Higher education cooperation at the regional level

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Abstract

Purpose – This article focuses on regional-level cooperation in higher education by examining the functional, organizational and political approaches (FOPA) framework for higher education regionalization and using supra-national regional universities as established and successful examples of regional-level higher education cooperation among countries.

Design/methodology/approach – A conceptual framework is used to provide the structure for analyzing the key approaches to higher education regionalization, followed by an analysis of supra-national regional universities to demonstrate the application of the model.

Findings – The FOPA framework for higher education regionalization includes three approaches. The first is the functional approach, which includes both collaborative academic and research activities among higher education institutions as well strategies and policies to help align systems across a region. The second is the organizational approach, which focuses on networks, organizations, institutions and programs, which facilitate partnerships. The third is the political approach, which includes regional-level agreements, declarations and strategic plans to promote higher education collaboration. Key higher education activities for each approach are discussed in generic terms, with examples provided from major regions of the world.

Research limitations/implications – The research was based on desk research only. No interviews were conducted.

Practical implications – A conceptual analysis and a model were provided for the concept of regionalization of higher education and for regional universities, which can help readers locate their interests and research in the regionalization of higher education. Examples of three different types of regional universities were provided to give concrete illustrations of a regional university.

Social implications – One of the rationales driving regional universities is to address and increase a sense of regional identify and to meet the social, economic and educational needs of the specified region.

Originality/value – Regional universities, such as the University of West Indies, Arab Open University and the Pan-Africa University, are an understudied phenomenon. Using them as innovative and sustainable examples of higher education regional cooperation and the FOPA model, this study illustrates how single-campus, multiple-campus and virtual regional universities are functioning to meet the diversified needs and priorities across a region through cooperation among countries.

Keywords Regional higher education cooperation, FOPA model, Supra-national regional universities, Regionalization

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The last three decades has seen an unequaled and significant change in the international higher education landscape. The more globalized and inter-connected world in which we live has stimulated higher education institutions, organizations and all levels of governments to pay more attention to academic relations and new opportunities for partnerships with other countries. An important development has been an increasing focus on higher education

collaboration and exchange within a region. There is no consensus on the causes for this, but different perspectives include the importance of developing a regional sense of identity for diverse reasons including peace, security, trade; a reaction to the unintended negative consequences of globalization; and the need to develop diverse partnerships to address current challenges such as climate change, food security, epidemics through increased regional higher education, research and innovation collaboration.

The movement to expand intra-regional cooperation and harmonization of national systems is occurring in all regions of the world. The well-known Bologna Process, which is discussed in other articles in this journal (see de Wit) aims to create a common higher education space in Europe. It has stimulated more attention being given to the importance of both intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation in higher education. For example, Africa has focused on regionalization of higher education (Knight & Woldegiorgis, 2017) and prioritized the development of an African Higher Education and Research Area since 2013 (https://www.adeanet.org/en/publications/towards-african-higher-education-research-space-ahers). Simultaneously there are efforts in Northeast Asia (Byun & Um, 2014), South East Asia (Chao, 2016) and the Baltic States (Ewert, 2012) to boost regional level higher education and research collaborations. These all point to the growing importance of the phenomenon of the regionalization of higher education.

But the regionalization of higher education is not without its complexities, challenges and misunderstandings and therefore the objectives of this article are twofold. The first is to propose and examine an analytical framework – the functional, organizational and political approaches (FOPA) framework - to better understand and analyze the higher education regionalization process (Knight, 2017). The framework builds on the multitude of higher education, research and innovation activities, networks and bi-lateral/multi-lateral relationships that help to improve higher education and its contributions to society. The second objective is to illustrate the functional approach of the FOPA framework by examining the phenomenon of regional universities and by examining five supra-national regional universities which are successful and sustainable examples of regional level higher education cooperation among countries within a region.

The outline for the article is as follows. The first section of the article focuses on the meaning of region and regionalization as opposed to related concepts such as regionalism or regionality. It also provides a brief introduction and definition of the term regional universities. This discussion is followed by a review of the proposed FOPA framework which involves three approaches to higher education regionalization – a functional approach, an organizational approach and a political approach. These three approaches are inter-related; they are not independent silos of activities. To elucidate the framework and illustrate the relationship among the three approaches, examples from the higher education landscape in three regions of the world- East Asia, Africa and the Arab region are provided. The next section of the article introduces regional universities as examples of the functional approach to the regionalization of higher education. Short descriptions of five regional universities from different parts of the world provide insights into different aspects and activities of these institutions. In the last section the relationship between regionalization and internationalization is discussed as well as issues and challenges related to the regionalization of higher education.

