

Reconceptualizing Interregionalism through Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

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Citation

Ermeydan, B. (2025). Reconceptualizing Interregionalism through Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis. *Bölge Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 4(1), 1-27.

Article Type

Research Article

Article History

Submitted: 5 November 2024

Accepted: 6 January 2025

Plagiarism/ Ethic

This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and and it has been confirmed that it is plagiarism-free and complies with research and publication ethics.

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Publisher

Social Sciences University of Ankara

Abstract

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was formed three decades ago to intensify European and Asian relations. Today, it constitutes the widest interregional dialogue mechanism covering 53 countries from Europe to Asia, and it is a special case for regionalism studies. The literature on ASEM discusses its scope, structure, means of cooperation, and possible future scenarios. Yet, the current studies lack an empirical data-based analysis of which themes shape cooperation processes, how regional and international issues reflect upon ASEM, and the extent of change in cooperation themes. In that regard, this study aims to examine ASEM to answer these questions. By using Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA), this research analyzes the chair's statements from ASEM Summits between 1996 and 2021 to identify discursive themes, their chronological shifts, and their alignment with ASEM's three pillars: political, economic, and socio-cultural. The research findings reveal that ASEM functions as an intergovernmental forum facilitating interregional dialogue on shared regional and global issues despite criticisms of lacking enforceable outcomes. The study underlines ASEM's role in fostering dialogue between Asia and Europe and proposes reconceptualizing interregionalism as an integral component of multilateral governance.

Keywords: ASEM, Asia-Europe Relations, Interregionalism, Corpus Linguistic, Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

The relationship between Europe and Asia has a long history, but it entered a new phase in the 1990s by prioritizing interregional dialogue. Although the first official interregional dialogue was established between the European Community (EC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the 1970s, this initial relationship was ineffective in promoting interregional dialogue. In the early 1990s, a pivotal chapter was opened for relations between the two regions, with the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. ASEM is an interregional dialogue mechanism established to foster cooperation, partnership, and dialogue between Asia and Europe. Initially, it covered only 25 countries, 15 from the European Union (EU) and the other 10 from Asia. In time, it has spread to a wide regional space covering 30 European and 21 Asian countries, together with the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat as regional organizations. Under ASEM, biannual summits, ministerial-level meetings, and various initiatives have been organized to foster closer interregional dialogue. It has built upon three pillars: political, economic, and socio-cultural. These pillars guide the biannual summits, ministerial meetings, and various initiatives under ASEM. Since its inception, ASEM has become a key reference point for studies examining relations between Asia and Europe and conceptualizing it with the term interregionalism. This study aims to evaluate ASEM by considering its objectives and policy areas since its establishment.

The literature on ASEM primarily focuses on its historical development, structure, and expectations regarding its role in facilitating relations between Asia and Europe. Since its establishment, many prolific studies have been done on ASEM, and they can be classified under two main themes. First, some studies evaluate conditions leading to its establishment and future expectations for facilitating interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe (See e.g. Abe and Plummer, 1996; Dent, 1997; Dent, 2001; Reiterer, 2001; Yeo, 2003; Park, 2004). Second, there are studies discussing and sometimes questioning its effectiveness (See e.g. Lim, 2001; Reiterer, 2004; Pereira, 2007). Moreover, ASEM plays a significant role in regionalism studies, serving as a crucial case for conceptualizing interregional interactions since the mid-1990s under the concept of interregionalism (See e.g. Cammack, 1999; Reiterer, 2006; Tsardanidis, 2010).

The contribution of these studies cannot be underestimated. However, studies on ASEM are relatively few in number, and the number of studies produced recently is also relatively low. In addition, due to the qualitative methods used in these studies, it is not possible to discuss and evaluate ASEM in all its aspects. Therefore, the literature on ASEM is

centered around the idea that ASEM's role in influencing relations between Europe and Asia is somewhat limited. Consequently, both the assessments of ASEM and the conceptualization of interregionalism in relation to it remain narrow in scope within the literature.

This study is built upon the idea that these mentioned weaknesses of the literature stem from the fact that the purpose of ASEM, its evolution over time, and its policy areas have yet to be revealed in detail. As a result, while these studies contribute to the discussions surrounding ASEM and the concept of interregionalism, they lack empirical evidence highlighting key themes shaping ASEM, how they may have evolved over time, and how Asia-Europe relations are represented within ASEM. Hence, it is still hard to identify the role attributed to ASEM in Asia-Europe relations in relation to interregionalism. This study aims to provide a glimpse of ASEM by focusing on these unexplored aspects.

To achieve this aim, this study focuses on ASEM Summits, which are ASEM's key events. It critically analyses the chair's statements of ASEM Summits, which have not been examined extensively. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the most frequent discursive themes in the ASEM Summits?
- Is there a change in these themes over time?
- With which themes do ASEM's pillars collocate?
- How is the word “interregional” defined and constructed in these documents?

In order to answer these questions, this study relies on two methodological strands: Corpus Linguistic (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While Corpus Linguistic (CL) allows the researcher to see dominant themes in texts, their change over time, and concordance among them, the CDA helps the researcher examine the context in which these themes are uttered. These two methods have been combined under Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA). Specifically, it examines 13 Chair's statements from the ASEM Summits between 1996 and 2021. These documents are the key texts that reflect participating countries' expectations from ASEM and how they associate interregional relations between Asia and Europe under ASEM.

This paper is organized as follows. A brief history of ASEM and its current structure is summarized at the outset. This would help to bring the contribution of the research into the picture. Next, the study's methodological framework and the structure of the examined documents will be presented. Afterward, the empirical findings of the research are summarized through frequency, concordance, and collocation analysis. Later, the place of

ASEM in Asia-Europe relations in reference to the notion of interregionalism will be discussed based on the empirical findings. Finally, the paper concludes with summaries of findings and comments on suggested agendas for future research.

1. Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): A Brief History and Literature Review

Despite having a long history lasting for centuries, the diplomatic relations between European and Asian states took new forms in the second half of the 20th century. At first, there were bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations between the states of the two regions. These relations, which can be defined as a continuum of long-lasting economic and political ties, were mainly in the form of state-to-state relations. Furthermore, in this period, the first steps towards region-to-region relations had been taken as a new dimension to Asia-Europe relations. The official region-to-region ties between the European Community and the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) were established in the 1970s. It is one of the oldest forms of regional group-to-regional group dialogue between two regional entities (Doidge, 2004: 39).

