Introduction

Due to a high level of uncertainty as well as the increase in unexpected extreme events caused by anthropogenic climate change, the respective policy making requires a substantial degree of flexibility, i.e. the ability of policy makers “to learn to manage by change” (Folke 2006: 255). From a resilience perspective, this means that small groups and individuals have to take a more prominent role in problem-solving (ibid.). Interregional dialogues and cooperation frameworks are an example of such small groups. The question remains which contribution they can make to global governance of climate change. Although some progress has been made on technical details, multilateral negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are lengthy, time-consuming and based on the least common denominator. They are therefore often perceived as ineffective. And yet, UNFCCC served as a catalyst to promote climate change policies on sub-global levels. In fact, we can observe that regional and national strategies to tackle climate change are increasingly becoming similar. I argue that this is a result of diffusion processes. In an earlier study, I integrated diffusion into the research agenda of interregionalism and defined this process as “the spreading and melting of ideas through the communicative interaction of two collective entities. ‘Spreading’ refers to institution-building and agenda-setting. Institutionalized dialogue structures are a prerequisite for agenda-setting as well as the exchange of information and knowledge about policy innovations. ‘Melting’ stands for the actual diffusion process” (Carrapatoso 2001: 178). The result is a worldwide convergence of climate change policies. It is therefore vital to ask about the mechanisms and communication channels which facilitate the dissemination and mainstreaming of effective policies, best practice and precautionary ‘no regrets’ measures. The aim of this paper is to set a research agenda for comparative eco-(inter-) regionalism with a specific focus on norm and policy diffusion. I will show that diffusion is an under researched phenomenon in interregional relations although, from my perspective, it is one of the central functions in interregional climate dialogues. Nevertheless, I will address the other functions of interregionalism in this study as diffusion cannot be analysed separate as, for example, institution-building is a part of the diffusion process. The theory discussion will also illustrate that interregional cooperation on climate change and the environment cannot be analysed without integrating ecological approaches into the analytical framework. I identified earth system governance, green International Relations (IR) theory and a complex systems theory as part of the international ecopolitical theory agenda as promising paths to better address the environmental dimension in interregional relations.

In the empirical part, I will focus on institution-building and agenda setting as the first step of the diffusion process. The analysis will therefore center upon the institutional linkages and networks in interregional relations as a prerequisite for effective climate policy diffusion. Exploring the potential for the exchange of knowledge, mutual learning and the dissemination of climate policies as well as best practice allows for a preliminary assessment regarding the relationship between interregional relations and the UNFCCC process. The case study to be analysed will be the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) with a specific focus on ASEM summit meetings as the intergovernmental level, the Asia-
Europe Foundation (ASEF) as a mediator between the intergovernmental and civil society level and the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF) as the independent civil society level. Methodologically, I follow abduction as a pragmatic research strategy on the intermediate level between deduction and induction. As Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2007: 13) explain, “[t]he typical situation for abduction is when you become aware of a certain class of phenomena that intrigues you [...]. You simply trust [...] that the observed class of phenomena is not random. Therefore you start collecting pertinent observations and, at the same time, applying concepts from existing fields of your knowledge”. Eclecticism is therefore an integral part of an abductive approach. This qualitative, abductive approach will be implemented by using the case study method (Bennett/Elman 2008), focusing on process tracing as the central method for within-case analyses. The paper starts with a theory discussion in which I link existing frameworks on interregionalism and policy diffusion with ecological and environmental governance approaches. This is followed by a presentation of the cases study. The section not only presents ASEM as a relevant case but also illustrates to what extent the interregional level can complement the current UNFCCC process or even serve as a safety net. Finally, ASEM summits, ASEF and AEPF are analysed with regard to the ‘spreading’ of climate policies and norms.

Interregionalism, the Environment and the Need for an Integrated Approach
Theoretically, a study on interregional climate cooperation has to be embedded in the wider context of comparative regionalism (e.g. Börzel 2011; Laursen 2010; Sbragia 2008; Farell et al. 2005; Katzenstein 1996, 2005) and interregionalism (e.g. Rüland 2002, 2006; Hänggi 2006, Dent 2004, Gilson 2002, 2005; Holland 2006, Hardacre/Smith 2009). Engaging in the study of comparative (inter-) regionalism is a challenging task because of the still existing conceptual, theoretical and methodological problems inherent in this research branch. De Lombaerde et al. (2010) identify the definitional problem as the major obstacle while at the same time asserting an inevitable conceptual pluralism. They suggest instead of arguing about definitions it seems reasonable to concentrate on both internal and external characteristics of regions and regionalisms such as identity, institutionalization or interactions between different regions. They argue in favour of eclectic theorizing as a logical consequence of conceptual pluralism and a multitude of research questions and stress the need to move beyond euro-centric approaches. An integration of comparative politics, International Relations and area studies seems to be productive. This could help to overcome the currently predominant European bias in comparative regionalism research. Methodologically, scholars face the problem of comparability of cases and case selection and should carefully select comparable case according to either their relevance as well as the objective of the analysis or their theoretical significance.