2. Understanding regionalization
2.1 Regionalization, regionalism, region
A review of academic articles and gray literature, such as policy documents, working papers and conference reports, reveals a vibrant debate on the topic of regions and their importance, formation and function (Hettne, 2005; Terada, 2003; Robertson, 2016; Knight, 2013).

Of interest are the different interpretations and permutations of the concept of region. Frequently used terms include regionalism, regionalness, regionality, regionalization, regional integration, inter-regional cooperation to name a few. It is clear that region constitutes the root concept while the suffixes introduce nuanced differences in meaning. For example, the suffix "ism" relates more to an ideology or set of beliefs, an "ization" focuses on the process of becoming and "tion" reflects a condition. Region can also be used to describe geographic areas or communities such as Southeast Asia or Central America. Other terms are more cultural or linguistic oriented such as Francophone Africa or the Arab region.

Equally important is that higher education regionalization can be interpreted differently either/both as "a means to an end" and also "an end unto itself". For instance, there are those who consider higher education as an instrument for regional integration as is in the case of using the Bologna process as a means to achieve Europeanization (Verger & Hermo, 2010); others focus on the impact of political, economic or social regionalism on higher education as a sector (Robertson, Neves De Azevedo, & Dale, 2016). These merit further examination, but this article focuses primarily on the process of "the regionalization of higher education" per se.

For the purposes of this discussion regionalization of higher education is defined as the "process of building closer collaboration and alignment among higher education actors and systems within a defined area or framework called a region" (Knight, 2012). Important to emphasize is that the term "regionalization of higher education" has been chosen over the concepts of regionalism or regional integration to denote the importance of the "process" of building closer collaboration and alignment among higher education institutions, organizations, national systems and networks in a designated area or framework, commonly called a region.

Thus, in this article there are three assumptions central to understanding the regionalization of higher education. The first is the view that region is defined by the players involved and can be interpreted as a specific area or an organizational/cultural/programmatic/political framework. In other words, a region does not have to be interpreted as a geographic space. The three regions of interest in this article -East Asia, Africa and Arab region-illustrate the different geographic, cultural and perhaps political interpretations of the key concept of region. The second assumption is that it is an ongoing and evolutionary process of collaboration and building partnerships; and the third assumption is the notion of intentionality in building a region based on existing and new relationships and activities by a diversity of actors as will be illustrated in the FOPA framework.

2.2 Regional universities

As discussed, the term "regionalization of higher education" introduces the process of intentionally building connections and relationships among countries, systems and higher education actors in a region. This differs from the "impact of regionalism on higher education" which involves higher education having less agency and being more reactive to other political or economic aspects of economic or political regionalization (Knight, 2017).

Regional universities represent a distinctive type of collaborative initiative as they involve multiple governments and nongovernmental organizations cooperating to establish a new higher education institution serving students in a particular region and responding to regional needs and priorities.

For the purposes of this article, a regional university can be described as "an institution of higher education which involves a group of countries in a designated region that collaborate to establish a university which offers degree and pre-degree courses, conducts research and serves the needs of the region" (Knight & Zhang, 2022). While regional universities can be single, multi-campus or virtual institutions, a defining feature is that they are not regulated or funded by one host government. They are not the equivalent of a national university. Instead,

they are governed, funded and have their qualifications recognized by a group of countries geographically, culturally, or politically identified as a region. It is important to emphasize that the regional university in this article is understood to be at the supra-national level meaning that regional university systems within a country are different.

Given the multiple term used in international higher education there is often confusion between a regional university and an international joint university. An international joint university typically involves two and in some cases three universities located in different countries and most often from different regions of the world, who come together to create a new higher education institution in one of the host countries (Knight & Simpson, 2021). International joint universities are independent entities from their founding institutions but are jointly governed and managed by their founders and engage in close collaboration on academic programs and research initiatives. Given that a new institution is established it is clear that an international joint university is not a branch campus. Therefore, regional universities, which are founded by a group of countries/actors/funders (not existing universities) located in one region, are a very different phenomenon than international joint universities.