However, until the 1990s, relations were primarily shaped by the Cold War dynamics. While some Asian countries were positioned under the influence of the Soviets and China, those allied with the US had closer relations with European countries. In addition, some Asian countries had a different positioning due to the Non-alignment Movement. As a result, during the Cold War period, interregional relations remained limited due to ideological and military competition. However, when the Cold War was over, new opportunities and motives to deepen, renew, and change the form of region-to-region relations emerged. As a result, in the mid-1990s, already existing ties between Europe and Asia were solidified with the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). This part of the paper summarizes the historical conditions paving the way for the inception of ASEM in 1996, its development, and its structure.

Two broad reasons trigger the intensification of interregional relations in the aftermath of the Cold War. First, as a political cause, with the end of the bipolar system of the Cold War, a new power vacuum in international order emerged. It prepared the ground for the arrival of multipolarity, which was an opportunity for new actors to engage in more active policies in different parts of the world. The second reason is associated with Asia's growing economic presence in the international economic order. As a result of the transformation of most of the Asian economies, the region turned into a huge production center. Consequently, establishing a dialogue with Asia and Asian states that would strengthen economic relations became an essential motive in pushing non-regional states' foreign policy agendas.

These two reasons should be considered interlocking motives paving the way for developing interregional relations under the concept of Triadic Notion, emphasizing a triangular relationship between Asia, Europe, and North America. The transatlantic dialogue had already secured the triangle's European and North American sides (Dent, 2004; Gilson, 2005: 313). On the Asia-North America side of the triangle, the region-to-region dialogue was institutionalized under the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The Asia-Europe side of the triangle, on the other hand, was missing. As a result, while the so-called Pacific Century came with the rise of Asia and there had already been institutionalized ties between the United States of America and Asian countries under the APEC, the European side aimed to keep the relations with Asia as the Euro-Asia leg of the broader new Triadic World Order (Segal, 1998: 563). Consequently, for both European and Asian states, intensifying structured interregional ties had both economic and political meanings within this triangular structure.

The first steps to form a regular and structured dialogue between East Asia and Europe were taken in the early 1990s. On the European side, the idea was solidified with the “Towards a New Asia Strategy” of the European Union. In this document, the European Commission declared that considering the dramatic change in the economic weight of Asia in the world economy, the EU needs to increase its presence in Asia by strengthening relations with Asia (European Commission, 1994). According to Doidge, this document clearly showed that the European side aimed to mitigate its potential economic marginalization by creating interregional dialogue (Doidge, 2019: 9).

On the Asian side, the idea was first put forward by Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. In his speech, Goh underlined that in the absence of dominant power in a tripolar world shaped among North America, Europe, and East Asia, communication channels among politicians and business networks of East Asia and Europe, which was the missing link of the triangle, is one of the essential priorities (Goh, 1995). Goh’s argument was also established on the notion of a tripolar world order. Doidge (2019: 7) claims that “Goh Chok Tong’s proposal was designed to plug this gap, with the call for “Pacific-style” ties between the two positing the new forum as something of a mirror to APEC.”

De Dios, Robles, and Santiago (1996: 57) point out that “ASEM is more than just another European tactic in an economic offensive. Rather, it reflects a broader political strategy of strengthening relations with regions, not simply with nations.” The Asian partner shared these motives. As a result, ASEM emerged as a byproduct of both sides' desire to facilitate interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe. Consequently, the first official meeting of ASEM was held in 1996 among the heads of participating states. During its

inception, it covered 15 EU Member States, 7 ASEAN Member States, China, Japan, Korea (Republic of), and the European Commission. In the following years, together with European eastward expansion and the inclusion of new partner states from the Asian side, it expanded to a vast regional sphere ranging from the Pacific to Eurasia. Today, it has 53 partners, including 51 independent states, including the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat, as regional entities.

ASEM does not have a permanent secretariat with a form of organizational structure. Instead, ASEM is structured as a dialogue mechanism consisting of regularly held Summits of heads of state, other ministerial-level meetings, and sub-working groups on selected areas. In its current setting, as declared on its official website, ASEM (n.d.) is an “intergovernmental process [...] to foster dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe”. Since it does not have a permanent secretariat, its events, including summits and ministerial and senior officials’ meetings, were organized under the management of four coordinators, two from Asia and two from Europe.

Yet, ASEM has only one permanent institution, the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), which aims to foster socio-cultural dialogue between peoples of Asia and Europe. It functions like “an intergovernmental not-for-profit organization,” which provides a ground for people-to-people networks between two regions (ASEF, n.d.). In addition to ASEF, the ASEM process hosts other types of dialogues like the parliamentary level dialogue under the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP), a network for civil society under The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), business dialogue under The Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) and dialogue of trade union centers under The Asia-Europe Labour Forum (AELF) (European Union, n.d.). Most of these are held as side events of formal biannual ASEM Summits and meetings.

In terms of cooperation areas, ASEM relies on a three-pillar structure composed of political, economic & financial, social, cultural & educational pillars (ASEM, n.d.). ASEM Summits bringing partner countries' leaders and ASEM foreign ministerial meetings represent ASEM's political pillar. Ministerial-level meeting series range in different topics such as economy, finance, transportation, employment, culture, education, and energy, marking the other pillars. In addition to the ministerial-level meeting series, senior officials' level meeting series have been carried out under different topics to supplement the ministerial-level meeting series. In that regard, through regularly held summits, ASEM offers a venue for leaders to directly address common policy areas on the summit diplomacy structure.

Despite addressing different cooperation areas, ASEM is not an institutionalized international organization. Instead, dialogue among partners under ASEM is carried out through these abovementioned meetings in the form of intergovernmental dialogue. Due to prioritizing dialogue, ASEM's decision-making process is not based on a formal voting system (Haksess, 2022). Instead, decisions are made through consultation and consensus among members. This flexibility allows decisions to be made based on consensus or broad acceptance by addressing different regional sensitivities.

For the last three decades, ASEM has constituted a special place in terms of its potential contribution to Asia-Europe relations and its significance in international relations with respect to interregional ties. Therefore, what ASEM is, how it can be conceptualized, and how it has affected and been affected by interregional relations and international politics since its establishment are three important questions defining the research agenda on ASEM. This study, in that regard, aims to contribute to the literature on ASEM by addressing these questions with its empirical findings.

2. Research Design

2.1. Corpus Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

This research is based on two methodological strands: corpus linguistic (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). While CL is used to disclose linguistic patterns and trends in large data sets, CDA focuses on understanding the social and ideological aspects of these linguistic patterns. These two methods have been combined under Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA).

