Regions Defined

Course Description
This course is designed as a general introduction to regional integration, and is particularly aimed at non-specialists. It reviews some of the main definitions of what constitutes a region, and identifies the basic concepts and approaches to integration. The course portrays both the diversity and the hierarchical nature of regionalism, and calls attention to the motivations that lead groups of states and regions to elect for one particular form of regional cooperation over another.

The course guides the learner through a description of integration across the political, economic and security arenas, and highlights the existence of both micro-regions (sub-national) and macro-regions (supranational). Attention is given to both long-established and more recent systems of regional integration, and to the particular forms that regionalism has taken in Asia, Latin America, Africa and Europe. The overall aim of this course is to equip the reader with the basic tools necessary to understand the variety and scope of cooperation across countries and within countries, while appreciating the dynamic and complex nature of such arrangements.

source : http://ocw.unu.edu/programme-for-comparative-regional-integration studies/introducing-regional-integration

What is a Region?
The word region stems from Latin regio, which denotes "direction, point of the compass", but later develops by association with regere, to direct or rule. Region was defined as the territory controlled by a regent and his regiment, so it should not come as a big surprise that a region had indeterminate boundaries. While this points at a potential essence of 'region', it is impossible to assert any original meaning to the concept as its particular connotations have varied greatly over history and across different cultural contexts.

What, then, is a region? It's a simple question, yet one that defies a simple answer.

The term "region" means different things to different people. Regions can be defined variously by: geography, economic interaction, institutional or governmental jurisdiction, or by social or cultural characteristics.

The Problem of Definition
"Regions are subjective artistic devices, and they must be shaped to fit the hand of the individual user. There can be no standard definition of a region, and there are no universal rules for recognizing, delimiting, and describing regions. Far too much time can be wasted in the trivial exercise of trying to draw lines around 'regions'".

This quote, given by Hart in 1982 Quote states well that "there is no standard definition of a region". Regions are not preordained, given, or natural, and a region is not a formal organisation.

Regions are not somewhere 'out there', waiting to be discovered. No, they are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed through interactions between various actors in response to changes in their internal and external environment on the basis of what is most appropriate for the pursuit of their commonly held goals.

For instance, the fact that the Mediterranean country Italy became a member of a regional organisation called North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was certainly not determined

by geography, but was due to an act of political imagination and a subsequent political process. Today the location of a Mediterranean state in the North Atlantic is not any longer considered as something "odd".

The construction of regions is part of the perpetual transformation of the international system, in which regions emerge, subsist and eventually cease to exist. Or, what we might label the process of regional integration and disintegration.

This also means that regions are not unitary or homogeneous units, they overlap and come in plural.

Although regions are not naturally constituted geographical units, they cannot exist without having a physical reality. Thus, territoriality is a sine qua non of regions. The territorial shaping of a region implies that regions require some kind of boundaries. After all, a territory can be defined as 'a cohesive section of the earth's surface that is distinguished from its surroundings by a boundary'. Boundaries have a dual role in the creation of a 'sense of place', namely the establishment of who is 'inside' and who is 'outside'. Regional borders are the products of a continuous process of construction and deconstruction, which implies that regional borders are mutable.

An example of changing perceptions of a region is the change from regarding the border of Europe as falling between East and West Germany to including all the former Eastern European countries as potential members of the EU.

Internal Dynamics of Regions
Regions have their own internal dynamic: they may become important vehicles of power, shaping the spaces of governance, economy and culture. However, it should not be neglected that each region forms a part of the global system, and thus, needs to be understood in a global perspective as well.

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Geographic and Non-Geographic Regions
While regions are most defined in terms of geographic proximity, it is equally possible to opt for a non-geographic definition. For instance, "currency" region, a group of states, which rely on one member's currency and whereby these states are not necessarily located in close proximity.

If we take a closer look at the geographical contiguousness of some of the formal regions (Andean Group; APEC; ANZCERTA; ASEAN; CACM; CARICOM; EU; MERCOSUR; NAFTA; SAARC; SACU; SADC), then almost all the regions pass the geographical test (see the Regional Integration Information System) The exceptions include the EU, SADC, APEC and ANZERTA. For instance, Mauritius is a member of SADC, but is separated from the others by both sea and a non-member country. APEC stretches from the west coast of Malaysia to the east coast of the USA, and is as outstretched as the WTO. Geography does

not identify which country should be included in a region. Thus, geography is at best an indicator, a sort of starting point.

But, as Katzenstein formulated: "Regional designations are no more "real" in terms of geography than they are "natural" in terms of culture". For instance, if we talk about the "West", it encompasses now Western Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, and Japan. The "Islamic world" is by no means limited to the Middle East, but stretches from Indonesia to Nigeria and Northern Africa. Thus, as products of culture and economics, history and politics, geographically defined regions change over time.

A Typology of Regions
Regions can be classified according to many criteria. In this module, we use the following - widely spread - typology.

