

# Understanding regionalisation in Philippine higher education

Regionalisation  
in Philippine  
higher  
education

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Regionalisation in education has gained increased interest and importance because of the increasing collaborations among neighbouring nations. Definitions of the term vary, and more so the regionalisation practices and initiatives of higher educational institutions. In the Philippines, the emphasis on regionalisation has become even more pronounced with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Integration Vision. This vision of the ASEAN is geared towards enhancing regional collaboration and the creation of an ASEAN identity and puts education at the forefront, considering it as a strategic objective to achieve the region's development agenda of economic, social and cultural growth. It becomes of paramount importance then to examine how regionalisation in education is understood by university constituents, its manifestations in terms of institutional activities and especially, how the ASEAN Integration shapes these initiatives and constructions of regionalisation. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using a multiple case study design that looked at three higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines, this study found that regionalisation is associated and interchanged with internationalisation in terms of purpose, goal and activities, but is differentiated in dimensions of geographical location and orientation.

**Findings** – Institutional initiatives pertaining to regionalisation were largely functional and mostly open and soft collaborations. The ASEAN Integration creates an ASEAN-centric consciousness, and functions as an opportunity for expanding partnerships, institutional niches and programmatic initiatives; and for legitimising regionalisation and internationalisation goals.

**Originality/value** – These definitions and approaches to regionalisation have significant policy implications as HEIs strive to respond to the challenges of the Integration.

**Keywords** Higher education, ASEAN Integration, Regionalisation

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation has far-reaching effects on nations and regions of the world. The phenomenon, which has been associated with the breaking down of barriers has heightened competition among nation-states as neighbouring countries enter into arrangements directed at creating a common market and allowing the free movement of goods, capital and labour (Gray, 2017). One of the significant responses to the phenomenon is the emergence of the notion of regionalisation, which began with the regional policy harmonisation in Europe, and eventually turning the discourse to higher education reforms and initiatives (Woldegiorgis, 2013). Various conceptions of regionalisation in education have been forwarded. In the context of higher education, it has been associated with such terms and constructions as harmonisation and the creation of a point of reference for comparisons (Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014). It is also closely associated with internationalisation, which may be viewed as a general, more overarching approach that refers to mechanisms by which higher education institutions (HEIs) adapt to the increasingly dynamic and borderless environment as a result of globalisation forces (Gacel-Avila, 2005). Knight (2012) suggests that regionalisation and internationalisation



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are symbiotic and complementary approaches in higher education, but has also emphasised that while both terms may be used interchangeably, both suggest distinct differences if examined closely.

This notion of regionalisation is particularly significant for Southeast Asia as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) embarks on a full-scale campaign to fully realise the ASEAN 2020 Vision of Integration. Under its banner statement of “One Vision, One Identity, One Community”, the ASEAN seeks to strengthen regional cooperation and foster a sense of community among the member-states. The role of education in achieving this vision has been particularly emphasised when ASEAN (2009) identified as one of its strategic objectives the “integration of education priorities into ASEAN’s development and creating a knowledge based society” (p. 2). Such objective has significant repercussions and implications for the Philippines, one of the oldest member countries of the ASEAN.

In 2014 alone, the country recorded over 2,300 HEIs and a total higher education enrolment of over three million for the same academic year (Commission on Higher Education, 2014a). Indeed, this high demand for higher education poses a paramount challenge for HEIs as they struggle both to meet this demand and to deliver education that is comparable with the rest of the region (Killingley and Ilieva, 2015). In light of the Integration, the Commission on Higher Education has mapped out the country’s major internationalisation strategies focusing on enhancing the implementation of quality assurance framework; facilitation of countrywide and regional mobility and market access of students and faculty; and strengthening of international linkages of Philippine HEIs (Commission on Higher Education, 2016). Other initiatives were the implementation of the K+12 curriculum, which mandates the addition of two years to the country’s basic education in keeping with global standards; and a stronger emphasis on outcome-based learning in higher education (Commission on Higher Education, 2014b). Yet despite these efforts, reports pointed to how the country has been lagging behind its Southeast Asian neighbours (see Geronimo, 2013a; Domingo, 2013). Amador (2013 as cited in Geronimo, 2013b), for instance, had listed key issues that the country’s higher education sector must address as part of the Integration, including the expansion in the membership to the ASEAN University Network (AUN); and enhancing student and faculty mobility and collaborations in research and extension.