The next section examines the FOPA Framework in order to bring a more systematic and rigorous approach to understanding the regionalization of higher education in general and regional universities in particular.

3. The FOPA model: functional, organizational and political approaches*
In spite of the growing interest in regionalization in general and in the regionalization of higher education (Lorenzo, 2022) there are few studies which have developed an analytical framework or model to carefully examine the process of achieving greater collaboration and cooperation between higher education and related actors within a designated supra-national region. This article focuses on one framework, the FOPA Framework. Three inter-related approaches constitute the FOPA model (Knight, 2017) which can be applied to regional higher education. The functional approach includes efforts to align certain higher education frameworks as well as a plethora of other programs and activities such as mobility programs, data bases or research projects. The organizational approach addresses the organizational architecture such as the associations, governmental or nongovernmental agencies which are actively engaged to establish regional higher education systems and for the purposes of this article, a regional university; and the political approach speaks to the necessary treaties, agendas, or agreements which speak to regional higher education priorities and in terms of a regional university the vision and mandate.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. They are not three separate silos of change as they work in unison complementing and reinforcing each other. While this is the optimal situation, it does not always happen in practice for there can be tension among the three approaches due to conflicting priorities or politics among the actors and countries involved. At any one time, one of the approaches could be more dominant than another; but ultimately progress needs to occur on all three to ensure sustainability. Current realities and priorities dictate the emphasis attributed to one approach over the other. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship and intersection of these three approaches.

3.1 Functional approach
The first approach takes a *functional* perspective of regionalization and focuses on the practical activities of higher education systems and institutions. The initiatives which make up the functional approach can be put into two distinct groups. The first group relates to policies or strategies that facilitate closer alignment or in some cases harmonization among national/ subregional higher education systems such as quality assurance schemes, academic credit
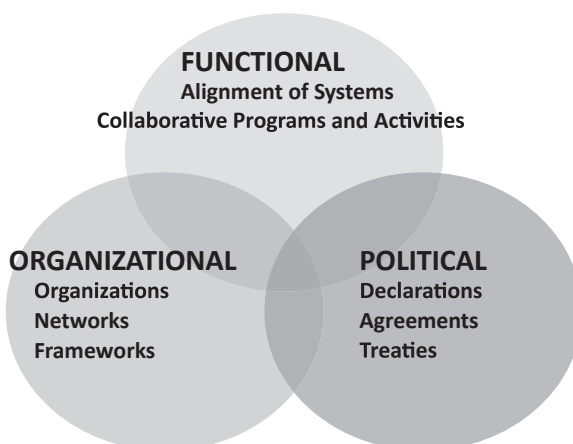
Source(s): Knight 2012

Figure 1.
Relationship among 3
approaches

systems or qualification frameworks. The second category includes a broad diversity of activities and programs such as student mobility schemes, crossborder collaborative education programs, regional universities and centers of excellence. The relationship between these two groups is critical as the systems in group one are needed to facilitate and expedite the programs in group two. For instance, compatibility between different quality assurance systems and academic credit systems will help to advance student mobility programs within a region. Generally, it is a more complex and serious undertaking to align national systems within a region than to establish bilateral or multi-lateral academic activities (Knight, 2012).

To illustrate the functional approach Table 1 provides concrete examples for both the alignment of systems and for collaborative programs and activities. Examples have been used from three regions/subregions of the world in order to demonstrate the similarities as well as differences that regions take in terms of the functional approach to regionalization.

3.2 Organizational approach

The second approach is called the *organizational* approach and refers to the organizational architecture that evolves to develop and guide the regionalization initiatives in a more systematic (although some might call it bureaucratic) manner. It is labeled the organizational approach because frameworks, structures, or agencies are necessary to help establish and oversee regional level initiatives and encourage ongoing cooperation and some level of coordination. This approach includes government and nongovernment bodies, professional organizations, foundations, research bodies, theme-based networks, financial institutions, among others. These entities assume a variety of responsibilities such as policy making, funding, research, capacity building, regulation and advocacy. Furthermore, non–education organizations with a regional mandate, such as trade related bodies and development banks are also making higher education a higher priority. Examples of the different types of organizations involved in facilitating and sustaining the regionalization of higher education in the three regions are presented in Table 2.