Critical Discourse Analysis is one of the most frequently used methods that look at language as part of social phenomena and is concerned with unearthing overt and covert messages in texts. It investigates how discourses in texts are shaped by social structures and power relations. This study analyzed text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practices based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical model. The model allows not only the comprehension of the linguistic structure within the texts but also an understanding of the social conditions in which those structures emerge. Despite being one of the most frequently used analysis approaches in social sciences in various fields, including politics, media, psychology, and sociology, CDA is still the subject of severe criticism. Studies utilizing the CDA are generally accused of problems related to research bias in choosing texts for analysis, highlighting certain discourses, and overlooking selected language forms to reveal discourses addressed in texts (See e.g. Stubbs, 1997; Widdowson, 2004).

On the other hand, Corpus Linguistics (CL) is a method used for examining corpus, focusing on the features of texts, the linguistic patterns dominating them, and the way language is used (Baker, 2006: 1). A corpus is a collection of linguistic data in which all written or spoken materials are gathered based on a specified set of criteria. A corpus can be produced by a specific person or institution or compiled based on one subject. As an analysis method, CL examines a selected corpus of a particular topic. Originally, CL was a method used by linguists to examine linguistic data. Since the 1990s, it has also inspired other fields and related methods, producing corpus-assisted research by utilizing a multi-method perspective. For example, it has been used in communication studies, which focus on media discourses (See e.g. Kim, 2014; Li and Zhang, 2021; Baker, 2012), political science studies, which analyze political discourses (See e.g. Garcia, 2018) and various other fields, such as law (See e.g. Vogel et al., 2018) and information science (See e.g. Papageorgiou and Vieira, 2021). CDA is one of the methods that CL assists with. Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) is an analysis method that benefits from CL and CDA simultaneously.

As Sinclair (2004: 10) states, both CDA and CL are “the twin pillars of language research.” In the former, the text is examined with a qualitative approach. The latter analyzes the textual data with a more quantitative approach. Yet, both methods have their own missing aspects. As mentioned before, one of the major limitations of CDA is its subjective positioning based on the researcher's perception. On the other hand, despite providing statistically measurable quantitative data, CL does not interpret this data through a contextual analysis in which specific language patterns emerge. CACDA, on the other hand, not only helps to overcome individual limitations of two methods but also provides a better understanding of a subject under examination.

Hence, this study prefers to use CACDA as a research method to examine the corpus of ASEM Summits. As mentioned before, in the literature on ASEM, there is a discernible lack of systematic revealing of the themes reflected on ASEM documents and discursive patterns in association with the notion of interregionalism. Also, there is no study tackling and examining ASEM's agenda and changes in the agenda every year. Lastly, to the researchers' best knowledge, no study has been conducted using CACDA to examine ASEM. Hence, this study utilizes CACDA to examine the ASEM Summit Corpus.

2.2. Data Collection

The essential aim of this study is to provide a glimpse of ASEM. In order to reach this aim, it is designed to examine selected documents related to ASEM comparatively and chronologically through CACDA. Since its inception, ASEM has organized ASEM Summits

for two-year periods and declares a chair's statement after each meeting. This study focuses on ASEM Summits, and the chair's statements produced after these meetings. These documents were chosen because, unlike sectoral and ministerial level meetings, which have a specific focus, chairs' statements of ASEM Summits contain all the cooperation pillars of ASEM and are declarations of the highest-level participants. They summarize the issues discussed during the meetings and highlight the themes characterizing interregional dialogue, thus offering a more comprehensive insight into ASEM. In that regard, this study covers 13 chairs' statements of ASEM Summits from 1996 to 2021.¹ They constitute the "ASEM Summit Corpus." It has 3,832 types and 57,682 tokens. The number of tokens for each year's document can be seen in Table 1.

	Number of Tokens
1996	2462
1998	3202
2000	4486
2002	1786
2004	3357
2006	5536
2008	4190
2010	7505
2012	7044
2014	4736
2016	5560
2018	3597
2021	4221
TOTAL	57682

Table 1. Number of Tokens in the ASEM Summit Corpus²

2.3. Data Analysis Tool: AntConc

This study uses AntConc Tools Version 3.5.8 (Anthony, n.d.) to conduct CACDA on ASEM Summit Corpus. It is a concordance analysis program created by Laurence Anthony. Like many other concordance analysis programs, it contains numerous functions, such as wordlist, concordance, concordance, collocation, and keyword list. To answer the research questions, the "wordlist," "keyword list," "collocation," and "concordance" tools of AntConc are employed extensively in this study.

¹ The summit, which is usually held every two years, was postponed to 2021 due to Covid-19. Afterward, the summit, which was normally supposed to be held in 2023, was not held. The reason for this delay/cancellation has not been officially revealed. For this reason, the study covers the documents from 1996, when the first event was held, to 2021, when the event was last held.

² The number of tokens refers to the total number of words (including repetitions and variations) in each document analyzed. The token count provides an overview of the corpus size and variation across documents.

3. Findings

3.1. Frequency Analysis

In CL, the primary function of frequency analysis is to determine the focus of the examined corpus (Baker, 2006: 70). In AntConc, the frequency analysis can be done through Word List and Keyword List Tools. The Word List Tool lists all the words in the corpus by sorting them by frequency. After listing all words in the corpus by their frequencies, a researcher can examine the reasons for the domination of certain words in the corpus. At that point, CDA assists in revealing a better understanding regarding the domination of these words. Table 2 below lists 20 high-frequency words in the ASEM Summit Corpus that had been attained after using the “stop list” function of AntConc.³

Ranking	Percentage	Frequency	Word
1	2,60	901	leaders
2	2,14	743	they
3	2,13	741	asem
4	1,20	418	cooperation
5	1,09	378	development
6	0,97	336	asia
7	0,88	306	international
8	0,84	293	europe
9	0,75	259	welcome
10	0,74	256	economic
11	0,73	253	meeting
12	0,65	225	importance
13	0,64	223	promote
14	0,62	215	un
15	0,59	206	sustainable
16	0,57	198	support
17	0,53	185	global
18	0,53	183	security
19	0,52	182	dialogue
20	0,50	173	strengthen

Table 2: Top 20 High-frequency Words in the ASEM Summits Corpus^{4,5}

³ The Stop List function in AntConc allows researchers to exclude certain words or items from the analysis, making it easier to focus on more meaningful or relevant data. Stop List words are typically high-frequency, low-information words that occur commonly across texts, such as "the," "and," "is," and "of."

