# How does regionalism unfold? Discussing the relationships of constitution and causation between identity and institutions[*]

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Constructivism is an approach to social science[1] that has penetrated the discipline of international politics in distinct forms, usually occupying the so-called midfield between positivist and post-positivist or reflectivist[2] approaches (Adler, 1997; Checkel, 1998, 347-8; Wendt, 1999, 40; Christiansen *et al.*, 1999). While positivist approaches have been overly concerned with 'explaining' international phenomena, in terms of providing causal Hu-

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[1]    The idea that constructivism is not a theory but an approach, is shared by various authors who have written about the main tenets of constructivism, like Emanuel Adler (1997); Ted Hopf (1998, 196); John G. Ruggie (1998, 856, 879-80); Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit (1998, 259); and Alexander Wendt (1999, 7). Jeffrey T. Checkel suggested that, more than anything else, constructivism remained a method (1998, 325-6, 342). Martha Finnemore considered constructivism as a 'sociological approach', a social theory and not a theory of politics (Finnemore, 1996, 4, 27). This view is shared by Adler, who considered constructivism as "a social theory on which constructivist theories of international politics – for example, about war, cooperation and international community – are based" (1997, 323). Maja Zehfuss, a thorough critic of constructivism, also opts to label constructivism as an approach, after noting that there is a discussion about "[…] whether constructivism is properly to be seen as a theory of IR or rather as a philosophical category, a meta-theory or a method for empirical research, or whether it is indeed an approach relevant at several levels" (Zeffuss, 2002, 8-9).

[2]    The term 'reflectivist' was introduced by R.O. Keohane "to refer to those IR scholars who reject the scientific explanation to social science of the mainstream rationalists" (Kurki, 2008, 3).

mean-like explanations, reflectivist approaches have been mostly concerned with 'understanding' how the meanings of social-international relationships are constructed, broadly using interpretive methods to assess the role of discursive practices (Hollis and Smith, 1990; Kurki, 2008, 4-5). Constructivism, or so-called 'social constructivism', has been engaged by many scholars interested in combining both 'explaining' and 'understanding', in a form to provide both causal and constitutive theorisations for social-international phenomena, and thus filling the space between positivist and reflectivist approaches, sometimes as a way of putting them together, or just bringing them 'closer'. As it usually happens with these kinds of attempts, combinations are always more laden to one side or the other, and so constructivism has been broadly criticised both by positivist and poststructuralist scholars. Yet, constructivism's middle-range flag keeps on waving, and continues to be a theoretical alternative to those researchers that do not feel comfortable with positivism, but that also remain dubious of the fully-fledged discursive analyses engaged by poststructuralists.

Applications of constructivist theorising to the study of regionalism are varied as are the possibilities to combine causal and constitutive theorising. More often than not, constructivists do not differentiate between relationships of constitution and causation in their analyses, and usually grant implicit causal power to constitutive factors. When claiming relationships of mutual constitution and causation between structure and agency, constructivism usually falls into under-explanation or under-specification, as it gives the impression

that everything – all the considered factors or variables – is mutually constituted and caused, as if 'everything explained everything': where ideational structures are claimed to cause and constitute each other and agency, it becomes rather difficult to answer questions about the causes (why?) and the ways (how?) agency occurs.

The present paper aims to problematise constructivism's middle-ground aim by assessing the ways in which constructivist analyses to regionalism address the relationships of constitution and causation between collective identity and regional institutions. The reviewed works emphasise the role of identity and institutions in the unfolding of regionalist projects in different parts of the world. In my view, the reasons to focus particularly on these two ideational structures are two-fold. First, one main ontological tenet of constructivism is that identity is at the basis of actors' interests (Checkel, 1998; Ruggie, 1998; Price and Reus-Smit, 1998; Wendt, 1999). Second, if regionalism is considered a state-led project aimed at organising a specific region along certain political and economic lines (Gamble and Payne, 1996, 2), it is clear that the pursuit of regionalism necessarily entails a minimum level of institution building; for the implementation of specific political and economic lines requires a minimum institutional framework that allows organising policy areas in the region and the unfolding of regionalism.

This review will show that constructivism offers diverse ways of conceptualising the relationships of constitution and causation between identity and institutions, and thus, explanations can be of a wide range of types.

As a consequence, it will be argued that by acknowledging relationships of mutual constitution and causation between identity and institutions, constructivism faces limitations in 'explaining' the ways in which regionalism unfolds, in terms of providing explanations of the causal role of identity and institutions in orienting state agency. Drawing upon Kurki's work (2008) on the concept of causation in International Relations, I argue that these limitations are due to a narrow conception of the concept of cause that is almost exclusively attached to the Humean conception of causation. If constitutive theorising is different from casual theorising, then the constitutive and causal role of ideational institutions must be differentiated, and this is precisely where constructivism faces trouble. In turn, by broadening the concept of cause and specifying distinct types of causes, constructivist accounts may be more able to provide explanations for the causes of social action ('why?' questions) and the ways they unfold ('how?' questions). Further, the paper argues that in order to carry on the analysis, constructivism needs to 'bracket' each ideational structure and to bracket agency, so social structures can be assessed as having *both* constitutive and 'transformative causal' effects. This is something that constructivist analyses of regionalism do not often explicitly do. The paper suggests that 'bracketing' is the strategy by which different types of causes can be identified, thus enabling constructivism to combine constitutive and causal theorising ('explaining' and 'understanding'), and further, to provide better explanations of the role of identity and institutions in the unfolding of regionalism.

The paper is divided in three sections. Section 1 provides a brief review of the main ontological and epistemological tenets of constructivism, emphasising the aim of combining constitutive and casual theorising, which intrinsically implies a distinction between the two. Section 2 reviews some constructivist analyses of regionalism that consider identity as preceding regional institution building, and thus identity is seen to hold a constitutive but not necessarily causal role. Section 3 reviews other constructivist analyses of regionalism where interaction and socialisation processes that occur within existing institutional frameworks lead to the rise and reinforcement of a collective identity, and special emphasis is made on a case where collective identity is claimed to have been created by norms, in a group of states that did not share a previous collective regional identity before engaging the regionalist project. Finally, Section 4 will show that by assessing relationships of mutual constitution and causation between identity and institutions, constructivism does not give a clear sense about why and how regionalism unfolds in the ways it does, as identity, institutions and agency seem to be indistinctively mutually constituted and caused. As a result, it will be argued that constructivism needs to broaden the conception of causation and open the room for distinguishing diverse types of causes, as well as using the strategy of 'bracketing' social structures and agency in order to provide better explanations for the unfolding of regionalism.

## 1. CONSTRUCTIVISM'S COMBINATION OF CONSTITUTIVE AND CAUSAL THEORISING

Some authors have suggested common ontological grounds for constructivism, while at the same time recognising that the most significant differences between different versions of constructivism are found in the field of epistemology[3]. On the ontological arena, constructivism's main point of departure is to emphasise the importance of ideas, as they constitute the meanings that actors grant to material resources. Accordingly, Price and Reus-Smit assert that constructivism underscores the importance of normative and ideational structures as well as material structures, for systems of meaning define how actors interpret their material environment, and "institutionalised meaning systems are thought to define the social identities of actors" (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998, 266, partly building on Adler, 1997). Quoting Wendt (1995, 73), they point out that "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded" (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998: 266). Checkel agrees with these ontological claims, as he tells us that "the environment in which agents/states take action is social as well as material" and that "this setting can provide agents/states with understandings of their interests (it can 'constitute' them)" (Checkel, 1998, 325-6). On his part, Ruggie considers that one core feature of constructivism is to conceive systems of rules as the main social structures within which social interaction takes place. Accordingly, actors are subject to structural constraints that are in part material, in part institutional (Ruggie, 1998, 879). In a later work, Wendt tells us that "the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces" (Wendt, 1999, 1). In these terms, constructivism opposes rationalist-materialist approaches which explain behaviour according to actors' interests exogenously given, oriented at the maximisation of benefits and the increasing of power conceived as the accumulation of material resources. Constructivism holds that the meaning of material factors is constituted by ideational structures like identity, institutions, norms, knowledge and culture that inform agents on the ways to think about the relevance of material factors. These ideational structures are conceived as social structures of knowledge that constitute actors' interests which, in contrast to rationalist-materialist approaches, are conceived as ideas (Finnemore, 1996, 146).

