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EUROPEAN PARADIGM DOCTORAL SCHOOL

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Non-state actors in regional governance structures. Implications for a Social-Constructivist  
approach of regionalism**

*summary*

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**2015**

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**Key words:** *Social-Constructivism, New Regionalism Theory, regional governance, non-state actors, civil society*

## **Introduction**

The thesis titled *Non-state actors in regional governance. Implications for a Social-Constructivist approach of regionalism* is a piece of research which looks into the role, functions, and contributions of non-governmental entities in the realm of regional affairs, with a focus on applying the findings into a theory of international relations' perspective on the study of regionalism.

The thesis has been completed as a three years PhD programme and has built upon previous research work undertaken at master's level; it has not been designed as an exhaustive academic contribution on the topic at stake, but rather as part of an ongoing research interest in the wider fields of *International Relations Theories, Global Governance* and *International Organisations*. As a consequence, the findings and conclusions of the thesis are to be equally interpreted as potential research developments to be considered at further stages of an academic trajectory.

The research project envisaged responding to the following questions:

1. What is the role of non-state actors in regional governance?
2. How do non-state actors engage in regional governance?
3. How do non-state actors create and shape regional governance structures?
4. How can one develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of regional governance based on facts learnt from non-state actors' activity?

Results of the assessment of non-state actors' involvement in regional governance structures are being considered as referential points for what it takes to develop and improve the Social-Constructivist theoretical framework of studying global regions, regionalism and regional governance.

The interest of International Relations Theories for the field of regionalism, regions' construction and dynamics can be related to the ever increasing part they play in world affairs. The study of regions as political entities and autonomous actors in international politics, beyond them being reduced to a group of states, is gaining more and more interest. For scholars of

International Relations Theories, the role and functions of regions in the international system is a topic most relevant and key to understanding current global dynamics.

## **Theoretical framework**

### ***A Social-Constructivist approach of regionalism***

The research hypothesis is based on the assumption that regional governance is an array of networks of common interests of states belonging to the same geographical space, marked by an increased interconnection of their societies, by the establishment of rules and the articulation and implementation of common policies. This process is accelerated by the current structure of the international system, which makes these congregating tendencies to grow stronger. A social theory approach of the regionalisation process requires an analysis of the establishment of cohesion and co-operation links between states based on common interests, having in mind the identity of the subjects and the structure of the system they operate in.

The theoretical approach of the research project is based on the works of Social-Constructivist scholars among which Alexander Wendt, Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore. The research project employs this approach to elaborate on the structures of regional governance in the area which is going to serve for a case study, with a special emphasis on the non-state actors involved in these structures.

One of the main concerns for this theoretical approach is what instils co-operation and the putting together of decisional capabilities by states, or their transferring to a supranational authority. There are many explanatory directions given by integration theories, which have studied the causes and the stimuli which determine states to adhere to regional constructions. Be there the case that they are political or security factors, be there the case of economic factors, or the irreversibility of integration and the related costs of stepping off the system, all these theories are founded on the principle of rational choice and the prevalence of material aspects.

A Social-Constructivist approach on regional integration and of the emergence of regional governance structures does not by far eliminate any of these, reducing their relevance, and does not invalidate any of these theoretical perspectives, but is rather focused on explaining

the trends in a (micro) system at a given time, based on the identities and interests of the actors operating in it and their relation to the wider structure.

Social-Constructivism as a social theory in international politics is still concerned with state agency in world affairs, but provides above that opportunities for scholars to address and comprehend questions on the nature of entities acting in the international system based on the meanings they give to issues such as power or capabilities, on the role of shared culture, of language, of historical experiences and collective memory.

One element of analysis is the approach of international institutions as social constructions, where concepts such as state, nation, sovereignty, legitimacy, power do not have fixed meanings, but are subject to the allocation of multiple meanings and interpretations. It is of interest, for the purpose of the research project, to examine how these concepts are given a certain meaning in a specific situation encountered in the international system. The challenge Social-Constructivism brings for the traditional approaches in international relations is the rejection of pre-established meanings before actors' interaction. Hence Alexander Wendt's argument from "A Social Theory of International Politics" where the international system is depicted as a social construction, because it is being shaped and manifests only in an interactional environment, where agents and structure are mutually constructed.