⁴ Table 4 lists only the 20 most frequently occurring words. Since the cumulative weight of these words within the total corpus exceeds 0.5%, this threshold has been chosen. The purpose of this table is to give an initial impression of the data, so the listed words have been kept limited. Different analyses will be used in the subsequent sections to provide a more detailed analysis of the content.

⁵ AntConc does not differentiate between uppercase and lowercase letters. This is due to the software's basic functionality. This is because AntConc generally operates in a case-insensitive manner, analyzing text at the word level without focusing on whether the letters are uppercase or lowercase. In other words, words like "Apple" and "apple," despite having different letter cases, are considered the same word. For this reason, throughout the analysis, all words, whether proper nouns or common nouns have not been distinguished by uppercase letters.

“asem,” “cooperation,” “development,” “asia,” “international,” “economic,” “meeting,” “importance,” “un,” and “sustainable” are some of the keywords with high frequency in the ASEM Summit Corpus. Although this short table may not be sufficient to represent the entire corpus, some inferences can be drawn based on these prominent words. Accordingly, the high frequency of terms such as *“leaders,” “asem,” “cooperation,” “development,” “economic,” “asia,”* and *“europe,”* suggests that there is a strong focus on fostering collaboration between Asia and Europe, emphasizing development and economic cooperation. Additionally, words like *“dialogue,” “sustainable,” “global,”* and *“security”* imply that the corpus also addresses broader global issues and sustainable development. Overall, the data suggests that the overarching theme of the ASEM Summit revolves around enhancing economic growth, regional cooperation, and sustainable development, with a clear focus on strengthening ties between the two continents.

Considering the aim and structure of ASEM, reaching this conclusion may not be interesting. Yet, the most remarkable findings that this table shows related to the first two words with high frequency are *“leaders”* and *“they”* as pronouns. Given that heads of state/government attend ASEM Summits, it is plausible to assume that *“leaders”* refers to them and that *“they”* serves as a pronoun to refer to these leaders.⁶ In political discourse analysis, the use of pronouns has a significant meaning. As Mahmood and Alshahrani (2019: 18) state, “Pronouns function a key role in political discourses and empower the users to control the power relations through varying referents of the pronouns they use.” The extensive use of these pronouns in the documents indicates that ASEM is perceived and framed more as an intergovernmental dialogue than an interregional one. This suggests that, although ASEM was established with an emphasis on the interregional framework, the regions themselves are not represented as independent, singular actors. Instead, the focus is on the leaders of states from both regions and their perspectives as key actors. Thus, it can be argued that ASEM Summits operate as an intergovernmental forum among European and Asian countries in the form of interregional dialogue.

In addition to analyzing high-frequency words to pinpoint the essential themes within the documents, it is also crucial to examine the yearly fluctuations in word frequency. As previously mentioned, one of the primary aims of this research is to present a chronological

⁶ To confirm this assumption and clearly identify the referent of *“they,”* a collocation analysis was conducted using AntConc. The analysis reveals that *“leaders”* collocates with *“they”* with a likelihood score of 187.593 and an effect ratio of -4.274. While the high likelihood score suggests a statistically significant co-occurrence, the negative effect ratio implies that the association is not exclusive due to the overall frequency of *“they”* in the corpus. This nuanced relationship supports the interpretation that *“they”* predominantly refers to *“leaders,”* i.e., heads of state/government.

analysis of the ASEM process. Therefore, tracking the annual changes in high-frequency words found in ASEM documents may facilitate a comparative chronological examination of ASEM Summits. In this context, Table 3 displays the top 10 high-frequency words in the chair's statements from ASEM Summits for each respective year.

	1996		1998		2000		2002		2004	
Rank	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word
1	58	meeting	46	leaders	63	they	41	leaders	65	asem
2	41	asia	42	asia	60	leaders	40	asem	52	they
3	40	europe	39	europe	48	asem	21	economic	45	leaders
4	27	cooperation	35	asem	39	cooperation	17	cooperation	37	cooperation
5	23	agree	35	cooperation	33	asia	15	they	20	asia
6	22	region	32	they	29	europe	14	development	19	agree
7	18	asem	20	economic	27	economic	11	dialogue	19	dialogue
8	16	development	16	business	26	welcome	11	meeting	19	economic
9	16	promote	16	meeting	24	international	11	region	19	europe
10	15	two	16	promote	24	meeting	10	minister	18	development
	2006		2008		2010		2012		2014	
Rank	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word
1	100	leaders	78	leaders	125	leaders	132	they	99	leaders
2	75	they	67	asem	114	they	87	asem	77	asem
3	49	asem	56	they	54	development	72	leaders	44	they
4	34	cooperation	48	development	53	asem	57	development	35	cooperation
5	33	development	29	cooperation	43	cooperation	46	welcome	35	welcome
6	33	importance	28	welcome	38	un	44	cooperation	30	sustainable
7	31	welcome	27	international	34	international	37	held	28	asia
8	30	international	23	economic	30	stressed	36	international	28	development
9	27	asia	22	global	30	support	35	support	26	europe
10	26	un	21	asia	29	dialogue	33	asia	25	held
	2016		2018		2021					
Rank	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.	Word				
1	90	asem	78	leaders	66	leaders				
2	89	leaders	56	asem	56	asem				
3	62	they	42	they	55	they				
4	46	cooperation	28	international	32	sustainable				
5	38	international	24	global	27	international				
6	36	development	23	importance	22	development				
7	33	promote	23	sustainable	20	cooperation				
8	24	importance	18	underlined	19	asia				
9	23	need	17	challenge	19	economic				
10	23	un	17	development	19	europe				

Table 3: Top 10 High-frequency Words in ASEM Yearly Documents (1996-2021)⁷

Based on Table 3, an analysis of the most frequently used words in ASEM summits over the years reveals that key themes include cooperation, leadership, development, and international relations. Starting from 1996, the process highlights the focus on fostering collaboration between Asia and Europe and emphasizing regional dynamics. In particular, terms like “*cooperation*,” “*region*,” and “*promote*” dominate the early years, reflecting ASEM's

⁷ Table 3 lists only the 10 most frequently occurring words for each year to provide a clear and concise overview of the data. Since the purpose of this table is to give an initial impression of the data, the listed words have been kept limited without sorting them according to certain thresholds. Different analyses will be used in the subsequent sections to provide a more detailed analysis of the content.

mission to build bridges between the two continents. Words like “*meeting*” and “*agree*” also underscore the commitment to dialogue and consensus among participants.