Interregionalism research has to be seen as a sub-field of comparative regionalism. Interregional relations can be divided in transregional, hybrid or quasi-interregional and pure interregional or bi-interregional relations ‘Bi-regionalism’ (Rüland 2006) or ‘pure interregionalism’ (Hänggi 2006) stands for group-to-group dialogues, for instance dialogues between the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or between the EU and the African Union (AU). ‘Transregionalism’ (Gilson/Hwee 2004, Dent 2003) is characterized by a more diffuse membership encompassing various regional organisations and member states from different regions, for example the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC). ‘Hybrid or quasi-interregionalism’ (Hänggi 2006) denotes strategic partnerships such as between the EU and China as well as cooperation in inter-continental forums like the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). A more recent category is ‘imagined interregionalism’ (Holland 2006) or ‘interregionalism without regions’ (Rüland/Bechle 2010) which covers cooperation between,
for example, regional hegemons like South Africa, Brazil and India (BASIC). When it comes to the latter, COP 17 negotiations illustrated that such a coalition is strategically motivated, ad-hoc-based and consequently unstable. The coalition finally split when Brazil and South Africa enthusiastically supported the EU’s proposal in Durban while India initially opposed it. The fact that the “Durban Platform for Enhanced Action” finally integrated the wordings of the EU however showed that pressure on India was high partly due to the collapse of a relatively strong coalition of BASIC countries. The concept of ‘complex interregionalism’ seeks to establish an analytical framework to address the coexistence of multi-level diplomacy and institutional structures, not only because of the mixture of interregional, bilateral and multilateral institutional frameworks and strategies but also because of the various actors involved, all of them showing mixed motivations and strategies (Hardacre/Smith 2009).

This paper is representative for a new generation of interregionalism research. It moves away from the standard themes of trade and economics and focuses on interregional cooperation in a specific policy field, issue-specific alliances and issue linkages (Kiatpongsan 2010). As the research objective is to study the potential of interregional relations to act as a platform for policy diffusion, we not only have to draw on existing theoretical frameworks on interregionalism, actorness and policy diffusion, but also to integrate ecological approaches due to the complex nature of environmental problems and climate change. This is a challenging task because of a rich research body addressing these issues. For the research of interregional climate dialogues and policy diffusion, the research of the Earth System Governance programme, Green International Relations (IR) Theory and International Ecopolitical Theory seem to be of specific relevance. The next sections will therefore outline the existing concept of interregionalism and discuss the contribution of green analytical approaches to an eco-interregional research agenda.

Functions of Interregionalism and the Concept of Actorness

The major driving forces for interregional cooperation include (soft) balancing and bandwagoning (realist school), institution-building (institutionalist approach) and collective identity-building (constructivist approach). These functions have primarily been identified in studies involving the European Union (EU) and other regional actors (Rüland/Robles/Roloff 2006) with a specific focus on economic and trade relations. These relations clearly reveal motivations of balancing. The export of the EU model of regional integration and its core values including sustainable development (Manners 2008) aims at collective identity-building. Institution-building seems to be always a key objective, not least because the EU seeks equal regional partners with who to establish interregional relations. In its interregional relations, the EU seeks to establish institutional frameworks to strengthen the relationship. These institutions are however designed to be flexible, i.e. the EU pursues soft institutionalism. Interregional relations are nevertheless and important diplomatic and strategic tool because of the establishment of political channels and diplomatic networks (Hardacre/Smith 2009).

The empirical findings on the functions attributed to interregionalism are a mixed bag. There is ample evidence for (soft) balancing and to a certain extent collective identity-building with the ‘ASEAN Way’ as the most prominent example. The results for institution-building, agenda-setting and rationalizing, summed up as ‘multilateral utility’ (Dent 2004), are less favourable and support a trend towards ‘shallow’ of ‘diminished’ multilateralism (Rüland/Bechle 2010; Rüland 2012). Rüland (2010) identified further need for in-depth research for each of these functions. Studies on norm and policy diffusion in interregional relations are specifically rare and still in their infancy. With regard to interregional environmental and climate cooperation, such analyses are almost non-existent. This is probably due to the fact that, on the one hand, interregionalism research has long focused almost
exclusively on trade and economic themes. Policy field research has not been of any specific interest (Rüland/Storz 2008). An analysis on interregional climate cooperation therefore has to be seen in the context of a new generation of research, which focuses on concrete policy areas in terms of issue-linkages and issue-specific alliances (Kiatpongsan 2010). On the other hand, the realist as well as institutionalist agenda and consequently a concentration on the logic of consequences was predominant, partly because of a priority for economic and security issues, partly because environmental and climate change issues are fairly new on the interregional agenda. Even now, in some interregional relations such as between the EU and Mercosur or EU and ASEAN the environment only plays a marginal role – if at all. Nevertheless, in some instances of hybrid interregionalism, e.g. EU and China (Carrapatoso 2011), interregional dialogues seem to fulfill certain functions with regard to climate policy making – particularly in the realm of diffusion. Literature on norm diffusion follows a constructivist approach (e.g. Wendt 1992, 1994; Finnemore/Sikkink 1998; Ruggie 1998; Börzel/Risse 2009), which stresses the transformative effects of social interaction on interests and identity. Central actors’ behavior as well as behavioural change is based on the logic of appropriateness (Wendt 1992; Ruggie 1998; Loewen/Nabers 2008). With regard to euro-centric norms, which are also reflected in the UNFCCC process, Rüland (2010) identified four research questions for the effects of interregional relations: Are these norms purely imitated by other regional actors in a sense of “mimetic isomorphism” (Jetschke 2009; 2010)? Are these norms localized, i.e. do local actors generate congruence between universal norms and local beliefs and practices? The inclination of these actors to localize foreign ideas stems from a “sense of uniqueness of the actors’ values and identities” and the wish “to exploit a new idea for power, efficiency, and status without admitting to cultural or knowledge inferiority” (Acharya 2009: 17). Does interaction between regional organisations facilitate norm transformation (Manea 2008)? Do we have a reverse flow from other regional actors’ norms to the EU (Börzel/Risse 2009)? Jetschke (2010: 17) outlined two indicators for both policy and norm diffusion as well as for the diffusion of institutional designs: first, the timing of policy adoptions and, second, the similarity of policies. Furthermore, she identified causal mechanisms for policy diffusion which include mutual learning through information-sharing and model production, the role of social networks, international organisations and epistemic communities as transmitter of ideas and norm promoters and diffusion as a source of legitimizing policy-making. It will nonetheless gain significant momentum when exploring the functions of interregional climate cooperation. There is currently a trend to “climate governance by diffusion”, which means that governments, regional organisations and local communities look for already existing models when drafting their own climate policies (e.g. Jänicke/Jörgens 2007; Holzinger et al 2009; Tews 2006, Carrapatoso 2011). The advantage is to effectively address climate change issues without having any obligation to comply with binding international agreements. Due to its comparatively ambitious climate and energy policy and its frontrunner position in developing and implementing new policies, the EU often acts as a worldwide reference model to either imitate or to oppose. Interregional dialogues are a suitable platform to share information on policies and to exchange knowledge on all climate-related issues. Research has however come to the conclusion that other regional organisations, too, serve as a role model. One example in other policy areas would be the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) (Börzel 2011: 26). This is, however, a research question which still needs further exploration with regard to climate policy.

