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ASEAN AS ‘COMPARTMENTALIZED REGIONALISM’: A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

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Abstrak

Artikel ini menawarkan cara pandang baru untuk melihat ASEAN dengan memperkenalkan konsep “compartmentalised regionalism” (“regionalisme terkompartemen-mentalisasi”). Pandangan umum para praktisi diplomasi ASEAN maupun para akademisi cenderung melihat sejarah ASEAN sebagai evolusi linear sebuah proyek regional yang berfokus pada dimensi politik dan keamanan menjadi sebuah proyek regional yang bersifat multidimensional melalui “perluasan dan pendalaman” (“widening and deepening”). Gagasan “compartmentalised regionalism” mengenali perkembangan ASEAN sebagai perkembangan dua proyek regionalisme yang terpisah namun diletakkan dalam satu nama. Kedua proyek regionalisme ini memiliki pengaturan yang berbeda, didorong oleh aktor-aktor yang berlainan, serta bekerja berdasarkan logika yang tak sama. Dengan demikian, perkembangan ASEAN selayaknya tidak dilihat hanya sebagai “perluasan dan pendalaman” (“widening and deepening”), namun sebagai perkembangan dua proyek regionalisme yang berbeda itu dan interaksi yang kompleks di antara keduanya.

Kata Kunci

Regionalisme, ASEAN, Regionalisasi, Asia Tenggara, Integrasi Ekonomi

Abstract

This article would propose Compartmentalized Regionalism as a new conceptual lens to examine ASEAN as regionalism projects. Generally, ASEAN tends to be treated as a linear evolution of a political-security regional project into a multidimensional one through widening and deepening process. The idea of Compartmentalized Regionalism thus acknowledges ASEAN’s development as a two separate regionalism projects but in a single entity. Both projects have different norms and settings reinforced by distinct actors, and functioned based on peculiar logic. Thus, ASEAN’s development should not be seen merely as widening and deepening process, but also how these two projects develop and the complex interaction between the two.

Keywords

Regionalism, ASEAN, Regionalization, Southeast Asia, Economic Integration.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to offer a different way to understand ASEAN regionalism. ASEAN regionalism is often understood as a multidimensional but unified regionalism project. In official ASEAN documents, ASEAN Political and Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community are referred to as the “three pillars of ASEAN Community” that are “closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing for the purpose of ensuring durable peace, stability and shared prosperity in

the region” (ASEAN, 2012). ASEAN and its member countries’ officials frequently mention that the three pillars are considered as three equal elements of ASEAN regional integration.

In a longer duration, the history of ASEAN is often portrayed as similar to the development of an organism: evolving from a simple creature into a more complex one. Officials and academics alike describe ASEAN regionalism as an evolution as it is “widening and deepening.” They believe that ASEAN’s biography is simple: its formation in 1967 was dominated by political and strategic consideration but then continues to become more and more complex by including other areas, mainly economic integration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2012; Yue, 1996). In this sense, both mainstream official and academic literature consider ASEAN’s economic regionalism as a continuation of ASEAN’s effort to manage regional political and strategic environment.

In contrast to this view, this article tries to elaborate an idea that ASEAN’s economic integration is actually a different regional project separated from the project to manage political and strategic issues in the region, but later combined under a single banner of ASEAN. ASEAN’s economic integration did not spring as a continuation from Bali Concord I, but has its own drive and its own supporters. The latter successfully convinced ASEAN countries to put it under the banner of ASEAN.

This article argues that despite the official rhetoric that the three pillars are three equal elements of a single and unified ASEAN community, it is better to understand ASEAN as two distinct projects of regionalism. They are distinct because they have distinct arrangements, constructed by distinct proponents, and operating on distinct logics.

Why three pillars but only two distinct regional projects? While considered as an equal pillar to Political and Security and Economic pillars, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community is considerably less coherent and less developed. Rather than a distinct regional project, it could be considered as an assemblage of responses and measures towards the development of the two regional projects.

