
UNIT 14 REGIONALISM AND NEW REGIONALISM*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 The Evolution of Regionalism
- 14.3 Factors Responsible for Regionalism
- 14.4 Features of Regionalism
- 14.5 New Regionalism
- 14.6 Critical Appraisal
- 14.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.8 References
- 14.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will be reading about regionalism and new regionalism. After going through the Unit, you would be able to understand the following.

- The importance of regionalism in international relations
- The circumstances and factors responsible for its evolution
- Features of regional arrangements
- New regionalism and its altered context, content and contours and
- A critical appraisal of the regionalism and new regionalism and its relevance in today's international system

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The first important point to consider here is to delineate regionalism as a concept. Regionalism in world politics refers to an attempt by countries in a geographical region to seek greater cooperation and support in different areas of state activity such as military, political, economic, and social-cultural interactions. At times, the need for such cooperation gradually manifests itself in the form of demand for establishing regional organizations. This phenomenon is also known as regional integration. Thus, regionalism often leads to regional integration and cooperation among the states in a particular region. Almost all the regions in the world have experienced this phenomenon and its development has seen increased emphasis since the 1990s. The next important point to ponder in this context is whether regionalism is a 'process' or a 'condition'. In a way, regionalism denotes both a process and a condition. It is a *condition* in the realm of ideas and sentiments when countries belonging to a region share a sense of affinity and belonging on the basis of such shared attributes as historical experiences (such as colonialism in Asia and Africa), economic conditions (economic underdevelopment in Latin

America), geographical contiguity, cultural similitude (tribal or linguistic affinity) or shared perception of threat from a dominant power. These are some of the conditions that encourage regional affinity and sentiment leading to formation of a regional organization. Regionalism is also understood as a *process* when certain efforts in a region are driven at tapping and consolidating the latent affinities among the members to further the cause of closer cooperation and integration, the process of drawing up a blue print of regional organization. The import substitution industrialization (ISI) model of development followed in Latin America in the 1950s convinced all the countries to go for closer economic integration. Hence, regionalism as a phenomenon denotes both a *condition* and *process*, both leading to bonds of cooperation and belonging.

14.2 EVOLUTION OF REGIONALISM

It is interesting to note that regional cooperation based on a sentiment of *belonging* to the neighbourhood is not new. We see instances of regionalism ever since the formation of organized political life. However, its most prominent avatar has been visible only in the twentieth century, more importantly, after the end of the First World War.

Conceptually speaking, a blueprint for cooperation was presented by David Mitrany in his book, *A Working Peace System* published in 1943 in which he proposed cooperation in technical areas of interdependence (he calls them 'functional' areas) so as to encourage greater interaction and closer relations among member states. He believed that such interaction would eventually result in habits of cooperation and deeper understanding among participating states leading to a system interdependencies and linkages in other areas as well. This, he thought, would lay the foundation for a peaceful working of the state system. His approach to peace came to be known as **the functionalist approach**. It means that one of the main factors responsible for the evolution of regionalism and regional cooperation is the emergence and existence of growing interdependence in technical and trade related interactions among the states. Gradually, when member states find it beneficial to cooperate in some 'functional' areas, they extend it to other areas of cooperation. This is known as the *spillover* effect. The functionalist approach received most traction in Europe after the Second World War since the European continent was witnessing the challenge of post-War reconstruction and need for economic cooperation. What began as cooperation in functional areas gained greater subscription and utility within the region of Europe to transform into a regional organization. It started with the formation of European Coal and Steel Community culminating in the regional European Economic Community. During the 1960s, there was a vigorous attempt to mould the functionalist approach to the specific needs of Europe by weaving political cooperation into the economic and trade matrix. A cluster of regionalists led by Ernst B Haas articulated the revised programme of functional cooperation envisioned by Mitrany. Their approach came to be known as **neofunctionalism** that underscored the inevitability of political element in the regional scheme of cooperation if it were to result in regional integration.

Besides the functionalists and neofunctionalists, those subscribing to **federalist approach** too supported regionalism as a viable programme. The federalists attributed different reasons for their argument in favour of regionalism. To them, regionalism and regional cooperation fulfilled the twin need for integration and

decentralization. The European Federalists in particular talked of *pooled sovereignty* (investing a slice of sovereignty in building and sustaining the regional institutions) to pave the way for a larger federal entity and closer union modelled, again, on the European Economic Community. Therefore, regionalism as an idea and project received support and legitimacy from three important theoretical approaches of the era, namely, the functionalist, the neofunctionalist and the federalist approaches.