When it comes to the analysis of interregional climate cooperation, current analytical frameworks are either deficient and focus on a limited number of functions or they are not sufficiently explored as in the case of complex interregionalism. Studies on policy diffusion, transfer and convergence
have to be added to the analytical toolkit. In contrast to hierarchical imposition or coercive policy transfer, Tews (2006) identifies policy diffusion as a voluntary mechanism which facilitates the spreading of policy innovations through communication. This diffusion process can range from learning to mimesis (Jetschke 2009, 2010; Meseguer 2009; Elkins/Simmons 2005). This combines two understandings of policy diffusion, namely diffusion as a “process of spreading policies across countries with the possible result of cross-national policy convergence, regardless of the causal factors that are driving this development” and “as a distinctive causal factor leading to policy convergence by means of voluntary transfer of policy models” (Holzinger/Knill/Arts 2008: 11). Tews (2006) points to three factors which determine this process: the interplay of international and transnational factors, national responsiveness and the characteristics of the policy innovation. Here, multilateral environmental discourse, benchmarking activities, model production as well as diffusion effects of hard law and soft law agreements have to be addressed. The level of analysis can comprise either horizontal, mainly bilateral communication between countries or deliberation processes of international intergovernmental organisations, knowledge networks and/or transnational non-state advocacy networks. Tews (2006: 252) comes to the conclusion that “diffusion may become a substitute for negotiated harmonization in global environmental governance [...] via knowledge diffusion, dissemination of best practice, and benchmarking activities”. Moreover, she draws attention to the fact that transnational advocacy networks as well as think tanks influence diffusion processes. There are two modes of diffusion: direct diffusion via horizontal and bilateral deliberation patterns and institutionalized diffusion via both multilateral and vertical communication patterns (ibid.: 233). While direct diffusion refers to bilateral relations and their effects, the latter is a complex set of interactions including discourse organized by multilateral institutions, benchmarking activities by inter- or transnational actors such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and model production by inter- or transnational actors (ibid.: 236). In addition to a certain degree of institutional linkage in interregional relations which serves as a platform to exchange ideas, policy diffusion only happens if these ideas converge with a government’s or regional organisation’s objective to adopt new policies (ibid.: 241). Besides, there must be a potential to bring different belief systems together, i.e. new ideas, norms and policies have to be localized. Acharya (2009: 17) defines localization as ‘the desire of the idea-recipient to exploit a new idea for power, efficiency, and status without admitting to cultural or knowledge inferiority or compromising its existing identity’. Both aspects taken together delineate a country’s national responsiveness or in terms of regional organisations, their ‘regional’ responsiveness (Carrapatoso 2011). Furthermore, a policy innovation has to be politically feasible. This means that the national context, the problem structure, the extent of policy change, the potential for conflict and the characteristics of a policy innovation determine the diffusability (Tews 2006).

The analysis of interregional relations requires the integration of the concept of actorness, particularly if the EU is in the center of studies. Sjöstedt defines actorness as “the capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system” (as quoted in Doidge

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1 For the role of transnational advocacy networks in global governance see, for example, Keck/Sikkink 1998; Della Porta/Diani 2006.