Another common ontological tenet of constructivism is the emphasis on the role of identity as a key factor in the constitution of actors' interests. Price and Reus-Smit assert that identities constitute interests and actions: "To explain preference formation, constructivists focus on actors' social identities. As Wendt (1992, 398) contends, 'Identities are

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[3]    See Adler (1997, 333-4); Hopf (1998, 182); Checkel (1998, 327); Ruggie (1998, 879-80) and Risse (2009). For Price and Reus-Smit, differences among different types of constructivism are mainly 'analytical' (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998, 267-8).

the basis of interests'" (Price and Reus Smit, 1998, 267). Ruggie asserts that another core feature of constructivism is to consider that identities and interests are socially constructed through interaction (Ruggie, 1998, 879). And Wendt points put that another basic tenet of constructivism is that that "the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by […] shared ideas rather than given by nature" (Wendt, 1999, 1).

Yet, although constructivism emphasises the constitutive role of ideas, there is a variant of constructivist scholars who consider that ideational structures have causal power[4]. This type of constructivism could be named 'soft', in contrast to a more 'radical' one[5] for which describing is the way of 'explaining', not being interested in providing causal explanations[6]. According to Finnemore, the challenge for constructivists is not just to demonstrate that ideas matter, but to assess the ways in which

they matter (Finnemore, 1996, 130) – that is, assessing their explanatory role. Accordingly, each constructivist identifies "a different socially constructed variable as causal and describes the causal process in a slightly different way, but all share a willingness to make social structures causal as well as a belief that these structures mould preferences in important ways" (Finnemore, 1996, 17). 'Soft' constructivists thus hold that ideational factors can explain agency, in the sense of establishing causes that explain why agency occurred the way it did.

Explanations in social science traditionally consist of identifying the causes that make action take place. The positivist tradition has usually relied on the Humean conception of causation[7], by which to say that A explains B means that, in the absence of A, B would have not occurred. The Humean conception of causation affirms that four conditions must be satisfied if we are to be sure that A caused

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[4]    This is the type of constructivism that Price and Reus-Smit (1998), Hopf (1998) and Ruggie (1998) labelled, respectively as 'modern', 'conventional' and 'neo-classical'/'naturalistic', and it is also the one that Checkel (1998) focused his review on. In my view, Ruggie's 'neoclassical' type of constructivism, which he claims to follow, can be included within the other authors' 'modern' and 'conventional' types, for Ruggie himself acknowledges that it does have an aim of 'explaining' and a commitment to an idea of doing 'science'.

[5]    The term 'soft' is taken from Onuf (2012, chapter 2), who opposes a 'strong' type of constructivism (namely his) to a 'soft' one of other authors like Wendt, Finnemore, Checkel, and Katzenstein among others. The term 'radical' is taken from Onuf's (2012, 44) quotation of the work of Drulák, who emphasises the 'radical change' that the emphasis on language issues implies for constructivist analysis (Drulák 2004, 6-13). Walter and Helmig (2005, 1) also refer to 'radical constructivism' as the one taking the epistemological stance of focusing on the key role of language in constructing social reality. See also Onuf (1989, 78-94; 2012, 29, 43) and Drulák (2004, 4, 2006, 501-3).

[6]    Price and Reus-Smit (1998) and Ruggie (1998) labelled this other type of constructivism as 'postmodern', while Hopf (1998) named it 'critical'. However, these authors included in their reviews a number of postmodern and poststructuralist scholars who have rejected their inclusion under the constructivist label (as pointed out by Zehfuss, 2002, 8).

[7]    Following Kurki (2008, 6-7) the term 'Humean' refers to certain key principles often attributed to Hume's philosophy of causation, but the 'Humean' conception of causation entails an empiricist connotation that David Hume's philosophy does not self-evidently hold.

B in some occasion, namely: A preceded B; there was no intermediate event; events like B are always followed by events like A in those conditions; and we are in the habit of expecting the sequence (Hollis and Smith, 1990, 49). Furthermore, Humean causal analysis subscribes an empiricist position where causal relations are regularity relations of patterns of *observables,* and causes refer exclusively to 'moving' causes' that 'push and pull' (Kurki, 2008, 6, emphasis original), like mechanisms that transform the state of things. In social science this reasoning is problematic, for a social event – which in constructivist terms includes an individual action, can hardly be understood as the consequence of one single factor (such as 'A'). Multiple factors – and of different types, i.e. materialist or ideational – usually orient agency. Moreover, factors cannot be 'isolated' or 'excluded' from an event that already occurred. Yet, the Humean conception of causation has been most and almost only an alternative considered by all theoretical approaches in the study of international politics, including positivist and post-positivist approaches. This consideration has served as the basis for positivist approaches to make claims about their scientific validity and denying it to reflectivist approaches, and has warranted the poststructuralist position of rejecting the analysis of causes (Kurki, 2008, 7-8).

Even those constructivists who attempt to combine causal and constitutive theorising, have often based this differentiation on attaching causal theorising to the Humean conception of causation, while associating constitutive theorising with interpretive methods (Kurki, 2008, ch. 4). Constructivism claims

to offer an alternative conception of 'explanation', one that combines 'explaining' – broadly building on the Humean conception of causation – and 'understanding', which is more related to the ways in which actors interpret the world. According to Hollis and Smith, in positivist terms, 'explaining' consists of establishing relations of causation, answering questions of the type 'why', and focusing on how the structural forces of nature (or 'social' nature, in a more radical form of positivism) push actors to behave one way or another. They also tell us that "explanation involves an appeal to causal laws and not only to generalizations" (Hollis and Smith, 1990, 63). In turn, 'understanding' deals with questions of the type 'how', and focuses on the actors' view as the starting point for research (p. 2-3). While 'explaining' envisions the world as an independent environment from agents' thinking and to some extent predictable, 'understanding' envisions the world as a construction consisting of rules and meanings (p. 6). Following these authors, "To understand is to reproduce the order in the minds of actors; to explain is to find causes in a scientific manner" (p. 87). In these terms, the 'soft' version of constructivism stands on the middle-ground between 'explaining' and 'understanding' as it has a clear aim of finding causal explanations for social events, while focusing on the ways in which ideas that inform their interests are socially constructed.

Hollis and Smith argue in their book that attempting to combine 'explaining' and 'understanding' at the same time is problematic, and that combinations of bits of one and bits of the other do not solve the problem of addressing their differing aims (1990, 7). Yet, it

is in these terms that 'soft' constructivism has been assessed as constituting a 'via media' between positivist and post-positivist approaches to international politics. Wendt, who has been perhaps the constructivist scholar that has dealt in greater extent with the philosophical-scientific grounds of constructivism, develops this combination of 'explaining' and 'understanding' through distinguishing causal and constitutive theorising (Wendt, 1999, 77-89). For Wendt, ideas play a constitutive role as long as they inform actors' interests and grant meaning to material factors, but they also play a causal role inasmuch as they motivate action. In these terms, Wendt aligns his arguments to the philosophical position that asserts that reasons are causes (Davidson, 1963), contrary to the Wittgestein an (interpretive) position that rejects that reasons can be causes, since reasons are understood as examples of rule-following behaviour (Kurki, 2008, 73-4)[8].

According to Wendt, constitutive and causal theorising are not incompatible because they just ask different questions, and therefore both are needed in order to provide more encompassing explanations. Causal theorising asks questions of the type 'why' and 'how', while constitutive theorising ask questions of the type 'what is' and 'how possible' (Wendt, 1999, 83-6). In these terms, when the ideas that inform agents' thinking are found as reasons that motivated behaviour, constructivists claim that those ideas have causal power. As Wendt points out, "Norms are causal insofar as they regulate behaviour. Reasons are causes

to the extent that they provide motivation and energy for action" (p.,83). This has taken Steve Smith to suggest that the distinction that constructivists (though particularly pointing to Wendt's work) make between constitutive and causal theorising is rather blurred and confusing, and that constitutive theorising seems just a form of causal theorising (Smith, 2000, 157). Yet, when constructivists find certain ideas that configure an agent's identity, they do not claim that such ideas 'cause' that identity. But very often in their analyses, when a certain identity is assessed as a motivation for actors' engagement of certain behaviour, such identity is implicitly acknowledged as having causal power, while it is simultaneously assessed as constituting actors' interests. Hence, constructivism's combination of causal and constitutive theorising often entails a blurred distinction between 'explaining' and 'understanding'.