The process of self defining which states undergo while interacting with other actors and building assumption on their counterparts' character as well as developing expectation related to the latter lead us to understanding that their identities are not given or fixed, but that they are subject to change as a result of continuous interaction and redefining involving other actors.

Since regional integration departs from the premise of identifying common interests and defining co-operation relations among states as the fundament for their actions, one element of the constructivist approach, interests formation, is of extreme use.

States' interests' formation is simultaneously a cause and an effect of the volatility of state identities. To illustrate his argument, Alexander Wendt is giving, in his article "Collective Identity Formation and the International State", the example of analysing the role of culture in the international system, where culture is given the meaning of common knowledge, shared ideas and values. Therefore, the rationalist theorists belief, namely that states operate with fixed preferences, is challenged by a complementary perspective.

In order to provide explanations for the states' option to co-operate (in this case applied to the regional integration and governance), Michael Barnett, in his study "Social Constructivism" does not intend to eliminate the assumption that states operate with fixed preferences and options, but rather invites to seeing rational choice as a result of the way in which states define their interests relating to dominant culture of the international system at that given time.

Barnett considers that scholars of international relations should not focus exclusively on the logic of consequences, but also on what he calls the logic of opportunities employed by states. This means that by defining an interest, a state does not solely focus on the maximisation of gains (be they relative or absolute), but that it is also displaying a behaviour which it is expected to display by the other actors in the international system, in order to secure legitimacy and acknowledgment within the system.

Alexander Wendt discusses in "Social Theory of International Politics" about the three cultures of anarchy, namely about the dominant ideas and values from the international system at a given time, those that shape the structure where the actors operate, and which model themselves too. Wendt speaks about mature anarchy of the nowadays international system, which he describes as Lockean with Kantian elements, an observation of interest for the analysis of regional integration processes in this given context.

New Regionalism has close ideational and methodological links to Comparative Regionalism as well as with a Social-Constructivist study paradigm of regionalism, and even up to a certain extent to Critical Theory. The New Regionalism theory brings along a more fluid, more flexible, interpretation of global regions and their study, stressing the fact that the static or unidirectional dimension should be abandoned in favour of a more dynamic approach – regions are permanently being made and unmade, integrated and fragmented/ disintegrated, meaning that scholars should be concerned with this aspects of the process as well.

Another important observation to be made in the structuring of this research project is that the acknowledgment as region should be derived from the degree of *Regionness* that is displayed by a certain space, and not automatically granted once with the formalising of an intergovernmental structure which claims this position. According to Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum, in "Theorising the Rise of Regionness", a region is being constructed and deconstructed according to its capacity to coagulate and project common identities and interests.

The working hypothesis employs the approach of New regionalism as well as Constructivist elements to assess the *Regionness* degree and the extent of articulating a sense of common belonging (regional culture).

### ***The emergence and consolidation of non-state actors in regional governance***

The interest for the study of non-state actors in global politics surged fairly recently, generating new questions about the nature, the character and the role of world affairs players. The most recurring thought about them is their emergence has been facilitated by the current condition of the international system, one defined by accentuated globalism, borders' permeability, easy access to information and communication, increased interdependency and high mobility of actors and capabilities from within it.

Non-state entities which present an interest for scholars of contemporary international relations are of different types, play different roles, and exert variable degrees of influence, but nevertheless their presence and impact makes for them impossible to be ignored in the study of nowadays international political processes.

The categories of non-state actors analysed in this research project include elements from civil society, be they grass root or non-institutionalised civic initiatives, alongside national, regional and international level non-governmental organisations.

Employing social international political theory tools can explain the trends of regional integration, as well as the proliferation of non-state actors, the defining of their relationship to states, the construction of their interaction based on the agency-structure pattern, the role of culture in the interstate integration process and the modelling of actors, of their identities and interests by common understanding, experiences and memories.