2 Note that other scholars make a distinction between policy transfer, policy diffusion and policy convergence. Holzinger, Knill and Arts (2008) distinguish the different levels of analysis. Policy transfer focuses on processes, i.e. how is knowledge about policies and institutions used to develop own strategies. Policy diffusion, too, refers to processes. The aim is to analyse how policies “travel” among various political systems, i.e. the understanding of mechanisms by which policies are communicated. Policy convergence concentrates on the effects, i.e. studies “seek to explain changes in policy similarity over time” (ibid.: 13). Policy convergence is closely related to the concept of isomorphism which analyses underlying reasons for increasing similarities of organizations and structures (DiMaggio/Powell 1991). In this study, the terms ‘diffusion’ and ‘transfer’ are used interchangeably due to their epistemological proximity.
Doidge (2007) argues that character of the actors involved determine the shape and the function of interregionalism. Although actor qualities differ depending on the policy issue and context, there are four major criteria which are decisive in determining the degree of actorness (see also Rüland 2011): presence or visibility of a regional actor, regional identity including common interests and norms, an institutional platform, the capacity to implement decisions. Allen and Smith (1991) understand presence as an actor quality based on the actor’s legitimacy, acting capacity, resources and its externally perceived role in the international system. With regard to collective identity, system cohesiveness and collective will determine the effectiveness of regional actors in the international system (Doidge 2008: 36). Providing an institutional platform for all kinds of relations and decision-making processes requires the actor to have a certain degree of institutional capacity. This means that an actor is able to learn (learning capacity), to conceptualize policies (carrying capacity) and to deploy resources in order to implement that policy (mobilization capacity) (ibid.: 397). When exploring the diffusion of European climate policy, this concept helps to define the actorness of both parties involved in interregional relations. Although it has so far been used to analyse the way in which the EU acts upon other regions, actorness is also implicitly part of the localization framework because the recipient party, too, needs actor qualities to respond to foreign ideas. The diffusability of a policy innovation is thus affected not only by its political feasibility and the national or regional responsiveness of the idea recipient but also by the actorness of the parties involved.

Interregionalism, Earth System Governance and Green Theories

Interregional climate dialogues should be viewed in the context of earth system governance, which is defined as “the sum of the formal and informal rule systems and actor-networks at all levels of human society that are set up in order to influence the co-evolution of human and natural systems in a way that secures the sustainable development of human society” (Biermann 2007: 329). Biermann outlines the specific problems that earth system governance has to address: the problems of persistent uncertainty, intergenerational dependencies, functional and spatial interdependencies as well as potentially extreme impacts. As a consequence, earth system governance must be based on the principles of credibility, stability, adaptiveness and inclusiveness to effectively deal with these problems. Interregional climate cooperation fits into the research agenda because of the establishment of institutionalized cooperation, the informal exchange of best practice and the evolution of multiple actor networks with the overall aim to promote sustainable development. Interregional relations can address the above mentioned problems on a sub-global level with a potential to impact on both the global and the regional level. What could be the advantage of the interregional level in coping with these problems? First, uncertainty could be reduced through the establishment of interregional research networks as well as multi-stakeholder cooperation to develop or exchange new norms and conceptual frameworks to tackle climate change. Second, intergenerational dependencies have to be integrated into an interregional cooperative framework by setting environmental justice issues and democratic legitimacy on the agenda. The establishment of inter-parliamentary exchange in addition to civil society forums would be the institutional manifestation of such an agenda. Third, functional interdependence could be addressed through policy integration at the interregional level. Fourth, spatial interdependence is an issue both on the regional and interregional level. Here, the challenge is to find solutions to the negative impacts of local environmental degradation on the world economy, global politics and the material security of individuals and societies. Interregional cooperation could assist in exchanging effective policies or best practice in risk management, including issue areas such as migration and disaster reduction in
addition to promote an ecological transformation of economic systems. Finally, interregional cooperation could help to build up mitigation and adaptation capacities in order to deal with the extreme consequences of climate change.

Because environmental justice and legitimacy should be a theme in interregional climate cooperation, green IR Theory could widen the analytical perspective of interregionalism. Green theorists (Eckersley 2010; Dobson et al. 2009) generally criticize rationalist approaches for merely concentrating on international behavior of states in environmental regimes and how the effectiveness of these regimes could be improved. They also disapprove of rationalist theorists neglecting globalized capitalism as the major driver of environmental degradation. The main research objective of modern green theorists is to find ways to reduce ecological risks and to encourage an environmental justice perspective. To achieve this, they point out the necessity to recognize affected parties, to integrate this community-at-risk into environmental decision-making processes, to take a precautionary approach, to distribute risks in a fair way and to compensate those parties who are affected most. It is therefore crucial to understand moral belief systems inherent in environmental regimes, to direct attention to the role of social agents and structures blocking more ambitious environmental regimes and to analyse the role of non-state actors in environmental governance. The value of integrating a green theory perspective into interregionalism research lies in its advocacy for integrating environmental justice issues into the IR agenda. Interregional relations could address these issues by institutionalizing specific dialogue platforms and fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation.