Over time, the focus of ASEM summits appears to have shifted towards the role of leadership. In the 2000s, the increasing frequency of words like “*leaders*” and “*they*” suggests that the forum evolved into a platform at the level of heads of state and government leaders. Terms such as “*economic*,” “*business*,” and “*international*” highlight the forum's role in promoting economic development and fostering international cooperation. Additionally, the prominence of “*welcome*” indicates the diplomatic warmth among participants and the inclusion of new members into the process.

By the 2010s, the emergence of terms such as “*sustainable*,” “*global*,” and “*challenge*” demonstrates a growing focus on global issues and sustainable development. This shift indicates that ASEM has transformed into a dialogue platform in which global challenges are also discussed. In summary, the language used in ASEM summits illustrates the evolution from balancing mutual interests between Asia and Europe to embracing a broader and more sustainable vision on a global scale. Yet, this result reflects that the core themes of discussion in the ASEM Summit Corpus have remained relatively stable over the years, with only minor changes in emphasis to reflect emerging global priorities. Consequently, it reflects that ASEM's focus has consistently centered on economic collaboration, international dialogue, and sustainable development rather than undergoing significant thematic shifts over time.

Table 3 also reveals another interesting conclusion. Every ASEM Summit is organized by either a European or an Asian country. Therefore, chair statements are prepared by the hosting country. Yet, as seen in Table 3, there is no recognizable change in terms of the top ten themes dominating ASEM Summit Corpus. However, as indicated in Table 3, the top ten themes within the ASEM Summit Corpus remain consistent regardless of the hosting region. This consistency implies that while individual regional perspectives may shape certain nuances, the documents largely reflect a balanced approach that aligns with shared priorities and mutual interests rather than emphasizing one region's agenda over the other.

3.2. Keyness Analysis

The Word List Function of AntConc helps to determine the focus of the examined corpus and to track yearly change. Using only the Word List function is not sufficient to conduct a more detailed analysis of the context and content of the examined corpus. An additional function of AntConc, which is the Keyword List Function, may help do a deeper analysis of the examined corpus. In its most basic way, the Keyword List Function allows

highlighting unusually frequent or infrequent words compared to a reference corpus. A positive keyness value indicates that the word is used noticeably more often in the examined corpus than in the reference corpus, suggesting that it is one of the key characteristics of the examined text. A negative keyness value, on the other hand, means that the word is used less frequently in the examined corpus, indicating that it is less important or prominent in that examined text.

This study uses the Keyword List Function of AntConc for a comparative analysis between years in order to unveil chronological shifts in ASEM statements. Specifically, each chair's statement, starting from 1998, is compared to a reference corpus of statements from previous years. This comparison helps to reveal the center of attention shaping each year's meeting. Accordingly, Table 4 below shows the center of attention of indicated years' meetings. By comparing the key terms that stand out each year in contrast to previous years, it will be possible to understand how the priorities of each annual meeting have evolved over time.

	1998		2000		2002	
Rank	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword
1	38.5	leaders	19.46	recognized	22.58	civilizations
2	28.64	they	17.6	they	18.81	doha
3	-48.85	meeting	-21.21	meeting	17.47	terrorism
4					16.16	endorsed
5					16.01	asem
	2004		2006		2008	
Rank	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword
1	18.6	coordination	24.16	energy	0	
2	18.34	regions	18.42	iran	0	
3	-17.93	meeting	-17.44	two	0	
4			-17.18	regions	0	
	2010		2012		2014	
Rank	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword
1	29.6	piracy	31.67	water	29.53	italy
2	28.27	labor	21.87	nuclear	26.68	milan
3	23.05	nuclear	17.49	held	18.35	innovation
4	17.39	somalia			17.14	connectivity
5	-20.84	asem				
6	-20.66	europe				
	2016		2018		2021	
Rank	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword	Keyness	Keyword
1	35.93	connectivity	23.75	women	67.58	covid
2	24.73	ulaanbaatar	21.39	empowerment	36.65	pandemic
3	21.8	bank	21.32	rakhine	25.02	cambodia
4	17.98	agreement	19.81	committed	24.68	inclusive
5			16.5	notably	20.78	pollution
6			16.46	displaced	18.39	recovery
7			16.46	girls	16.57	digital

Table 4: Keyword List for Each ASEM Summit Chair's Statement

According to this table, it is seen that in 1998, the words “*leaders*” and “*they*” were replaced with “*meeting*,” which was the dominant word at the 1996 ASEM Summit. In the forthcoming years, “*leaders*” and “*they*” continued their domination. This suggests that while the importance was given to the event itself in 1996 when the first meeting was held, in subsequent years, rather than the event itself, the participants who were heads of state (governments) were prioritized. These findings are compatible with one of the early conclusions of the study, arguing that ASEM Summits operate as an intergovernmental forum among European and Asian countries.

In 2002, one of the most significant changes in the themes of ASEM was observed. “*civilization*,” “*terrorism*,” and “*doha*” surpassed other themes. It is highly related to the historical context of the meeting. Predictably, the Doha Round of trade negotiation of WTO members and the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001 were reflected in these documents. As seen in 2002, the fact that international and regional events reflected in ASEM Summits are also relevant for the following years. In that manner, in 2006, “*iran*” and “*energy*” became a significant topic after the embargo on Iran. Whereas there was no significant new topic on the ASEM agenda in 2008, in 2010, “*piracy*” and “*nuclear*” after piracy activities around Somalia and nuclear escalation in Asia after North Korean nuclear tests. In 2014 and 2016, “*connectivity*” replaced other themes after the European Union declared its connectivity strategy. In 2018, along with other themes, women empowerment and issues related to displaced peoples found a place in the meeting. Lastly, after the outbreak of the global pandemic, themes like “*covid*,” “*pandemic*,” “*digital*,” and “*pollution*” found a place in the 2021 ASEM Summit.

As mentioned previously, when the ASEM Summit Corpus is analyzed yearly, it is hard to find a significant change in terms of the general themes of the ASEM Summits. However, the Keyness Analysis reveals that the topics addressed during ASEM meetings have evolved in response to regional developments and shifts in the international order. That shows that ASEM has demonstrated adaptability to emerging geopolitical challenges and evolving global priorities without deviation from foundational focus areas. In that regard, it can be concluded that ASEM Summits functions like a platform to discuss the dynamics shaping interregional dialogue and developments at the global scale.