It is often the case that there is a direct connection established between a region and a regional organisation. The extent up to which a certain regional intergovernmental organisation can actually provide an accurate and exhaustive picture of the regional realities varies greatly, meaning that the study of regionalism should not be exclusively confined to these aspects.

In order to better understand the regional dynamics, one should include in the study of regions actors coming from other backgrounds than the formal institutional one. Regional governance is carried out both formally and non-formally, in the case of the latter a special



emphasis being put on the contribution of non-state actors. The formal and non-formal regional governance arrays have to be discussed together so that one may gain an accurate perception of the regions' processes.

### **Case study**

Non-governmental entities operating in the field of development and humanitarian aid in the East African Community have been selected to serve as case study for the research project, based on this space's potential to contribute to the objectives of the research. The area offers a valuable insight regarding the study of non-state actors which take part in the regional integration and governance process, due to the fact that the regional profile and that of the organisation are somewhat different from a traditional approach of regionalism and its associated processes, including regional governance; therefore, the findings contribute to highlighting aspects of what could help develop and improve a comprehensive Social-Constructivist theory of regionalism.

This is a space where regional governance is being built on rather different premises than in the case of areas with well established nation states, and regional governance structures follow therefore a different pattern of organisation and functioning.

The emergent economies of the area, disposing of growth potential, with high demographic scores and natural resources, are to be found in rather weak states, marked by internal segregation and centrifugal tendencies. The states making this region are confronted with underdevelopment and other structural issues derived from frail political organisation.

The experience of regional integration processes did not meet the level attained by other areas as a result of the insufficient political and economic motivation to drive a supranational organisational structure. Regional integration is here undersized compared with other areas on the globe, but retains an individualised profile.

### **On the research methodology**

A survey has been employed in order to answer the research questions, whose design is based on some key elements identified in the underlying theoretical framework of the project. By interviewing different types of non-state actors, the study investigates their perception on

regional integration and governance, their actual contribution regarding the regional agenda, their perception of events holding a regional impact, their strategies and actions carried out to influence and channel regional governance.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the activity and contribution of non-state actors in formal (governmental) and non-formal (civil society) regional governance structures. In depth, it aims to investigate how international as well as local non-governmental organisations contribute to the creation and establishment of regional governance structures (standard, norms, legislation, institution building etc.) in the member states of the East African Community.

The research survey has been applied to a number of 10 non-governmental organisations active in the East African Community region.

The main criterion employed for their selection was that the actors had an *international dimension*, that is to say, apart from the fact that these organisations should be active in a country or more of the East African Community region, they should have a dimension that goes beyond the borders of the specific country it operates in. This may be reflected in the fact that the organisation headquarters are based outside the country/ countries of operation, the fact that the organisation is being partnered in its programs by an organisation or institution from abroad, that it is being part of an international network of organisations of its type, of the fact that it receives international funding, or that its crew, staff and volunteers are international.

All the organisations comprised in the study had to fulfil another criteria in order to be included in the research, namely that they should operate in the field of *development and humanitarian assistance*. The East African Community could be described as an example of developmental regionalism, so that the main drivers of the process of regional integration and therefore of the formula of regional governance are subscribed to this element.

### ***Some observations on the limitations of the research methodology***

The limitations entailed by the research strategies and methods may be divided into three sections: the size of the pooling base of respondents for the survey, the calculation of results, and the viability of the information obtained to making a solid contribution to the research objectives.

While not promising to deliver an exhaustive account on the role and impact of non-state actors in regional governance structures, be they formal or non-formal, the this thesis purpose is

to identify some key elements of the participation of non-governmental entities in the aforementioned process and to tie them to the existing agenda of international relations scholarship on the wider study of regionalism, in order to contribute to the development and consolidation of a sound and employable theoretical framework to investigate the phenomenon.

## **Findings**

### ***On the structures and actors impacting on regional governance (in the case study area)***

Structures are to be described as conditions or recurrences in the realm where actors reside (the international system), but they are *caused* and *maintained* by the behaviour and actions of the latter. When there is continuous maintenance of these conditions, they become entrenched enough to be causing themselves the actors to behave or to react in a particular way, until a sudden occurrence in the actors' profile leads to them changing or even disappearing (identities and interests being modified as a result of interacting with the structures and with other actors).