International Ecopolitical Theory is a third research branch which is valuable for the analysis of interregional climate and environment cooperation. It seeks to understand the complexity of integrated social-ecological systems. Harrison (2006) therefore argues in favour of a complex systems theory for environmental politics and introduces the principles of adaptive agents, self-organizing emergence, authority and openness. Participants in interregional cooperation have to be considered as adaptive agents because their preferences and strategies can change with social interaction, learning, experience and the exchange of, for example, policy models. The underlying ontology is thus that “adaptive agents are ‘satisficers’ and [...] adapt more readily to conditions around them, they accept a wider range of alternatives, increasing opportunities for cooperation” (ibid.: 55). Self-emergence refers to the fact that “social systems emerge from the interaction of interdependent, co-evolving, adaptive agents” (ibid.: 56). This means that there is a constant flow of emerging and modifying institutions which impact on agents’ strategies and behaviours. In the case of interregional relations, this is particularly relevant because this is an intermediate level brokering between the global, regional and national level which in turn influence this specific type of cooperation. With regard to authority, Harrison (2006: 62) contends that authority cannot be ignored when analyzing human interactions. It is crucial, however, to address the fragmentation of state authority due to a power shift towards other actors such as non-governmental organisations or corporations. Authority is a key concept when dealing with complex social-ecological systems because it affects human behavior and impinges on causal and moral belief systems. Openness refers to the need for an integration of politics, economics, science, ecology, technology and culture to effectively solve environmental problems. This can be achieved by institutionalizing multi-stakeholder cooperation.

To sum up, even though interregional relations perform various functions in diverse issue areas, policy diffusion seems to be of specific relevance when it comes to the analysis of interregional climate cooperation. The prerequisites for policy diffusion are institutional linkages and a certain degree of actorness on both sides. Because of the complexity of climate change and environmental policies, it does not make sense to rely only on existing literature on interregionalism for the
approach is based on traditional IR theories. Rather, an eco-interregional research agenda has to be enriched by ecological approaches in social science in order to work out the performance of interregional relations in terms of environmental protection, climate mitigation and adaptation and sustainable development. The research categories should therefore include: defining actorness, exploring institutional linkages and interregional environmental governance, analyzing functions and communication channels, looking for alternative explanations for the functioning or disfunctioning of eco-interregional relations. The following section will introduce ASEM as the case study and briefly discuss the potential contribution of the interregional level to the international climate regime complex.

**Introducing the Asia-Europe Meeting as a Case of Eco-Interregionalism**

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) as a case of hybrid interregionalism is one of the most institutionalized interregional dialogues between the European Union (EU) and another world region\(^3\). ASEM dates back to a French-Singaporean initiative in 1994 that suggested organizing an EU-Asia summit and marked the beginning of a strategic shift in Asia-Europe relations\(^4\). The inaugural summit was held in Bangkok in 1996 and established ASEM as an economic, political and cultural dialogue forum. This goes beyond the initial objective to establish ASEM as an answer to the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) (Gaens 2008: 1). The ASEM process is characterized by informality, multi-dimensionality, equal partnership and a dual focus on high-level and people-to-people contacts. According to the functions of interregionalism, ASEM serves as a platform for balancing, institution-building, agenda-setting, rationalizing and collective identity-building. While there is evidence for the balancing function as a means to globally distribute institutional power in interregional relations, the functions of multilateral utility and collective identity-building are less clear, specifically with regard to solving collection action problems and norm diffusion (Rüland 2010). Climate change is currently one of the greatest collective action problems. The well-known dilemma between problem-solving for long-term extreme effects and the realization of short-term goals such as economic growth paralyses multilateral negotiations. But it is not only the problem of short-term versus long-term solutions which hampers effective negotiations. Kürzinger (2011) identifies a wide range of other root causes: too many veto players and retarding coalitions, the consensus principle and consequently a focus on least common denominators, the UN diplomatic negotiation style based on positions rather than on interests, untrained, inexperienced and overloaded negotiators, ineffective working methods, outdated concepts, a lack of systemic evaluation of the negotiation process as well as a mushrooming of new institutions and funds. The question remains whether smaller groups on sub-global levels are more effective to solve collective action problems and are thus a means to circumvent gridlocked negotiations on a global level.

Effective climate policy-making and implementation depends on “end users taking charge of policy goals and resources” as well as on translating climate policies into priorities that are significant to local and regional actors. (Auer 2000: 174). The multilateral process has given impulses for a deepening of climate cooperation on sub-global levels. Despite the problems of the UNFCCC process mentioned above, it nevertheless set the agenda for further collaboration. Key themes include

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\(^3\) ASEM partners include the 27 member states of the EU, the EU Commission, the 10 ASEAN countries, the ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, Korea, India, Pakistan and Mongolia, ASEM. ASEM Partners, ASEM, http://www.aseminfoboard.org/page.phtml?code=Partners (accessed January 18, 2010).

mitigation, adaptation, transparency of actions, finance, technology, forests and capacity building. The Cancún Agreements\(^5\) in 2010 and the outcome of the COP 17, the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action\(^6\), seemed to be a step forward in global climate change negotiations and might have an effect on, for example, interregional cooperation regarding topics and institutions to be discussed. An example would be the decision “to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties” (UNFCCC 2011, Draft Decision - /CP.17). The inclusion of all member states marks a paradigm shift as it moves away from the up to then predominant principle of common but differentiated responsibility. Taking a look at interregional relations, it remains to be seen whether this is rhetoric or indeed the beginning of a different thinking. In any case, the concentration of smaller groups can help to overcome general problems of global environmental governance such as incoherence, intransparency, an overcrowding of treaties, implementational and operational inefficiencies (Ivanova/Roy 2007) and can translate multilateral impulses into regional and national action.