The ASEAN Integration therefore serves as a crucial force driving reforms of the region’s overall higher education sector and individually, at the national level such as in the case of the Philippines. With this push for strengthened regionalisation in the ASEAN, a number of compelling questions arise: How do university administrators and faculty members construct and define the subject of regionalisation of higher education? What are the institutions’ regionalisation approaches, initiatives and practices? How is the ASEAN Integration driving the regionalisation of higher education in the Philippines? This study aims to explore these issues from the perspective of three HEIs in the Philippines, and subsequently, describe the regionalisation of Philippine higher education.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *Regionalisation: a general definition*

Regionalisation is not new or uncommon, but it has earned increased attention as nations seek new ways and forms of working and living together. Kacowicz (1998) suggested a close interrelationship among the concepts of globalisation, regionalisation and nationalism where the first is seen as a more overarching term that refers to a “set of related changes” in the economic, ideological, technological and cultural spheres of the global society (para 4). Regionalisation, on the other hand, may be discussed in the context of a group of states, often defined by geography, but also by other criteria such as social and cultural

homogeneity, similarities in political attitudes, and economic interdependence, and builds on the idea of regionalism (Kacowicz, 1998).

Mittelman (1996 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998) further suggested three lenses by which one can view the interrelationship between globalisation and regionalisation: regionalisation as a subset or component of globalisation; regionalisation as a response to globalisation; and regionalisation and globalisation as both parallel or overlapping processes. As a subset of globalisation, regionalisation promotes integration activities aimed at multi-lateral cooperation. As a response to globalisation, it is a counter alternative, an opposing response of nation-states to the idea of a “single universal culture” that is associated with the goals of globalisation (para 22). The third notion views the two as more than an economic process: the integration and creation of “megaregions” (Wyatt-Walter, 1995 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998, para 23).

### 2.2 *Regionalisation in higher education*

In higher education, the discourse on regionalisation seems to revolve around the appropriateness of terminologies to be used. Woldegiorgis (2013) and Yavaprabhas (2014) both underscored the term harmonisation in describing regionalisation. Compared to other associated terms like uniformity or standardisation, the former suggests a point of reference for comparability and compatibility. In this sense, harmonisation in education suggests that universities are able to retain their own identity, while ensuring that their quality of education is comparable and compatible with others, though not necessarily similar. Sirat *et al.* (2014) also emphasised that the conceptions and understanding of regionalisation in higher education vary depending on the actors involved in the process. Further, while there are several actors involved, much of the harmonisation actively takes place and stems from the educational institutions, further suggesting that the process is bottom-up. This is in contrast with Woldegiorgis' (2013) suggestion that regionalisation in higher education, taking the Bologna Process as an example, is a top-down process where the initiative stems from regional organisations or supranational bodies.

Knight (2012) further adds that there are several lines of inquiry that can be used to view regionalisation, one of which is in terms of the relationships between and among HEI actors and systems, or what the author refers to as higher education regionalisation. This relational notion of regionalisation may be illustrated through a continuum of regionalisation terms where on one end, associated terms like cooperation and collaboration suggest more informal and open relationships, and on the other, terms like integration, interdependence and community connote more formalised and institutionalised relationships (Knight, 2012). The author further proffers a model of interrelated approaches – functional, organisational and political approaches (FOPA) – by which one may examine the pursuit of regionalisation. The functional approach looks at the practical activities of HEIs, including policies, strategies and programmes for alignment and collaboration. The organisational approach pertains to the structures, frameworks and agencies that facilitate regionalisation, and lastly, the political approach refers to strategies and the political will in decision making concerning regionalisation (Knight, 2013).

### 2.3 *The impetus for regionalisation: ASEAN Integration and the Philippine higher education sector*

The subject of education and more specifically, regionalisation of higher education are covered in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) pillar, one of the three pillars of the ASEAN Integration. The ASCC's goal of promoting a “people-centred and socially-responsible” ASEAN Community (ASEAN, 2009, p. 1) rests in part on human resource development, which in turn is grounded on education. In fact, higher education has been identified as a “core action line” to boost regional human resource development and the idea of a “Common Space of Higher

Education in Southeast Asia” (Sirat *et al.*, 2014, para 8). Indeed, the ASCC Blueprint identifies a number of actions in support of the objective of advancing and prioritising education in the region, including enhancing inter-institutional networking to increase academic exchange and professional interactions; creating research clusters; increasing university placements through year abroad or semester abroad programmes; and offering courses and degree programmes on ASEAN studies (ASEAN, 2009, pp. 2-3).

A closer look at these proposed actions suggests that these are largely institutional-based or initiated and operationalised at the institutional level. In the Philippines, these initiatives are not necessarily absent nor are they relatively new. Killingley and Ilieva’s (2015) research point to, for instance, the presence of outbound and inbound student mobility programmes in Philippine HEIs, although relatively lower in comparison to its Southeast Asian neighbours like Thailand and Malaysia. On the other hand, the country’s use of English as a medium of instruction in schools is one opportunity that can be maximised. This, coupled with the low cost of tuition and living, has led to a significant increase in international students, mainly non-native English speakers like Koreans, who come to the country to study English. The authors noted that such offers a potential for the country to develop itself into an education hub (Killingley and Ilieva, 2015). Full and active implementation of such initiatives is, however, hampered by a number of factors. At the national level, for example, there are unfriendly labour and immigration laws that serve as a disincentive for foreign students and faculty (Killingley and Ilieva, 2015). At the institutional level, there are policy gaps and standard operating procedures that must be addressed such as those that will encourage increased research productivity of faculty members (Rosaroso *et al.*, 2015).