*Anarchy* is the absence of any formal central authority in charge with the governing functions for this specific area. The functioning of the organisation occurs in a realm which is neither regulated nor controlled, neither coerced nor sanctioned by any other authority or entity higher than that of states, and everything associated with the performing of governance is an expression of this condition.

*Sovereignty* is the independent, autonomous character of the will of states entering this regional structure of governance and of their actions accordingly. The member states of this organisation, considering their historical experiences, are keener on preserving their autonomy in regional interaction or socialising and less likely to be willing to delegate higher amounts of sovereignty to a supranational entity.

*Culture* is shared ideas and values, including the dominant vision on inter-state cooperation and regional integration, are highly responsible for the evolution towards a direction or another of the process itself.

*Regional issues* are particular needs, shortcomings, threats, risks and crisis experienced by more than one country in the region, which hold a high propagating possibility and which

cannot be addressed and managed individually by a state, exert a strong influence on the course of action and development taken by the organisation. They may be of a physical-natural type, social-economic, or cultural.

Actors are not only the types of entities populating the regional realm, but those that actually have a role in advancing, influencing or managing the regional integration process, as well as regional governance.

*Governments.* As long as states retain their sovereignty and do not decide to embark into regional political federations, governments remain the primary artisans and enactors of regional governance.

*Political leaders.* In the case of regions with somewhat feeble or less consolidated institutional and administrative structures of the state, even more so in the case of those with a tradition of a *paternalist* political culture, the influence exerted by individual leaders is key to understanding developments and certain courses of action in the realm of foreign affairs.

*Great powers.* Great powers politics continues to be a central element of understanding the evolution and dynamics of regional groups. Even though the manifestation of great power politics does no longer take the direct, explicit pattern of interfering with the course of internal political life, or by military or economic support of contesting factions in their quest of securing power, it comes in the form of investments, financing, commercial ties, development aid, education etc., all of which bearing the mark of a particular profile. The creation of regional norms, practices and institutions as well as the enactment of regional governance often fall under the influence of a model or blueprint provided for by another similar structure, which the organisation tries to emulate.

*Civil society.* An actor with an incredibly diverse typology, civil society plays an ever increasing role in the process of regional governance. The concept of civil society is understood from a wider theoretical perspective.

The *interactional* approach, preferred over the *associational* approach, when studying civil society, entails a set of differentiations which impact on the unfolding of a research. While the *associational* approach, based on the liberal tradition, is concerned with institutional design of organisational forms of non-state actors, membership issues, policy advocacy and engagement with governmental institutions, the *interactional* approach comes not to substitute, but to complement the former by looking at less formalised groups and even individuals engaging in

community matters and aiming to influence the evolution of their societies in one direction or another.

The activity of such an associational form should be consciously unfolding based on *a set of established principles* (at entity or community level) and aiming at accomplishing *a series of objectives directed to impact on the community*, otherwise it may be hardly the case to consider such entity as an element of civil society, but rather as a form of private association.

Added to this, the *opposition, or delimitation*, to the state should be understood in this context as the *clearly citizen, voluntary type of association directed to the involvement in and contribution to the community, working complementarily with the state and monitoring/sanctioning the activity of the former*.

In the forthcoming paragraphs, a brief discussion on recurrent issues of civil society in the case study area.

*Ethnicism*. While preserving ethnic and cultural identity is not a strategy to be discarded and does not in itself hinder community development, it may impact negatively on the participation pattern as it draws back, if not prevents, interaction and co-operation of these associations and organisations of local civil society which are constituted around a particular ethnic core.

*Atomism*. This phenomenon is characterised by the extreme multiplicity of associations and other forms of initiative a civil space often characterised by a scarcity of resources (be they material, financial or staff) and which work on a very limited number of issues.

*Dependency*. *Material* dependency is over-relying on the external support at stake may come either from the state, either from international donors. The *psychological* dependency at its turn manifests in the form of perpetuating the tradition of assistance and support seeking for any new form of civic initiative.