That the interregional level can be a promising path to promote effective climate strategies on regional levels was realized at ASEM6 in 2006. Sustainable development, climate change and energy security was set high on the agenda and resulted in the ASEM6 Declaration on Climate Change\(^7\). The Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development as an outcome of the ASEM 7 summit further emphasized the joint commitment to reduce emissions, to sustainably manage forests, to transfer technology and cooperate on energy issues, to finance mitigation and adaptation measures and to enhance natural disaster management\(^8\). This combines multilateral themes with regional needs, which have resulted in various initiatives to tackle climate change on regional, national and local levels. Since 2006, Asian-European commitment to tackle climate change has been reaffirmed in several meetings such as the 9th ASEM Ministers’ Meeting in Ha Noi in 2009\(^9\). The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which was founded in 1997 by ASEM, has provided a platform for exchange on environmental and sustainable development matters. ASEF promotes dialogues and cooperation on various levels including ministries, academia, international governmental organisation (IGOs), business and civil society. The Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENVforum), for instance, is a multi-stakeholder process facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practice with regard to environmental policies\(^10\). The economic and business dimension was realized through the foundation of the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF)\(^11\). An attempt to integrate economic and environmental issues is the ASEM SEMs Eco-Innovation Center (ASEIC), which was established in 2011 with the

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overall objective to foster the dissemination of eco-innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SEM)\(^{12}\). This is an interesting case to look at in the run up of the Earth Summit 2012 (Rio+20), which focuses on the green economy. The question will be whether ASEIC will be a crucial platform for policy diffusion or just an irrelevant talk shop. The Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF) as the civil society answer to the intergovernmental ASEM process addresses ecological and climate justice issues, which works out recommendations for the other ASEM institutional levels\(^ {13}\). In addition to high-level summits, multi-stakeholder dialogues and civil society initiatives, the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP) gives parliamentarians from Asia and Europe a chance to have a say in the ASEM process\(^ {14}\). On all these levels, interregional dialogues help to reduce uncertainties, to make cooperation predictable, to build mutual trust, to identify shared interests, to exchange ideas and knowledge, and to build up capacities and establish institutions in order to coherently and consistently implement climate strategies of mutual interest.

ASEM is a relevant case to analyse on four grounds: first, it is one of the oldest interregional forums initiated by the EU and its Asian partners, which established political channels and diplomatic networks in order to discuss global issues; second, ASEM was designed as a flexible institutions, thus allowing to create cooperative frameworks on governmental, bureaucratic and civil society levels and to pragmatically deal with problems of mutual concern; third, it pursues shared objectives on an intergovernmental as well as civil society level, thus trying to establish a certain degree of inclusiveness; third, since 2006, climate change issues have been addressed on various levels with the aim to strengthen cooperation in this respect. I therefore consider ASEM as an interregional climate dialogue platform with the potential to foster the dissemination of effective climate policies and best practice. Based on preliminary empirical observations and theoretical reflections, the following aspects of interregional relations will be the point of focus in this study: institutional linkage and networks, environmental norm and policy diffusion, interregional climate dialogues and global environmental governance. Four sets of questions will be addressed:

- Which climate change and environmental topics are discussed on which institutional levels? Which networks have been established with which objectives? Which functions do these interregional climate dialogues fulfill?

- Do interregional climate dialogues promote policy diffusion? Are the results and effects of this cooperation based on direct or institutionalized diffusion? What is the interplay between international and transnational factors, national responsiveness and the characteristics of the policy innovation with regard to climate policy diffusion? Which factors hinder or facilitate diffusion?

- Which elements of Earth System Governance and ecological theories can be identified in interregional climate cooperation? Which specific functions for interregional climate dialogues can be derived from this?

- Can interregional climate dialogues be a means to circumvent gridlocked multilateral environmental negotiations? What is their contribution in the climate regime complex and the global environmental governance architecture?


The case study analysis will explore the first set of questions in further detail and touch the other aspects in order to set a research agenda for subsequent studies. Process tracing will be used as the central method. In the following section, I will analyse ASEM summit meetings, activities initiated by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF). The sources include scientific articles and books but foremost primary sources such as websites, press releases and newspaper articles.

The Intergovernmental Level of Asia-Europe Relations: ASEM Summits and Ministerial Meetings

The ASEM6 summit can be marked as a turning point in Asia-Europe environmental relations. Although sustainable development has been mentioned in previous summit meetings and environment-related activities have been promoted in the context of ASEF, the ASEM6 summit extensively addressed climate change issues. The Chairman’s statement lists priorities in future cooperation, ranging from a strengthening of the multilateral environmental system, disaster reduction and risk management to biodiversity, climate change and energy security. The ASEM6 Declaration on Climate Change further emphasized the joint commitment to finding viable and region-based solutions in the combat against climate change. ASEM member states made out “interrelated multiple goals” leading to win-win-win solutions such as the reduction of emissions while at the same time improving air quality and contributing to energy security. Cooperation on climate change centers upon the issues of low carbon technology, energy efficiency and renewable energies. Adaptation is another issue of specific concern. The ASEM7 Chairman statement listed energy security, an understanding for adaptation, sustainable management of forests and oceans, biodiversity, environmentally sound energy and projects on low carbon economy as key priorities for cooperation. ASEM member states regularly propose new initiatives to work on the issues highlighted in the summit statements. The ASEM work programme for 2008 to 2010, for example, included five new proposals related to environmental and climate change issues such as the ASEM Seminar on Energy Security and Climate Change suggested by Singapore. Since the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM, members can take the lead in policy fields which are of specific interest to them. Between 2008 and 2010, Japan, Poland and Denmark took the lead for climate change issues, Singapore and the Philippines did the same for energy security and energy efficiency issues. The Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development reaffirmed ASEM’s positions on climate change and recalled the commitment to multilateral solutions, mitigation, adaptation, emission reduction targets, the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation, technology transfer, energy efficiency, energy security and the need for policy integration. It furthermore stressed the potential for win-win-win solutions such as improving energy cooperation while at the same time reducing poverty and protecting the environment. ASEM8 tied in with the previous statements but added the 2 degree Celsius goal, the provision of fast-start financing as well as sustainable production and consumption. The Global Green Growth Institute was founded in Seoul, Korea, to assist developing