However, the European Economic Community (EEC) that gave wings to the idea of European regionalism, and later brought to life that idea in concrete terms, was largely limited to economic and trade issues for the first thirty years before embarking on a more ambitious journey towards single currency and harmonization of policies in such areas as travel and immigration (Schengen visa) accompanied by a change in nomenclature from EEC to European Union.

Alongside the process of economic and trade cooperation through EEC, another important development unfolded in Europe that had greater implications for regionalism. **The Council of Europe** as a regional organization for political cooperation was founded in 1949. It soon acquired status of being forerunner in establishing common rights and standards for people of Europe irrespective of their nationality. It was the first regional organization that established a regional human rights system by adopting the first legally binding European Convention on Human Rights in 1950 to protect civil and political rights of individuals in addition to The European Social Charter in 1961. Thus, Council of Europe directed its efforts towards upholding human rights, democracy and rule of law in Europe. Rising competition between the West and the East in the context of Cold War meant that the emergence of organizations for security cooperation was not far behind or a distant goal; they arrived in the form of NATO and Warsaw Pact. They remained the broad framework within which security cooperation and protection of Europe evolved. The developments in Europe in terms of regional organizations in economic, political and security areas provided the template for similar organizations representing oneness and common goals to mushroom in other regions of the world. However, the process of emulating European regional cooperation in other regions of the world has been very uneven both in terms of close (harmonizing policies and enacting commonly agreed enforceable laws) and broader (extending to large number of issues and areas) cooperation. There are many reasons responsible for this divergence. Regions other than Europe that do not share the same level of uniformity in economic development, ideological commitment or cultural and religious traditions have found it difficult to replicate Europe's level of success in regional cooperation and integration. Also, all regions in the world are not geographically small and compact like Europe. That is why we see sub-continental, sub-regional, smaller organizations in large continents like Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, leaving aside the unevenness and dissimilarity, there are regional organizations in every part of the world that have symbolized regional aspirations and upheld the shared goal of regionalism. Examples of cooperation can be ASEAN, SAARC, Arab League, GCC, NAFTA and APEC etc. This brief description evidently shows that while regionalism is prevalent in every part of the world in political, economic and strategic areas, it also differs in its extent and depth of cooperation from one region to another.

One more aspect related to the development of regionalism is that its ascendancy reached its zenith during the decade of 1960s and early 1970s. There was a period

of lull after that until about early 1990s when we witness a renewed emphasis on regional cooperation in economic and trade areas so much so that they are emerging in the form of trade blocs based on exclusive membership and preferential rules of trade. It is causing some concern and resentment among countries that are excluded from trade blocs. This type of regionalism is known as ‘new regionalism’. We will discuss more about this later.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

1) Trace the evolution of regionalism and regional organizations.

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14.3 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR REGIONALISM

The obvious question that arises in one’s mind is why regionalism? What prompts the emergence of regionalism as an inevitable development? Based on the above mentioned description of its evolution, we can now deduce reasons for the growth of regionalism and factors that encourage this development. If David Mitrany proposed a blueprint for cooperation in technical and functional areas, it is fairly obvious to infer that growing interdependence in technical and trade relations among member states has been a major driving force of regionalism. The evolution of public international unions in the 19th Century is a testimony to increasing interactions leading to common concerns and need for harmonious laws that needed to be addressed at the intergovernmental level. Examples of Universal Postal Union and International Bureau of Weights and Measures are relevant here. This process has been further galvanized by globalisation wherein it is impossible to conceive of member states as isolated, independent entities characterised by self-sufficiency. Secondly, regional level acts as an intermediary between national and global levels of economic and political activity. Oftentimes, issues of regional concern get lost in the melee of global problems and concerns. Universal intergovernmental organizations tend to be remote in terms of access and diffused in terms of focus and attention when dealing with specific problems of a region. Hence, regionalism fits the bill perfectly while dealing with transnational issues that are of particular relevance to a region and not of global concern. Thirdly, regional cooperation checks the authoritarian tendencies of a dominant, stronger actor within a region. It acts as a bulwark against oppressive, totalitarian behaviour towards smaller states by protecting their interest through collective endeavour as also by putting to rest their fears and anxieties. Fourthly, in a broader global context, regionalism provides visibility and voice to regional aspirations and common shared attributes such as language, culture, history, and orchestrated ideas based on those attributes. African Union has for long given voice to the idea of African nationalism and African brotherhood that encapsulated