3.3 Political approach

The third approach is labeled the political approach. It refers to political will and strategies that put higher education initiatives on the agenda of decision-making bodies. The political

	East Asia Region	Africa Region	Arab Region
Alignment of Education Systems	- ASEAN Credit transfer system - Academic Credit System for Asian Mobility - ASEAN University Inter- library Online - Quality Assurance-mutual recognition of QAA systems - ASEAN Research citation index	- African Regional Accreditation and Regional Qualification Frameworks - African Union Harmonization Strategy - New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) - African Quality Rating Mechanism - South African Qualifications Framework - East African Qualifications Framework	- Regional Qualifications Framework by The Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) - The Network for the Expansion of Convergent Technologies in the Arab Region (NECTAR)
Collaborative Programs and Projects	- Student mobility program between Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan (JMIT) - University Mobility in Asia–Pacific (UMAP) - CAMPUS ASIA - Collective Action for the Mobility of University Students in Asia– Japan, China and Korea - AUN/SEED-NET-Southeast Asian Engineering Education Dev Network - ASEAN Graduate Business Economic Program - ASEAN University Human Rights Network	- Pan-Africa University - New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD) - African Virtual University - African On-line Digital Library - Roster of African Professionals (AAU) - Mwalimu Nyerere African Scholarship Scheme - Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA) - Pan Africa Institute of University Governance - Open Education Africa - African Books Collective - Database of African Theses and Dissertations - Tuning Africa	- Arab Open University (AOU) - The Forum for Exchange of Student Training Officers - The Forum for Students' Inventions organized by AArU - Arab e-Marifa Database for Arabs Theses and Dissertations - Arab Educational Information Network (Shamaa)

Table 1.
Examples of FOPA's functional approach - alignment of systems and collaborative programs

Source(s): Author, 2023 NB. The notation of names of organizations and programs may vary from original due to translation and source

approach helps to launch major programs or funding schemes and to formalize initiatives. Declarations of intent, binding conventions, treaties, agreements and special meetings like summits or policy dialogs are instruments for generating political support and visibility in order to make regionalization of higher education a priority. This approach can be

East Asia	Africa	Arab
- Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization SEAMEO - Regional Center for Higher Education Development -RIHED - Asia-Pacific Quality Network -APQN - ASEAN University Network – AUN - Ass of Universities of Asia and the Pacific -AUAP - Asia-Pacific Rim University Network- APRU - Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning –ASAIHL - Association of East Asian Research Universities - AEARU - Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau UNESCO - Asian Development Bank –ADB	- African Union Conference on Ministers of Education (COMEDAF) - Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) - Association of African Universities (AAU) - African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) - The Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents (CORVIP) - Council for the - Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) - Association for the Internationalization of Education (ANIE) - African Council for - Distance Education (ACDE) - South Africa Regional University Association (SARUA) - Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) - Conseil Africaine et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Superior (CAMES) - The Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) - African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) - African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions - Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA) - African Regional Bureau UNESCO - African Development Bank (ADB)	- The Arab League's Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) - The Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) - The Arab Organization for Quality Assurance in Education (AROQA) - Arab Regional Bureau UNESCO - Arab observatory of science and technology

Source(s): Author, 2023

*Includes Networks, Associations, Foundations, Govt and Non-Govt org, Dev banks. The notation of names of organizations and programs may vary from original due to translation and source

Table 2.
Examples of FOPA's organizational approach* to regionalization of higher education

characterized has having more of a top down, formal and intentional orientation. Table 3 provides examples of different initiatives that are included in the political approach.

The purpose of this section was to present the FOPA model and provide concrete examples of higher education frameworks, activities, organizations and political agreements being used to promote and facilitate the regionalization of higher education. The next section focuses on one particular regional higher education initiative – the regional university.

4. Regional universities
The regionalization of higher education and the FOPA framework introduces the process of intentionally building connections and relationships among countries, systems and higher

East Asia	Africa	Arab
- Brisbane Communique - Chiba Principles - Asia-Pacific UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications - Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Meetings - Tri-lateral summit - Asia-Pacific Economic Community -APEC - East Asian Summit	- Arusha Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications of Higher Education in Africa - Southern Africa Development Community- Regional Protocol on Education and Training (SADC) - Conference of Ministers of Education of African Union Meetings - EU-African Policy Dialogues on Higher Education - Trust Africa: Policy Dialogue Series on Higher Education in Africa - African Economic Community and Regional Economic Communities	- Conference of the Ministers of Higher Education and Scientific - Research of the Arab League - Regional Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) - Education Development Plan in Arab Countries 2008–2018

Table 3.
Examples of FOPA's political approach* to regionalization of higher education

Source(s): Author, 2023

*Includes declarations, agreements, conventions, treaties, summits, task forces and dialogs. The notation of abbreviations and names of organizations and programs may vary from original due to translation and source

education actors in a self-described or prescribed region. The regional university is an example of this intentionality and represents a proactive strategy of higher education and related actors.