*Isolation*. It refers here to the fact that there is little trans-interaction between various branches of civil society (from state abuse check, to human rights activism to development, or the environmentalists), leading to the further prevention of its proper consolidation and concerted operation.

Concerning the legislative and strategic framework for civil society engagement with the East African Community, the issue has been addressed in a five year strategy, titled *EAC Strategic Plan: Community Development (2009-2014)*, which highlights the importance of

mobilising civil society in order to accomplish developmental goals, mainly by engaging it in addressing several structural issues.

The expression of this commitment has been followed by the elaboration an organisational programmatic document, the *Adopted Consultative Dialogue Framework for the Private Sector, Civil Society and Other Interest Groups in the EAC Integration Process*, issued by the Council of the EAC in 2012, building on the *Draft EAC Civil Society Mobilisation Strategy* from 2010.

### ***Formal regional governance structures – contribution and influence of non-state actors***

A formal regional governance structure is best understood as a network of actors directed by one entity which takes an official, institutionalised form, and which assumes the main management role in the leading of regional affairs. This type of structures or networks is usually being built around an inter-state political organisation, such as the case of the East African Community. The functions listed below are described based on the case study findings, but have been generalised in order to respond to the research questions.

**1. Awareness creation.** One mean of involving civil society representatives in regional affairs is by granting them with opportunities to bring the integration debate closer to its beneficiaries, the people and societies it means to bring together. This task is to be carried by acting as a mediating channel between regional governance institutions, national authorities and local groups, for instance by providing the necessary meeting and dialogue framework, where such the interested parties could get together and discuss the direction and priorities the integration process should take.

**2. Providing access to information.** While not only raising awareness regarding the work of the organisation and its institutions, the representatives of civil society may also play the part where they present and disseminate policy papers and submit them to public discussion. This works by explaining the local communities the way regional strategies, programmes and projects affect their everyday life, how the decision making process takes place and how they can contribute and sanction such action in their capacity of member states' citizens.

**3. Policy formulation and analysis.** The representatives of civil society can be actively involved in the advancing of regional integration by giving a voice and providing expertise to the establishment and implementation of official organisational policies.

The input that can be delivered by the non-governmental entities resides mainly in their expertise, in the fact that they can provide for research which has already been undertaken by their organisation and whose findings may prove relevant for the purpose of establishing a regional policy in a certain field.

**4. Dialogue and consultation.** The permanent character of the interactions between the organisation's bodies and non-governmental organisation is a central element of providing cohesion and sustainability to the co-operation for regional integration. It is a means of not only continuously providing for expertise, but also a means of delivering the degree of legitimacy for the work undertaken by the organisation for the advancing of regional integration.

**5. Monitoring and evaluation.** This schemes contribute to ensuring that the efforts put into the design and structuring of key strategic policies are fully made use of and that the bodies which are in charge with their implementation receive adequate support for the carrying out of these procedures until they built their own institutional capabilities.

### ***Non-formal regional governance structures – contribution and influence of non-state actors***

A non-formal structure of this sort is taking this management of leadership role in regional affairs from a non-official, non-institutionalised stance. It may have a *permanent, organised* character, meaning that groups and organisations representing civil society voluntarily and consciously congregate and decide to establish ties between them, bringing them together for the attainment of specific goals. In this case, non-governmental organisations embark on co-operation structures which can take the shape of thematic platform and forums, which meet regularly and are in permanent contact and dialogue on the issues of interest.

It may also have a *spontaneous* and/ or *unintentional* character, meaning that these types of networks are congregating momentarily around poignant or critical issues; the study of their impact and significance in regional governance has been undersized, compared to the previous type.

Returning to the observation made at an earlier point, the functions listed below are described based on the case study findings, but have been generalised in order to respond to the research questions.

**1. Identity creators.** The congregation of civil society towards a particular focus or towards important issues affecting their communities is a process which strengthens their common ties and generates a sense of belonging.