countries in their green growth. The results of the ASEM7 and ASEM8 summits mirror multilateral negotiations. The final outcome of COP 15, the Copenhagen Accord, included the objective to keep the increase of global temperature below 2 degree Celsius and addressed the issue of providing additional financial resources for mitigation, adaptation, REDD+, technology development and transfer and capacity-building. The Bali Action Plan listed areas of enhanced action which are reflected in ASEM summit meetings. Convergence can be recognized in the field of adaptation including risk management, risk and disaster reduction strategies, improved cooperation on technology development and transfer, and, finally, financing. The question can be raised whether diffusion takes place from the global to the interregional level rather than – as previously assumed – establishing the interregional level as an independent source for climate change policies. In fact, the interregional level seems to pursue UNFCCC objectives with the aim to implement the Bali Action Plan, the Copenhagen Accord and the Cancún Agreements on the (inter-) regional level. The concrete design of enhanced cooperation has been left out by UNFCCC decisions, which is in fact easier to plan in smaller groups on sub-global levels. One new initiative under the ASEM8 framework is the establishment of the ASEM SME’s Eco Innovation Center (ASEIC). Another new platform for the exchange on low carbon economies and the integration of ecological and economic policies is the ASEM Green Growth Forum.

A further platform on the intergovernmental level is the ASEM Environment Ministers’ Meeting, which was established in 2002. The first statement summed up general positions on environmental governance, sustainable development and shared commitment to the multilateral process. And yet, ASEM ministers set the agenda for future cooperation and normatively defined the common ground for their partnership. Key areas include poverty eradication, energy, water, desertification, forest degradation, chemicals, urban environment, bio-safety, coastal and marine protection, clean production technologies, conservation, climate change, environmental policies and laws, sustainable livelihood. Since then, these issues were regularly set on the agenda of ASEM summits or activities under the auspices of ASEF. The first meeting also established a new institution, the Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre, which is based in Thailand.

On normative grounds, ASEM members underlined that “environmental cooperation should be based on equality and full partnership”. In later documents such as the “Declaration of the 3rd ASEM Environment Ministers’ Meeting”, the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities” was emphasized in the context of climate cooperation as well as the recognition of “the priority of developing countries to achieve sustainable economic growth and eradicate poverty”. The increase in meetings on sustainable or green growth and corresponding institutions is thus less surprising.

The second meeting, which took place in 2003, seemed to have extensively dealt with all kinds of environmental problems in the Asian-European context. One indicator is the sheer number of paragraphs in the chairman’s statement, which increased from 19 in the first statement to 36 in the second one. While the first meeting set the agenda for future cooperation, the second meeting

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discussed these issues and explored common grounds for cooperation on water, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable consumption and production, forest management, biodiversity, energy, technology transfer, information-sharing, public participation, knowledge exchange, international environmental governance, poverty reduction, climate change, financing and environmental education\textsuperscript{24}. ASEM ministers reaffirmed the normative dimension as outlined in the first chairman’s statement.

There was then a gap in the sequence of meetings. The third meeting was held in 2007 – four years later – and specifically addressed climate change related issues. Here, low carbon economic growth, renewable energy, energy efficiency, low carbon technologies, energy management, biodiversity, deforestation, biofuels and international cooperation were of specific relevance\textsuperscript{25}. The fourth meeting has not yet taken place and will be hosted by Mongolia in May 2012. The discussions will concentrate on sustainable water and forest management\textsuperscript{26}. The fact that environment ministers meet irregularly leads to the assumption that environmental cooperation takes place on other levels within the ASEM process. First, the environment and climate change has been intensively discussed in the context of ASEM summit meetings since 2006. Second, although the intergovernmental level is important in setting the agenda and in listing the environment and climate change as priority areas in Asia-Europe relations, concrete collaborative frameworks are developed under the patronage of ASEF based on multi-stakeholder dialogues. The following section will analyse the role of ASEF as a catalyst for deepened cooperation in environmental and climate change policies.

\textit{Linking the Intergovernmental to the Civil Society Level: The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)}

Bersick (2008) analysed democratization potential of civil society in Asia-Europe Relations. In his perspective, the fact that civil society is not formally involved in the ASEM process is because of a fundamental difference in the understanding of civil society between the European and the Asian governments. While the Europeans point to the importance of people-to-people contacts and NGOs, Asian leaders fear that NGOs question and challenge their power and legitimacy. Due to European insistence, the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) integrated civil society as one of the main actors in ASEM (AECF 2000: paragraph 2005). The gradual inclusion of civil society was shifted to the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which was founded in 1997 with the objective “to promote better mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through greater intellectual, cultural and people exchanges” (ASEF 2005, Dublin Principles). Bersick (ibid.: 247) emphasizes that ASEF is an intergovernmental body as most of the members of the Board of Governors are governmental officials so that governments’ interests are represented in ASEF. This is important to bear in mind because it might impact on ASEF’s alignment, i.e. the topics to be addressed and civil society to be included. Members of the AEPF criticize ASEF for not being pluralistic enough and ASEF has so far failed to establish a political civil society which communicates between the societal and governmental level (ibid.). ASEF is considered as “elitist and limited in its approach toward civil society” (Keva 2008: 110).