In order to do so, this article is organized into the following structure. First, the article explores existing literature on regionalism to show the limits of both “old” and “new regionalism” literature in understanding ASEAN regionalism. Second, the article elaborates the concept of “compartmentalised regionalism” and why it could help us to understand ASEAN regionalism better. It offers to deconstruct the mainstream

understanding of ASEAN promoted by "widening and deepening" literature which argues that ASEAN is a single regional project that has been evolving to be covering multiple dimensions. This article attempts to explain how this "compartments" have different arrangements, are driven by distinguishable proponents, with distinct logics, but remain to be identified under a single banner of regionalism (i.e. ASEAN). Lastly, this article reflects on the contemporary development that threatens the delicate balance between "compartments" in ASEAN's "compartmentalised regionalism".

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding Regionalism: Old, New, and What?

Before further discussion, it is important to clarify what this article means by regionalism and how it is related to other commonly used concepts such as "regionalisation" and "regional cooperation." However, it must be acknowledged that these concepts could be understood differently by different scholars. Thus, this clarification of the concepts served more as an attempt to explain the position of this article rather than an intellectual exercise to determine which definition is correct and which is not (or to elaborate the details of the conceptual debates), which is beyond the scope of this article.

This article understands regionalism as "political project to reorganize a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines." This definition is based upon Anthony Payne and Andrew Gamble's definition of regionalism (i.e. "state-led or states-led project designed to reorganize a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines") but with the acknowledgement that states are not the only actor involved as the drivers in such process (Payne & Gamble, 1996, p. 2).

In existing literature on regionalism, some scholars use the concept of regionalism interchangeably with regionalization, while some others differentiate the two. Those who see the two concepts as different concepts also differ in explaining why the two concepts are different. Some scholars distinguish the two through understanding of "regionalism" as marked by a top down process (mainly driven by political authority, i.e. state) whilst seeing "regionalisation" as representing a more bottom up process (which sprang from the need for transnational relations due to economic interdependency). Some others argue that the relationship between "regionalism" and "regionalisation" is similar to the relationship between "nationalism" and "nation building" (Camroux, 2007). This article sees that the two as distinct concepts, with regionalism referring to "a *political project* to reorganize a particular regional space" whilst regionalisation understood as the "*process*

of forming regions that can emerge both by being planned (means: a political project) or by spontaneous development.”¹ Under these definitions, both are distinct but also could be used interchangeably in some particular contexts. All regionalisms are regionalisation, while not all regionalisation could be understood as regionalism (because not all regionalisation process are planned consciously as a political project).

Regional cooperation, on the other hand, is a wider and more general concept that can be understood as the term to call any kinds of joint efforts by states to solve a specific problem. In Ernst Haas (1970, p. 610) classical definition, regional cooperation is “a vague term covering any interstate activity with less than universal participation designed to meet commonly experienced need.” With abovementioned conceptual understanding, this article is deliberately using the term “regionalism,” since ASEAN is clearly a political project.

The Limits of Regionalism Literature in Understanding ASEAN

Based on the previous conceptual discussion, how to best understand ASEAN? What is exactly ASEAN according to regionalism literature? Some scholars classify ASEAN as “network regionalization,” which means “regional identity-driven response to globalization. (*It*) may acquire significant or more limited range of powers, but relies primarily on non-institutionalized or intergovernmental working methods” (Warleigh-Lack, 2008, p. 52). However, this definition of network regionalisation is too general to understand what ASEAN is conceptually since it is only pointing out that ASEAN is characterised by “non-institutionalised or intergovernmental working methods.” Some other scholar use the term “open regionalism,” implying that the regional project is based on the premise that trade liberalisation and more integration to global economy will benefit its members (Phillips, 2003). Open regionalism is marked by the reduction in barriers on imports from non-member countries that is undertaken when member countries liberalise the trade among themselves, although the degree of liberalisation on imports from non-members need not be as high as that for member countries (Wei & Frankel, 1998). While these features are present in ASEAN regionalism, especially in the ASEAN Economic Community “pillar”, the concept of “open regionalism” could not explain the regional arrangement established on the security dimension through the ASEAN Political Security Community. Thus, this concept could also be considered as unable to understand ASEAN, or at least only understand it partially. In search for better

understanding of ASEAN regionalism, it is important to trace the development in the regionalism studies and comprehend how this development is relevant to the question.