This outcome is thereafter projected into the home communities and leads to a development and consolidation of the common identity, generating more support for the representatives of the community to speak and act on its behalf, bearing this time and ever more legitimate dimension. Their contribution may be similar to that identified in the case of formal governance structures, where civil society representatives were encouraged to support the regional integration work directed by the political organisation. Comparably, this action may happen under the common decision of the network of non-governmental entities to promote the regional construction by strengthening the sense of common identity.

The unintentional creation of identity derives from the efforts of these organisations to work towards the achievement of particular goals or towards to the solving of certain issues which generate awareness and mutual understanding of affecting neighbouring societies. This type of work brings communities closer and leads to them developing a sense of shared consciousness and the feeling of working together to bettering themselves off.

**2. Norm entrepreneurs.** It is a tool for creating, distributing and entrenching values and behaviour with the purpose of creating legitimate and acceptable pattern of interaction between states and other actors in global affairs. The most recurrent situation where such entities perform an entrepreneurial role at establishing and consolidating patterns of behaviour in the international system is the absence of normatives in a specific area or domain.

**3. Governance providing function.** Governance providing function can be described as the undertaking of the role meant to belong to governmental authorities, when these organisations substitute the actions of an official political body. In more detail, in situations where political bodies are incapacitated for a number of reasons (such as security threats, internal instability and/ or conflicts, scarcity of resources, lack of expertise etc.) their role may be taken by non-governmental entities which provide for the needs of the local communities. The organisational reference towards their actions as governance providers is in many cases



described as working sidelines with the official political bodies, not taking over their responsibilities nor entering a competition with them as service providers. They hold high maintaining their civil society status.

The *unintentional governance providers* function, refers here to the fact that in most cases, non-governmental organisations do not openly embrace this status and do not hold it as their mission or goal to replace the state. Their performing of these functions is not meant to be an alternative to the state role – even though this is the *de facto* situation in some cases. Such example may be very visible in contexts of internal turmoil or conflicts of many sorts, when political bodies are not only incapacitated to perform their function, or found in a state of illegitimacy, but they may be completely dissolved.

### ***Overview of non-state actors' contributions to regional governance***

**1. Governance creators.** Governance creators or governance makers, refers here to the fact that non-state actors may play, in the early stages of the aggregation of a form of institutional regional governance in a particular area, an alike to states role in setting up and putting into function the structures which are going to be charged with the manning of regional affairs.

**2. Governance contributors.** This role is usually assumed by civil society representatives once the organisational, institutional structures of regional governance have been set in place and are running at acceptable, if not optimal parameters. This means that the intergovernmental authorities have managed to successfully create the basic infrastructure or framework needed to manage regional affairs, first, and, second, that they have once more acknowledged the fact that civil society representatives can play a determinant role in this construction.

**3. Governance providers.** The provider function refers to the fact that non-governmental networks assume themselves the leadership position in manning regional affairs, but moving a step further beyond the mere role of norm entrepreneurs. Besides setting international behavioural norms and good practices and transmitting them to states or intergovernmental organisations, such networks take upon themselves the setting up and the delivery of regional

policies. In other words, civil society is substituting the functions that should have traditionally been assumed by states or intergovernmental organisations.

### **Contributions for developing a Social-Constructivist theoretical framework for the study of regionalism**

**1. Defining and understanding regions.** The construction of the region is instead depending on the entrenchment of its identity ties, which is an ongoing process and which has to prove to be sustainable in itself; as learnt from the case study findings, the construction of regional identity has to be reliant on a common foundation, such as the aforementioned minimal proximity ties which can be historical, demographic, cultural and/ or economic, but the process can also take a conscious, deliberate and assumed dimension where actors are deciding to come together to fulfil common goals and objectives. This identity building endeavour is the mixed work of political leadership, private actors and civil society.

**2. Developmental regionalism.** Regions should be seen as voluntary and assumed political architectures which bear at times an individualising profile, worth being studied in order to grasp a more comprehensive image of the process. *Developmental regionalism*, as the particular form of co-operation and integration that East African Community as a regional organisation embraces, has provided in practice the example that belonging to a close geographical realm, sharing up to a certain point commonalities and similar values in their relational histories, despite many fault lines and syncope moments, may lead in the end to congregating around comparable objectives and to putting together resources and capabilities to secure them.

