Inter/regionalism: Universities in a World of Regions [v2]

Help

© Kris Olds & Susan Robertson | Contemporary Map of Higher Education in Europe

Take a look at this contemporary map of higher education in Europe.

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

By anyone's reckoning, it is impossible not to be bowled over by some of its 'facts'. Two stand out that are worth us pondering in terms of the changing spatial configuration of higher education.

1 Fact One: Two Kinds of Europe

Despite higher education being a jealously guarded domestic responsibility in pretty much all countries around the world, in just over 10 years beginning in 1999, some 47 national education Ministers across 'Europe' representing more than 5,600 public and private institutions with more than 16 million students committed themselves to the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) via what is known as The Bologna Process.

Given that there are now only 28 members of the European Union (EU), and the EHEA covers 47 countries, we can see that there are at least two kinds of Europe as a region being represented here – the EU version of 'Europe' and an aspirational/continental version of 'Europe.'

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2 Fact Two: Degree Architecture

In voluntarily committing themselves to the Bologna Process, members were agreeing to:

- bring their degree architectures into line

In doing so, an important dimension of national sovereignty was ceded to Europe, and to the growing number of agencies making up a 'European', and not national, higher education system.

with each other (for both graduate and undergraduate studies),
- ramp up their commitments to student mobility as part of a student's learning experience,
- introduce an educational credit transfer system to enable students to undertake some of their studies in other parts of Europe and have them recognized in their home institutions,
- establish National Qualifications Framework where there were none, and have these regulated by an overarching Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area.

You might be prompted to ask: *how did this amazing set of outcomes happen?* Were the respective ministers for higher education not paying attention whilst on the job? Was a modern day Machiavelli at work, striding the corridors of power, whilst the professors and protectors of university autonomy distracted themselves with other endeavors in their respective ivory towers? How could such a revolution in the organization and governing of the university happen across Europe? And why? Is this a unique set of events tied to Europe, or are regionalizing projects a more widely shared phenomenon?

Let's consider two more facts that will raise a further set of questions for us to ponder, unravel, and make sense of regarding this new regionalizing geography for higher education.

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3 Fact Three: EU-Latin American Collaboration

In 2011, 23 national and international university associations and universities from across Europe joined forces to enhance Europe-Latin American university partnerships, bringing together sub-regional initiatives across the Latin American continent, the Andean Community, the MERCOSUR region, and Central America/Mexico in a conversation around the development of an EU-Latin American Common Higher Education and Knowledge Area (ALCUE). This kind of *inter-regional* initiative is aimed at thickening a range of already existing EU activities in the Latin American region, including EU funding

To some observers of region-building and inter-regionalism, such as Paul Cammack, this kind of EU-Latin American collaboration is motivated by an explicit intention concerning higher education, but with a much bigger goal in mind. On the one hand the EU is seeking to challenge the United States' presence in Latin America through building up its own presence in the region. On the other hand, such strategies provide an opportunity for the EU to act as a regional integration entrepreneur and exporter of ideas in ways that suit the EU's global economic competitiveness agenda. Viewed from within, key players in the Latin American region, particularly Argentina and

to MERCOSUR, otherwise known as the Common Market of the South (involving Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela), for student mobility within the region.

Brazil, have been interested in governing mechanisms that might enable the development of a stronger regional identity to mediate the US's interest in promoting its own free trade agendas there. For writers like Harvard's Joseph Nye, the EU-Latin American collaborations can be viewed as a form of 'soft power,' that is, *attracting* others into projects in such a way that we do not see power explicitly at work.

Fact Four: Branding

Now if the EU-Latin American activities around higher education come as something of a surprise to you, consider Fact 4 which has more recently come to light: In January 2013, a well-known Australian university, Macquarie University, adopted a new post-graduate degree structure and began advertising its post-graduate degree pathways as 'Bologna Compliant' (see Box 1).[1]

Macquarie's advertising points out to prospective students that this will enhance employment opportunities and open up pathways to further overseas studies. The question of why and how this necessarily lubricates the career opportunities for Macquarie graduates is unanswered, but presumably it is to make negotiating CVs and capabilities in both regional and global labour markets much easier. Only time will tell.