As already being pointed out quite frequently, studies in regionalism started to be developed in 1950s as responses to the development in post-World War II Europe. These early studies on regionalism, first to understand and to prescribe a strategy for the European regional integration but then spread to study other regional project elsewhere, are often lumped together as “Old Regionalism.” This first wave of regionalism studies was halted due to some stagnation in the progress of regional projects in Europe and other regions in 1970s. A new wave of regionalism studies started in 1980s. Many scholars argued that the rejuvenation of interest on regionalism is related to the phenomenon of globalisation. This new wave of regionalism studies often identified as the studies of “New Regionalism.” It must be noted, however, that some scholars advocated for transcending this division of old and new regionalisms (Hettne, 2005).

Old regionalism approaches are often also considered as “political programme,” since it also serves as prescriptions for regional integration. Federalism, an early approach to study regionalism and very influential among the pioneers of European integration, was advocating for the retreat of nation-state and the formation of a new form of political structure that integrate the existing nation-states. The impetus for this argument was the European experience of devastating world wars and the drive to ensure peace in the region. This argument then criticised by functionalism approach, often associated with David Mitrany, which argues that rather than the form (as advocated by the federalists), function is more important. “Form” (i.e. the international/supranational organization) must be established based on “function” (i.e. cooperation and activities around functional needs such as trade, production, welfare, and transportation) (Hettne, 2005, p. 546). Later, functionalists are criticized by neo-functionalists, such as Ernst Haas, who disputed functionalists’ neglect of politics and argued that those “functions” are not merely technical but also political (“technical realm was in fact made technical by a prior political decision”) (Hettne, 2005, p. 546). Integration is not driven by “functional automaticity”, but by political process and the existence of determined actors. In this sense, according to neo-functionalists, increasing level of interdependence would start a process that will lead to political integration. One important mechanism related to this argument is “spillover,” which is “the way in which the creation and deepening of integration in one economic sector would create pressures for further economic integration within and beyond that sector and greater authoritative capacity at the European level” (Hettne, 2005,

p. 546).² Based on this idea, Bela Balassa (1961; 1987) developed an influential concept that regional integration shall take place in five stages: Free trade area will lead to customs union, customs union will lead to common market, common market will lead to economic and monetary union, and finally economic and monetary union will lead to political union. It must be noted that despite being published in 1960s, and thus could be classified in the label of “Old Regionalism,” Balassa’s concept remains influential in shaping our understanding (and strategy of the policy makers) until today (Dieter, 2007). ASEAN integration is often framed under Balassa’s concept, by putting ASEAN Economic Community as an effort to move up from free trade (AFTA) to common market (“single market and production base”).

Despite the existence of internal debates within the “Old Regionalism,” its approaches generally consider regionalism as a linear and relatively mono-dimensional process. Linear means that the process follows a particular trajectory. This does not mean that the process necessarily run in a single direction of progress since the process can be stagnated or even regressing, but the stages (can be explicitly mentioned as in Balassa’s concept or implicitly assumed) are connected as a series of milestones. Mono-dimensional refers to the tendency to see regionalism as something that is happening in one or at least “unified” dimension (e.g. security or economy).

“New Regionalism” approaches are different from its “Old” counterpart by acknowledging the diversity of regionalisms. According to Andrew Hurrell (1995), there are five distinguishing factors that differentiate “New Regionalism” from “Old Regionalism”:

- (1) New Regionalism is very diverse. It comprises of a variety of models/structures/processes of region-building instead of a single norm;
- (2) New Regionalism can involve partnerships between developed and developing countries;
- (3) New Regionalism varies in the level of institutionalization, in contrast to the very formal understanding of region building of the Old Regionalism;
- (4) New Regionalism is multi-dimensional and is blurring the distinction between the economic and the political; and
- (5) New Regionalism mirrors, shapes and requires the construction of a sense of regional identity.