3.3. Collocation Analysis on ASEM Pillars

As mentioned, ASEM has a three-pillar structure composed of political; economic and financial; and social, cultural and educational pillars. Therefore, in order to comprehend the content and context of these pillars, determining the collocation of these pillars in ASEM

documents may help to understand ASEM better. Doing this analysis is essential to answer one of the primary research questions of this paper, asking which themes ASEM's pillars collocate.

In the most basic way, collocation analysis in CL refers to the study of the way certain words tend to co-occur or appear in proximity to each other by calculating their statistical association (Ayson, 2020: 110). Collocation Analysis highlights words that frequently appear together in a corpus. In order to do Collocation Analysis in the corpus, it is necessary to select a specified focal word, and AntConc sorts all words in association with the focal word within the specified word range. In AntConc, "likelihood" refers to a statistical measure used in collocation analysis to assess the strength or significance of a word's co-occurrence with another word within a given context. Table 5 below is prepared by taking the words representing each ASEM pillar and identifying the words that collocate the most on their left and right sides based on the likelihood value. Accordingly, to extract the root words of the ASEM pillar names, the analysis is based on "politic*," "econom*," "financ*," "soci*," "cultur*," and "educat*."⁸

⁸ In order to capture the full spectrum of word variants related to ASEM's thematic pillars, root words were used in this analysis. This approach allows for the inclusion of various morphological forms of the words, such as 'politic*' (political, politics, politicized), 'econom*' (economy, economics, economic), and 'educat*' (education, educational, educator), among others. By using root words, the analysis ensures that all relevant instances, regardless of their grammatical variation, are considered in identifying the themes that ASEM's pillars address. This method provides a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis rather than focusing on individual word forms.

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	POLITICAL PILLAR		ECONOMY AND FINANCE PILLAR				SOCIO-CULTURAL AND EDUCATION PILLAR					
Searched Keyword	Politic*		Econom*		Financ*		Soci*		Cultur*		Educat*	
Rank	Likelihood	Collocating Keyword	Likelihood	Collocating Keyword	Likelihood	Collocating Keyword	Likelihood	Collocating Keyword	Likelihood	Collocating Keyword	Likelihood	Collocating Keyword
1	46.904	dialogue	129.699	growth	103.290	ministers	135.245	economic	98.074	civilizations	83.422	training
2	41.721	economic	79.248	financial	71.755	economic	102.593	civil	82.658	diversity	81.603	vocational
3	22.670	fostering	74.318	social	26.134	crisis	80.299	cohesion	58.059	heritage	52.404	higher
4	19.162	lifting	64.620	socio	21.501	finmm	47.839	cultural	54.798	people	52.404	lifelong
5	15.775	restrictions	40.315	ministers	21.371	sustainability	37.214	protection	37.157	exchanges	33.109	learning
6	15.775	placed	35.085	closer	16.124	abuse	33.456	development	36.266	dignity	27.281	quality
7	15.494	socio	34.774	political	15.265	foreign	29.507	inclusion	28.897	ministers	25.073	me
8			30.539	integration			27.496	promoting	26.346	dialogue	24.833	asem
9			28.097	global			26.156	nets	25.891	social	21.577	education
10			25.754	sustainable			23.010	environmental	25.076	intellectual	19.426	ministers
11			24.210	recovery			21.432	media	24.202	expressions	18.802	presented
12			23.200	promoting			20.922	justice	22.606	educational	17.914	health
13			22.350	outlook			17.884	governments	21.843	equal	16.279	germany
14			20.358	partnership			17.706	growth	21.358	protect	15.679	basic
15			18.827	job			17.654	employment	20.222	understanding	15.494	secondary
16			18.620	crisis			17.150	social	19.989	conviction	15.487	exchanges
17			17.131	reinforcing			16.439	dimension	19.989	cmm		
18			16.647	un			15.399	improving	18.898	festivals		
19			16.073	emm					18.898	art		
20									18.832	respect		
21									16.354	festival		
22									16.259	religious		

Table 5: Collocation of Each ASEM Pillar

Collocation analysis sheds light on the themes associated with ASEM's three main pillars: Political; Economic and Financial; and Social, Cultural and Educational. Examining the top collocates for each pillar reveals insights into the discourse priorities and interconnections between these dimensions.

The collocation analysis for the political pillar shows significant associations with keywords like "dialogue" (46.904), "economic" (41.721), and "fostering" (22.670). These collocations suggest that political discussions within the ASEM framework often emphasize fostering cooperation and economic dialogue. Terms like "lifting," "restrictions," and "placed" point to policy discussions aimed at reducing barriers, potentially reflecting efforts to improve political relations between regions. The presence of "socio" (15.494) highlights an overlap with social themes, indicating a multidimensional discourse involving societal considerations.

The economic and financial pillars are deeply interconnected, with "growth" (129.699), "financial" (79.248), and "sustainable" (25.754) emerging as dominant themes in the economic context. These keywords underscore the emphasis on sustainable development, global

economic recovery, and fostering partnerships. On the financial side, "*ministers*" (103.290) and "*economic*" (71.755) dominate, reflecting the critical role of policymakers in financial sustainability and addressing crises. Words like "*crisis*" (26.134) and "*reinforcing*" (17.131) suggest ongoing challenges in economic resilience and stability, which ASEM seeks to address through multilateral collaboration.

The socio-cultural and educational pillar highlights the intersection of societal and cultural dimensions with education. Keywords like "*civil*" (102.593), "*cultural*" (47.839), and "*protection*" (37.214) emphasize civil society's role and the importance of cultural cohesion. Education-related terms such as "*training*" (83.422), "*vocational*" (81.603), and "*lifelong*" (52.404) illustrate a strong focus on improving skills and quality education. The frequent mention of "*diversity*" (82.658) and "*heritage*" (58.059) within cultural discussions highlights ASEM's commitment to celebrating and protecting cultural diversity as a unifying theme for its members.

Across all pillars, the interplay between political, economic, and social dimensions is evident. For instance, the strong collocation between the economic and social pillars suggests a shared focus on inclusive growth and addressing societal needs. Similarly, "*dialogue*" appears prominently in both political and cultural contexts, highlighting the centrality of communication and understanding across different domains. The presence of terms like "*sustainability*" in economic discussions and "*learning*" in education underscores a long-term vision within ASEM's pillars. A comparative analysis reveals that while each pillar has distinct priorities, they collectively align toward fostering cooperation, growth, and mutual understanding.