In her enlightening work about the concept of causation in IR, Milja Kurki (2008) has shown that constructivists' reluctance to grant causal powers to ideas is due to their excluding association of the concept of causation to the Humean conception of conception described above. Although some constructivists like Wendt and Dessler have developed theoretical insights that aim to transcend the Humean conception of causation, they have reproduced it when attempting to draw a clear line separating constitutive from causal theorising (Kurki, 2008, 177-84). Partly drawing on the works of Suganami, Wight and Patomäki, Kurki shows

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[8]    The possibility of conceiving reasons as causes is discussed in the last section of this paper.

that by engaging the philosophical doctrine of 'scientific' or 'critical' realism, it is possible to acknowledge the causal powers of empirically unobservable elements such as ideas (pp. 161-73). Further, Kurki argues that through reclaiming the Aristotelian conceptualisation of causes, it is possible to distinguish different types of causes that make unnecessary the distinction between constitutive and causal theorising (ch. 6), offering a way to sort out the constructivist crossroads between 'explaining' and 'understanding'. Kurki's position on causation will be further developed in the last section of the paper. In the meantime, let us move to the observation of different ways in which constructivist analyses of regionalism conceptualise the relationships of constitution and causation between identity and institutions, in order to show that by differentiating constitutive and causal theorising, constructivism tends to fall into serious confusion.

## 2. IDENTITY PRECEDING REGIONAL INSTITUTION BUILDING

Among the constructivist analyses to regionalism reviewed in this paper, the work of Fredrik Söderbaum on regionalism in Southern Africa, as well as the one in conjunction with Björn Hettne on the concept of 'regionness' and the work of Luk Van Langenhove on the concept of 'regionhood', suggests that the process of construction of a region entails the configuration of a collective identity that *may* eventually *motivate* agents to engage a regionalist project and build regional institutions. Nonetheless, none of these approaches show a systematic explanation of the causal effects of identity on regional institution building, and instead they point out constitutive effects of the former over the latter. Moreover, none of these authors show explicit concern about differentiating relationships of constitution and causation between identity and institutions.

Söderbaum's work on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is oriented by the implementation of the New Regionalism Approach (NRA)[9], a theoretical approach that emphasises the importance of reflexivity, intersubjectivity and identity in the unfolding of regionalism and processes of region-building. The NRA adopts a constructivist framework that provides:

[A] theoretically rich and promising way of conceptualizing the interaction between material incentives, intersubjective structures and the identity and interests of the actors […] Interests are not pre-given but socially constructed […] constructivists argue that understanding intersubjective structures allows us to trace the ways whereby interests and identities change over time and new forms of cooperation and community can emerge. The basic assumption is that there is an inevitable connection between the dynamics of collective action and the social identity by which the individual teams up with others in real or 'imagined communities' (Söderbaum, 2004, 44, the last sentence built on Anderson 1991).

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[9] Söderbaum has developed the NRA in a close joint work with Björn Hettne (see for example Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998, 2000).

Paraphrasing Wendt (1992), Söderbaum asserts that 'regionalism is what actors make of it':

The reflective capacity of concerned actors is seen as an important explanation for the emergence and quality of regionalism. In this way regionalization is seen as an instrument to change existing structures, take advantage of new opportunities that arise as well as to *create* bonds of identity and community. According to this perspective actors engage in regionalism not only on the basis of material incentives and resources [...] but they are also *motivated by* ideas and identities (Söderbaum, 2004, 44-5, emphasis added).

Söderbaum agrees with Wendt (1992) that identities are at the basis of interests, by which he acknowledges that identity has constitutive power on interests. He emphasises that it is imperative to observe the historical formation of the Southern African region in order to understand how identities have been created, and he underlines the importance of acknowledging racial differentiations between whites and non-whites for understanding the political economy of the SADC (Kurki, 2008, ch. 4). However, he does not address the process of collective identity formation as such, nor does he explain in a systematic fashion how identity influenced the creation of the SADC regionalist project. His main conclusion regarding the role of identity in orienting actors' behaviour is that interests change through interaction and socialisation, inasmuch as actors develop a sense of belonging to the region (Söderbaum, 2004, 202). From Söderbaum's analysis one can infer that collective identity played a constitutive role in actors' interests

towards regional institution building, and hence, we can observe that interests are the ideational factor through which identity can have causal power on the creation of regional institutions. In other words, it is not that identity generates regional institutions *all by itself*, but that identity, as a constitutive factor of interests, orients and informs such interests towards regional institution building. In this sense, identity can be assessed as having causal effects on institution building.

Another interesting element regarding the importance of identity in Söderbaum's work is his conceptualisation of regime-boosting as a very significant reason why political leaders support regionalist initiatives. By engaging the rather intense and symbolic game of regionalism, they can be perceived as promoters of the goals and values of regionalism and regional integration, which enables them to raise the profile and image of their often authoritarian regimes (Söderbaum, 2004, 96, 98). The aim of regime-boosting can be explained because of the inherent 'weakness' of most post-colonial states in Southern Africa, which "are overly concerned with absolute sovereignty as well as the formal status and survival of their regimes, rather than the promotion of the 'national interest' in a broader sense and the achievement of national security" (Söderbaum, 2004, 96-7). Hence, in the terms posed by Söderbaum, illegitimacy and 'state weakness' may work as sources of collective identity for Southern African political leaders, which leads them to promote regionalism mostly in its rhetorical dimension (p. 99). Yet, Söderbaum does not mention 'identity' in this passage and throughout the book there is not any statement about

the casual power of identity over regional institution building.

Söderbaum acknowledges that identity is *ambiguous* and *multiple* and *does not explain* action itself: it rather informs and transforms individuals (and their behaviour and their interests) as well as the quality of interaction (Söderbaum, 2004, 45, emphasis mine). Söderbaum coincides with constructivists in that identity is at the basis of interest formation, and thus identity plays a constitutive role in actors' interests in regional institution building. Indeed, Söderbaum tells us that identity *motivates* actors' engagement with regionalism. If identity is a motivation then it can be considered a cause for action (Davidson, 1963; Wendt, 1999; Kurki, 2008)[10]. But at the same time Söderbaum claims that regionalisation processes can be seen as *instruments to create* 'bonds of identity and community'. Perhaps Söderbaum is thinking here of regionalist projects as well, since regionalisation is a more spontaneous process that can be hardly considered an 'instrument' intentionally used by specific actors (Hurrell, 1995, 334). Thus, in Söderbaum's view, identity constitutes actors' interests in developing processes of regionalisation – and regionalist projects – while at the same time such processes and projects can be used as instruments to create 'bonds' of identity. He does not differentiate between relationships of constitution and causation in one way or another, but rather suggests that regionalisation (and regionalism) and identity may constitute and create each other, which gives an implicit idea of mutual constitution.

The case of regime-boosting accounts for another example of the constitutive and causal roles of a different kind of collective identity formation – the one of weak states deeply concerned about strengthening their sovereignty and legitimacy. From Söderbaum's analysis we can infer that collective identity around state 'weakness' and scarce legitimacy plays a powerful constitutive and causal role of state interest formation towards regionalism, as it *motivates* Southern African states to pursue the SADC project, even though Söderbaum does not make explicit claims about the causal powers of this source of identity (which in no case is treated by Söderbaum as such).

## 2.1 The concept of 'regionness'

A significant contribution of the NRA to the comprehension of region-building processes and the evolution of regionalism is the concept of 'regionness', where identity has an important role to play. Hettne and Söderbaum define regionness as:

> [T]he process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region. Regionness thus implies that a region can be a region 'more or less'. The level of regionness can both increase and decrease (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000, 461).

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[10]    The causal role of motives and reasons will be further discussed in the last section of the paper.

Accordingly, "The level of 'regionness' defines the position of a particular region or regional system in terms of regional coherence and identity [...]" (Hettne, 2003, 28). There are five levels of regionness, where collective identity evolves altogether with deeper levels of regionness[11]:

i)   The *regional space*, identified as a primarily geographical unit delimited by more or less natural physical barriers and marked by ecological characteristics (like a proto-region). In such a territory, people develop a kind of translocal relationship.

ii)  The *regional complex*, which emerges through increased social contacts and transactions between previously more isolated groups, giving place to patterns of economic interdependencies. The collective memory of a more widespread identity, albeit confined to a relatively small elite, dissipates. This level is seen as the real starting point for a regionalisation process.

iii) The *regional society*, which is a *de jure* or formal region characterised by the appearance of a number of different actors apart from the states that move towards transcendence of national space, making use of a more rule-based pattern of relations. Formal organisations and social institutions play a crucial role in this process leading towards community and region-building.

iv)  The *regional community*, which is an active subject with a distinct identity, institutionalised or informal actor capability, legitimacy and structure of decision-making in relation with a more or less responsive regional civil society, transcending the old state borders. A regional collective identity emerges and relations are characterised by mutual trust driven by social learning.

v)   The *region-state*, or regional institutionalised polity, which is a 'hypothetical' entity constituted out of a voluntary evolution of a group of formerly sovereign national communities into a new form of political entity where sovereignty is pooled for the best of all.