the common history of colonialism and the need to shape a common destiny in future. It promotes regional solutions to problems of conflict by referring to regional challenges and the need to give cooperation a chance. After all, shared destiny is a reality that cannot be reversed by many states. Hence, regionalism helps in preventing conflicts through cooperation. Lastly, harmony and homogeneity of interests coupled with regional socio-cultural attributes galvanizes the creation of regional aspirations and their articulation. Scholars like Amitai Etzioni emphasize on the cultural and social aspects (non-political) of regionalism seen as *community* for its continued strength and relevance in the long run. Regionalism eventually leads to what Karl Deutsch called as *security community* wherein members of a regional organization are held together through enmesh of cooperation, interdependence and integration. He further believed that the level of integration in a region can be measured by looking at transactions among member states. Etzioni's non-political interactions leading to a community of people or Deutsch's *security community* or *spillover* effect of Ernst B Haas are pointers to the utility of regionalism for peace and stability of a region.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the factors responsible for regionalism?

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14.4 FEATURES OF REGIONALISM

Regionalism as a concept and as a process shares certain features which help us in identifying the trend. Firstly, regional organizations are not always exclusive in nature; they might be overlapping to let a country be part of multiple organizations or yet again, include a country that is geographically not part of a region. Andrew Heywood states that regional organizations may be continental, sub-continental or transcontinental in their membership. While Council of Europe represents continental organization, SAARC is an example of sub-continental entity and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) or BRICS are transcontinental in nature. Mexico is a good example of a state having overlapping, multiple shared interests with the North American continent (member of NAFTA), with the Asia-Pacific region (member of APEC), and the linguistic, cultural and historical affinity with Latin America (member of LAIA). Therefore, **regions are often politically and socially constructed “imagined communities”**, they are ideas that are not always limited to one region. This reading of a region as an *idea* of a political, cultural or social construct makes it extremely fluid, open to myriad possibilities of configuration and/of cooperation. In fact, some have suggested that there are no ‘natural’ or ‘given’ regions. What appears as a ‘region’ in economic and cultural terms may not be appealing in political or security terms; e.g. SAARC. The political elites of a region are, therefore, required to

articulate regional political aspirations to align with its strides in economic cooperation.

Secondly, there are many dimensions of regionalism depending on the primary purpose and objective which determines its emergence. We can identify at least three main forms of regionalism, which are, economic, political, and strategic. Economic regionalism in the form of free trade area or common market is one of the earliest forms of cooperation that evolved in Europe in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Political regionalism seeks to protect and consolidate shared political values such as democratic government, individual freedom, liberal outlook, etc in order to develop a harmonious collective image and exert greater political influence both within and outside the region. Strategic cooperation gained recognition and ascendancy to address the needs of collective self-defence and protection from more powerful neighbours. This form of regionalism may also be driven by ideology and commitment to a certain political value system irrespective of geographical location of its members. North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Warsaw Pact are the most prominent examples of strategic (some call it military or security regionalism) regionalism.

Thirdly, regionalism in the traditional sense followed a familiar path of incremental progress in economic field from free trade area to common market to economic community to economic union. For a long time, this path of incremental progress witnessed in Europe seemed to be inevitable and was replicated in similar fashion elsewhere. Political and strategic communities/organizations formed separate, parallel projects. In the area of security regionalism, international organizations like UN largely determined tasks undertaken at the regional level. However, with the advent of new regionalism in recent decades, regional organizations have acquired a status of their own quite distinct from international organizations like the United Nations. They ‘have transformed from objects into subjects, making their relationship to the UN much more complex...’ (Hettne and Söderbaum: 2006, 228). The regional approach no longer strictly adheres to state-centric model of international organizations; rather, they have transcended the inevitable centrality of state apparatus to achieve regional goals.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
- ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

1) Briefly explain different forms of regionalism.

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14.5 NEW REGIONALISM

The decade of 1990s witnessed resurgence of regionalism and mushrooming of several regional organizations “ a development that is considered as ‘the second coming’ (Andrew Heywood) of regionalism. After a relatively less active decade

from mid-1970s to mid-1980s, there has been a renewed interest in regional groupings. In this section, we look at the features and nature of new regionalism from the stand point of its changed **context, content and contours** as it has emerged in 1990s.