3.4. Concordance Line Analysis for "*interregional*"

In the literature on ASEM, the notion of *interregionalism* has a significant place because ASEM is considered an example of interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe. Therefore, how "*interregional*" is defined and constructed in ASEM documents might give an insight into how interregionalism is associated with the ASEM agenda. In that regard, one of the best ways to conclude the context in which "*interregional*" is used is to do the Concordance Line Analysis. In corpus linguistics (CL), Concordance Line Analysis is used for listing "all of the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus" (Baker, 2006: 71). Like most corpus analysis software, AntConc functions as a concordance tool that sorts and lists

sentences or text parts associated with the searched term. This function allows the researcher to see the context in which the searched term is used in all corpora.

In the ASEM Summit corpus, the word “*interregional*” is used only 10 times. It is collocated with themes of 1) Political Dialogue, 2) Cultural Dialogue, and 3) Intensifying Economic Relations. Table 6 lists all instances where the word “*interregional*” is used.

Semantic Category	Text Part	Year
Political Dialogue	The Leaders agreed on the need to reinforce multilateral dialogue and cooperation in ASEM, as well as within regional and interregional frameworks, to help strengthen the global multilateral system.	2004
	Leaders welcomed the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 as a significant step towards greater regional and interregional integration.	2016
	Leaders reviewed the progress made and achievements gained since the inception of ASEM in 1996 and set the course for further enhancement and evolution of the interregional process in the next decade.	2016
Cultural Dialogue	Leaders emphasized the importance of keeping the good momentum of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue and welcomed the outcomes of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogues (Nanjing 2007 and Amsterdam 2008) and urged governments to actively facilitate interfaith and intercultural dialogues, particularly at the regional and interregional levels, which is part of a much broader dialogue between Asia and Europe.	2008
Intensifying Economic Relations	They reiterated strong and continued support to the implementation of Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP) in infrastructure projects and noted that an improved environment for PPP financing could help boost the pace of development, as well as intra and interregional connectivity in both regions.	2012
	Intra and Interregional Connectivity Leaders stressed the importance of strengthening regional connectivity to support economic integration, including through subregional initiatives and frameworks, in narrowing development gaps and boosting sustainable development within and among the subregions in Asia and Europe.	2012
	Leaders acknowledged the necessity of further strengthening interregional financial cooperation between Asia and Europe.	2012
	Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhance interregional investment and trade flows through the market economy, open multilateral trading system, nondiscriminatory liberalisation and open regionalism.	2012
	Leaders underlined their commitment to enhancing interregional trade and investment flows, including through the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP), to actively resisting trade-distorting or protectionist measures, and to addressing restrictions, including nontariff barriers, which inhibit trade growth and investment.	2014
	Leaders reiterated their commitment to enhance interregional trade and investment flows as an engine of sustainable growth and deeper economic integration connectivity between Asia and Europe, to actively resist trade-distorting or protectionist measures, and to address restrictions, including nontariff barriers and especially behind-the-border barriers, which inhibit trade growth and investment.	2016

Table 6: Concordance lines of the word “*interregional*”

The term "interregional" is employed across a variety of contexts in ASEM summit documents, reflecting its multidimensional role in political, cultural, and economic dialogues.

In political discussions, "*interregional*" appears as a part of broader efforts to reinforce multilateral systems and frameworks. For instance, in 2004, leaders emphasized the need to strengthen interregional frameworks to bolster the global multilateral system. Similarly, in 2016, interregional processes were highlighted as crucial to the evolution of ASEM, suggesting that interregionalism serves as a cornerstone of ASEM's long-term vision. This use implies that interregionalism in the political sphere focuses on creating cohesive frameworks that align regional cooperation with global multilateral goals.

In cultural discussions, "*interregional*" serves as a bridge for fostering mutual understanding and dialogue across regions. The emphasis on interfaith and intercultural dialogues in 2008 reflects ASEM's role in promoting cultural exchange and shared values. This application highlights interregionalism as a mechanism for transcending regional divides, reinforcing ASEM's identity as a connector between diverse societies.

Economically, "*interregional*" is applied to connectivity, trade, and financial cooperation. References in 2012 and 2014 link interregionalism to economic integration, trade liberalization, and infrastructure development. These examples demonstrate how interregional dialogue is operationalized to address barriers, promote sustainable growth, and integrate markets. Together, these uses affirm the conclusion that ASEM functions as an intergovernmental forum where interregionalism drives dialogue and cooperation across political, cultural, and economic domains.

4. What is ASEM? Reconceptualizing *Interregionalism*

Since its establishment, ASEM has held an important place in regionalism studies. Especially for the studies conceptualizing interregional relations with the concept of *interregionalism*, ASEM has been a critical case study for a long time. In its simplest definition, *interregionalism* refers to the cooperation and interactions established between different regions. Although we can identify the first interregional relations in the 1960s, *interregionalism* studies emerged as an area of research within regionalism studies in the mid-1990s, especially after the European Union started to establish and deepen interregional relations with other regional entities (Rüland, 2010: 1273). ASEM, which is the main subject of this research, is one of the interregional dialogue mechanisms that we can evaluate in that manner.

Scholars working on *interregionalism* have been heavily influenced by the "world of regions"(Katzenstein, 2005) approach, which dominated regionalism studies. According to this

approach, in the new international order, in addition to states, regions are recognized as actors in their own right due to their capacity to establish external relations. Henceforth, evaluating and conceptualizing relations of regional actors like regional organizations and regional entities should become a subject of International Relations and regionalism studies.

Yet, *interregionalism* studies have faced criticisms for structural weaknesses of interregional relations compared to traditional diplomacy dominated by states, potential inefficiencies in decision-making, and concerns over the effectiveness of verbose rhetoric in agreements. Considering the effectiveness of interregional relations all over the world, the validity of this criticism cannot be denied. For example, the trade deal between the EU and MERCOSUR has been negotiated for almost two decades, while the EU and ASEAN relations have nearly stuck due to different political and economic priorities. Even under ASEM, which is this study's main subject, the planned meeting has been postponed without an explanation. Nevertheless, this study argues that *interregionalism* should not be defined according to its effectiveness in producing tangible outcomes for relations between regions. Instead, the function of *interregionalism* within the international system should be evaluated from a broader perspective, emphasizing its role as a facilitator of dialogue and a layer of global governance.