Hettne and Söderbaum do not aim to suggest a stage theory, neither do they anticipate "a single path or detailed 'series of stages' that are exactly the same for all regions and that must be passed in order for higher levels of regionness to occur" (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000, 470). Nevertheless, these five levels of regionness denote a progressive identification of peoples with the region they live in, creating a sense of 'belonging'. Identification refers here to the degree to which the inhabitants of a region 'feel' they are part of that region, and the extent to which the region constitutes part of their identity towards the inhabitants of other

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[11]  The following descriptions of each level of regionness are just an edited transcription of the descriptions made by Hettne and Söderbaum in their 2000 article, pp. 462-8. They also contain some fragments of Van Langenhove referring to the work of Hettne and Söderbaum (van Langenhove, 2003, 11-2).

regions. Identification can be understood in terms of regional cohesion, which means: (i) that the region plays a defining role in inter-state relations (and in relations with other non-state actors), both within the region and with the rest of the world; and (ii) that the region serves as the organising base of a wide range of issues within the region (Söderbaum, 2001, 50, quoting Hurrell, 1997). Regional cohesion is a useful category for understanding the extent to which the region shapes actors' identities and interests, and it can be seen that it holds a direct relationship with the levels of regionness.

In the definition of each level of region-ness it is easy to see that institution building deepens along with higher levels of regionness, thus establishing a direct relationship between the level of actors' identification with the re-gion and the development of more complex regional institutions - which in turn leads to higher levels of regional cohesion. It can be noted that regionalism, as a formal state project that entails a minimum of institution buil-ding, starts at the level of the 'regional society' (though Hettne and Söderbaum do not make this explicit and there is no reason to think that a regionalist project could not emerge in a previous level of regionness). As in the case of Söderbaum's (2004) previously reviewed work, we can appreciate here clear relationships of constitution, but not necessarily of causation. Hettne and Söderbaum suggest a relationship of mutual constitution between regionness and collective identity. They emphasise the dissipation of a 'collective memory of a more widespread identity' along a 'small elite' that occurs at the level of 'regional complex' as an incipient feature of regional identity forma-tion. They also suggest a relationship of mutual constitution between collective identity and institution building, for both types of ideatio-nal structures grow with every higher level of regionness. But Hettne and Söderbaum do not specify any relationship of causation between identity and institutions, nor do they clarify if it is regionalisation together with a greater collective identity which causes these structu-res to enlarge or vice versa. Again, we may face a case of mutual constitution and causation, though one that leaves us uncertain about the concrete ways in which such relationships might work.

## 2.2 The concept of 'regionhood'

The linkages between the levels of regionness and the rising of a regional identity can also be seen through the concept of 'regionhood' introduced by Luk Van Langenhove, for whom the five levels of regionness are to be seen as five phases in the process of 'becoming' a region (van Langenhove, 2003, 12). Accordingly, the concept of 'regionhood' serves to understand the agential capabilities of regions in the new regionalisms' world order. Drawing on social psychology, van Langenhove understands re-gionhood as those conditions which grant a region the capacity to act as a polity, namely, a corporate actor. These conditions are (i) the region as a system of intentional acts in the international and national arena; (ii) the region as a 'rational' system with statehood properties; (iii) the region as a reciprocal achievement; and (iv) the region as a generator and communica-tor of meaning and identity. Such conditions

are the same characteristics that are said to be constitutive of personhood (pp. 14-5).

It is easy to infer that regionhood entails the existence of a regional identity that allows the region to act as unitary actor, as the region needs to define who it is in relation to other regions and actors in order to act as a corporate actor - condition (iv). Likewise, the four conditions of regionhood imply the existence of a more or less developed institutional framework that necessarily follows a regionalist project, and which allows the region to: (i) perform intentional acts; (ii) acquire statehood properties; and (iii and iv) allow the region to make visible its achievements as a generator and communicator of meaning and identity. Van Langenhove asserts that a region must express meaning towards other social and personal actors as well as possessing a particular identity (p. 23). Developing regionhood entails developing a collective identity and institution building, but following Van Langnehove's reasoning we remain uncertain whether the interest in acquiring regionhood causes the other two ideational structures or if it is the interest in developing a regional identity and institution building which leads to the consolidation of regionhood; nor does Van Langenhove enquire into the relationships of causation between identity and institutions, although their constitutive relationships are clearer to observe.

van Langenhove differentiates the concept of regionhood from the one of 'regionality'. While regionhood allows the distinction of a region from a non-region, regionality corresponds to the suitable historical, geographical, economic, cultural and social conditions that allow for a region to be distinguished from other regions, and thus, more equivalent to the concept of regionness outlined by Söderbaum and Hettne (van Langenhove, 2003, 9, 12). According to Marchand *et al.*, regionality has to do with "the relative convergence of dimensions such as cultural affinity, political regimes, security arrangements and economic policies (i.e. relative sameness). As such, it is the outcome of not one but several processes, and involves the creation of a regional identity" (Marchand *et al.*, 1999, 900). In this case, regionality, understood as those cultural features that distinguish one region from others, is clearly a consequence of the development of a regional identity, it is – at least partly – *caused* by the emergence of such identity. Yet, the concept of regionality does not tell us anything about the role of institutions, though one could infer that regional institutions reflect those cultural features (identity) that configure regionality.

Both concepts of regionness and regionhood entail an acknowledgement of the importance of identity as a preceding factor that constitutes actors' interests in pursuing regionalism - and regional institution building. This is the view maintained in a previous work of mine on the role of ideas in the development of the Andean Community (AC) and Mercosur regionalist projects, which suggested a constitutive and causal relationship between identity and regional institution building. In the case of the AC, I asserted that the common history of Andean countries, which were liberated by Simón Bolívar and were born independent as a single country – Gran Colombia – before becoming individual states in the 1830s, strongly marked the constitution of the Andean Pact

in 1969 and the subsequent re-launching of the Andean Community in the early 1990s (Prieto, 2003, 277). In the case of Mercosur, I proposed that the common recent history of dictatorships in the Southern Cone provided a basis for the creation of a collective identity that helped the rise of the regionalist project in 1991 as a way to strengthen the democratisation processes that began to occur in the Southern Cone since the mid 1980s (pp. 280-1)[12]. Since my analysis held the view that collective identity preceded the creation of the AC and Mercosur, it implicitly suggested that identity was a cause of regional institution building, as different types of identity informed state interests towards such endeavour and such identities motivated states to group together. Yet, the relationships of constitution and causation between identity and institutions remained undistinguished.

## 3. INSTITUTIONS CAUSING REGIONAL IDENTITY

This section reviews the work of some constructivists who have addressed the process of European regional integration showing that EU institutions have socialisation and learning effects that lead to the formation of collective identity. It also reviews the work of Amitav Acharya on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regionalist project, which claims that state interests on regional institution building were not constituted by the previous existence of a collective identity

in South East Asia, but in turn further regional institution building led to the formation of a collective regional identity among ASEAN member states.

### 3.1 Collective identity formation through socialisation within institutional environments: the case of the EU

In one of his studies, Jeffrey T. Checkel inquires about the reasons why states comply with regional norms. His constructivist approach emphasises social learning, socialisation and social norms (Checkel, 2001, 553). The main argument is that "norms matter in a constitutive, interest-shaping way not captured by rationalist arguments" (p. 554). Checkel points out to persuasion as the prevailing mechanism through which compliance occurs. Checkel suggests that the reason why states comply with regional norms is because norms constitute state interests. Checkel argues that the historical and institutional context, and the experience that bureaucrats have on the issue area at play in a particular moment, determine to a high extent the ways in which such bureaucrats comply with regional norms (p. 573).

Although Checkel does not mention identity in this analysis, it is not difficult to incorporate identity in it. If one considers Berger and Luckmann's argument about the need of roles for creating and developing institutions, and the identification that agents generate towards the roles they assume (Berger and Luckmann, 1968, 96-7), it is possible to

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[12]    This view was drawn directly from the works of Cammack (1999) and Hirst (1999).

infer from Checkel's analysis that institutional environments make bureaucrats identify with each other and with the purpose of their job and carry out the tasks that institutions impose on them, including compliance with norms. In these terms, institutions create a 'bureaucratic' collective identity, which would correspond to a state identity in the sense that a state acts through the bureaucrats that represent it and act in its name (Finnemore, 1996, 2; Wendt, 1999, ch. 5). Hence, Checkel's explanation could be summarised as follows: norms that constitute state interests make agents identify with them, and this is why they comply with regional norms. In other words, Checkel suggests that the constitutive role of norms becomes causal as it *makes* agents (state bureaucrats) identify with such norms. In this sense, norms create collective identity and explain state action.