First and foremost, in terms of *context*, new regionalism is an offspring of globalization. Hence, there is an unmistakable emphasis on economic and trade issues at the regional and global level. Regional organizations became active agents rather than passive objects of international policy processes promoting neoliberalism. In this sense, new regionalism rejected over-determination of international organizations in world affairs. Until then, regional organizations were seen to be representing intermediary levels of cooperation. However, 'new regionalism' redefined the kernel of their identity to signify their emergence as 'potentially competing structures' (Hettne and Söderbaum: 2006, p. 227) in an increasingly globalized world. The underlining factor of changed context in the form of accelerated globalization led to rebooting their logics and functioning. It meant that new regionalism as a phenomenon was a result of twin processes – regions intersecting with economic globalization at the international level alongside creating protectionist trade blocs at the regional or sub-regional level “ that produced multiple, interlinking, complex relationships between regions and multilateral actors and within the regional groupings themselves. There was also tendency to develop several micro regions and trade blocs within a broad macro region. Thus, new regionalism is undoubtedly economic in character leading to formation of multiple trade blocs and complex web of relationships undercutting the old ones and forming new trajectories of cooperation. J N Bhagwati calls this complex web of relationships as '**spaghetti bowl**' system (cited in Heywood: 2014, 496) wherein it is difficult to trace clearly a particular state's path within the web of complex, multiple, overlapping, regional trade agreements.

New regionalism, insofar as its *content* is concerned, is associated with several structural transformations in international system such as: the end of Cold War; transition from bipolar to multipolar power structure; and post-Westphalian nation-state system where state has been relegated to a non-dominant position in regional and international affairs. Further, state has been to an extent replaced by transnational economic-social-political interdependencies unleashed by globalization leading to newer patterns of interactions between state and non-state actors. The decade of 1990s is also symptomatic of changed attitude towards economic development and political system in the developing countries as evidenced in weakening of Third World solidarity and Non-Aligned Movement in favour of neoliberal economic development. Hettne and Söderbaum refer to multipolar power structure of post-Cold War era as New International Division of Power (NIDP) and globalisation of 'finance, trade, production and technology' as New International Division of Labour (NIDL). Insofar as the sentiment of new regionalism is concerned, it is an extension of nationalism at a different, higher level; it supplements in areas where national states are incapable of protecting national interests in a globalised context. This is known as 'pooling sovereignty' (Andrew Heywood: 2014, p. 491; Hettne and Söderbaum: 1998, p. 4). Therefore, the resurgence of regionalism is here to stay but its *content and contours* have shifted dramatically in its second coming.

Regarding the *contours* of new regionalism, it needs to be mentioned here that the new regional organizations are comprehensive, multidimensional in their

structure as opposed to simple structures in the common market era. The multidimensionality of regional organizations is also reflected in the convergence of culture, economic interests, security arrangement and political regime that emerge spontaneously from within a region in the form of sub-regional aspirations to create trade blocs to protect economic/trade interests. Since we have defined regionalism as both a *condition* and a *process*, we must underscore here that 'new regionalism' is a complex process of change operating at such various levels, as global system's level. These processes display dynamic interactions at various levels to produce different forms of cooperation depending on their relative importance, which differs from one region to the other.

One intriguing contemporary debate has emerged surrounding the relationship between regionalism and globalization – is it complementary, supporting each other along the way or is it contradictory, giving rise to conflict and friction? In other words, whether regionalization is a building block or a stumbling block for globalization? One finds support for both these positions in academic writings. Arvind Panagariya, Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell believe that globalization and 'new regionalism' share a symbiotic relationship reinforcing each other in the process. There are others (Hettne, Inatoi and Sunkel cited in Hettne and Söderbaum: 1998) who suggest that the relationship is not linear and smooth, rather, it is dialectic in nature occasioned by friction and tension until a rearrangement is negotiated among all the stakeholders.

14.6 CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Having discussed the features and nature of regionalism and new regionalism, it is now imperative to take stock of these concepts from a critical perspective. If regionalism has supporters among functionalists, neofunctionalists and federalists, does it mean that it is a panacea for all problems in international system? There have been claims and counter claims as to the desirability of regionalism. The universalists question the relevance and utility of regional organizations while placing their faith in global international organizations to address and solve problems of both regional and international nature.