Recognising then the critical role of HEIs in forwarding regionalisation, it is at this level of the institution that the research is particularly invested in as it examines how regionalisation is understood and made evident in institutional initiatives and practices against the backdrop that is the ASEAN Integration. The next section details the design and methodology used to answer the research objectives.

### 3. Methods

This study employed the multiple case study design to look into the definitions and practices of regionalisation of three types of Philippine HEIs: public (state-managed), private sectarian (for-profit institutions that are denominational or run by a religious order) and private non-sectarian (for-profit HEIs that are managed or owned by individuals and/or private corporations and associations). While it is not the research’s objective to compare regionalisation practices, the choice to include three institutions that belong to each of the three types of HEIs in the country was made in order to see how distinct institutional factors such as organisational nature, orientation, structure and even geographical location shape the HEIs’ definitions of and approaches to regionalisation.

#### 3.1 Case selection

Given the extensive number of HEIs in the country, the study cases were selected following the general classification of Philippine HEIs based on ownership. Furthermore, the following criteria were used in the selection: should be a recognised autonomous HEI by the Commission on Higher Education; should have CHED Centres of Excellence and/or Development, an award given by the Commission to HEIs with notable degree programmes in particular academic disciplines; and at least one HEI should be based outside of the capital. HEI A is a public, state-funded university and is the second largest autonomous campus of the national university. HEI B is a private sectarian HEI and is one of the six main autonomous tertiary institutions established by a religious order of priests. Both HEIs A and B are outside of the capital but in semi-urbanised/urbanised communities.

HEI C is a private non-sectarian institution in Manila (capital) founded by a family of architects. As mentioned, these HEIs differ in organisational nature and structure, and are representative of each of the three types of HEIs in the Philippines.

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis

As a form of triangulation and in order to provide for a comprehensive and richer discussion on the definitions and practices of regionalisation of the institutions, data were gathered from three sources: administrators involved in or undertaking regionalisation initiatives; selected faculty members and research and extension personnel (REPs); and documents/secondary sources (Figure 1).

Interviews with administrators sought to uncover their perceptions and understanding of regionalisation; the regionalisation initiatives of their office, including policies concerning regionalisation; and their views on the ASEAN Integration and how it is impacting institutional initiatives. A similar interview guide was also used for the REPs[1], but focused on their research and extension engagements that have a regionalisation focus. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather the insights of selected faculty members on their understanding of regionalisation; their knowledge of the regionalisation initiatives in their institution and their perception on their extent of implementation; and how the ASEAN Integration is shaping their work as faculty members. As the questionnaires were not designed for a survey but rather as a means to solicit representative answers from faculty members, convenience sampling was employed in determining faculty respondents. Lastly, a document review and analysis of publicly available documents was carried out. The documents were sourced from the institutions' respective websites, and included institutional write-ups, news and feature articles on regionalisation and internationalisation activities, newsletters, downloadable reports and promotional materials (Table I).

A two-cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2009) was applied on the data gathered from the three data sources. A mix of descriptive, *in vivo* and initial coding methods were used in the first cycle coding to identify concepts, categories and loose themes, while the second

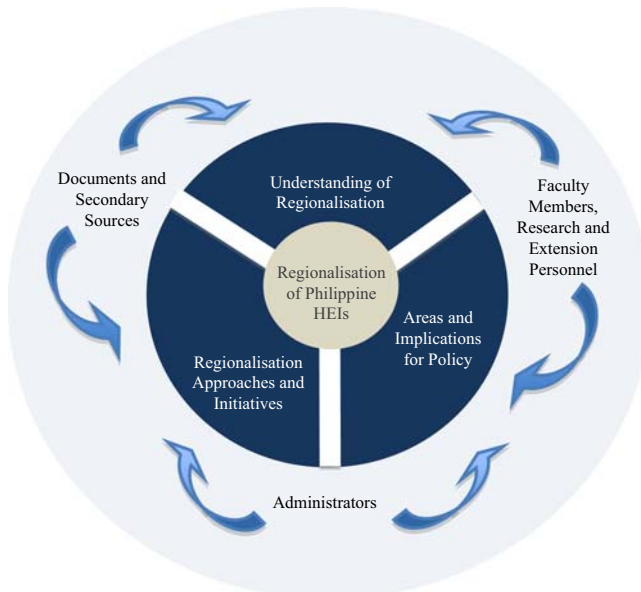


Figure 1.  
Research framework

Higher education institutions	Interviews (administrators and REPs)	Semi-structured questionnaire (faculty members)	Document review
HEI A (public)	4 Graduate School Office of Institutional Linkages College of Development Communication College of Agriculture	22 College of Development Communication College of Arts and Sciences College of Forestry College of Economics and Management College of Agriculture	24
HEI B (private sectarian)	6 University Research Council Graduate School Office of Alumni and International Relations College of Education College of Engineering College of Arts and Sciences	9 College of Education College of Engineering	15
HEI C (private non-sectarian)	3 Office of Admissions Office of Graduate School and Directive Research Office for International Linkages for Research and Development	8 School of Information Technology School of Architecture School of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences	36