Following a 1996 Eurobarometer study, Brigid Laffan asserts that EU institutions have a socialisation effect, as 94 per cent of European top decision makers stated that their country's membership was a 'good' thing, and 90 per cent believed that their country had benefited from membership. Accordingly, "These figures were far higher than recorded among the wider population, and there was far less interstate variation than found in the attitudes of the mass public" (Laffan, 2004, 76-7). Thomas Risse also finds that identification with and support for the EU and its institutions are higher among political and social elites than in the larger public (Risse, 2004, 260). He explains this difference as "Policy makers and government officials on all levels of governance spend a considerable amount of time dealing with the EU" as a result of which the EU has "a real psychological existence" for the European elites (p. 261).

In a former work, Risse showed his concern about the ways in which national and European identities mould each other and how identity changes with the progressive construction of the EU. His starting point was the concept of 'entitativity', which suggests that "the more salient a social context becomes, the more people identify with the respective social group (or strongly reject it)[13]. This leads to the proposition that levels of identification with or conscious rejection of Europe should increase, the more important the EU becomes in peoples' lives" (Risse, 2000, 4, referring to the work of Castano, reference omitted in the original)[14]. Risse points out that there is a 'constructivist story' about the ways in which the EU and its institutions shape collective identities. Such a story endogenises identities, interests and institutions, as over time institutions "become part and parcel of the social and power structure that form the social environment in which people act" (Risse, 2004, 263). Accordingly:

Institutions tend to have *constitutive* effects on corporate actors such as national governments and

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[13]    See p.8 above. The definition that Van Langenhove provides of this concept is slightly different from the one provided by Risse, but I find both complementary and not contradictory whatsoever.

[14]    For a later version of the work of Castano and the use of the concept of 'entitativity' see Castano (2004).

interest groups, but also on individuals. Since people act in an environment structured by the institutions, the latter affect their interests, preferences and collective identities. We should then expect identities and institutions to coevolve, with the causal arrows between the two pointing in both directions (Risse, 2004, 263, emphasis original).

Risse's constructivist view on the causal effects of institutions over identity is shown in a more recent work, where he holds that:

[T]he EU as an emergent polity is expected not just to constrain the range of choices available to, say, nation states, but the way in which they define their interests and even their identities. EU 'membership matters' […] in that it influences the very way in which actors see themselves and are seen by others as special beings (Risse, 2009, 148).

Risse finds that "support for European integration and attachment to Europe appear to be closely related, *motivating* European elites to continue on the path of institution building" (Risse, 2004, 270, emphasis added). However, Risse warns against excessively optimistic statements about European identity, for there remains a lot to know about the precise causal relationships and mechanisms between European integration and European identity, and he acknowledges that the existing literature on European identity in general is less concerned with linking the development of a European identity with the evolution of European institutions (pp. 270-1). Indeed, the causal power of institutional environments and the identification effects they generate on norm compliance are questioned by Risse's

finding of no immediate connection between the level of elite identification with Europe and national policies toward the EU in general, considering the scant correlation between European identities among elites and the degree of compliance with EU law (Risse, 2000, 17, drawing on a data base developed at the European University Institute - Börzel).

The reviewed constructivist approaches to European regionalism clearly acknowledge the causal power of regional institutions in generating collective identity, especially emphasising the socialisation effects that EU institutions have on national and regional bureaucrats. EU institutions are also considered to have constitutive effects on state interest formation. The reviewed authors emphasise the effects of existing institutions on the formation of collective identity, but do not enquire into the ways in which a previous collective identity – which is often attached to Europe as a region (Smith, 1990, 187), played a constitutive/causal role in the creation and development of regional institutions. They only claim that, once institutions are created, they have constitutive and causal effects on collective identity formation, and this in turn reinforces institution building (although not necessarily norm compliance, as Risse's finding pointed out), which derives in a process of mutual constitution and causation between collective identity and regional institutions.

### 3.2 Regional norms creating collective identity: the case of the ASEAN

A salient example of a constructivist analysis that emphasises the causal role of regional

norms in the creation of collective identity is Amitav Acharya's study of the ASEAN regionalist project. Acharya intends to explain the unfolding of the ASEAN through the application of the concept of 'security community' coined by Karl Deutsch in the 1950s, that "describes groups of states which have developed a long-term habit of peaceful interaction and ruled out the use of force in settling disputes with other members of the group" (Acharya, 2009, 1). Acharya focuses primarily on the role of norms, and, to a lesser extent, of identity, in orienting Southeast Asian states' behaviour towards the development of the ASEAN. Since the ASEAN regionalist project has not developed a broad or complex institutional framework of diverse decision-making organisms[15], Acharya focuses on the analysis of norms as the main regional institutions existing. Ontologically, norms are assessed to operate as constitutive factors of identities and identity is also created by norms. Accordingly:

Norms not only 'regulate' state behaviour […] but also redefine state interests and *constitute* state identities, including the development of collective identities. By focusing on the *constitutive effects* of norms, constructivism has thus restored some of the original insights of integration theory regarding the impact of socialisation in *creating* collective interests and identities […] norms play a crucial role in the socialisation process leading to peaceful conduct among states, which form the core of security communities (Acharya, 2009, 4, emphasis added).

As can be seen in the previous quote, Acharya indiscriminately interchanges terms regarding constitution and causation (the term 'creation' might refer to both types of effects)[16], maybe because he assumes that if B is constituted by A, then B is automatically caused by A. Given this, we must assume that Acharya considers that norms constitute *and* cause identity, without necessarily assuming that he considers constitution and causation to be the same thing.

Acharya aims as well to examine identity formation in the ASEAN by "looking at the claims made by ASEAN elites about regionally specific ways of problem solving and cooperation" (Acharya, 2009, 7), by which he explicitly acknowledges that state identity is what state representatives - which he equates to 'elites' - claim it is. Yet, his emphasis is clearly on norms as the main explanatory variable in his study, as he intends to "[…] analyse systematically the role of ASEAN's norms in the management of regional order and *their effect* on the development of collective interests and identities" (p. 9, emphasis mine)[17]. Identity

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[15]    Acharya (2009, 6-7) speaks of an 'organisational minimalism' and a 'soft institutionalism' that characterise the 'ASEAN Way'.

[16]    The last section of the paper will discuss the possibility of considering the creation of things as a form of causation. Suffice it to say, up to this point, that following the Humean conception of causation, if B is *created* by A then we must accept that B was, at least partly, *caused* by A.

[17]    Note that "the effect" of norms on interests and identities that Acharya aims to assess can be both constitutive and/or causal.

is not taken as a main explanatory variable: at least, it must be understood as something that is first partly constituted *and* created by norms in order to further understand its role as an ideational factor orienting state behaviour. Acharya's main hypothesis reads as follows:

ASEAN's frameworks of interaction and socialisation have themselves become a crucial factor *affecting* the interests and identities of its members. The idea of security community, sociologically understood, enables us to analyse ASEAN as a regional institution which both *regulates and constitutes* the interests and policies of its members in matters of war, peace and cooperation. ASEAN's role in regional order can be studied and evaluated by looking at the extent to which its norms and socialisation processes, and identity-building initiatives, *have shaped* the attitudes and behaviour of its members about conflict and order in the region, and the extent to which they *have led* to the development of common understandings, expectations and practices about peaceful conduct (Acharya, 2009, 9, emphasis added).