Regional universities represent a distinctive type of collaborative initiative in international academic collaboration as they involve multiple governments and agencies cooperating to establish a new institution which serves students in a particular region, undertakes collaborative research and responds to regional needs and priorities. While regional universities may not be a new development, they are definitely an understudied phenomenon. The purpose of this section is to look at key aspects of regional higher education institutions by presenting a typology of three different models and brief case studies of five existing regional universities.

4.1 Different models of regional universities

A regional university can be described as a higher education institution founded, funded and/ governed by a group of countries and related actors located in a supra-national region. The term region is deliberately not defined in geographic, cultural, or economic terms so as to allow for inclusiveness. It is noted, however, that many of the names of regional universities do include a geographic descriptor, i.e. University of the South Pacific, The University of the West Indies, Pan-African University (PAU) and University of Central Asia. While regional universities can be single, multi-campus or virtual institutions, a defining feature is that they are not regulated or funded by one host government. Instead, they are governed, funded and have their qualifications recognized by a group of countries geographically, culturally, or politically identified as a region.

Table 4 lists ten examples of regional universities that align with the proposed definition of a regional university. Interesting to note is that Africa hosts three regional university and Asia-Pacific hosts four while Europe, the Arab region and the Caribbean host one each. The first two regional universities were founded in 1948 (The University of the West Indies) and 1957 (Asian Institute of Technology). The last two were founded in the first two decades of the 21st century – the University of Central Asia in 2010 and the PAU in 2013.

Model	Name of university	Founding Year
Single Campus	European University Institute (EUI)	1972
	South Asian University (SAU)	2010
Multiple Campus	The University of the West Indies (UWI)	1948
	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)	1957
	University of South Pacific (USP)	1968
	The Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI)	1979
	University Central Asia (UCA)	2000
	Pan-African University (PAU)	2013
Virtual	African Virtual University (AVU)	1997
	Arab Open University	2002

Source(s): Author, 2023 updated from Knight and Zhang (2022)

4.2 Regional university case studies

Regional universities are dedicated to providing access to higher education, conducting research as well as facilitating regional cooperation and capacity building. While there are many similarities among the RUs, there are also differences in priorities and rationales and hence outcomes. Funding models, diversity of partnerships, governance and management strategies, development of academic programs and well as joint research and innovation can vary. Given that many of the regional universities were established more than two or three decades ago, it is important to acknowledge the success and sustainability of this model of collaborative higher education institutions. As discussed, it is also critical to differentiate regional universities which are based on multi-lateral collaboration among countries from International joint universities which are primarily based on a bilateral partnership. Furthermore, regional universities differ significantly from the popular international branch campuses which are essentially satellite operations of a parent university offering academic programs and qualifications in a foreign country (Wilkins, 2021).

To better understand the establishment, priorities and outreach of regional universities the next section provides brief descriptions of five regional universities. There is no intention to provide an in-depth comparative analysis of specific features of these five regional universities. Instead, similarities and differences are acknowledged and together they show the range of establishment dates from 1948 to 2013, the three different models as depicted in Table 4, as well as represent different geographic regions of the world.

The University of West Indies was first established in 1948 as a college of the University of London with 33 students. It soon became an independent institution and during the last decades has grown to be an internationally recognized university with over 50,000 students, clearing demonstrating the sustainability of this regional university model. The university consists of several constituent campuses, four satellite discipline specific university centers, as well as an open virtual campus. The UWI campus in Mona, Jamaica 1948 serves as the headquarters of the UWI system. The major satellite campuses in neighboring countries include UWI St. Augustine 1960 (Trinidad and Tobago), UWI Cave Hill 1963, (Barbados) and UWI Five Islands 2019 (Antigua and Barbuda), as well as the regional UWI Open Campus established in 2008. Together they serve students and conduct research in 18 different Caribbean states. In addition, UWI has successfully developed education and research collaborations with higher education institutions and research centers in different parts of the world, while ensuring that the priorities and needs of the Caribbean are foremost.