**Table I.**  
Data sources

**Source:** Based on study

cycle coding used pattern and axial coding methods to arrive at overarching themes and to note associations and thematic relationships. The themes emerged from the coding process served as discussion points in approaching the HEIs' definitions and practices of regionalisation and the role of the ASEAN Integration as a push factor.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Definitions and constructions of regionalisation

Five themes were uncovered from the HEI constituents' definitions and understanding of regionalisation in higher education. These definitional dimensions were: purpose, referring to the goals and objectives or the "whys" of regionalisation; spatial or notions relating to space, time and magnitude or coverage of regionalisation; outcome or the expected results or consequences of regionalisation; orientation, pertaining to ascribed beliefs and attitudes towards regionalisation; and activity or the modes by which regionalisation happens or proceeds. In all three HEIs, there was the prevailing idea of regionalisation as directed to a precursor of a bigger, overarching notion such as internationalisation. This close association between these two concepts seems to support Mittelman's (1996 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998) argument about regionalisation as a subset of globalisation. Regionalisation, very much like internationalisation (also a response to globalisation), is a venue for creating multi-lateral collaborations, an idea that constituents of the three HEIs also perceived to be its main purpose. Interviews and responses in the semi-structured questionnaire emerged the most commonly associated terms with regionalisation to be collaboration and partnership, and following Knight's (2012) conceptual mapping of regionalisation terms, these words suggest a more informal and open relationship between partner universities, than a rigidly structured one. Likewise, for all three HEIs, regionalisation was equated with competitiveness as its perceived outcome. Regionalisation is meeting standards in order to become "at par with the others". Through regionalisation or more specifically, the adherence to standards and accreditation, students of the HEIs are "acceptable" and

“adaptable” anywhere, and their education comparable to the education of their foreign counterparts.

A clear differentiation between regionalisation and internationalisation was identified, however, in terms of the spatial and orientation dimensions. For the HEIs, regionalisation, in referring to the geo-political unit, is limited to those within the “immediate” and “neighbours” or those with whom the country or university shares commonalities with or similarities in interests and/or socio-economic background. They then automatically identified the region as Asia and more specific, Southeast Asia. Concurrent to this, regionalisation was associated with a more Asian/Southeast Asian-centric orientation where the study participants seemed to attach a protectionist lens to regionalisation, describing it as putting the region first (in this case, Asia/Southeast Asia), and using this geo-political unit as the frame of reference or operating context. As respondent HEI B-A1 expressed:

One aspect of regionalisation is, we’re able to protect our own region vis-à-vis the international community where we cannot compete as much because we are just a third world country and they are more.

Such view also lends support to another lens of inquiry by which one can view regionalisation: as a counter alternative to globalisation (Mittelman, 1996 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998). In this case, regionalisation is seen as a mechanism to elevate the region’s own culture and development and boost its ability to compete. As regionalisation brings together countries, the competitive advantage is enhanced when countries operate as a region rather than as individual nations. Initiatives directed to encourage higher education partnerships and collaborations, for instance, become a collective, regional effort that makes the region much more competitive, a feat that is achieved more easily as a group of nations rather than as individual countries.

#### *4.2 Initiatives and approaches in regionalisation*

The coding process also yielded three themes with regards the institutions’ regionalisation initiatives, namely: programmatic, resource-oriented and institutional leadership. Table II provides a summary list of the key regionalisation approaches and initiatives of the HEIs in these three areas.

*4.2.1 Programmatic.* Across all three HEIs, there was a strong emphasis on programmatic initiatives, particularly degree programme enhancements. These include the focus on outcome-based education (OBE); academic exchange, particularly student exchange; and accreditation. All three HEIs have taken steps to revise their degree programme curricula to follow OBE standards. This move to OBE is in accordance with the CHED Memorandum Order No. 46 Series of 2012 (Commission on Higher Education, 2012) which lays down the rationale for the adoption of a competency-based learning standard and outcomes-based quality assurance monitoring and evaluation.

Academic exchange, particularly student exchange, also appears to be the easiest and most popular form of institutional collaboration, and is particularly actively pursued by HEIs A and C, making use of their extensive institutional network, the Asian University Network and the university system network for HEI A, and the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific for HEI C. HEI B has its own network to tap but has only recently started exploring academic exchange and partnerships with a university from the same religious order. Documents reviewed and insights shared by administrator respondents, however, point to an imbalance in numbers where there were more inbound than outbound students participating in said programmes. A key constraint factor was funding because while there are grants available, these are generally limited and students have to shoulder part of the expenses.