The immediate question for you here is: why would an Australian university more than half way around the world from Europe be sufficiently concerned with this new European qualification system such that it reorganises its post-graduate programmes and advertises 'Bologna Compliance' as part of its recruitment and marketing strateg? The answer? That new and different ways of 'branding' a university help them position themselves in a marketplace, and compete for students, status and resources. In essence, regionalisms can act as potential brands enabling new forms of distinction to emerge.

Box 1: Macquarie is Bologna Compliant

Macquarie's Research Training Pathway has changed. What does this mean for Honours in 2014?

In 2013 Macquarie University adopted a new postgraduate degree structure, making it the first Australian university to fully align its research training with European, North American and Asian qualifications. With greater international recognition for their qualifications, graduates of the new Master of Research degree will enjoy enhanced

employment opportunities and pathways to further study overseas.

Macquarie University, Australia, website, Nov, 2013.

New processes, projects and outcomes

These facts point to a number of developments that are unfolding in higher education and which we will tease out below. The first is that, like developments we introduced in Week 3 at the national level, new forms of region-building are also taking shape through the reorganizing of higher education. The second is that newer region-building projects that are taking place in different parts of the world are a reaction to global processes broadly in train in the 1980s, processes we address in different ways in Class 1 and Class 5. For those of us working in, researching, or simply wanting to make sense of higher education in the contemporary world, ignoring these regional developments means failing to 'see', and ask questions about, these processes, projects and outcomes that are radically changing many higher education landscapes.

Why Regionalize Higher Education?

EARLY INITIATIVES

In asking why regionalize—and from there, why regionalize higher education—we are immediately launched into a massive literature on the archetypal regionaliser, the EU, keeping in mind that regionalism is always a state-led agenda.

The origins of the EU can be traced back to the 1950s, and the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to develop the basis of a regional economy sufficiently strong to balance the post-war Communist bloc. At this point, higher education was put to work for nation-building projects *within* national economies, and played no part in this first phase of creating Europe.

Yet as Anne Corbett of the London School of Economics points out in her very important book *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: Ideas, Institutions, and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education, 1955-2005*, by the late 1960s and '70s there were repeated efforts to launch various kinds of higher education initiatives in the EU region, but with limited success. In short, the early Member States of the EC blocked potential higher education regional integration projects (though the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence was created in 1971 and continues today). If you are interested in this topic, it is worth looking at the EUI's research projects and outputs as it is a source of interesting work on regional integration more generally.

Perhaps the most notable higher education initiative to come out of this early period of regionalizing in Europe was the 1987 launch of the EU's Erasmus Mobility Programme, aimed at enabling university students enrolled in one country to undertake some of their studies in another European university, with funding available (and growing) to enable the student to cover some of their costs. Erasmus was meant to break down

Box 2 – Regionalism vs Regionalization

Regionalism is formally known as the:

[S]tructures, processes, and arrangements that are working toward greater coherence within a specific international region in terms of economic, political, security, socio-cultural, and other kinds of linkages.

This definition comes from Christopher Dent's excellent 2008 book East Asian Regionalism(London: Routledge).

Regionalism is often differentiated from *regionalization*, which is the tangible material flows that cross borders within a region and in doing so generate an evident intraregional integration pattern when viewed from a global perspective. For example, family firms in Southeast Asia trade heavily amongst each other, and help bind together

nationalisms and help create a European identity, much like we see with the development of global competences which we presented to you in Week 1. Yet as the wonderful film *L'Auberge Espagnol* shows, and which we encourage you to take a peek at if you can, cross-border mobility projects like Erasmus can have much more diverse outcomes, including the reinforcement of national traditions, the promotion of academic tourism (and a lot of partying!), and the tendency to teach in English.

For our purposes here in thinking about regionalisms and higher education, whilst the Erasmus programme has never enrolled the numbers of students the European Commission had hoped for (see the work of Ulrich Teichler on this), it did generate major headaches for universities that would have to be solved, and was an important stimulus for the later Bologna Process we introduced above.

The most immediate headache, of course, was how to make sure that a student's university studies undertaken in one European university be credited in another. This proved to be no easy task, as it is not simply a technical matter. Rather, it challenges, head-on, ways of organizing degree programmes and scientific knowledges. For instance, how would we compare the value of an undergraduate degree that takes five years to acquire in a country like Slovenia, with one that might only take three years, as in the UK? And what about questions related to student fees, or issues of quality? The European Higher Education Area houses a diverse set of institutions with very different histories that include their governance structures. The other headache of course is that bringing these different academic traditions into some kind of harmony is no easy matter, and particularly so when academics take the view that it is *they* who should preside over and negotiate matters, such as how the curriculum is organized, the kind of teaching methods to be used, the

the region's economy. This form of regionalization is thus differentiated from the regionalism associated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—an institution and reform agenda created by nation-states.