UWI describes its mission as " to advance learning, create knowledge and foster innovation for the positive transformation of the Caribbean . . .. producing critical thinkers

and leaders who serve the needs of the 21st century society." The governance structure is based on representation of key stakeholder groups from the member states (https://www.mona.uwi.edu/).

The Pan-African University (PAU) is an example of a contemporary regional higher education initiative involving a university with multi-campuses located across the African continent. PAU was conceived in 2008 and launched in 2013 to establish a regional university system to serve the entire continent by addressing key development priorities and to strengthen the regional integration goal of the Africa Union's *Agenda 2063: First Ten Year Implementation Plan 2014–2023* (African Union, 2015). The initiative was started by the 54 member states of the African Union and is funded jointly by the African Development Bank, host African countries, World Bank and international partners. The PAU is made up of five post-graduate training and research institutes, hosted at leading universities in the West, North, East, Central and South regions of the African Continent demonstrating its pan-regional geographical approach. Each institute focuses on one of the strategic areas for African advancement, as determined by the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union. The research institutes are: (1) Kenya: Basic Sciences, Technology and Innovation located at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, (2) Nigeria: Life and Earth Sciences, including Health and Agriculture, located at University of Ibadan, (3) Cameroon: Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences located at University of Yaounde II, (4) Algeria: Water and Energy Sciences located at the Abou Bakr University of Tlemcen, (5) South Africa (future plan): Space Sciences Institute located at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (African Union, 2016).

In terms of its rationales, the PAU was designed to be a key player and contributor to the operationalization of the first 10-year phase of the African Union's Agenda 2063 which outlines a vision for pan-African unity for the creation of an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena." The Agenda 2063 document, ratified in 2015, charts a path for "inclusive and sustainable development, a politically integrated continent, peace, and security, fused together by a strong "cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics' (African Union, 2015).

The five regional networks of universities and research partners are connected and strengthened by a continental framework. A review of the stated objectives reveals how PAU strives to enhance collaboration and integration between and among African countries through International Higher Education, Research and Innovation (IHERI) activities. The two primary academic objectives are to (1) stimulate collaborative, internationally competitive, cutting-edge fundamental and development-oriented research, in areas having a direct bearing on the technical, economic and social development of Africa while recruiting, training and retaining African talent and (2) enhance the mobility of students, lecturers, researchers and administrative staff between African universities to improve teaching, leadership, collaborative research and create regional/continental integrating networks (African Union, 2016).. (https://pau-au.africa/)

The Arab Open University (AOU) was conceived in 1996 and officially opened in 2002 with its headquarters in Kuwait. It is a higher education institution delivering a blended system of learning from its inception. It operates in nine countries in the Arab region including Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Sudan and Palestine.

The University is mandated to serve local and regional communities by offering high-quality market-driven programs of study and research. The AOU vision is articulated as "a pioneering Arab Open University dedicated to building the science and knowledge society". Its mission centers on 3 priorities: (1) providing high-quality education to all segments of society and providing them with labor market skills, (2) developing the science and knowledge society by providing a stimulating environment for scientific research and an

incubator for innovation; (3) contribute to achieving sustainable development in Arab societies (https://www.arabou.edu.kw/university/Pages/vision-and-mission.aspx).

A noteworthy feature is that early in its development AOU developed a partnership with the Open University (OU) in the UK. The partnership agreement allows AOU to offer higher education programs leading to validated OU qualification. The educational systems and academic programs at AOU are evaluated every five years by a specialized committee whose members are affiliated to respected British universities. Individual AOU campuses may also be reviewed and accredited by national host country quality assurance agencies. Governance is through the Board of Trustee which includes members from the nine countries with campuses.

The European University Institute is located in Italy and was founded in 1972 by the six original members of the then European Community- Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The institute is dedicated to social sciences and humanities and offers masters and doctorate programs and qualifications only. It takes an interdisciplinary approach to its teaching, research and policy work (https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative.)