Regionalisation initiatives	HEI A (public)	HEI B (private sectarian)	HEI C (private non-sectarian)
<i>Programmatic</i>			
<i>Curricular</i>	AUN-QA standard accreditation of degree programmes Synchronisation of academic calendar Outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum Postgraduate short-term courses for credit Establishment of satellite campus (Nagoya Asian Satellite Campus)	Implementation of K-12 (senior high school) International on-the-job-training programme (College of Business Administration) OBE curriculum Chinese language programme Study visits	ABET accreditation OBE curriculum Joint/double degree programmes (i.e. Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan) International on-the-job training and internship programmes Study and plant visits
<i>Linkaging</i>	Membership in AUN; SEARCA University Network Inbound and outbound student exchange Active partnerships with universities (e.g. Kobe University; Kyoto University; University of Putra Malaysia) for research	Membership in Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in Asia Pacific Institutional partnerships with Sanata Dharma University (planning stage); Open University Malaysia; Center for Logistics Management Studies; Taylor's University, Malaysia (active)	Membership in University Mobility in Asia and Pacific; Higher Education Consortium Partnership Inbound and outbound student exchange Active partnerships with universities (e.g. National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan; Politeknik Piksi Ganesha, Indonesia)
<i>Resource</i>			
<i>Human resource</i>	PhD scholarships to staff (international and local through CHED scholarships) Internationalisation of faculty/hiring of foreign-trained PhD faculty and researchers Attendance/participation in international conference/paper presentation	PhD scholarships to staff (through CHED scholarships) Attendance/participation in international conference/paper presentation	Attendance/participation in international conference/paper presentation
<i>Infrastructural</i>	Construction of facilities (e.g. International Student and Cultural Center)		
<i>Financial</i>	Exploring external funding (i.e. Erasmus Mundus Fund) in development of proposals for joint degree programmes with foreign universities		
<i>Institutional leadership</i>	Increased role of Office for Institutional Linkages Drafting of a policy framework for joint/dual degree programmes	Review of institutional plan (CorePlan 2020)	Creation of Office for International Linkages for Research and Development
<b>Source:</b> Based on data gathered			

**Table II.** Summary list of major regionalisation approaches and initiatives

Accreditation is common among all three but comes in different types. HEI A has taken advantage of its membership in the AUN to pursue the regional AUN-Quality Assurance Standard Accreditation, whereas HEI B is focused on local accreditation provided by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities. HEI C's engineering and computing programs, on the other hand, are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). This varying focus on accreditation may be attributed to resource and relevancy factors. Accreditation is an expensive investment for institutions, which may explain why HEI B has chosen to focus on local accreditation owing to its nature as a private institution and with no state support.

For HEI C, the ABET accreditation may be viewed as lending more weight and significance to its programmes because it is international.

Another notable programmatic initiative of the HEIs was niche building and development. Given the emphasis on comparability and competitiveness associated with regionalisation, degree programme initiatives were geared towards harnessing, strengthening and/or developing new niches in areas and fields of study. HEI A's postgraduate short-term course for credit offered through the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture University Consortium, as well as the Transnational PhD Program for Leading Professionals offered through the Nagoya Asian Satellite Campus, both build on the institution's niches in agriculture, biotechnology and environmental science. HEI B is positioning its degree programme on Digital Illustration and Animation as a possible draw for foreign students. HEI C is crafting a new niche that marries engineering technology and entrepreneurship through partnerships with universities in Taiwan and China. Taking advantage of the Philippines' niche in English language education, all three HEIs also offer some form of non-degree English Language course designed primarily for non-English speakers and students coming mainly from countries like South Korea. Academic linkages and partnerships with universities, both in research and instruction, were also closely tied with the development and creation of niches. For HEIs A and C, its roster of partner universities from within Asia/Southeast Asia are institutions with the same or similar academic niches like Kasetsart University (Thailand) for HEI A and National Cheng Kung University (Taiwan) for HEI C.

As far as synchronising systems, only HEI A has shifted its academic calendar to August in order to synchronise with the calendars of other Southeast Asian universities. HEI B as a provincial university has yet to shift its calendar system, a move that the institution argues should be a decision that needs to be made along with other HEIs in the local community because of profitability issues, competition for local student enrolment and other socio-cultural considerations. HEI C has continued to follow its quarter system, an arrangement that does not seem to pose a conflict as far as foreign student exchange is concerned.

*4.2.2 Resource.* Much of the HEIs' focus on resource development as part of regionalisation is the professionalisation of its staff. This includes encouragement of faculty members to avail of scholarships and grants for PhD studies, and support in attendance in international conferences. These two are also closely tied to financial initiatives. All administrator respondents of the three HEIs agreed that there has been considerable increase in financial support when it comes to advanced studies and conference attendance and participation compared to previous years. However, it remains limited due to increased competition. For HEIs B and C that are both private institutions and receive no state support, initiatives that require financial resource must be tempered and must be viewed in terms of greater returns for the institution as HEI C-A2 explained:

The main challenge is that because we are private and for-profit, we have to be conservative with our efforts, with the spending. As much as possible, any move you make should have a corresponding return or at the very least, it should not cost you money, which [then] hampers our efforts [because] it means you can only go so far.