Despite our differentiation of regionalism vs regionalization, it is worth noting that some analysts merge the two terms into one, most often regionalization. This is confusing, we admit!

Interregionalism is a phenomenon linked to regionalism. Once a regional state-led agenda and architecture is constructed (e.g., the EU), regions reach out to other regions to facilitate the development process via the building of linkages. An example of interregionalism would be the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) initiative, which was established in 1996 by 25 countries from Asia and Europe, along with the European Commission. The logic behind ASEM is to build society-to-society ties between Asia and Europe, with higher education as a key targeted sector.

In doing so—in reaching out—the assertive region also builds up and shapes its own identity while facilitating the construction of its partner

length of the teaching term, which universities are to be eligible to participate in regionalising activity, and so on.

region's identity. The class exercise deals with interregionalism, FYI.

Writers on the broader phenomenon of regionalism and regionalization, such as Bjorn Hettne or James Mittelman, refer to the kinds of processes and projects we have been discussing as *endogenous regionalism*; that is, regions get built from processes set in train from *within,* as a way of solving particular kinds of internal problems—in this case an internal market, the making of a new post-national identity, and so on. Hettne helpfully contrasts this with *exogenous regionalism*, in which regions are constructed as a result of a dialectical relationship with external processes, including developmental processes in other regions, as we noted with the Latin American developments earlier.

The most important for our purposes here, and which takes us into the most recent phase of the regionalization of higher education around the world, is globalisation. That is, regionalism and globalisation are intimately related to each other in the ongoing transformation of world order.

From the kind of research we have been doing on higher education, we can see the two processes go hand in hand. Being in a region can help protect an individual nation against global competition. But it might mean having to manage the pooling of some degree of sovereignty upward, negotiate or contest who takes an active lead on constructing the shape and scope of the region's regulatory structures. Either way, the emergence of regional blocs, particularly those shaped by the more open and export-oriented *new regionalisms* that characterized the 1990s onwards (see the contrast between 'old' and 'new' regionalisms in Table 1), tends to ratchet up the thickening of region-building in a multi-polar world.

Old Regionalism—post-1945–1990s	**New Regionalism—1990s onwards**
Bi-polar world; Cold War; strong national states	Multi-polar world made up of national, regional and global actors

Created from above through super-power engagement	Voluntary process from within the emerging region/cooperation to tackle global challenges
Inward and protectionist	Open and export-oriented
Specific and narrow objectives	More comprehensive, multi-dimensional societal processes
Concerned with relations between nation states	New forms of special organization that are part of a global structural transformation that includes non-state actors

Table 1: drawn from work of Bjorn Hettne (2002)[2]

Why Regionalize Higher Education?

IT'S GLOBALISATION, AND THE ECONOMY, STUPID!

We asked earlier—why regionalize?—and suggested there are both endogenous and exogenous processes at work.

But this does not answer the question of why higher education, and why higher education over the past decade?

The answer, as you may have concluded for yourself, is arguably tied to 'globalisation'. But referring to globalisation in this way does not tell us much. Rather, we need to look at what kinds of higher education projects have been launched to solve what kinds of problems, and what new kinds of tensions, contradictions and forms of uneven development get established as a consequence.

The most immediate issue that the Bologna Process was being asked to solve in the late 1990s for the Member States of Europe was how to stem the flow of graduates from Europe to the USA which the Bologna architects viewed as limiting Europe's capacity to build a globally-competitive, knowledge-based economy.

A 'Europe of Universities,' as French Minister for Higher Education Claude Allègre deemed it, viewed the possibilities opened up by the Bologna Process as expanding the pool of talent because of the more efficient ways in which credentials were recognized.

Policies promoted by the European Commission also referred to the need to make European higher education institutions more efficient and competitive (i.e. 'modernized'!), and Members were encouraged to be much open to developing their higher education sectors as areas of trade—much as the United Kingdom had done, beginning in the 1990s, as it set out to build a higher education services sector. For the Commission, this meant promoting policies and making available sources of funds to construct 'Europe' as a regional destination for international fee-paying students, in competition with countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, who had begun to carve out a bigger slice of the market for themselves.