A unique feature of the European University Institute is that it was created and regulated by an international treaty – the Convention Setting up the EUI – signed by its Contracting States. Thus, it is not regulated by any national regulation and has the status of an international government organization which distinguishes itself from other regional universities as well as national level universities.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) was established in 1968. Because of the region's colonized history, the establishment of USP was enacted by a Royal Charter granted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1970. USP is now co-owned by 12 members countries in the Pacific region, including Cook Islands, Republic of Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Kingdom of Tonga, Republic of Vanuatu, Samoa and the Republic of Fiji. As a result, USP is a multi-campus regional university with 14 campuses located across its 12 member countries. As USP is co-owned by 12 governments in the Pacific region, it is considered a public university in the region. In addition, USP is registered under the Fiji Higher Education Commission, which is a government-mandated regulatory and quality assurance body for higher education in Fiji.

The USP has a strong orientation to serve the Pacific region through tertiary education and research. For example, its founding and mission as stated on its website, was to meet the needs of the countries in the region to train leaders after the countries' independence. USP prides itself in serving the sustainable development of the Pacific region through tertiary education and research. To achieve this, according to USP's 2022–2023 Strategic Plan, USP strives to produce graduates who are knowledgeable about the Pacific Island region and who can innovate and create economic growth to ensure that the region is successful in the global knowledge economy. In addition to training workforce in the region, more broadly, USP is also tasked with addressing regional issues and recognize that regional cooperation is necessary to enable the countries in the region to tackle common issues, such as climate change. Moreover, USP also aims at celebrating the history, culture and the natural environment in the region. In short, USP serves as a propeller for the economic and social development of the Pacific Island region and is also an institution that strives to preserve the diverse cultures and heritage in the region (https://www.usp.ac.fj/). All member states contribute to the funding of the university with Fiji being the major contributor. Other sources of income include student tuition, development assistance and commercial activities of the university.

4.3 Rationales of regional universities
Rationales refer to universities' objectives or key missions as articulated in their official documents or websites. This factor is important as mission statements reveal why the

regional university was established and dictate its priorities and programs. A close examination of the ten regional universities included in Table 4 revealed that the primary rationales/missions can be categorized into four major groups (Knight & Zhang, 2022).

(1) Human resource development (HRD) indicates a clear emphasis on providing access for students and developing the skill and knowledge of graduates in specific fields or professions needed in the region.

(2) Research and Development (R&D) indicates the importance of developing the necessary expertise and infrastructure to conduct research which is relevant to the needs of the region.

(3) Capacity Building (CB) of the higher education system indicates the need to improve and build capacity of higher education at institutional, national and regional levels.

(4) Regional Development (Reg Dev) indicates a strong emphasis on the universities' role in enhancing regional development, integration and identity.

4.4 European Universities- a new model of regional universities

While the interest and research on the phenomenon of higher education regionalization is increasing it is evident that there is less interest in the specific topic of regional universities. This is unexpected given the age of and apparent sustainability of the ten identified in this article. However, recent efforts by the European Union towards the development of a new model of European Universities seems to indicate renewed interest. Important to note is the intention and rationales driving this new initiative. The idea for the European Universities initiative was first announced at the 2017 Gothenburg Summit where European Union (EU) leaders outlined a vision '. . .strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities. " The European Universities program is seen as a flagship initiative of the European strategy for developing the European Education Area as it aims to support 60 European Universities involving more than 500 higher education institutions by mid-2024 (https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative).

European Universities are described by the European Union on their above cited website as "transnational alliances that will lead the way towards the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education." The plans are to include alliances that include partners from all types of higher education institution, cover a broad geographic scope across Europe and are based upon a co-envisioned long-term strategy focused on sustainability, excellence and European values. Furthermore, the website states that they offer student-centered curricula jointly delivered across inter-university campuses, where diverse student bodies can build their own programs, experience mobility at all levels of study and adopt a challenge-based approach according to which students, academics and external partners can cooperate in interdisciplinary teams to tackle the biggest issues facing Europe today.

This "alliance" model of a regional university is very different from the ten regional universities identified in Table 4 which were all newly established higher education institutions. The European University model is based on existing individual institutions creating a wide variety of "alliances" or networks with a diversity of partners/actors including nongovernmental organizations, private enterprises, cities, local and regional authorities among other. The EU website states that as of 2023, there are 50 European

Universities involving more than 430 higher education institutions in capital cities as well as remote regions of 35 countries (https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative#action).