Next to professionalisation, much of the resource initiatives were also concentrated on improving infrastructural resources. This is particularly evident in HEI A, a state-funded institution that has seen the development and construction of infrastructures like the International Student and Cultural Centre, pursued as part of the institution's internationalisation objective.

*4.2.3 Institutional leadership.* All three HEIs acknowledge the value of internationalisation. HEIs A and C have explicit, clearly articulated internationalisation

goals in their vision-mission statements. For these two institutions, the direction is towards global recognition where HEI A aspires to become “a globally competitive graduate and research university”, and HEI C seeks to “be among the best universities in the world”. For HEI B, there exists a strong local mission, the development of the local community, but it also recognises the benefits of and contributions it can make to the broader global context as expressed in its vision-mission statement: “To contribute to and benefit from global society for the transformation of the Filipino nation”.

The inclusion of this institutional goal that is reflective of and relating to globalisation, particularly for HEIs A and C, was found to be a crucial element used to rationalise and justify its pursuit of regionalisation and by extension, internationalisation initiatives. It legitimised the creation of structures and mechanisms such as facilitative or coordinating units that undertake the task of regionalisation; and the development and institutionalisation of supportive policies, among others. For HEI A, this was evident in the increased role and visibility of the Office for International Linkages in protocols and procedures concerning institutional partnerships, while in the case of HEI C, it has led to the creation of the Office for International Linkages for Research and Development that has been tasked to coordinate and oversee all international research and development collaborations of the institution. For HEI B, the addition of an international relations function to the original alumni office was a first attempt to suggest a modicum sense of international function or mission. Respondents of HEI B though insisted that to be able to truly commit to regionalisation or internationalisation, a separate office with a firmer internationalisation mandate should be created.

The crafting and implementation of institutional policies that create an enabling and conducive environment for regionalisation, was also recognised as a critical initiative. A significant move for HEI A’s Graduate School, which remains one of the primary units of the university that actively promotes and pursues regionalisation/internationalisation, was the drafting of a framework for implementation of joint and degree programmes to address issues like crediting and fees, and enable the actual development of such programmes with partner universities. For HEIs B and C, responses from both the administrators and faculty members point to the need for more clear-cut institutional policies that will address issues such as de-loading of teachers and crediting of research collaborative work, and fairer compensation terms for those who will be going on faculty exchange or serving as visiting professor in partner universities.

Juxtaposing these initiatives with Knight’s FOPA, it was found that most of the regionalisation initiatives of the HEIs were largely functional, which Knight (2013) describes as those involving programmes and policies directed at strengthening collaboration and partnership. Organisational approaches at the institution level were limited to the creation of designated internationalisation units and offices, and the focus on membership and engagement in inter-university networks and organisations to strengthen institutional networks. Political approaches were minimal, and may be due largely to the fact that these require inter-country agreements, and the current initiatives of the universities are still primarily facilitated by inter-institutional arrangements.

#### *4.3 Role of ASEAN Integration in shaping regionalisation initiatives*

The ASEAN Integration is seen both as a consciousness and an opportunity that underpins the pursuit of regionalisation. Across all three HEIs, the ASEAN Integration seems to foster a positive consciousness that supports an increased Southeast Asian/Asian orientation or bias. Study participants in all three institutions attested that the Integration cultivates not just multi-cultural awareness, but also a more heightened awareness and focus on the region of Southeast Asia as the context to operate in. In addition to exposure gained from the

interactions, albeit limited, with some foreign students and attendees in international conferences, the mention of the ASEAN Integration in institutional discussions, workshops, in-house conferences and events has prompted faculty and administrators to explore and use materials and literature that offer perspectives from other Southeast Asian nations. One illustration from HEI A-R2 is the increased use and recognition of templates, models and literature on best practices from Asia and Southeast Asia not just the West or the Philippines. Indeed, this Asian/Southeast Asian-centric mindset is seen as a way of elevating the region and veering away from the traditional impositions of western perspectives. Furthermore, this focus on regional development appears to also be closely intertwined with nation building as suggested by HEI A-F10:

I see more young Filipinos exposed to the socio-cultural realities of other ASEAN nations so they will deepen the appreciation of Asia's cultural heritage and diversity, resist the cultural domination of the West, and use their exposure in enriching the cultural consciousness, appreciation and empowerment of Filipinos.

Another positive consciousness that the ASEAN Integration appears to foster is positional awareness. The Integration, as all administrator respondents and most faculty responses from the three HEIs noted, has encouraged an increased awareness of the need to look at the quality and comparability of their education, their position as an educational institution in the overall regional context, and what they should be doing to respond to the challenges of the Integration. It has encouraged questions among constituents, such as "Where are we?" or "What should we do?" HEI C-A1 explained:

The ASEAN Integration propelled us to revisit our internationalisation efforts and capitalised on its objectives to find valuable partners in the region. It helped us recognise the need to prepare the students to adapt to local/regional opportunities while being global in perspective.