Critics also contend that excessive emphasis on regionalism leads to inward-looking, closed organizations that foster greater domination by big powers within the region. Hence, the assumption that smaller states come together to protect themselves against bigger, dominant powers within or outside the region is an oversimplified assumption. The empirical evidence of regional groupings so far suggests that in security arena, bigger and stronger powers acquire an additional forum for influence and domination leading to greater concentration of power than ever before.

There are others who contend that regional organizations have failed to seize the initiative to resolve regional conflicts and restore peace owing to competing ambitions of regional powers to steer the peace process in a way as to determine its outcome to their advantage or to suit their national interests. For instance, the Chinese government did not allow external actors to broker peace in Cambodia fearing a dilution of its own role and strategic interest. Stronger powers in a region accept conflict resolution mechanisms mostly when the conflict has become intractable or strategically insignificant or still, financially burdensome without serving any diplomatic purpose.

Regionalism may foment inter-regional or ethno-national conflict leading to disintegration when cultural difference within a state receives outside support from groups with cultural affinity. It impacts intraregional dynamics on political questions. For example, India and Bangladesh share linguistic affinity or Sri Lanka and India have Tamil groups as common variable between them. This in itself could lead to tensions and strife within a state.

An economic argument against new regionalism has been deployed by those who support free trade and dismantling of trade barriers. It is alleged that regional trade blocs resort to protectionism and favour trade within the bloc to create a fortress and foreclose adverse impact of global competitiveness and volatile market on their economies. But, such protectionism undermines the principles of free trade and open borders envisaged in a globalised world. J N Bhagwati questioned the position of regional blocs on free trade as ‘building blocks’ or ‘stumbling blocks’ within the global system. Regional systems have been short of stumbling blocks but they have given rise to a tangle of regional trade agreements, “complex and overlapping bilateral and regional arrangements, each with conflicting and contradictory provisions....” (Heywood: 2014, p. 496)

In spite of the above criticisms, regionalism and new regionalism have found many takers who suggest that the criticisms and fears are overstated propositions. One aspect in favour of new regionalism arrangements is that they are rarely imposed from above; most such arrangements are a result of bottom-up approach orchestrated by a clutch of national and regional interest groups striving to protect their sectoral interests. Green political parties across Europe have sought to harmonize their respective positions to put forth a common agenda for the protection of their interests and insulate their communities and consumer interests from ill effects of unbridled globalization. Viewed from this perspective, regionalism and new regionalism are indeed ‘building blocks’ in protecting sectional, national, and regional interests.

14.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have looked at regionalism and new regionalism as important developments within the international system. Regionalism can be understood both as a *condition* and a *process*. Regionalism found many takers in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War owing to specific, unique circumstances prevailing in Europe. Most regional systems then emulated the pattern of European model moving from free trade area to common market to economic community to economic union. However, the results of such efforts have been uneven. Regionalism received conceptual support in functionalist, neofunctionalist and federalist thought. Features of old regionalism have been non-exclusive nature of membership based instead largely on shared attributes and values. As for the evolution of regionalism in Europe and elsewhere, it has manifested in three areas, namely, economic, political and strategic. Regionalism witnessed ascendancy from 1950s to mid- 1970s. After a period of relatively dormant action, it has seen renewed growth and acknowledgement in 1990s in the form of new regionalism.

New regionalism is a baby of globalization. Unquestionably, advent of globalization propelled regionalism to reinvent itself in a new avatar. We have discussed the context, content and contours of new regionalism to suggest its

features and differences with old regionalism. One distinguishing feature of new regionalism is the emergence of multiple trade blocs sometimes within the same region challenging the macro regional template. They have also been accused of resorting to protectionism and in the process disrupting the principles of free trade and open markets orchestrated as the mantra of globalization. Yet, it is also generally agreed that new regionalism has promoted communication and interrelationships among various interest groups across region resulting in meaningful cross breeding and convergence of policies and ideas.

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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Concept of functional areas by David Mitrany
 - Spillover effect
 - Beginning of regional cooperation in Europe after the 2nd World War

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Evolution of public international unions in the 19th Century
 - Regional cooperation checks the authoritarian tendencies
 - Provides visibility and voice to regional aspirations and common shared attributes
 - Harmony and homogeneity of interests coupled with regional socio-cultural attributes galvanizes the creation of regional aspirations and their articulation

Check Your Progress Exercise 3.

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Your answer should highlight economic, political, and strategic features of regionalism

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