> Viewed from the outside, Europe's Bologna Process to create a European Higher Education Area has been nothing short of astonishing. Pavel Zgaga, one of the architects of the Bologna Process from its inception, muses over

So too does Cliff Adelman, a well-known higher education consultant in the US who describes being left 'breathless' by both the ambition and achievements of

why this is so.

Download the **MP3 Audio File** or **Transcript** here.

the Bologna Process (see Adelman's short report here). After all, the form of the modern university has pretty much remained the same over the past two centuries. According to Adelman, via his work with the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), the US had a lot to learn from the political success of the Bologna Process in bringing otherwise highly competitive and territorial Member States into the same room, singing more or less from the same hymn sheet. And learn they have been. In what might be viewed as a very controversial move, the US-based Lumina Foundation has been nursing a project in the USA in a series of states using one of the Bologna instruments—Tuning USA—to develop a competency or outcomes-based approach to higher education in the United States. In short, we can see not just 'echoes' of the Bologna Process in the US, as Pavel Zgaga describes it, but the potential for something of a mini-revolution in the US higher education sector that might erode some of the boundaries around the US's state system of HE (e.g., see 'New Approach to Transfer' in *Inside Higher Ed*).

These kinds of developments show us that instruments like Bologna are not simply contained in the spaces that create them. In fact, they have uses and effects in spaces and places and for purposes not even imagined by the original creators. Countries and organizations in different parts of the world have become interested in the Bologna Process, not only in terms of what it means for them, but whether, how, and in what form, they might use some of the instruments to build their own regionalizing—or indeed nationalizing (if we think of the US)—projects.

Returning to region-building, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been developing student mobility schemes for across the region, and begun to explore issues of quality and degree recognition. This is tied to their own interest in the region to become a regional hub for trading in higher education, attracting talent, creating an area that will kick-start innovation, and so on. Keep an eye on the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development for updates on this region-building project. This entry ('Towards harmonisation of higher education in Southeast Asia: Malaysia's perspective')[3] by Morshidi Sirat **(Universiti Malaysia Sarawak)** is also helpful in summarizing the state of the Southeast Asian higher education region-building project, as well as providing a Malaysian perspective on it.

But you should also keep in mind that within this region, the rise of China as a 21st Century super-power, is also on the minds of those within the region. Building a region is thus

political, and not just an economic process. And as you explore the South-East Asian region more generally, you will quickly become aware that this region has its own views on what region building might look like and what forms if might take. One very prominent view is that region-building 'the Asian way' means a commitment to a more consensus-building approach (compared to Europe which uses a voting system through the European Parliament).

This has not discouraged the European Commission from being very active as a 'regional integration entrepreneur' and attempting to broker a specific set of ideas about how to regionalize, such as in meetings aimed at encouraging nascent regional projects to use European Higher Education Area/Bologna Process tools. You can see this very clearly in the following set of slides delivered in 2011 to an Asia Europe Meeting See also 'Euro-Asia university cooperation as a means to enrich academic quality' by Alistair MacDonald, Head of Delegation, European Union Delegation Manila.

Yet the big question remains: what will be the long-term outcomes for Europe or South-East Asia? Indeed, will there be any major gains, economically and politically, from moving in the kinds of regionalising directions anticipated?

Some worry this 'one-size-fits-all model' for the organization of higher education regionally, which is extending to institutions such as Macquarie University in Australia, will limit innovation rather than hasten it. Others are concerned that the loss of both institutional and national control over higher education to a more instrumental, competitive project, as we see with the ideological project driving the Bologna Process, will create a set of values that are counter-productive and thus destructive. And others are concerned that in the context of economic crisis and austerity (as we are seeing in Europe), the easing of frictions holding back human mobility (e.g., faculty and graduate students) at a regional scale will exacerbate uneven development patterns. If you were an un/underemployed Spanish or Greek or Italian academic or (post)graduate student, right now, and you could move to Germany or the UK or Denmark to take up a position, wouldn't you?

It is perhaps too early to see some of the effects of these regionalizing projects on universities, academics and students, but we can anticipate that some countries and institutions will be more deeply affected than others, depending on how close or far they were to the original Bologna model.