According to Hettne and Soderbaum (2008, pp. 65-66), “New Regionalism” considered new aspects related to the phenomena of globalisation. They also argued that New Regionalism focused on the concept of “regionalism” and “regionalisation” (in contrast of the concept of “regional integration” and “regional cooperation” that were preferred by earlier studies of regionalism), because those concepts are considered more appropriate for capture the multidimensional features of contemporary regionalism.

DISCUSSIONS

This article will focus on the multidimensionality of both Old and New Regionalism approaches. As discussed above, Hurrel, Hettne and Soderbaum agreed that New Regionalism is marked by multidimensionality, as it attempts to understand the multidimensional features of current regionalism. Old Regionalism, on the contrary, tends to be mono-dimensional in the sense that regional integration is seen to be happening at a specific sector. It must be noted that all scholars agree to this division between the Old and the New. Warleigh-Lack (2008, hal. 45-46) argued that the view that Old Regionalism is not multi-dimensional and separated economic and politics is incorrect, as illustrated in the EU Case where a range of tasks was anticipated in the very idea of “Community Method” of integration and that politics was never missing from the discussion of Old Regionalism (EU began as a matter of high politics: peace preservation) and the importance of political process in shaping EU’s economic integration. If we accept the idea that Old Regionalism is not multidimensional, of course it could not capture ASEAN comprehensively. But, even if we accept that both Old and New Regionalism are multidimensional, is the word “multidimensional” sufficient to understand ASEAN?

To answer this question, it is also important to note that this distinction of old and new does not only apply in theoretical sense, but also in empirical sense, since the term does not only refer to the approach to study regionalism but also to the regionalism projects themselves. Some regional organizations are considered as “old regionalism” (mostly those established during the Cold War, especially in 1650s-1970s) and some others, especially those which established effectively after 1980s, are considered as “new regionalism.” Hettne (2005, p. 549) considers “old regionalism” to be a “Cold War phenomenon” and that it has specific objectives (some are security-motivated while others are more economically oriented) while “new regionalism” is a result of “more comprehensive, multidimensional societal process.” In this sense, it is interesting to note that ASEAN was established in 1967 with a strong Cold War context but then established new elements of the regional project in 1990s. This situation often creates confusion for observers, because then ASEAN could be considered both as “old” and “new” regionalism. If we look at political and security issues, ASEAN fits the description of old regionalism due to its Cold War origin and the continuing importance of the states. But, “old regionalism” could not capture the development of many features of ASEAN regionalism after 1990s which transcends a single specific dimension. Some others would

argue that ASEAN is closer to the “new regionalism” because it is considered as “comprehensive and multidimensional” (referring to the existence of three equal pillars of ASEAN Community). However, “comprehensive and multidimensional” assume integrality of the dimensions, indicated by the existence of unified patterns/rules of arrangement, similar proponents and a single particular logic on which the regional project is operating. This might not be sufficient to explain the frequent disconnection between the economic, security, and socio-cultural “pillars” of ASEAN and the focal point agencies of each pillar in each country.

The limitations of the “Old” and “New” regionalisms in capturing the abovementioned complexity of ASEAN regionalism demand a more creative approach. To fill this demand, the aim of this article is to explore the idea of “compartmentalized regionalism.” This concept argues that ASEAN is a “political project” which is composed by at least two different “political projects” with distinct arrangements, proponents and logics that are separated but identified politically as a single integrated project.

Understanding ASEAN as “Compartmentalized Regionalism”

In his widely quoted work on Power, Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2011) argue that: “*Today, power in the world is distributed in a pattern that resembles a complex three-dimensional game.*” In this article, I would like to add that Nye’s analogy of multidimensional chessboards is also relevant in the case of ASEAN regionalism. Furthermore, I even believe that actors are not only playing on multiple chessboards simultaneously, they are playing different board-games with different rules on each layers.

EU is multidimensional, its regionalism project creates authorities for the EU in economic, politics, security, agriculture, environment, as well as some other sectors, in an integrated process based on a coherent arrangement and operating on a particular logic. In the context of EU, this particular logic is “*liberal prescription for the conduct of international politics*” (Walt, 2015).