The verbs emphasised in the previous quotation like 'affecting', 'regulating', 'shaping' and 'leading' give a sense of causation, and Acharya tells us that institutions also constitute ASEAN members' interests. At the end of his book he concludes that the existence of certain norms, such as the principle of non-interference, regional solutions to regional problems, informality, bilateralism in defence relations, regional autonomy and other principles conforming the so-called 'ASEAN Way' (Acharya, 2009, 287), help understand why the ASEAN has been 'successful' in organising the region along certain political lines. Acharya's

approach puts the main explanatory weight on norms, to the point that ASEAN norms are considered to be the main constitutive factors of collective regional identity, inasmuch as they help its *creation*. If norms help the creation of identity, it is implied that norms cause such identity, at least partly. Acharya even suggests that building a common identity was an explicit aim of state leaders through the creation of ASEAN norms (Acharya, 2009, 37). Although the former conceptualisation of a security community advanced by Deutsch contemplated its formation as a result of a process of integration where high volumes of transactions – political, cultural or economic – existed, Acharya asserts that "ASEAN evolved as a sort of an 'imagined community', despite low initial levels of interdependence and transactions, and the existence of substantial political and situational differences among its members" (Acharya, 2009, 286). Yet, he concludes that "[…] the vision of community preceded rather than resulted from political, strategic and functional interactions and interdependence" (p. 286). In these terms, the question that crucially arises is: why did the idea of an 'imagined' community precede interdependence and interaction? How was such idea formed? Acharya attributes the main explanation to the role of norms:

Central to this process was a set of norms, among which non-interference, non-use of force, regional autonomy, the avoidance of collective defence and the practice of the 'ASEAN Way' were the most salient […] While some of these norms were adapted from universal legal-rational principles, others had their sources in what ASEAN's founders claimed to be *the unique socio-cultural practices of the region*. Together

they led to the emergence of what its members claimed to be a 'cultural-specific' and sociological approach to conflict management and decision making, called the 'ASEAN Way'. This turned out to be a key symbol of ASEAN, helping the grouping to overcome intra-mural tensions especially during the crucial early years of ASEAN […] Subsequently, the ASEAN Way was useful in attracting new members and persuading ASEANs external dialogue partners to see things from an ASEAN perspective, as well as in muting substantive areas of disagreement (Acharya 2009: 286, emphasis added).

Following Acharya, the 'ASEAN Way' is the product of normative settings, made of norms, and these constitute a source of collective identity for ASEAN member states. According to the previous quotation, the 'ASEAN Way' *is* the collective identity of member states, it is what regional collective identity is *made of*. In Acharya's view, ASEAN countries have even considered that not fulfilling one of their norms would lead to a loss of ASEAN identity (Acharya, 2009, 196). Thus, in Acharya's terms, regional norms and collective identity seem to be the *same* thing, inasmuch as the source of the ASEAN identity is constituted and caused by the regional norms that constitute the 'ASEAN Way'. If this is the case, under a Humean conception of causation it would only be possible to claim that ASEAN norms constitute ASEAN's collective identity, but not that ASEAN norms *caused* such collective identity, as the condition of an independent existence between the cause and the effect would be violated.

But furthermore, when Acharya mentions that regional norms "had their sources in what ASEAN's founders claimed to be the unique socio-cultural practices of the region",

would such socio-cultural practices not account for the existence of a previous collective identity in the region? Unfortunately, this is not discussed in Acharya's work. Nonetheless, Acharya even refers to certain issues that could account for the existence of a previous collective identity among ASEAN states. Accordingly, the doctrine of non-interference in national affairs, which made part of the ASEAN Way, can only be understood in the context of the domestic security concerns of the ASEAN states:

As new political entities with 'weak' state structures (e.g. lack of a close congruence between ethnic groups and territorial boundaries) and an equally problematic lack of strong regime legitimacy, the primary sources of threat to the national security of the ASEAN states were not external, but internal […] No framework for regional security cooperation could be meaningful for ASEAN unless it countered the internal enemy and enhanced regime security (Acharya, 2009, 71).

Acharya also tells us that "The establishment of ASEAN was the product of a desire by its five original members to create a mechanism for war prevention and conflict management" (Acharya, 2009, 58), and that ASEAN member states were also concerned about the emergence of China as the dominant force in the region. These states were also worried about being left out of the Sino-Soviet competition for hegemony in South East Asia. Acharya then asserts that around these two security issues ASEAN countries appreciated "the need for a united response to the new form of Great Power rivalry" (p. 64). However, although these common concerns could count as sources of

collective identity, Acharya just chooses not to use the term 'identity' to name them.

Acharya acknowledges that "Identity had been a concern of South East Asian leaders even before the creation of ASEAN. [Some of them] also believed that South East Asia should have a distinctive place in the Asian regional order and therefore an identity of its own" (Acharya, 2009, 86). He even tells us that Ceylon was invited to join the ASEAN in 1967, despite it not being considered to belong geographically to the Southeast Asian region, "presumably because its size, influence and resources did not threaten *ASEAN's own identity* or cohesion […]" (p. 62, emphasis added). Crucially, Acharya does not enquire into the possible existence of distinct sources of collective identity among ASEAN states before the configuration of the ASEAN in 1967. However, Acharya asserts that "Some scholars and policy-makers view the ASEAN Way as a by-product of cultural similarities among the ASEAN societies" (p. 78). One Malaysian former Foreign Minister spoke of a 'common cultural heritage' and of a 'spirit of togetherness' as a key factor that forms the basis of the establishment of the ASEAN (p. 78). Estrella Solidum, who Acharya considers to be the first scholar that seriously studied the term, asserted that the ASEAN Way 'consisted of cultural elements which are found to be congruent with some values of each of the member states' (ibid., quoting the work of Solidum 1981). Notwithstanding, Acharya tells us that*:*

… the 'cultural' underpinnings of the ASEAN Way of managing disputes and advancing security cooperation could be overstated. Several elements of the ASEAN Way are hardly different from the ordinary qualities of pragmatism and flexibility that are found in national decision-making styles in other cultural settings. Moreover, the so-called cultural underpinnings of the ASEAN Way are not fixed or static, but have been subject to continuous adjustment in response to national, regional and global developments (Acharya, 2009, 79).

Yet, by equating the 'cultural underpinnings' of the ASEAN Way to 'the ordinary qualities of pragmatism and flexibility that are found in national decision-making styles in other cultural settings', Acharya is unable to rule out the possibility that such settings account for a source of collective identity, even more when Acharya himself acknowledges that legal-rational norms – that are also shared by states belonging to other cultural settings – fostered the creation of ASEAN norms. Furthermore, Acharya does not engage in a thorough study of those cultural underpinnings suggested by the scholar he first quoted, but he only 'forces' the reader to forget about the possibility that cultural settings could account as a form of collective identity, and to concentrate solely on the explanatory role of norms.

In these terms, not only does Acharya emphasise the role of norms, but he also discards identity. The question that arises is: what was ASEAN's identity at the time the regionalist project was created? Acharya does not say. He just concludes that:

… the concept of an ASEAN identity was to be derived substantively from its socialisation process. The ASEAN Way itself resulted not so much from preordained cultural sources […] but from incremental

socialisation. It emerged not only from the principles of interstate relations agreed to by the founders of ASEAN, but also from a subsequent and long-term process of interaction and adjustment. Thus, in the case of ASEAN, it was not so much that culture created norms, norms also created culture. As Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Abdullah Badawi, would put it later, ASEAN's 'norms have become very much part of the ASEAN culture' (Acharya, 2009, 86).

Hence, the question of why ASEAN member states were able to advance in the consolidation of their normative principles, even more, while facing the 'absence' of a pre-existing collective identity, remains unanswered[18]. In the end, Acharya succeeds in showing the importance of norms and the necessity of studying their role in pursuing regionalism, but he does not provide an explanation of why norms are sometimes fulfilled and sometimes not, nor does he assess the role of identity when norms were created in the first place. Answering such questions seems necessary if a collective identity is conceptualised *precisely* as the sharing of a set of norms. How do we explain the creation of such norms and the interest in constructing a collective identity?

Lastly, a significant difference between Acharya's approach and the ones engaged by the reviewed constructivists working on the EU, is that Acharya stresses the role of norms in constituting and creating regional identity without the creation of large institutional organisations that allow for interaction and socialisation of national and regional bureau-crats. In contrast, the EU has complex regional institutions, such as the Commission, the Parliament and the several Councils and Committees that allow for such processes to occur. This fact shows that Acharya's study acknowledges greater constitutive and causal power of norms. But simultaneously, this insight raises more questions about the possible identity-related reasons that led ASEAN leaders to the creation of regional norms and their interests in their enforcement through time. In other words, Acharya tells us that norms constitute and are capable of creating regional identity, but he does not tell us much about the role of identity in the creation of such norms in the first place.

The final section of the paper will show that the confusion between relationships of constitution and causation present in the reviewed constructivist analyses of regionalism can be overcome if the conceptualisation of causation is broadened and different types of causes are distinguished. Furthermore, a reflection on the need to bracket ideational structures and agency will be provided in order to improve the capability of constructivism to explain and understand why and how regionalism unfolds.

