

**Kühnhardt, Ludger, 2014. Region-building: Vol. I: The Global Proliferation of Regional Integration. Berghahn Books, 502 pp. \$ 120.00 (Hardcover).**

In spite of the fact that regions became “one of the cornerstones” of post-Cold War world order, Kühnhardt argues that the increase in region-building efforts across the world did not attract sufficient scholarly attention. An inadequate academic response to emergences of region-building was one of Kühnhardt’s main motives in writing a study which would deal with global proliferation of regional integration projects, which gained particular momentum with the termination of the Cold War. This book was, therefore, written with the overall purpose of deepening an academic understanding of contemporary region-building, relying on empirical investigation, and to contribute to laying the groundwork for development of comparative regionalism as a distinct scholarly field.

The study is divided into 3 parts. The first section of the study, entitled “Framing the Issue”, aims to introduce its main topic, as well as to clarify the theoretical framework and key concepts that the author utilizes throughout the study. In this section the author initiates discussion about the main preconditions of viable regional-building and postulates European integration experience as a reference point for assessing regional integration efforts in other parts of the world. The largest part of the study is dedicated to the comparative empirical research about ongoing regional integration processes. “A Global Survey”, as the title of this section, offers an overview of main regional groupings from around the world. The third and final part of the study is titled “Context and Implication”. In this section of the study, the author goes back to the theoretical discussion, anticipating that findings of the empirical research would confirm his assumptions regarding democracy as a main precondition for success in regional-building.

As the author states himself, the central hypothesis of this study is that “democratic regionalism... is the precondition for region-building to make any lasting impact on world order and governance” (p. 6). Furthermore, the author intends to prove a presupposition that democracy is at the same time “a precondition, tool and objective of solid and legitimate regionalism” (p. 6). The author further emphasizes that the term “democratic region-building” was actually coined in this study in order to describe the European integration experience (p. 22). Democratic region-building and the EU therefore represent the *leitmotifs* of this study. However, since the author rejects claims that regional integration goes through any deterministic or linear path, he refuses to consider EU as a model for non-European regional-building. Instead, the author’s favoritism of the EU is explained by the fact that it represents the most advanced scheme of regional integration (p. 2).

The author is very critical of existing academic literature which, in his opinion, has failed to grasp the wider picture of proliferation of regional integration as a global phenomenon. In that sense, it seems as if the goal of the author is to make a breakthrough in the field of regional studies in a manner that would ensure that his theoretical reflections have a solid basis in a broad empirical survey. Taking this into account, it is not surprising that the largest part of the study is dedicated to a comprehensive examination of regional groupings across the world.

The section of the study entitled “A Global Survey” is subdivided into several chapters which examine regional groupings in Latin America and the Caribbean (SICA, CAN, CARICOM and MERCOSUR), Asia (ASEAN, GCC, SAARC), Africa (AU, ECOWAS, SADC), Pacific Ocean (PIF) and Eurasia (CIS). This study, however, did not deal with either NAFTA or APEC. In the author’s view, free trade regimes differ from regional integration projects which aspire towards community-building. Therefore, since neither NAFTA nor APEC intend to engage in the process of region-building that would go beyond a free trade agreement, none of them was included in the survey (pp. 26-30). Nevertheless, somewhat paradoxically, the survey did include regions such as Northeast Asia and the broader Middle East where intraregional rivalry and geopolitical tensions precluded any meaningful achievements in regional integration.

Every chapter within the section dedicated to the global survey follows the same analytical pattern. The research about each of the regional groupings includes a review of basic historical, geographical, political and economic facts relevant to the current state of integration, as well as a detailed examination of treaties and political statements which point to the aims of that regional integration. In order to determine whether integration made any actual progress beyond rhetorical claims, the author explores specific efforts to implement agreements and develop an institutional framework and mechanism. Furthermore, for each of the groupings the author closely examines inner dynamics as well as relevant geopolitical circumstances, in order to shed light on *intrinsic motives* and *external factors* which had already prevented or induced regional integration, or could do so in the future.

One of the main presumptions of the study is that since the end of the Cold War the EU has assumed an increasingly active role in promoting regional integration across the world, thus each chapter in the survey contains a subheading dedicated to the *role and interest of the EU*. Accordingly, one of the main findings of the study is that the EU’s support for worldwide region-building and its policy of developing interregional relations with other groupings, especially with former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, has reinforced its global relevance (p. 418).

According to the author’s own testimony, his strong appreciation for European achievements in regional integration arguably owes to the fact that he used to be a director at the Center for European Integration Studies of Bonn University. In his own words, that experience provided him with the opportunity to find out about global interest in learning

about the EU structures (pp. 6–7). However, one of the goals of this study was to warn about shortcomings of copying EU structures without considering preconditions for its success. For instance, the findings from empirical research have led him to conclude that certain regional groupings examined in this study could be considered as examples of developmental or security regionalism. In that respect, the Pacific Island Forum could be used as an example of the former and the Gulf Cooperation Council of the latter. However, European integration experience stands out as a sole example of “democratic region-building”.

The main assumption of the study was that European experience affirmed that “there can be no successful region-building without regime cohesion in terms of democratic governance” (p. 14). Likewise, after examining the empirical data, the author remained assured that his study had proved that democratic governance in constituent parts of the regional scheme was “the single most important prerequisite for building trust among actors” (pp. 395, 426).

The author provides strong arguments for considering the EU to be the most advanced regional grouping in the world. However, it is questionable whether he managed to prove this hypothesis. The fact that the EU’s achievements in regional-building are superior to non-European integration efforts cannot automatically lead to the conclusion that internal democracy in the member states of a regional grouping is the universal precondition for the success of a regional integration process. Moreover, it is noticeable that the author barely reflects on the conceptual relationship between his two main variables *democracy* and *region-building*, as if it was *self-evident*. In this regards, the author simply claims that only democratic governance in member states will provide the political legitimacy, public trust and support necessary to pool sovereignty and building a regional community (pp. 21–22). Nevertheless, this particular fallacy does not undermine the overall quality and significance of the study, especially since the author himself pleads for more research on this phenomenon.

In conclusion it should be said that this study undoubtedly represents a valuable contribution to the field of regional studies and gives the reader the opportunity to advance their understanding of the contemporary regional integration processes in all of its complexity. Global survey demonstrates that regional integration does not follow any predestinated linear sequencing of stages. On the contrary, the study suggests that each region-building process has its inner logic and that it faces challenges, setbacks, backlashes and unintended consequences along the way. Lastly, the significance of the study is especially reflected in the fact that it managed to demonstrate by its own examples the importance and advantages of comparative examination of region-building projects in different parts of the world.

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