I would like to argue that unlike EU, ASEAN is not only multi-dimensional, because the “dimensions” have distinguishable arrangements, proponents and logics from each other. If the dimensions in EU regionalism are similar chessboards, the dimensions in ASEAN regionalisms are different board-games altogether.

In this article, I would like to propose the idea that ASEAN regionalism is driven by separate regional projects. ASEAN is a “political project” is composed by at least two distinct “political projects.” One is in the political security dimension (in the recent

development manifested as ASEAN Political Security Community pillar in ASEAN Community) and the other one is in the economic dimension (manifested in the ASEAN Economic Community pillar). The two have distinguishable arrangements, proponents and logics that are separated but identified politically as a single integrated project. Thus, I would like to propose the use of the term “compartmentalised regionalism.”

One symptom of this “compartmentalised regionalism” is the partial and limited leadership in ASEAN. For example, Emmers (2014, pp. 543-562) observes that Indonesia’s leadership “has so far also been limited to the political and security spheres, leaving other sectors, like the economy, to others.” If we use the framework of compartmentalised regionalism, this is not merely a problem of partial, sectoral, incomplete or limited leadership of a particular state in ASEAN. It is related to the fact that economic and political-security are not merely “sectors” of ASEAN regionalism, but two distinct regionalisms despite being identified under one flag of ASEAN.

Below, this article would elaborate the distinct arrangement, proponents, and logics that can be used to distinguish the two regionalism projects under the name of ASEAN regionalism.

Distinct Arrangements

One visible distinction between the two “compartments” is that they have different arrangements in organising the regional space. On the political-security compartment, sovereignty and non-interference remains to be sacred and act as the basic principle to shape the regional arrangement. “Respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all ASEAN Member States” is included in the Charter as the first principle of ASEAN. This is apparently not enough, since another principle to guarantee Member States’ sovereignty still appears in point (k) “Abstention from participation in any policy or activity, including the use of its territory, pursued by any ASEAN Member State or non-ASEAN State or any non-State actor, which threatens the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political and economic stability of ASEAN Member States.” The principle of non-interference mentioned in point (e) “non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States” and (f) “respect for the right of every Member State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion.”

It is interesting to note that while the ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint (2009) emphasises the importance of the principles contained in the ASEAN

Charter (“The APSC Blueprint is guided by the ASEAN Charter and the principles and purposes contained therein”), the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint (2008) directly mentions that “the Leaders agreed to hasten the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 and to transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital.” The AEC Blueprint does not refer specifically to the principles in the ASEAN Charter, but mentions that “ASEAN shall act in accordance to the principles of an open, outward-looking, inclusive, and market-driven economy consistent with multilateral rules as well as adherence to rules-based systems for effective compliance and implementation of economic commitments” (ASEAN, 2008). This is of course in line with the Article 2 Paragraph 2 point (n) of the ASEAN Charter, but with additional words (not only market driven as in the Charter, it additional characteristics are explicitly added: open, outward-looking, and inclusive). Of course, one can argue that this is only a trivial matter about document structure. However, this is showing that the two compartments are actually having different principles in organising the regional space.

In the “political-security compartment,” sovereignty and non-interference are generally considered as non-negotiable. Thus, ASEAN observers are pessimistic about the possibility of functioning human rights institutions under ASEAN or about the prospect of ASEAN’s democratization agenda (Kvanvig, 2014). However, in the economic compartment, it seems that sovereignty can, and even must, be compromised. Rather than stressing the importance of sovereignty, the AEC Blueprint emphasizes that ASEAN Member Countries shall adhere to “rules-based systems for effective compliance and implementation of economic commitments.” To comply and implement economic commitment, one must compromise at least parts of its sovereignty.

Distinct Proponents

As already mentioned, one symptom of “compartmentalized regionalism” is the partial and limited leadership in ASEAN. This is also an indicator that the “compartments” are driven by different champions with different motivations.