## 4. EXPANDING THE BORDERS OF CAUSATION

Section 2 reviewed the works of some authors (Söderbaum, Hettne and Van Langenhove) who hold that the formation process of a region – regionalisation, entails the development of a regional collective identity, which

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[18]    Indeed, none of the questions Acharya poses for developing his study relate to this issue (Acharya, 2009, 7, 9).

may derive on actors willing to pursue regionalism and subsequent institution building that leads the region to act as a unitary actor. In these terms, it can be said that collective identity precedes regionalism and institution building. Nonetheless, the reviewed authors do not make explicit that regional institutions are created *because* of the existence of a previous collective identity, this is, they do not explicitly acknowledge causal power of collective identity on institution building. Thus, the effects of collective identity over regional institutions are initially constitutive, but not necessarily causal, the latter understood under the Humean conception of causation. Yet, though none of these authors claim that collective identity is a necessary condition for regional institution building, from their works we can infer that, when it exists, identity can be assessed as having causal effects. As stated in Section 1, 'soft' constructivism aims to provide both constitutive and causal explanations. If actors' interests in creating regional institutions arise because they share a collective identity, then regional institutions could be understood as being *caused* by such identity, and therefore, *explained*.

Section 3 reviewed the works of some constructivist scholars working on European regionalism who show the socialisation effects that EU institutions have over bureaucrats working at the national and regional levels. Socialisation processes cause the development of a collective identity among bureaucrats working both at regional institutions and at the national level. EU institutions are assessed as creators of a collective identity, and once this identity starts developing, it reinforces regional institution building, giving way to conceptua-

lising a relationship of mutual constitution and causation between identity and institutions. Furthermore, Acharya's study of the ASEAN claims that regional institutions were created in the absence of a pre-existing collective identity among state members (although he does not explore the possible sources of such identity that he mentions), and that such identity was instead generated by the creation of regional institutions. All these authors acknowledge the constitutive and causal power of institutions on agents' interests, and by looking at actors' interests they assess regional institutions as creators of collective identity, inasmuch as the actors increasingly identify themselves with the institutions they create and reproduce, and with their roles as members of the group of states that share such regional institutions.

None of the reviewed authors show special concern about distinguishing relationships of constitution from relationships of causation between identity and institutions, and the general impression given by the whole set of the reviewed constructivist analyses of regionalism is that 'everything can explain everything', even more in those cases where relationships of mutual constitution and causation between identity and institutions are suggested. By 'everything explains everything' I mean that when it is possible to assess the existence of structures of collective identity and processes of institution building by simply claiming that relationships of mutual constitution and causation exist between identity and institutions, constructivism tells us little about how and in what terms these two ideational structures constitute and cause each other. In a constitutive relationship, the existence of a factor entails

the existence of the whole, it is intrinsic to it, and thus there is no independent existence and no previous existence in time between the constitutive factor and the whole. In stressing relationships of mutual constitution and causation between identity and institutions, constructivism is thus violating an indispensable condition of causation, which is the independent existence between cause and effect, and the precedence of the former in relation to the latter (Suganami, 2006, 65, 71). Yet, when the reviewed authors stress the constitutive role of identity over institutions, there is a sense or precedence; the same happens with those reviewed authors that acknowledge constitutive power of institutions on identity: first there were EU institutions, or ASEAN norms, and then collective identity began to emerge, or so the argument goes, as the possibility for the existence of a previous collective identity before the creation of EU institutions and ASEAN norms is not addressed. This analysis shows in clear fashion that for most constructivist analyses, assessing relationships of constitution imply indeed relationships of causation.

In her enlightening work from 2008, Milja Kurki shows that the apparent contradiction and confusion between constitutive and causal theorising is due to an excluding attachment of the conceptualisation of cause to the Humean conception of causation. In turn, she suggests that IR theory, and particularly constructivism – as she finds it the most promising approach for doing this - must broaden its conceptualisation of causation drawing on the philosophical doctrine of 'critical' (also called 'scientific') realism and reclaiming Aristotle's conceptualisation of causes. Accordingly, cri-

tical realism is needed for two reasons: one, to acknowledge the structural constraints that material conditions pose to agency; and two, to assess the causal powers of empirically unobservable structures, such as ideas. Aristotelian conceptualisation of cause is needed in order to acknowledge that there are different types of causes, and that such types are usually present together in social life, thus enlarging the room for assessing multi-causation (Kurki, 2008, ch. 1).

Following Kurki (2008, 12), Aristotle proposed four types of causes: material, formal, efficient and final. Material causes are those conditions that physically enable and/or constrain agency, i.e. the raw material with which a sculpture is made. Formal causes refer to the shape that an object must take in order to acquire the meaning as such an object, i.e. a house must have some kind of walls and roof and a door in order to be recognised as a house. Efficient causes refer to the mechanisms by which things change from one state to another, like 'pushing and pulling' forces, i.e. the mechanism by which cold water in a pot turns into vapour (heating). Lastly, final causes refer to the motives and reasons that made an agent willing to carry out a particular action, i.e. the sculptor carves a stone figure because he/she wanted to praise a god (Kurki, 2008, ch. 6). By these definitions, the only one that matches the Humean conception of causation is the one corresponding to 'efficient' cause. Effectively, an object's change of state needs to be preceded by an external factor that produced such change. In turn, material and formal causes have a greater constitutive character, inasmuch as they make possible that an object is so – its existen-

ce. Yet, in Aristotle's view, to 'make possible' entails a causal relationship, inasmuch as such conditions of possibility enable the existence of the object, its *creation* (Kurki, 2008, 220). Finally, and perhaps the most problematic issue for social and IR theory, the definition of final causes grants causal power to motives and reasons, something overtly rejected by many postmodernist and poststructuralist scholars.

The issue of final causes is problematic because constructivism emphasises ideas as the most important constitutive and casual factors of agency and social structures. And it is in the category of final causes where ideas such as reasons and motives mostly fit. Ideas are not material conditions, although Kurki and Wendt open the possibility to think of the material implications of certain social structures, like capitalism or slavery (Kurki, 2008, 139, 228-9, 258; Wendt, 1999, 95). Ideas are formal causes inasmuch as they constitute the meaning of objects (material and non-material), as they constitute language, and express the terms in which social things are defined, i.e. a house, a book, a war, a family[19]. But crucially, ideas can only be assessed as efficient causes inasmuch as they are final causes[20]. In other words, we can only be sure about the causal power of ideas as efficient causes if we can know that agents hold them, and this can only be acknowledged by observing agents' discourse. Hence, we

can observe a more constitutive role of ideas by assessing the ways in which they operate as material and formal causes - granting meaning to material and non-material factors; and a more causal role (closer but not too much to the Humean conception of causation) when they operate as final-efficient causes.

Postmodernist and poststructuralist scholars usually reject the conception of motives and reasons as causes because they follow a Wittgesteinian view according to which reasons are cases of rule-following, which do not have an independent existence from the actions they motivate. In turn, the philosophical doctrine of critical realism defends the causal power of reasons, arguing that in most cases agency would have not taken place if they had been absent, and that the justifying power that reasons provide to agents acts as a strong internal force (motivation) to carry out certain actions. Donald Davidson (1963) poses the case of explaining why an individual turned on the lights of his living room. Davidson tells us that the cause why the individual turned on the lights was because he wanted to warn a suspicious person that was prowling the outside of his house, that someone else was in the house in order to deter his intentions to rob it. A Wittgesteinian explanation of this case would say that the individual was just following a rule that says "if I turn on the lights the person

[19]  'Social things' refer here to all those categories of meaning that entail human interaction, this is, they exist only for human beings, and in this sense are not part of the natural world in case human beings did not exist. Drawing on Currie, Wendt provides a definition of social kinds as all those "physical objects that have a social function" (Wendt, 1999, 68).

[20]  I draw this argument from Aristotle's acknowledgement that final causes – the ends and purposes 'for the sake of which a thing is'- are closely associated with efficient causes, as Kurki asserts (Kurki, 2008, 222).

outside my house will know someone is in the house and will think twice before deciding to enter my house to rob it", and surely another rule that says "if you see someone prowling your house, you should alert him because he might be a thief". Davidson claims that the cause why the individual turned on the lights is not that someone was prowling his house, but rather that *he thought* that someone could be a thief and thus *he wanted* to alert him. The individual's suspicion and his will of preventing a robbery was the *reason* why he turned on the light. This reason might not have been the only cause that explains his action, but Davidson claims that if such reason had been absent, the individual would have not turned on the lights (Davidson, 1963, 691, 695).