Clearly this new initiative offers a different model of a regional university which will further the regionalization of the European higher education landscape and contribute towards the long-term goal of promoting a European identity and ensuring a stronger, more innovative and competitive Europe. It is too soon to study trends and impacts but it is revealing to examine the rationales. As previously discussed, the analysis of the ten existing regional universities centered on the development of human resources, research expertise, institutional capacity building and responding/contributing to the needs and priorities for regional development. This aligns with the intentions outlined by the EU promoting "European values and identity and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education". However, the element of competitiveness of European higher education stands out as an interesting point of differentiation and reflects new priorities of higher education, not only in Europe but in other regions of the world.

5. Concluding remarks

5.1 Regionalization and internationalization

This article has addressed the increasingly important topic of the regionalization of higher education and has examined an analytical framework, the FOPA model, in order to understand more deeply three critical elements of the process of building greater cooperation and collaboration for regional level higher education, research and innovation. However, confusion still exists about the differences and similarities between the processes of regionalization and internationalization of higher education.

A major assumption of this analysis is that regionalization and internationalization processes of higher education co-exist and are compatible and can be complementary. There is much debate on this topic (Ogachi, 2009; Kuroda, 2016) but for the purposes of this discussion they are not seen to be mutually exclusive or contradictory processes. It is not an either/or situation. In fact, both processes include similar activities, actors and outcomes but regionalization emphasizes region-centered initiatives not global ones.

Therefore, it is understood, that regionalization occurs in concert with internationalization of higher education activities. International higher education cooperation, whether it is intra-regional (regionalization) or inter-regional (internationalization) is not a zero-sum situation. The current reality is that regional cooperation and alignment of systems is becoming increasingly important but not to the exclusion of other international relationships. History will likely show that regionalization and internationalization have a symbiotic relationship. They co-exist, can be complementary or competitive and each will have prominence at different stages of international engagement (Knight, 2012).

5.2 Further research needed

In spite of the growing trend towards increased regionalization of higher education, there is a serious lack of research and literature which addresses the specific topic of regional universities. Therefore, this section focuses on identifying issues that merit further investigation.

Given that 60% of the regional universities identified in Table 4 are multi-campus, an interesting question relates to how enrollments differ between a single campus model versus a multi-campus model regional university in terms of students' country of origin. And secondly, does this impact migration flows, human resource capacity and cultural identity within the region? There is some evidence that regional universities are offering programs and qualifications provided by national universities located in the region or elsewhere, i.e. the AOU,

but more information is needed. For instance, how common is it for regional universities to offer franchise, 2 plus 2 and joint/double degree programs and what is the accreditation and quality assurance process with respect to this type of program mobility. Given that preponderance of multi-campus regional universities, what are the governance, management, accreditation, funding arrangements with their branch campuses or satellite partners and do these differ from international branch campuses established by single national universities? Do regional universities contribute in a direct way to students' awareness, competencies and sense of cultural identify within the region. What is the country origin of the faculty members and management staff of regional universities? Do host country academics predominate and what is the percentage of faculty members originating from countries outside the region or who have had attained their terminal degree internal or external to the region?

As previously discussed, an international joint university is primarily a bilateral partnership between two countries internal or external to the region while regional universities are multi-lateral in nature. A comparison of regional universities which are multi-lateral with international joint universities has the potential to yield new insights into current and future trends. It can be said that there are more questions than answers about regional universities-especially now the new "European University" model initiative has been launched. Scholars, policy makers, graduate students and experts from higher education, in collaboration with colleagues from other fields of study, are encouraged to undertake further research and reflection on the role and contribution of regional universities to the increasing regionalization of higher education.

This article has focused on the phenomenon of regionalization of higher education which has been predicated on collaboration, cooperation, partnerships, alliances among higher education institutions and related actors. However, as already noted competitiveness is also a key factor whether between and among actors internal (and external) to the region. This can bring new opportunities and benefits and it can also bring new risks and unintended consequences. These can range from threats to research integrity and the undesirable and inappropriate transfer of knowledge, data or patents resulting in the need for new knowledge security policies. Another potential issue is multi-lateral recognition of qualifications and double counting academic credits, quality assurance, sustainability, among others. Of course, these potential threats or risks are not limited to regionalization or regional universities as they can apply to international higher education, research and innovation in the broadest sense, but they do introduce new issues which need to be given greater attention and research.

*This article draws upon and updates pervious work by Knight (2012, 2017) and Knight and Zhang (2022).

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