The political-security regionalism/compartment was formed and initiated by ASEAN Member States during the Cold War. It is in this context that the principle of non-interference was outlined as the ASEAN principle, as mentioned in the Bangkok Declaration. From 1960s-1980s, ASEAN successfully managed to prevent large conflict and provide stability in the region. This is an important achievement if we compare with

other regions that were devastated by conflicts spurred by the interference of the competing blocs. Thus, states played a very important role in the shaping of regional cooperation in security. This continues after the end of the Cold War and the rise of China that set a new geopolitical complexity in the region. However, states remain to act in similar manner, with their own national interest act as their guiding lights. In this compartment, countries with large size and huge strategic interests, such as Indonesia, act as sectoral leader. It must be noted that despite the existence of non-interference principle, external powers such as US, Japan, and China are also competing for influence in shaping the regional security architecture.

The economic regionalism/compartment was initiated by different proponents. Some scholars argue that ASEAN regionalism (in the context of this article, the “economic regionalism” part), had been largely initiated by private sector, especially by the activities of Japanese Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and overseas Chinese business, whilst states played only secondary and reactive roles (Stubbs, 1995). This changed after the Asian Crisis 1997/1998, which spurred the emergence of a more active role of the state in shaping the regional project (Bowels, 2002). In this compartment, Singapore plays a significant role. External economic powers such as Japan and China also act as important proponents. For example, Japan helped to establish and sustain ERIA (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia), a think tank that is very influential in providing recommendations for ASEAN economic integration.

Domestically, the separation between two compartments is also visible. Different focal points (especially Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense vs. Ministry of Trade) often have different ideas of ASEAN and how ASEAN should interact with external powers. However, these differences do not become a problem because they have their own “compartments,” that are institutionalised through ASEAN mechanisms.

Distinct Logics

Lastly, the two compartments are different because they are operating based on different logics. The difference in the regional arrangement and in its proponents is strongly correlated to the difference in the ideological perspective that is becoming the basis of the regional project. The political-security compartment operates on Westphalian logic that stresses the importance of the state and territoriality, while the economic compartment relies on the insights of the technocrats that believe in economic liberalism.

The former is concerned with relative gain, while the latter is concerned mostly with absolute gain.

To sum up, the differences that can separate the two compartments can be outlined in the following table.

Table 1. Features of Political-Security and Economic Compartments of ASEAN Regionalism

| | Political-Security “Compartment” | Economic “Compartment” |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Arrangements | Sovereignty is the basis and thus not to be compromised. | Some parts of national sovereignty must be compromised. |
| Proponents | ASEAN Member States, Defense Ministries, Competing regional powers | Business (MNCs, mostly Japanese and Chinese), Economic Ministries, Regional economic powers |
| Logics | Westphalian, state-centric, relative gain | Economic liberalism, Open regionalism, absolute gain |

CONCLUSION

Based on the understanding of ASEAN as compartmentalised regionalism, discussions on the prospect of ASEAN must be understood as discussions on the trajectories of two separate regional projects: economic regionalism and political-security regional project. ASEAN’s development should not be considered simply as “widening and deepening,” but the developments of two distinct regional projects (i.e. political and security cooperation and economic integration) as well as the complex interplay between those two projects.

It is important to note that although the two can be identified as different regionalism projects, it does not mean that the two are completely separate. They are separate but combined as “compartments” under ASEAN. Thus, we witness that there are contradictions within ASEAN that spring from this compartmentalization. However, this separation of the compartments is important. ASEAN could go this far because of the relative balance and distance between the two compartments. APSC and AEC could go hand in hand ironically because the two are not completely integrated.

This state of a compartmentalised ASEAN is likely changing, however. The rise of China provokes the conflation of the two compartments, due to the increasingly overt use of economic instruments for geopolitical gains by competing external powers (China and its rivals) in the region (Lee, 2015). This conflation creates disruption in the balance between the “compartments” and thus threatening ASEAN centralities in both dimensions that are based on distinct arrangements and logics on each realms. Can ASEAN regionalism(s) survive? We will have to wait for the future to unravel the answer.

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ENDNOTES

¹ This is a reformulation of Hettne's explanation of regionalisation in Hettne, B. (2005), 545.

² The use of 'European' here is understandable because Old Regionalism mostly focuses on Europe, which is also empirically the first project of regional integration. Later, 'European level' in this definition also often applied to other regional project.