In assessing the causal power of reasons and motives, I do not see why constructivists – and social theorists in general – need to adopt a position pro or contra the Wittgesteinian view of reasons as cases of rule-following. For in social life, cases where there is only one rule to follow are rather scarce. Most of the times, agents have a diverse range of rules to follow. They must often choose what rules to follow. In their exercise of choosing, agents give to themselves – and often to other agents – reasons that justify their choosing in moral and ethical terms. When dealing with a conflict with someone else, an individual usually has the option of being more or less understanding and more or less aggressive. For instance,

there might be a rule that says "if you caught your girlfriend cheating on you with one of your friends, you should break up with both". Another rule could say "in such a case, you should beat up your friend, or do the same to him that he did to you in revenge". But other rules might command less aggressive and avenging attitudes. The individual may choose some and not others, and finally what counts for the researcher intending to explain the individual's conduct is *not only* the set of rules that might have informed the individual's behaviour, *but also*, and crucially, the reasons provided by the individual to justify his/her behaviour[21], even if those reasons are also cases of rule-following. In other words, by acknowledging the causal power of reasons one does not need to deny the constraining, constitutive and causal power of rules.

The previous reflections lead to the conclusion that, as pointed out by Kurki, constitutive theorising is actually a form of causal theorising[22], inasmuch as constitutive factors enable the existence of those things they constitute (material and formal types of causes in Aristotle's conceptualisation) (Kurki, 2008, ch. 6). If this position is accepted, the confusion between constitution and causation in constructivist analyses can be overcome. For what is needed, thus, is not a clear-cut differentiation between relationships of constitution from relationships of causation, but rather the differentiation of different types of more cons-

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[21]   See Davidson (1963, 691-2).

[22]   Note that this coincides with Steve Smith's view on Wendt's work (Smith 2000, 157), although Smith intended to raise this point as a critique.

titutive (material and formal) and more *transformative*[23] (efficient and final) causes. In other words, if we accept Aristotle's different types of causes, constitutive theorising – as understood by reflectivists, postmodernists, interpretivists and poststructuralists – on the one hand, and causal theorising – as understood by positivists and rationalists under the Humean conception of causation – on the other, are possible to combine, and so enabling constructivism's aim of combining 'explaining' and 'understanding'. But this task is by no means easy, and it poses serious challenges.

### 4.1 'Bracketing' for 'explaining' (and 'understanding')

Constructivism's acknowledgement of relationships of mutual constitution and causation between collective identity and regional institutions is acceptable as a point of departure, an ontological position, but this does not tell us anything concrete about the ways in which the relationships of constitution and causation – the latter understood in a more Humean conception of efficient cause - between identity and institutions actually *work*, since, ontologically, they can work in *any* way. As Finnemore points out:

> Constructivism is [...] the most amorphous and least defined of the perspectives emphasizing the causal nature of social structures [...] constructivists investigate a wide variety of social structural elements, and it is not clear how these different aspects of social structures relate to one another either conceptually or substantively. Conceptually, the relationships among principles, norms, institutions, identities, roles and rules are not well defined [...] These scholars [...] investigate social structures in the plural with little attention to questions about the relations among specific social elements – whether they can exist independently or whether they must appear as a part of a mutually reinforcing collection of norms, institutions and discourse (Finnemore, 1996, 16).

The previous quotation gives a clear picture of constructivism's risks – and frequent results – of under-explanation and under-specification. Instead of attempting to make predictions about agency and finding regularity patterns in agents' behaviour, constructivism must work on a case-by-case basis describing the ways in which ideational structures explain agency, and the ways in which such ideational structures constitute and cause each other through their interplay at the process of agents' interests formation and their role in orienting agents' behaviour. This role can only be assessed by observing agents' discourse and its relation to agents' deeds. For agents' discourse is a crucial element that the researcher must observe in order to know agents' interests. Yet, agents can 'lie' to others – and even to themselves – and may not be keen on recognising the ideas that informed their behaviour as reasons

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[23]   The term 'transformative' is not used in any case by Kurki, and it is only my responsibility to propose it. It intends to give the sense of 'change of state' characteristic of efficient causes, and of final causes (reasons and motives) that justify agents' actions that 'transform' or 'change' the state of things.

for actions. Thus, assessing the ideational social structures in which agents interact is also necessary in order to assess the causal power – both constitutive and transformative - of ideas.

In these terms, my claim is not that constructivism cannot or should not combine causal and constitutive theorising in the terms of 'explaining' and 'understanding' posed by Hollis and Smith. My claim is that, following Kurki's view, constructivism needs to broaden its conceptualisation of causation and differentiate types of causes engaging the Aristotelian classification. Turning back to the acknowledgement of relationships of mutual constitution and causation between identity and institutions made by the above reviewed constructivist analyses of regionalism, my claim is not that such relationships cannot be ontologically warranted, but rather that in order to understand how such relationships work, constructivism must 'bracket' each ideational structure in order to assess the causal effects - constitutive and transformative - of one on the other, and on agency. 'Bracketing' means to make a variable 'stable', this is, not exploring its construction at the same time as it is used as an explanatory variable. Constructivism needs to 'stabilise' ideational structures such as identity and institutions, not for claiming that such ideational structures *really are* stable – something broadly criticised by poststructuralist analyses (i.e. Zehfuss, 2002), but only for analytical purposes (Finnemore, 1996; Checkel, 2001), in order to show what are the constitutive and causal effects of one on the other and the ways in which they constitute agents' interests and cause action in concrete cases.

If one has the aim of 'explaining', explanations must start somewhere, and more than taking 'reality' as something more or less a priori 'given', constructivism needs to 'bracket' ideational structures in order to assess their explanatory role. If we want to turn a factor into an explanatory variable it is necessary to bracket it or make it stable because treating a factor as both the *explanans* and the *explanandum* at the same time – accordingly, what explains and what is to be explained – is problematic. Consider the following example: let us assume that Söderbaum sees the shared interest of regime-boosting among SADC state leaders as a result of these states sharing a collective identity as 'weak' states that suffer a significant lack of legitimacy. My claim is that, in order to assess the explanatory role of such identity in actors' interest in pursuing regionalism, we cannot ask at the same time how or why such collective identity was constituted among SADC state leaders, nor can we explain why SADC states are weak and lack legitimacy. All questions have to do with the same thing, but we cannot answer them simultaneously.

The same happens with the constructivist analyses of the role of institutions in the creation of a collective identity among EU and national bureaucrats. We cannot assess the socialisation effects of EU institutions at the same time as we try to understand why and how EU institutions were created in the first place. These are two different questions that need to be answered in separate fashion, one at a time, and not necessarily in the same analysis. It is not necessary to enquire into the construction of a certain identity and certain institutions in order to assess their causal effects, both consti-

tutive and transformative, on each other and on agency. This is not to say that the process of social construction of identity and institutions is irrelevant, but only to say that by bracketing and taking them as given we are not ruling out the possibility of assessing their explanatory role. In the case of Acharya's work, the problem is not that he 'brackets' norms in order to show how they cause the emergence of a collective identity in the form of the 'ASEAN Way', but, more crucially, that he discards the role of identity in the emergence and maintenance of such norms, even more when he provides evidence of the existence of possible sources of a pre-existing collective identity among ASEAN member states.

As the previous sections of the paper showed, Söderbaum, Hettne and Van Langenhove (and my previous work) implicitly tended to bracket identity to assess its effects on the pursuit of regionalism – which entails regional institution building, while Checkel, Risse and other constructivist authors bracketed institutions – not always explicitly, to assess their effects on the formation of a collective identity in the EU. Acharya himself implicitly bracketed norms (the explanatory variable) when he said that his study "is intended to analyse systematically the role of ASEAN's norms in the management of regional order and *their effects on* the development of collective interests and identities" (Acharya, 2009, 9, emphasis mine). I argue that, in order to assess the role of identity and institutions in the unfolding of regionalism, it is necessary to bracket both ideational structures and agency, and in this way constructivism can provide 'better' expla-

nations in terms of meeting its aim to combine 'explaining' (causal theorising understood in the Humean conception of causation) and 'understanding' (constitutive theorising understood in the interpretive and hermeneutic sense of postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches).

Once we have bracketed one variable and then the other, we can put together our conclusions and provide an explanation of the terms in which collective identity and regional institutions constitute and transform each other and what effects they have on agency. Moreover, through bracketing and ideational variable for assessing its explanatory role, it is possible to make findings about the ways in which such variable – i.e. a collective identity, is constructed through agents' interaction. For this, it is crucial to consider agents' discourse on their views on identity and institutions. Broadening the concept of causation and distinguishing different types of causes engaging the Aristotelian classification is also necessary in order to overcome constructivism's confusion between constitutive and causal theorising, and this enables the provision of multi-causal explanations which are more encompassing and adequate for understanding the unfolding of social life and, in regard to the topic concerning this paper, of regionalism.

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