Looking around the globe, it is clear there is not one single regionalizing story going on regarding higher education. Rather, we can see rather different kinds of projects at work, despite the fact that the EU has tried to broker its own model through funding, such as student mobility within MERCOSUR, or promoting curriculum harmonization tools, such as Tuning America Latina. However, there are, as we suggested above, a whole range of other projects and drivers at work within the Latin American region which make it particularly fascinating to

study. These make very clear that regionalizing does *not* follow a single unfolding logic. This has been one of the biggest theoretical lessons that observers of regionalizing processes have had to learn: just because Europe is one of the oldest and most developed regions within the current dynamics associated with globalization does not mean that we study regions through European eyes, and even more so just through the eyes of European states.

Rather, in the case of Latin America, we need to look at tendencies toward 'regionness' as shaped by the histories within the region, the balance of power amongst the regional partners, the specific claims that the universities have been able to make historically about higher education as a public good, and the growing view within the region that it needs to recover its own identify and not be tied to either its colonial past (Spain, Portugal, France) or more recent relationship with an imperial power, the USA. Three regional projects are worth briefly mentioning here because they highlight specifically this point and thus are a useful comparison with Europe; that is, of MERCOSUR, UNASUR and ALBA. Indeed Latin America is particularly interesting for our purposes as it is one of the few regions that has developed a strong critique of globalization which they tend to equate with neoliberalism or Americanization.

MERCOSUR, UNASUR and ALBA

As we noted earlier, MERCOSUR was established in 1991, paralleling similar regionalizing developments in other parts of the world, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (USA, Canada and Mexico) and a revamped Southern African Development Community (SADC). Writers on MERCOSUR and higher education, such as our colleague and collaborator Alfredo Gomes (see 'The Social Condition of Higher Education: Globalisation and (beyond) Regionalisation in Latin America'), show that over the period 1991-2001, MERCOSUR's Education Sector (SEM) progressed slowly, and largely around building relations of trust. Between 2001-2008 the first regional programmes were implemented, though the greatest achievement was in the establishment of protocols for the recognition of qualifications, in its first regional policy around the establishment of *national* accreditation and quality assurance (AQA) mechanisms, mobility, and inter-institutional cooperation. Some of these processes have been deepened from 2011 onward, though mobility is still small despite EU funding for this activity.

However, what is particularly fascinating about the case of MERCOSUR is the ways in which the Member States have continued to retain significant power and therefore autonomy, largely because the involvement of the professoriate (as opposed to the Rectors [Presidents/Vice Chancellors] in Europe being the chief negotiators) means that governing the professions is dependent on gaining permission from the professors themselves. Yet there was great concern that Brazil should not overwhelm the rest of the MERCOSUR members because of its size. As a result, 'Brand Mercosur,' the stamp of quality given to the top universities in MERCOSUR, was to be evenly distributed across the MERCOSUR partners. And it is particularly a country like Argentina, able to draw upon its own experiences with quality assurance and keen to take the lead on initiatives within

the region and again in competition with Brazil, who was able to promote its own instruments. These kinds of politics highlight the unique trajectories that emerge as a result of particular historical arrangements and in the light of contemporary politics.

Two other Latin American initiatives are worth signaling here as worthy of further exploration for students of higher education and regionalism. Both were launched in the same year, 2008. These are the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the People's of Our America Trade Agreement (ALBA – PTA). UNASUR is composed of all of the South American countries, except French Guiana. ALBA has evolved out of an earlier agreement between Cuba and Venezuela, and now includes Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Honduras, Ecuador, St. Vincents and The Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda.

What is particularly notable about both UNASUR and ALBA is that they are based on cooperation particularly in social welfare areas, leading writers like Thomas Muhr to suggest that this form of regionalization offers a very different kind of alternative to that being exported by Europe, on the one hand, and via dominant conceptions of what higher education should look like in a globalizing world with 'world class institutions, on the other (discussed in Week 5), that focus on prominence, competition, and, arguably, dominance. Writers like Muhr strongly suggest that the role of higher education in Latin American regionalism opens up bigger conversations around the role and purpose of higher education that go beyond narrow trade debates or comparative advantage accounts, which have accompanied many national conceptions.

