade agreements. The negotiations shall take into account the developmental aspects of regional trade agreements'.

But the WTO could acknowledge the rise of higher education regions and collaborate with them. They are a unique way to promote open regionalism. If university systems, by nature very static, find regional synergies they would do so in a way that promotes greater global openness.

Towards a more effective World Bank

The World Bank is, alongside the WTO (the outgrowth of GATT) an economic multilateral organization created by the US and the UK after WW.II. The Bank's support for the development of higher education has been hampered by limited funds and a fragmented approach (World Bank, 2002). From 1963, the Bank supported the growth and diversification of tertiary education in middle-income developing countries, promoting policy reforms to make the sector 'more efficient, relevant, equitable, transparent and responsive'. During the 1970s and 1980s much of the support was narrowly focused on new programmes or on discrete quality improvement measures for existing teaching and research activities. The Bank was rarely able to offer long-term comprehensive support for tertiary education that successful reform and effective institution building required.

The Bank's instrumental approach to higher education changed during the 1990s. A new policy framework included projects, research, sector studies, training and technical assistance (World Bank, 1994). The Bank began paying attention to broader political-economy aspects and relying on positive incentives to other actors. More recently, together with UNESCO, the Bank focused on poorer countries while placing higher education in a broader context of lifelong learning, using info-communication technologies when possible.

But the Bank also has the possibility of working with world regional networks, thus supplementing those elements in its higher education that already pay increasing attention to changes in the regional dimension. In the recent past the Bank has proposed small states to form sub-regional networks along the lines of the University of the West Indies, the University of the South Pacific, and the University of the Indian Ocean. Portuguese-language economies of the African Atlantic region (São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde and the Azores) recently discussed a similar step. In addition, the Bank has a significant new pan-African initiative centred on the African Economic Research Consortium, a collaborative PhD programme in economics. And there is a recent African Virtual University initiative hoping to survive beyond its pilot phase. Finally, the Bank is helping regulate higher education regionally. The Bank's Global Development Network (GDN.net) has regional partners and an agenda to raise the quality and availability of policy-oriented research.

Summary of recommendations

In sum, opportunities exist for international organizations involved in higher education to find synergies with regional networks and channels of



Table 3 Recommendations for international organizations addressing higher education

<i>International organization</i>	<i>Global projection</i>	<i>Regional initiatives</i>	<i>Policy recommendations</i>
UNESCO	Limited but growing governance as key Countries (Japan, US) are more active	Reviewing its regional/ intergovernmental Conventions	Monitoring regional processes Synergies with effective ones
WTO–GATS	Very limited liberalization	Allowed in principle, not encouraged in reality; internal debate	Acceptance of open knowledge regional processes
World Bank	Failed development for lack of funding and sound strategy	Incipient	Co-financing with regional organizations

collaboration, Table 3 summarizes them. UNESCO could monitor the basic indicators of autonomous regional processes and then review its Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees and related activities in collaboration with those best suited to deliver more and better higher education services. For its part, the WTO could press on with liberalizing higher education through open regional agreements in higher education. Finally, the meagre resources for higher education development of the World Bank may prove more efficient by teaming up with innovative regional initiatives. This multiple and flexible approach would balance and complement the many existing pressures to govern global higher education.

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Notes

- 1 For higher education overviews, Boston College Center for International Higher Education website (www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/index.htm).
- 2 See www.eduventures.com/research/industry_research_resources/ev100_2003.cfm. For a list of all the public and private universities around the world, see www.braintrack.com/index.htm.
- 3 The Free Trade Agreement of the Americas had, by November 2003, only advanced a draft agreement on services with some indirect mention of professional services, but civil society representatives were against the idea of including education.
- 4 The Coimbra group, created in 1985, is a network of traditional universities. The Utrecht group, created in 1987, comprises 25 universities. The Santander Group, created in 1988, currently has 43 members. The Compostela group, created in 1993, now has 70 universities from 17 countries.

- 5 For instance: Rectors' Conference of the Universities of Alps-Adria (1972), Confédération européenne des universités du Rhin supérieur EUCOR (1989), Conference of Baltic University Rectors CBUR, Community of Mediterranean Universities CMU (1983).
- 6 There is now a geographically broader Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (sut.ac.th/auap). It was formed in July 1995 from a conference at Suranaree University of Technology in Thailand. Its broad membership includes universities from Iran, India, Bangladesh, US, Australia, Japan and UNESCO. It has an operational plan to develop management, teaching, research, international, information dissemination, and attracting new members. Meanwhile, the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU.org) was created in 1997 with a base in Singapore to link the chief executives of nowadays 34 leading universities in APEC hoping to stimulate cooperation in teaching and research on various issues. For instance, it has started a fellows programme in 2002. And there is a consortium of APEC study centres (apecestudy.org) to promote studies and research on APEC issues.
- 7 Source: Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/conference/asean3/sg0305.html.
- 8 See <http://newsfromrussia.com/main/2003/10/22/50683.html>.
- 9 See www.unesco.org/general/eng/legal/convent.shtml; www.unesco.org/education/stuyingabroad/tools/conventions.shtml.
- 10 The informal WTO's Classification List divides educational services into five parts: primary, secondary, higher, adult and other. 'Higher education' includes all tertiary education (i.e., education beyond secondary education).
- 11 Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Chinese, Taipei, Colombia, Czech Rep, EC; Fiji, Guatemala, Hong Kong, China, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Liechtenstein, Macao, China, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, St Christopher & Nevis, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United States, Uruguay.
- 12 Sources: American Council of Education, www.acenet.edu/programs/international/gats/2004-update.cfm; Observatory of Higher Education, www.obhe.ac.uk/products/reports/publicaccesspdf/May2003.pdf.
- 13 Communication from Japan (15 March 2002): 'From the viewpoint of protecting consumers (learners), Members should thus recognize the significance and necessity of constructing an information network on the higher education supplied across borders. Moreover, in international organizations such as the OECD as well as in international groups consisting of university evaluation organs in each country, Members should make intensive efforts for realizing a collaborative research.'

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