**3. Regions dynamic.** Regions should be perceived first of all as flexible, active constructions which model, transform and evolve due to a complex interaction of internal and external factors.

Concluding from the case study and the survey's findings, it may be thus said that it is not only sufficient to acknowledge the impact of certain elements and factors, be they external or internal to the regional integration process, upon its outcome, but also to examine in closer detail the ways in which their proportional interaction is responsible for the variations of the integration speed and depth. Such observation transposed into a practical research endeavour enhances the

Constructivist assumptions on the actors-structures mutual shaping, which is going to be discussed in the forthcoming paragraphs.

**4. Interactions between structures and actors.** The lessons learnt from the survey carried out have demonstrated that this approach may facilitate understanding the particularities of a certain regionalism type or regional integration process and therefore provide a reason to consider that such an approach may prove beneficial for the overall understanding of this global phenomenon.

With this in mind, one may explain why in a particular context the global players and regional organisations have responded in different ways to a similar critical situation holding a transborder effect.

**5. The role of culture.** The role of culture in influencing the course of the regional identity formational, regional integration and governance building processes can be observed in terms of both internal and external influences. This is one key lesson learnt from the experience of carrying out this research's case study: understanding global evolution has to always be put in accordance to local experiences. Indeed, we may resort to building and employing study framework with a general applicability, but when using them, for accurate results, we must always be considering the *local*, particular variable.

**6. The importance of area studies.** Although building and employing study frameworks with a general applicability is a valid research task, accurate results cannot be guaranteed in absence of considering the *local* variable. Therefore, it may be concluded that the lessons drawn from this case study endorse the argument that International Relations theories must be *locally conscious*. This is even more the case of Constructivism, which is a *theory* (as considered in the case of this paper) which relies on wide interpretative margins, and has to be permanently amended to produce solid research results.

### **Future developments of the research project**

*Great Powers dynamics beyond Cold War logics and its effect on regionalism.* In a Constructivist approach, the meaning of Great Powers can be attributed to that actor of the international system who has the capabilities, the willingness and the recognition of other regarding its capacity to influence and conduct affairs in the global realm according to its

purpose. “The rise and fall of great powers” in the Constructivist logic relies on the acquisition, preservation or loss of any of the elements described above. Furthermore, great powers need not be necessarily states. From a softpower perspective, as first introduced by Liberals, influential organisations may equally play this role. Related to this, the *power* of the *great* does not necessarily derive from the military or the financial realm, which, far from being totally set aside, complement with cultural, ideological elements.

A route interesting to be explored, and which has only briefly been touched upon in the chapters of this thesis, is the role and impact of emerging global players upon the outcomes of regionalism.

*The role of personal leadership in regionalism.* Personal leadership is not to be understood in this context solely by the political connotation of the term. Personal leadership should here relate to the public dimension of a representative personality and its capacity to influence local societies and to drive them to change.

Specifically, once these societies have engaged on the path of democratisation and opening of political regimes, no matter how feeble or inconsistent results may have proved, the emergence of such leaders/ inspiring personalities could not be neglected. They may be local or internationally set, they may come from civil society, from business, from arts/ literature, they may be clerics or human rights activists etc., but all linked by the only essential trait which is their capacity to relate to societies and to exert influence on people’s thinking and decisions, including their repercussions on regionalism.

*Alternatives to traditional government.* The contributions of the thesis in this regard may rely in the fact that the investigations around the role of non-state actors in regional governance and the examination of the functions performed by them provide arguments to open additional and innovative ways to understand the manner in which social and human affairs are being managed. Might the undertaking of rules, regulations and behaviour standard setting, the diffusion of norms by non-governmental organisations and the delivery of community public services, such functions performed by civil society in the local/ regional realm be replicated at global level, and with what effects, costs and gains? Could civil society provide a solution to where states and traditional governments have failed to deliver and if so, how would the new world order appear? These are just a few examples of research questions exploring this side of the thesis findings and which may be examined departing from it.

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