

Book Review

The unintended consequences of interregionalism: effects on regional actors, societies and structures

Burcu Ermeydan ^{1,*}

¹ PhD., Independent Researcher, Turkey. ORCID: 0000-0002-5809-6717

* Correspondence: bermeydan@gmail.com

Lopez-Lucia, Elisa and Frank Mattheis (eds). *The Unintended Consequences of Interregionalism: Effects on Regional Actors, Societies and Structures*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021. 242 pp.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.38154/cjas.41>

The Unintended Consequences of Interregionalism: Effects on Regional Actors, Societies and Structures is an edited volume that offers an alternative perspective to studies on interregionalism. Today, the regional world order is defined around regional pools, however, regional groups and regional organizations are gaining more prominent positions in the international order. Indeed, along with nation-states, regional groups and organizations are acquiring an “actor” role for themselves by establishing diplomatic and economic ties with their counterparts in different regions. This is not a new phenomenon, as the interregional dialogue between regional groups in different parts of the world has been witnessing a resurgence since the 1990s, accompanied by many studies that seek to define and analyze them. That said, most of the existing works on the topic adopt a deductive approach and have a Euro-centric focus, and tend to highlight whether the interregional dialogues achieved their intended goals. The Unintended Consequences of Interregionalism breaks these norms by approaching the topic inductively, while also considering myriad regionalisms, addressing the fact that different regions produce distinct “regionalisms”, and, therefore, a plethora of “interregionalisms” exist. The edited volume presents a unique perspective – one that grapples with the unintended outcomes of interregional interactions.

The volume is presented in eleven chapters, including the introduction in which Lopez-Lucia and Mattheis, as the editors, explain the volume's aim,

approach and targeted contribution to the field. The following chapters then present a different case of interregionalism, classified under three headings defining the effects of the unintended consequences of interregional relations. The chapters by Haroldo Ramanzini Junior, Giulia Tercovich and Carolina Salgado present the actors' positioning results in unintended consequences in interregional dialogues, indicating that while interregional links may seek the creation and consolidation of common policies, the actual outcome may instead be conflict, competition and marginalization. In the second section, Dominik Giese, Bruno Theodoro Luciano and Friedrich Plank examine the European Union's (EU) relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Al Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) and West Africa, and conclude that due to mismatches of principles and the presence of bilateral initiatives that hinder interregional cooperation in the institutional structure, unintended consequences arise that undermine the structure of interregional dialogues. Finally, the third category investigates the social impact of the unintended consequences of interregional links in the Sahel, Horn of Africa and Eurasia. The contributors to this section, Baldaro, Grant, Issa and Yusuf, Oltramonti and Wolfschwenger, claim that interactions between regional agents may result in instability – and even regional fragmentations – as a result of transforms in the socio-political environment in which interregional interactions are practiced.

Today, interregional relationships spanning different parts of the world are becoming a defining feature of the international order, and interregional dialogue has become an integral part of International Relations and Area Studies. That said, the notion of interregionalism, which is still an emerging field of research, necessitates alternative theoretical and methodological perspectives. With its emphasis on unintended consequences, the volume makes two significant contributions to the field. First, it demonstrates that the notion of interregionalism has multiple forms, making it necessary to treat interregional interactions as interregionalisms; and second, it reveals that the outcome of each interregional interaction can be different, as the result may not be in line with the goal. Viewing the issue through a lens of unintended consequences reveals variations in the possible outcomes of interregional interactions that may be both negative and positive, depending on the case. In this way, it becomes possible to distance oneself from the overemphasized expectations cited in the existing studies, and to understand that interregional interactions are always open to transformation in terms of the socio-political environment, the actors' positions and structures behind the interactions.

In this regard, the most laudable contribution of the 245ölüme is the way it approaches the 245ölüme of interregional dialogue, and relies on this approach as a decentralizing tool for its examination of the notions of regionalism and interregionalism. Each chapter, focusing on different cases of interregional dialogues, contributes to the discussion on the unintended consequences of interregionalism by preventing EU-centric bias and deductive thinking. One of the 245ölüm problems of EU-centrism and deductive thinking in such studies is the overemphasis on the 245ölüme of asymmetry and expected outcomes. This edited 245ölüme, in contrast, throws light on the diversity of interregionalism in terms of geography, the actors' positions and the outcomes of interregional interactions.

As a note of caution about the edited volume: the book makes heavy criticisms of the EU-centrism of existing studies, yet, alongside the chapters focusing on different regions, like the Sahel, and South America, it still talks about the EU, such as the case study of the EU's relationship with Russia, ASEAN and West Africa. These chapters are written explicitly without an EU-centric bias and the overemphasis on the notion of asymmetry, as the edited volume attests, although it would be more fruitful to feature studies of interregional interactions in which the EU plays no part. That said, with the alternative perspective it brings, the book certainly opens the door to future studies.

This book contributes to the body of literature on regionalism by demonstrating how region-to-region interactions are always open to change. Almost all similar works on interregionalism conclude with suggested remedies to challenging problems and the future prospects for the development of interregional relations, as they are built upon expectations. By highlighting the unintended consequences of such interactions to scholars of interregionalism and policymakers, this book reminds us that there is always the potential for surprises in interregional interactions that go beyond any pre-defined expectations. In its current state, literature on regionalism is searching for new conceptual, theoretical and methodological approaches to interregional and intraregional interactions. With the coherence of each contribution, the novel approach adopted in this edited volume opens a new window of opportunity for the assessment of different interregionalisms.

A broad array of people with an interest in interregionalism and regionalism can benefit from this volume. As the book accepts, unintended consequences are an inescapable aspect of international relations, and so in addition to those with an academic interest in regionalism, scholars of international relations working on different subjects may gain insight from the edited volume's emphasis on

unintended consequences while examining the effects of particular issues in international relations.



© 2022. This work is licensed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).