So far we have said nothing about parts of the world such as Africa and the Middle East, both important spaces with a great deal going on. There is a nascent region being developed via the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), but as yet this tends to be dominated by national development projects, such as in Saudi Arabia and KAUST, or Qatar and the Qatar Education Foundation. To be sure we can see that some collaborations have taken place between the GCC and the EC, but nothing more formal has emerged. We also see interesting initiatives emerging regarding higher education transformations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, like those driven or supported by the World Bank (e.g., see 'Internationalization of higher education in MENA: policy issues associated with skills formation and mobility,' 2011), or the *US News* plan, "initiated with the encouragement of Sheika Moza bint Nasser, the chairwoman of the Qatar Foundation and the wife of the country's former emir," to develop a MENA ranking (summarized here in 'Choose your ranking').

Regarding the African sub-continent, writers like Bjorn Hettne reflect upon efforts to generate a 'pan-African regionalism' but argue that this tends to be what he calls 'shadow regionalism'. By this he means lots of rhetoric, pomp and ceremony and not much that materializes out of this. This said, there have been some recent attempt to establish an

African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS), driven by the African Union Commission and the Association of African Universities. Goolam Mohamedbhai**,** the former secretary-general of the Association of African Universities, has developed an informative summary of this initiative in 'Lessons from Europe: Towards an African Higher Education and Research Space.'

Again, watchers of higher education have been interested and curious as to how old forms of colonialism have become the basis for negotiating between Africa and Europe—for instance, where the former French-speaking colonies have been targeted by France and Belgium. These overtures, of course, are aimed at creating a new relationship between Africa and Europe tied to recruiting talent, making education services markets, and as objects and spaces for new forms of foreign investment lubricated by the new competences that higher education is supposed to develop.

Final Thoughts...

You'll be in little doubt now that the relationship between higher education and region-building is highly political, driven by the state, and shaped by key actors such as associations of universities and regional organizations. But you can also see that far from there being one big project at work, rolled out across the globe, there are different and competing projects, with outcomes we simply cannot predict.

In our view, adding in a geo-strategic and geo-political layering to our questions and explorations helps us think in more incisive and insightful ways about these developments, and what resources and conversations we need to ensure that we limit the ways in which the higher education sector services largely economic and political purposes. It is important that all of us, as students of the globalization of higher education and research, to think about these processes at work, what their outcomes are, and what they may become.

Susan and Kris

Week Four Exercise:

Regions, Interregionalism, and the Cultural Politics of MOOCs

As we have been noting in this week's material on regionalism and higher education, the development of mechanisms to encourage intra-regional higher education development processes include degree recognition and credit transfer, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, mobility schemes, benchmarking, regionally specific MOOC platforms (e.g., OpenupEd, iVersity), and so on.

But what happens when the objective shifts from being *intra*-regional in nature (e.g., let's build the European Higher Education Area) to being *inter*-regional in nature? In other words, what mechanisms can be developed anew, or adopted and perhaps refashioned, to encourage the formation of linkages and interdependencies *between* regions? We might think about, for example, human mobility schemes, joint research funding, the sharing of facilities and infrastructure (e.g., joint labs), and the export of qualifications framework models that have potential to sync different higher education systems.

If interregionalism is the objective, what issues and politics do we need to think about when *interregionalizing*; a process that generates fascinating and ever evolving entanglements between higher education systems (esp., students). This topic – the *cultural politics of interregionalism* – has bubbled up in fascinating ways ever since MOOC platforms, universities producing MOOCs, and international organizations (e.g., the World

Bank), started promoting MOOCs as a vehicle to transmit information and knowledge from one higher education context to another – and in this case – from one region (Europe) to another (Africa).

On one side, MOOCs have been viewed as free and somewhat open access vehicles to *share* knowledge between world regions, build capacity in regions importing educational services (to use GATS parlance), and promote higher education systems and universities associated with the MOOC production process. See, for example:

- MOOCs in Africa (*EduTech*, 12 April 2013)
- Missing Perspectives on MOOCs — Views from developing countries (*EduTech*, 19 April 2013)
- Debating MOOCs (*EduTech*, 23 April 2013)
- Coursera Equity – Summary of Investment Information (IFC, 20 May 2013)
- European Higher Education in the World (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, 11 July 2013)
- 'Are MOOCs the best chance we have to satisfy a global thirst for education?' (Guardian, 20 January 2014)
- 'New satellite could deliver MOOCs to Africa' (University World News, 12 December 2013)

It is worth noting too that Coursera, the platform our MOOC is on, has an expansive global footprint, and is creating material spaces (hubs) throughout many non-Western contexts where internet bandwidth is limited. Coursera is also going through a complex process to ensure access to select countries formally being sanctioned/embargoed by the US Government (see 'No MOOCs for Iran or Syria' and 'Massive Closed Online Courses,' both in Inside Higher Ed on 28 January 2014).