On the other hand, there are also traces of negative and ambivalent consciousness wherein the Integration was noted as a "top-down" and forced initiative. As HEI A-F4 expressed:

It is more of a top-down-hands-down approach where we only follow what the focus of the top [administration] wanted without really understanding how to make use of the tools and practices of the integration.

Such view certainly seems to add to Woldegiorgis' (2013) suggestion that regionalisation is a top-down process. At the same time, there also appears to be certain ambivalence towards the ASEAN Integration. For instance, while administrator respondents of HEI B agreed that the Integration cultivates positional awareness of the institution, three also described it as "difficult to grasp" and the institution's initiatives as "sporadic and fragmented". In HEI C, two faculty respondents noted that the institution has been engaging in partnerships with foreign universities long before the Integration and thus, its introduction did not require much adjustment on their part, nor are its benefits distinctly felt or visible. The apparent lack of clarity of the Integration goals and how it specifically translates to higher education initiatives also echo Ratanawijitrasin's (2015) critique of the ASEAN Integration's Five-Year Work Plan on Education as not providing specific policies and measures for implementation. At the institutional level, these types of consciousness also reflect how the HEIs are translating the Integration's goals into their respective initiatives and are contextualised in sector or constituency roles and responsibilities.

Likewise, the Integration is seen as a platform of opportunities. First, it serves as an opportunity for institutional review and redirection and the creation of mechanisms that will undertake regionalisation or internationalisation functions. Second, it provides the HEIs an opportunity to seek and pursue programmatic developments, particularly in the areas of curricular and degree programme innovations; and the establishment and strengthening of educational niches that will enhance the institutions' track record, give them a comparative

advantage, or cement their position as educational institutions in the region. Most administrator respondents noted that while foreign partnerships and linkages with universities were already in place even prior to the ASEAN Integration, the Integration has provided an added impetus for the institutions to further their initiatives and use Southeast Asia as their point of reference or operating context. For HEIs A and C, the Integration also seems to offer broader opportunities for research and industry collaborations that can also improve and deepen institutional relevance through knowledge sharing.

#### *4.4 Issues and implications*

The findings presented in the earlier section revealed a number of noteworthy issues relating to how regionalisation and the ASEAN Integration are approached and viewed at the institutional level, and how these relate to national and regional discourses on the Integration.

*4.4.1 The interchangeability of internationalisation and regionalisation.* The prevailing notion of regionalisation as being part of and a foundation for internationalisation leads to an evident interchangeability of the two terms. For the HEIs, regionalisation is part of a bigger goal of internationalising their institutions. The geo-political and orientation emphasis on Asia/Southeast Asia to refer to the region suggests that regionalisation is viewed as smaller in scope than internationalisation because it is confined first and foremost to this particular geo-political boundary. Other than this, HEI constituents consider regionalisation and internationalisation as having the same purposes, objectives, approaches and activities. Any form of regionalisation is also internationalisation. This interchangeability further asserts how these two notions, often construed to be contradictory, are in fact closely tied to each other (Yang, 2002), and how their approaches are symbiotic and complementary as posited by Knight (2012). The HEIs' idea, for example, of subscribing to regional standards as a way to be competitive is not only limited to being comparable with universities in the region, but is also a step at levelling up in the international arena.

This interchangeability of the two terms also reflects how regionalisation and the ASEAN Integration in higher education are discussed at the national level. In the Philippine context, internationalisation is the more popular, widely used and pervasive term used by education experts, school leaders and administrators, and even education officials. CHED Memorandum Order No. 55 Series of 2016 titled, "Policy Framework and Strategies on the Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education", clearly establishes internationalisation as the response to the ASEAN Integration. The document further indicates one of the Commission's objectives for pursuing internationalisation as a strategy, which is to "develop Philippine HEIs as productive members of the international academic community" (CHED, 2016, p. 6). Clearly then, internationalisation is regarded as one of the broad goals of the Philippine higher education sector, and as a response to the Integration, regionalisation is only but a subset of this bigger goal. The ASEAN Integration provides a convenient platform for pursuing regionalisation because it contributes to the internationalisation of higher education.

*4.4.2 Prioritising regionalisation.* Given how internationalisation has been positioned as the response to the ASEAN Integration, regionalisation then, in and of itself, does not appear to be the priority of the HEIs, but rather internationalisation. This is clearly evident in the articulated vision-mission statements of HEIs A and C, for example, and in the number of academic linkages and partnerships, previous, current and under negotiations, with universities that are well outside of the geo-political unit of Southeast Asia. As a subset of internationalisation, regionalisation facilitated through the ASEAN Integration provides a good starting point for exploring academic collaborations, but as most respondents

explained, the Integration does not limit them from reaching out only to immediate or neighbouring universities.