Interregional relations are different from state-to-state relations, which International Relations as a discipline has been focusing on, especially in two respects. As Gardini and Malamud (2014: 1) stated, first of all, in Interregional Relations, the nature of the actors cannot be taken for granted, so interregional relations are built upon internal consultations more frequently, using complex and less formalized mechanisms. Secondly, since most interregional agreements and declarations are built upon verbose rhetoric rather than concrete outcomes, the scope of *interregionalism* is generally limited to "low politics." As a result, Gardini and Malamud (2014) perceive *interregionalism* "as a summitry exercise". Yet, it should not imply that *interregionalism* is a totally ineffective tool of diplomacy. On the contrary, it can be considered "an additional layer of multilateral governance which could facilitate the finding of solutions on a global scale in pre-discussing or even pre-negotiating issues to be taken up in a multilateral or global setting" (Reiterer 2006: 241). Therefore, rather than achieving tangible outcomes, exercises of *interregionalism* should be reconceptualized as a continuum of multilateral governance in which states and regional entities establish dialogue for topics concerning their regional space and common issues in the global system. This perspective highlights the importance of ongoing engagement and collaborative discourse, which fosters a

deeper comprehension of interconnected problems and promotes cooperative mechanisms that go beyond the interests of individual states.

Accordingly, although ASEM has often been questioned for being ineffective in shaping Asia and Europe relations, we must say that ASEM has fulfilled its targeted duty in establishing interregional dialogue. As Yeo (2013: 3; 2019) predicted, ASEM remains a forum for informal, shallow dialogue along with different strands of EU-Asia relations with no clear value added in terms of problem-solving. The empirical findings of this study support this argument by showing that “dialogue” is one of the most frequently used words in the ASEM Summit Corpus without a visible change in agenda. ASEM aims to intensify cooperation and dialogue between Asia and Europe for the sake of development and economic relations. Although interregional relations are defined mostly through economic relations, ASEM is a multidimensional dialogue platform in which a wide range of topics ranging from politics to security, education to culture is discussed. Moreover, dynamics shaping region-to-region dialogue have been discussed in conjunction with a wide range of issues on a global scale. As a result, as Fort (2004) describes, ASEM is a process of multidimensional dialogue.

This conclusion fits what Dent (2004) proposes with the “Theory of Multilateral Utility,” which underscores the idea that multilateralism can create a “utility” or positive net benefit for all parties involved, often by enhancing stability, pooling resources, or addressing complex global issues collectively. According to Dent (2004), “interregional frameworks like ASEM, and in general terms what proactive contribution they can make to foster stability, peace, prosperity, and equality in the global system, in partnership with multilateral institutions” as a multilateral utility. Considering the main themes prevalent in ASEM Summits and continuous emphasis on “dialogue,” and “cooperation,” it can be argued that ASEM is a manifestation of multilateral utility to facilitate constructive dialogue between Asian and European nations, fostering a more integrated and cooperative international environment.

ASEM was initially created to establish an interregional dialogue between the European Union and East Asia in particular. Not having an institutional structure and having a limited effect in implementing policies have been the main criticisms of ASEM. However, as the empirical data of the study shows, there has been no agenda to institutionalize it and to transform it into a framework that generates concrete outcomes. On the contrary, since its inception, it has sustained its aim of fostering dialogue between the participating states. As Gaens (2006: 32) claims, ASEM is designed on principles of “open, informal and non-binding dialogue.” Also, Yeo (2006: 80) points out that “ASEM is now on auto-pilot driven by bureaucrats, and while it is likely to continue, it is unlikely to create any excitement.”

Therefore, expecting tangible results from it might be misleading when defining the borders of ASEM's *interregionalism*. Instead, as claimed by Christiansen and Tsui (2017), despite its limitations, ASEM should be accepted as a “process adding value in the context of the wider diplomacy between the EU and its Asian partners.” In that regard, considering the range of topics discussed in the ASEM Summits, regardless of its effectiveness, as Pelkmans and Hu (2014: 12) put it, ASEM is “an effective facilitator of Asia-Europe dialogue in many ways, in many areas, and at all levels.” Therefore, in response to the question "What is ASEM?" it should be characterized as a platform for multi-faceted dialogue comprising interregional and inter-state aspects of cooperation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers an overview of ASEM by critically examining the chair's statements from its summits over the years. CACDA showed the continuities and discontinuities within the discursive themes of these statements that have dominated them and brought further insight into ASEM's role in promoting interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe. The empirical findings revealed that ASEM Summits operate as an intergovernmental forum among European and Asian countries in the form of interregional dialogue. Moreover, it is seen that significant themes emerge that align with ASEM's three pillars—political, economic, and socio-cultural, while they show consistency in time. The findings also demonstrate that the role attributed to ASEM is a dialogue mechanism on complex issues, bridging Asia and Europe by highlighting common concerns and priorities of the two regions. Relatedly, while ASEM is often criticized for lacking tangible, enforceable outcomes, the study concludes that it fulfills a crucial role within multilateral governance by functioning as a platform that fosters trust and aligns regional priorities. Therefore, in conjunction with the discussion on what interregionalism is and its role in international politics, it concludes that exercises of interregionalism should be reconceptualized as a continuum of multilateral governance in which states and regional entities establish dialogue for topics concerning their regional space and common issues in the global system.

The main contribution of this study is to describe and analyze what ASEM is in more detail by using CACDA. This method helped to evaluate the themes that emerged in ASEM in detail, chronologically, and contextually. In addition, the study not only analyzed ASEM but also contributed to regionalism studies by relating empirical data to the concept of interregionalism. However, some shortcomings of the study should also be admitted. Firstly, the method employed relied exclusively on textual data, which constrained the ability to delve deeper into the relations between Asia and Europe and assess the role and impact of ASEM in

these interactions from a broader viewpoint. Nevertheless, future studies can provide a more comprehensive analysis of ASEM and its place in Asian-European relations, taking into account these shortcomings and the methodological contributions of this study. Second, all inferences on the notion of interregionalism are based on the ASEM case. On the other hand, there are other cases of interregionalism, such as FEALAC, EU-ASEAN, EU-MERCOSUR, etc. Hence, findings specific to ASEM may not be applicable to other interregional organizations or diplomatic frameworks, limiting the broader applicability of the conclusions. Utilizing a similar methodological framework and making a comparative analysis with ASEM may also reveal the complexity of interregional relations across different contexts and provide a deeper understanding of ASEM and interregionalism. In this respect, this study can be seen as a modest contribution to the studies and evaluations in this direction.

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