Mirco-Regions
"We are more and more Tuscans, Sicilians, Walloons and Welshmen, and less and less Italians, Frenchmen and Englishmen, or in other words we are becoming more and more Europeans."

A micro-region can be defined as a territorial area that is smaller than a state to which it belongs, but larger than a municipality. Typical examples of such micro-regions are provinces, districts, departments or even mega-cities. A special case of a micro-region is one that spreads across different states (cross-border region).

Micro-regionalism is related to macro-regionalism in the way that the larger regionalisation (and globalisation) processes create possibilities for smaller economically dynamic sub-national or transnational regions to get a direct access to the larger regional economic system, often bypassing the nation-state and the national capital, sometimes even as an alternative or in opposition to the challenged state and formal state-led regionalisms.

An example of where the typology of micro-regions are commonly used is the Assembly of European Regions (AER).

Cross-Border Regions
Since the end of the eighties, cross-border region building processes have gained momentum. A cross-border region is actually a special case of a micro-region, whereby the micro-region spreads across different states.

An example of a dynamic cross-border region in North America is the so-called "Cascadia", at the western edge of the US-Canadian border.

Cascadia, in fact, is presented as a rather flexible notion. Depending on the interests and agendas involved, different 'boundaries' of Cascadia are constructed. Mappings of Cascadia range from a conceptualisation that includes only the watershed of the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound to one called "Main Street", running from Vancouver south through Seattle to Portland and Eugene; to a depiction of a two-state, one province agglomeration of British Columbia, Washington State and sometimes even Oregon; to a much larger approach envisioning the cross-border entity as a "Pacific Northwest Economic Region", including five states, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska, and two provinces, British Columbia and Alberta.

Some scholars state that these presentations of variously scaled partnerships are not geopolitical in the sense that they represent areas of influence or conflict, but are rather geo-economic framings of the region.

Macro-Regions
Macro-regions, sometimes called international regions or world-regions, refer to large territorial units comprising different states. A former definition of macro-region is: 'A limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence' (Joseph Nye). This is a valuable definition, but seen the increasingly interdependent world, a more accurate definition is the one provided by Barry Buzan: "A spatially coherent territory composed of two or more states".

Typical examples are the 'Pacific region' or the 'Mediterranean region'. These entities are often characterised by their formal level of integration (cf. the European Union in Europe, Mercosur in Latin-America; see also chapter two). From a geographical perspective one can distinguish the following regional 'realms' in the world:

- **Europe**
- **Russia**
- **North America**
- **Middle America**
- **South America**
- **North Africa/Southwest Asia**
- **Sub-saharan Africa**
- **South Asia**
- **East Asia**
- **Southeast Asia**
- **Austral Realm**
- **Pacific Realm**

Sub-Regions
Within the realms of Macro-regions one can also identify smaller regional entities, sometimes called 'sub-regions'. In Europe for instance, one can refer to sub-regions that reflect old historical formations such as the Swedish, Baltic Empire, the Habsburg Empire ... But not only nations, also micro-regions can form a sub-region. The old Hanseatic project in Europe seems to be revitalised today as Hamburg/Bremen develops more links with Baltic states in response to the Southern German growth pole centred on Munich that in turn forms a 'growth-triangle' with Milan and Barcelona.

However, setting the boundaries of some of these realms is a daunting task, because they are susceptible to different interpretations. This is especially the case with Europe. Talking of 'Europe' can mean different things to different people.

"There is today much more to identifying 'Europe' than looking on a map: politics is more important than geography. How people choose to define Europe will have a significant impact on how they think both about security (in a broad sense) in Europe and Europe's relations with the outside world. The chosen definition will provide the basis of the answer to the crucial question: who is 'us' and who is 'them' politically speaking?" Quote

For instance, to many people Europe means simply the European Union, thus, they are referring to the area covered by the EU member-states, or what in geography is called Western Europe. However, the impending wave of accessions will inevitably lead to a broader interpretation frame of Europe.

Sometimes, Europe is used to describe the area stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, which refers to the "whole" of Europe and, thus, includes two former Soviet Union Republics and a part of the Russian Federation.

Another interpretation of Europe is the one, which refers to the area stretching from Poland to Portugal. The well-known argument of some famous Eastern European authors, such as Milan Kundera, Gyorgy Konrad, goes as follows: 'Our East-Central European countries belong to Europe, in fact, they are culturally and historically among the most important parts of Europe." The reference to Europe in the designation already states the fact that East and Central European countries form part of Europe. These kind of arguments were especially ventilated during the period prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and placed the major dividing line between the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries.

But Europe can also be seen as the European Security Area, represented by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and whereby Europe stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok. This security Europe includes states, which do not belong to the geographic Europe.

