



Situating regions in global worlds: towards a 'new' politics of social policy?

Professor Nicola Yeates
The Open University, UK

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Context: socialising globalisation – globalising social policy

- From ‘bounded’ national systems to an integrated global system comprised of global and sub-global connections, interactions, effects, outcomes;
- The social politics of globalisation and social development is played out in multiple spheres of cross-border governance as well as in country contexts;
- Pluralism of actors, institutions, arenas, ideas

See Yeates (2014) *Understanding Global Social Policy* (2nd ed) The Policy Press, Bristol; Yeates and Holden (2009) *The Global Social Policy Reader* (The Policy Press, Bristol). (<http://oro.open.ac.uk/40529/>)

On regionalism

- Resurgence of interest in the possibilities of regional integration as a feature of international integration, for social development.
- Regionalism is a source of socio-political dynamism: it mobilises diverse social actors in developing new political vision, structure, participation and activism;
- Practices of regionalist collective action are ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom up’; they forge and mediate ‘regionness’ (Hettne and Soderbaum 2000)
- Regionalism goes beyond the hub of trade, industry, finance and security to embrace issues of social policy and human development

See Yeates (2014) *The Socialisation of Regionalism and the Regionalisation of Social Policy: contexts, imperatives, and challenges*, in A Kaasch and P Stubbs (eds)

Transformations in Global and Regional Social Policies. Palgrave.

(<http://oro.open.ac.uk/40530/>)

What kinds of social policy for what kind of regional integration?

- What societal model should underpin visions and practices of international integration?
- What sorts of political cooperation and institutions are needed to promote regional social policy and convergence forged on common interests?
- Is social policy to remain an essentially sovereign matter, or evolve over larger integrative scales and become a matter for supra-national governance?
- Should the strategic ambitions of regional social policy be to promote inter-state coordination, promote labour mobility and manage the risks of cross-border harms? Should they aim for a more maximalist regional social policy, founded on social inclusivity, democracy, developmentalism, instituting elements of supra-nationalism to ensure common standards?
- What would it mean to construct social policy as part of a broad public services policy as distinct from trade or security policy?

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Principles of regional social policy

- Access to a broader 'menu' of social policy options; greater ease in agreeing common social policies;
- Enhanced access to, influence over global policy;
- Harness the economic, fiscal and social benefits of intra-regional trade in support of regional social policy priorities
- Enable economies of scale in pooling risks and resources among MS;
- Single point of contact for donors and partners, a channel for the disbursement of development aid

Yeates (2014) *Global Poverty Reduction: what can regional organisations do?* PRARI Policy Brief no 3, The Open University, Milton Keynes. Freely available at http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/prari/files/policy_brief_3_en.pdf

Strengthened regional governance of social policy makes possible the development of:

- Regional social redistribution mechanisms
- Regional social, health and labour regulations
- Regional social rights
- Regional lesson learning to develop solutions amenable to scaling up in regional cooperation, coordination and provision

Yeates (2014) *Global Poverty Reduction: what can regional organisations do?* PRARI Policy Brief no 3, The Open University, Milton Keynes. Freely available at http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/prari/files/policy_brief_3_en.pdf

Expressions and contestations of regional social policy

- In what forms and by what methods is regional social policy being realised?
- What is the scope of regional social policy in practice?
- What are the axes of ideological contestation around social policy as played out through regional integration?

Regional social policies in practice in four continents

(Adapted from fig 10.1, Deacon, Macovei, Van Langenhove, Yeates (eds) 2010 *World-Regional Social Policy and Global Governance*. Routledge.

<http://oro.open.ac.uk/19009/>

	<i>Re-distribution</i>	<i>Social regulation</i>	<i>Social rights</i>	<i>Cooperation in social sectors</i>	<i>Cross-border lesson learning</i>
EUROPE					
EU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Council of Europe	No	No	Yes (but not backed by law)	No	Yes
LATIN AMERICA					
MERCOSUR	Yes	Soft law	Yes (but not backed by law)	Yes	Yes
CAN	Yes	Soft law	Yes (but not backed by law)	Yes	Yes
CARICOM	No?	Soft law	Yes (but not backed by law)	Yes	Yes
ALBA	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
ASIA					
ASEAN	Yes	Soft law	Yes (but not backed by law)	Yes	Yes
SAARC	Yes	Only trafficking of women and children	Yes (but not backed by the force of law)	Yes	Yes
AFRICA					
AU	No	Soft law	Yes (but not backed by law)	Yes via sub-regions	Yes
ECOWAS	No?	Soft law	Yes	Yes	Yes
SADC	No	Soft law	Yes (but not backed by law)	Yes	Yes

- Several regional organisations have a track record of tackling issues of the relationship between trade, labour and social standards, and the question of how to maintain fiscal capacity and social solidarity in the face of international competition
- The scope of regional social policy goes beyond creating regional labour markets to also include institutional action and provision in relation to health care, human rights, poverty reduction, education, food security.
- Faster progress through exhortative declarations of aims and principles, rather than as binding regulatory or redistributive mechanisms.
- Notes of caution: 1. dominance of industrial/commercial logics and elite interests; 2. question mark over the extent of policy implementation; 3. varieties of social liberalism.
- Can regional social policy effect social transformation?

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Conclusion

- Globalisation calls for greater attention to the transnational dimensions and dynamics of social policy and development
- Regionalisation processes, including regional formations, are central to the revitalisation of research, educational, policy and campaign agendas on social policy, development and change
- Is a bolstered social regionalism a retreat from or a building block towards a more robust social policy founded on inclusivity, democracy, solidarity?
- Can regionalisation processes spur alternative (progressive) developmental trajectories in the interests of social inclusion, protection and equality?

For further information and resources on Social Policy, Poverty Reduction and Regional Integration go to <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/prari/index.php>