On the other side, which might be viewed as a more critical one, MOOCs have been criticized as strategic or defacto instruments of neo-colonialism and imperialism; vehicles that transmit decontextualized, irrelevant, even exploitative knowledges across space to distant regions. See, for example:

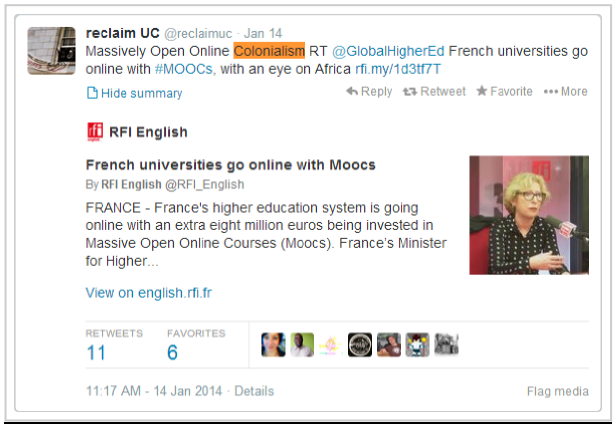
- 'Let Them Eat MOOCs' (Harvard Business Review, 9 October 2013)
- 'The World is Not Flat' (Inside Higher Ed, 25 April 2013)
- 'MOOCs as Neocolonialism: Who Controls Knowledge' (Chronicle of Higher Education, 4 December 2014).
- 'Offshore Education: MOOCs in Africa' (One Thought Blog, 7 March 2013)
- 'MOOC-less in Africa' (OPENUCT Initiative, September 2013)

- Coursera Raises Millions (*Inside Higher Ed*, 10 July 2013)
- More about MOOCs and developing countries (*EduTech*, 12 November 2013)

These two perspectives came to mind when Kris (via @GlobalHigherEd) sent a link to this article ('French universities go online with Moocs') on Radio France International (14 January 2014) via Twitter. The RFI article included these paragraphs:

> France's higher education system is going online with an extra eight million euros being invested in Massive Open Online Courses (Moocs). France's Minister for Higher Education, Geneviève Fioraso announced the new funding on Tuesday in addition to 12 million euros already planned to develop these online courses….
> Fioraso said that France is lagging behind the US and the UK in developing MOOCs….
> France is targeting Africa with the planned programme.
> "African people are vey creative and they are very familiar with the oral tradition," she said. "They also have very large countries with not very many campuses. So it is very well adapted to the African culture. We want to be more connected to the African development via Moocs."

Within minutes, this @reclaimuc revised the tweet into:



Exercise Directions

This week's student exercise extends this unresolved discussion/debate. Your task is to develop a response regarding one of the following three topics:

Option 1:
Does the notion of

Option 2:
Are Western MOOCs

Option 3:
Outline an argument for

‘European Higher Education in the World’, including via the mechanism of MOOCs to build interregional relations, mask neocolonial agendas for regions like Sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

Option 1 Discussion Thread

targeted at serving people outside of Europe and North America best concentrated in select disciplines or fields where knowledge is less culturally/geographically specific? If so, which ones, and why?

Option 2 Discussion Thread

the development of interregional (e.g., North America + the Middle East and North Africa; Europe + Africa) MOOC platforms vs MOOC platforms that reflect a single national origin and operational base.

Option 3 Discussion Thread

Sharing Policy Reminder:

To receive points for your submission:

1. Submit your response as a new posting in the corresponding discussion sub-forum (linked above) by 11:59 p.m. (CST) on XX/XX/XXXX.
2. Read and debate with your fellow students. You are encouraged to discuss in all three topic areas.
3. Vote up the posting that you feel makes the strongest argument.

When you're done, click the button below to attest your completion.

★ I've Completed This Exercise

References:

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkwQqmMVBjY

[2] Björn Hettne (2002) The Europeanisation of Europe: Endogenous and Exogenous Dimensions, Journal of European Integration, 24:4, 325-340.

[3] This 2008 entry is being updated by Morshidi Sirat, Vice Chancellor of the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.