Likewise, in looking at how the HEIs regard the objectives of regionalisation *vis-à-vis* the ASEAN's broad goal of using education to advance the region's human development agenda, it appears that the ASEAN Integration cannot also be separated from objectives of institutional and national building. At the conceptual level, the Asian/Southeast Asian orientation places emphasis on increased regional consciousness and awareness, but in more practical and concrete terms, regionalisation is seen as contributing to nation building such as when faculty members train or study in other universities in Southeast Asia or maximise their partnerships with foreign Southeast Asian universities to fill in inadequacies or gaps in expertise or facilities; or to strengthen and enhance their programmatic niches by partnering with universities that have notable reputations in the niches they wish to develop. Indeed, a closer look at the motives of the HEIs for exploring partnerships and collaborations suggests that they cooperate, first and foremost, to improve individual institutional capacities and boost institutional track record.

#### *4.5 Raising awareness on the ASEAN Integration among relevant stakeholders*

The negative and ambivalent consciousness of HEI constituents towards the ASEAN Integration also underscores the importance of communicating the broader goals of the Integration and how it can be translated to institutional and individual (sectoral) roles and actions. While the study found that there were efforts to communicate the Integration, these were minimal and in most cases, present only an overly broad discussion of the ASEAN Integration's implications, such as job placement and employability of graduates. Little discussion has been made on the implications of the Integration on both the professional development and responsibilities of the constituents of the HEIs. There also appears to be little active discussion going on at the smaller units of the institutions (i.e. departmental or sectoral levels). The importance of targeted discourse and awareness-raising efforts that emphasise other issues of the Integration such as pedagogical innovations, teaching styles for multi-cultural classrooms, resource and facility-sharing and collaborative teaching/instruction should not be discounted.

## **5. Conclusions**

Constructions and definitions of regionalisation closely intersect with notions of internationalisation particularly in terms of purpose, outcome and activities. The overlap further positions regionalisation as a subset or precursor to internationalisation, and leads to a tendency to interchange both terms. A major point of difference, on the other hand, is in terms of notions of geographic location and proximity where the geo-political unit of the region is identified as those that include the immediate and the neighbours, in this case, Southeast Asia and Asia, as well as those that share common and similar interests and backgrounds. In this regard, it is differentiated from internationalisation in that the latter covers those outside of this geo-political unit. Congruent with this, regionalisation is also associated with the creation of a region-first orientation or a form of Asian/Southeast Asian-centrism where the geo-political region is placed first over other regions, and therefore becomes the frame of reference of HEIs in their internationalisation activities.

The HEIs' regionalisation approaches and initiatives are largely functional, particularly in terms of academic and programmatic initiatives, namely student exchange; accreditation; curriculum development adherence to outcomes-based education standards; and niche building and development. Institutional partnerships and linkages are facilitated through and begin within the institutional network of the HEIs. There is more concerted effort from HEI A to concentrate on region-oriented academic initiatives, such as membership in the AUN,

accreditation from the AUN-QA of its degree programmes, and the academic calendar shift. HEI B's regionalisation activities are still largely in the exploratory and planning stage in part due to its being a provincial university with a strong local mission, while HEI C is focused on elevating its regional position through international accreditation of its niche programmes. Initiatives relating to resource development largely point to the strengthening of the institutions' human resource through an intensified campaign to encourage faculty and staff to acquire PhD and postgraduate degrees, and infrastructural development. In terms of institutional leadership, a key initiative is the creation of and the increased emphasis given to facilitative or coordinating units that are tasked to undertake regionalisation/internationalisation efforts. Moreover, at the institutional level, the regionalisation initiatives denote a less formalised and more open relationship, hence a softer form of collaboration, rather than more structured and formalised ones that require inter-country intervention or facilitated through inter-country arrangements.

The ASEAN Integration drives the regionalisation of the HEIs by serving both as a consciousness and an opportunity. On one end, it has encouraged heightened multi-cultural awareness; an increased emphasis and focus on the region (Asia/Southeast Asia) as a context; and of positional awareness driving competitiveness. On the other, it has also created impressions of the Integration as a vague and top-down initiative. As an opportunity, the ASEAN Integration is used to legitimise and rationalise institutional planning and redirection, foreign university partnerships and networking, and increased knowledge sharing.

As HEIs recognise and acknowledge the reality of the ASEAN Integration, there is a strong need for HEIs in the Philippines to pursue more concerted efforts beyond curricular and degree programme initiatives at the broad institutional level, and also focus on the individual/sectoral level (i.e. among groups of faculty members, research personnel, administrative staff, etc.). Awareness-raising efforts that will focus on the strategic and effective communication of the goals of the ASEAN Integration (regional level), how these translate to university-level programmes and initiatives (institutional) and what it means, what it can do, and the roles of the different sectors of the institution, are needed.

Alongside institutional leadership reforms and programmatic and curricular initiatives, there is a need to pay attention to the review, crafting and implementation of institutional policies that will not just legitimise regionalisation and internationalisation initiatives, but more importantly, provide an enabling environment that incentivises, encourages, promotes and gives adequate support to university stakeholders to actively pursue and engage in regionalisation and internationalisation.

#### Note

1. Research and extension personnel (REPs) are unique only to HEI A.

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