Europe is, however, not an exception. A similar story can be told about the Middle East. There is no single agreed definition of the political and geographical boundaries of the Middle East. For instance, in some parts of Asia the region is referred to as West Asia, however, this does not include Egypt, the Sudan, and the Magreb, which are located in Africa but are generally conceived as countries of the Middle East. During the nineteenth century the European powers considered the East as the Eurasian region, which started where the Western civilization ended, namely the African continent and the Ottoman Empire. In those days, the Eastern Question was the term to describe the great strategic competition among Britain, France, Russia and Germany for access to and control over this region. And as the influence of the West expanded further into Asia, a distinction between the Near East and the Far East was made.

Middle East Example
The term the 'Middle East' has an exogenous policy-contingent origin and evolution.

Mahan, a U.S. naval officer and strategist coined the term the 'Middle East' in 1902, which referred to the area between Arabia and India, namely the Persian Gulf. He stated that in order to secure the route to India and to keep Russia in check Great Britain should assume responsibility for the security of the Gulf area. The geographical boundaries of the 'Middle East' were not fixed; the term was used as a kind of 'shifting strategic concept' to indicate the importance of the area and the upcoming challenge between Russia and Britain in Asia. After the First World War, Britain and France had gained control over Transjordan, Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and as such the 'Middle East' was expanded to include these territories as well. Except, now the term was not only linked to the security of the region, but was as well tied to the large resources of oil in the area. During World War II, Great Britain started to use the 'Middle East' concept to describe the area covering all Asian and North African lands to the west of India. In the same period, the U.S. got more involved in the region and followed the British interpretation of the region. For both countries, the region was not only important for geo-strategic reasons, but also for its tremendous reserves of oil. Who actually formed part of the region was of lesser importance. However, this changed with the increasing number of Jewish settlers in Palestine and the eventual establishment of the state Israel (1948). Thus, the 'Middle East' was used for purposes external to the region, without consideration for the interests of the people concerned. Basically, the security of the 'Middle East' boiled down to defending the 'Middle East' from any external power which could form a threat to the interests of Britain and the U.S.. During the Cold War, the Anglo-American policy was directed on the prevention of communism to gain access to the region by keeping the area stable, which implied keeping bases in the region.

The exogenous policy-contingent origins of the term 'Middle East' render the term highly contested. After the first Arab-Israeli War, when the Arab forces were defeated, the peoples of the region started to scrutinise the 'Middle East' concept. Those were the days when Arab nationalism ran rampant. The Arab vision, which dates back to the 19th Century and which is primarily rooted in culture and reinforced by history, geography and demography, was revived. The term 'Arab regional order' was put forward to replace the contested concept of the 'Middle East'. The argument of Ali Eddin Hellal Dessouki and Jamil Matar was that the 'Middle East' represented a political term instead of referring to a geographical area; that the term was not derived from the nature of the area or its political, cultural, civilizational and demographic characteristics, because when one uses the term 'Middle', one has to ask 'middle' in reference to what; plus the term tears up the Arab homeland as a distinct unit since it has always included non-Arab states. Instead of portraying the region as an ethnic mosaic the term should underpin the Arab unity. The 'Arab regional order' included all Arab states: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine/PLO, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates. The advantage of the term 'Arab regional order' is that it is generated from the inside; the disadvantage is that there is no consideration for the non-Arab peoples in the region plus that it ignores the role played by Israel, Iran and Turkey in the region.

There are others, however, who emphasise the 'Mediterranean' as an alternative regional conception. This conception links the South European states to the other Mediterranean littoral states. Thus, it encompasses two prominent international regions: the geographical space which borders the northwest sector of the Mediterranean, which is labelled the EU, and the geographical area covering the south-eastern flank of the basis, which is labelled the Middle East. The sub-regions included in the Mediterranean are southern Europe, the Balkans, the Maghreb, and the Mashreq.

The Mediterranean dimension of the region is not new, but was definitely given a boost after the Cold War, and especially after the Gulf War in 1990-1991. Notwithstanding that the concept 'Mediterranean' is widely used, the concept remains vague and is predominantly used to describe the cooperation between European countries and Arab states. This cooperation ranges from bilateral cooperation agreements under the 'Mediterranean' policy; multilateral relations with all Arab states via the Euro-Arab dialogue (established in 1973); multilateral agreements with sub-regional organisations in the Middle East (Arab Magreb Union; Gulf Cooperation Council; Arab League); to the Conference of Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), and the Euro-Mediterranean process established by the EU at the European Council Meeting in Barcelona in 1995. Whereby the major issues of EU's concern are: energy security; regional stability; and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. The impression, however, remains that the 'Mediterranean' concept is rather conceived as a sort of meeting ground for Europe and the Middle East than as a region in itself. The advantage of a Mediterranean vision lies in the fact that is not contested. True enough, there are not too many proponents of the idea, but there are not too many opponents either. In any event, it does not provoke hostility in the Arab region, which was clearly the case with the 'Middle East' label.

source : http://ocw.unu.edu/

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