ASEF sees itself as “a unique meeting point for intellectual, cultural, and personal interactions between Asia and Europe” with the overall objectives of strengthening Asia-Europe relations by


developing interregional networks, enabling learning and the exchange of ideas and experiences, fostering dialogue, improving mutual understanding and exploring opportunities for cooperation.\(^{27}\)

With regard to climate change and environmental issues, ASEF fulfills these functions by establishing forums and roundtables as well as organizing conferences and workshops. The foundation is therefore a promising platform for the diffusion of norms, ideas and policies but also for other functions of interregionalism such as institution-building and agenda-setting.

As mentioned above, the starting point for increased climate cooperation was ASEM 6 in 2006. ASEF had already organised conferences, workshops, seminars and roundtables on environmental issues since the year 2000. But as illustrated in Table 1, activities have significantly increased since 2006, which also shows the increased importance of environmental protection and climate change in Asia-Europe relations. This observation is also supported by an intensification of exchange on environmental and climate change issues on the intergovernmental level.

![Graph showing the increase in environmental related projects and events from 1997 to 2011.](image)

**Table 1: ASEF environment related projects and events, 1997-2011**

ASEF pursues three pillars in its environment programme: education, culture, politics and multi-stakeholder interaction. As Table 2 illustrates the political pillar and the facilitation of political dialogues takes a prominent role in Asia-Europe relations. The first roundtable of the Asia-Europe Environment Forum was held in 2003 in Bangkok. It was attended by 41 representatives from academia, local authorities, the private sector and NGOs as well as members from the European Commission, the Asian Development Bank, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Environment Agency.\(^{28}\) In the aftermath of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, participants worked out recommendations how to strengthen Asia-Europe partnerships to tackle serious environmental problems.\(^{29}\) Since then, eight events specifically addressed climate change and centered around the issues of mitigation and adaptation in agriculture, emission reductions from deforestation, the impact of the economic crisis on climate change and UNFCCC negotiations. Further events directly or indirectly integrated climate change in the discussions. The following events are of particular interest: the 2005 Jakarta Conference on “1/3 of Our Planet: What Can Asia and Europe Do for Sustainable Development”, the Asia-Europe Environment Forum Panel on “Global climate policy after 2012 – ASEM’s contribution” in April 2007 in Copenhagen, the discussions on REDD alongside

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COP 15 in 2009 in Copenhagen and the workshops developing “Strategies for the Earth Summit 2012” in 2011 and 2012. From an analytical perspective, these events are interesting because of the underlying potential for policy diffusion in the context of the Asia-Europe Environment Forum’s work on climate change and the question of ASEM as a way to complement UNFCCC initiatives or to circumvent gridlocked negotiations. For the purpose of this paper, I will only analyse the 2007 panel and the 2009 discussions on REDD.

Table 2: Three Pillars of ASEF Environment-related Activities 1997-2012

The Asia-Europe Environment Forum Panel on “Global climate policy after 2012 – ASEM’s contribution” focused on three issues: the costs and benefits of a global climate policy, the actors involved and their roles, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The panel emphasized the need for including a wide range of actors, the commitment to the UNFCCC process, the importance of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and the benefits of the Kyoto mechanisms such as the CDM. Regarding the latter, participants identified the CDM as a concrete area for enhanced cooperation between Asia and Europe. They therefore suggested the creation of an ASEM CDM Observatory as well as an Asia-Europe Technology Exchange for Renewables to foster technology transfer, policy support and investment. Asia-Europe cooperation on climate change should also focus on knowledge exchange of best practice and facilitate lesson learning. Furthermore, aid and cooperation with developing countries should be in the centre of the partnership. Yaacob Ibrahim, Environment and Water Resources Minister from Singapore, pointed out that technology transfer “to help developing nations grow in a sustainable manner could be the common ground that would help to get more countries on board”. Results of this panel were delivered to the ASEM environment ministers but it remains to be explored what kinds of effects these proceedings had. Moreover, further research on the ASEM CDM Observatory and the Asia-Europe Technology Exchange on Renewables did not come to any conclusion regarding the level of institutionalization and concrete implementation – a fact that leads to the question whether there is a gap between rhetoric and action in Asia-Europe relations. One reason might be found in the informal character of the process with summit meetings alternately organized by Asian and European countries and ASEF as a multi-stakeholder dialogue facilitator. When it comes to the foundation of concrete cooperative frameworks and their implementation, some countries have to take the lead as there is no ASEM institution which could carry out and supervise such projects.

Another aspect of Asia-Europe relations came up during this panel and shapes other meetings, workshops, etc.: Common but differentiated responsibility is the norm or principle in international
climate change negotiations that is passionately defended by developing countries also in Asia-Europe cooperation. The principle was watered down in the Durban negotiations, which was hailed as a breakthrough because it enabled a - at least rhetorically – shared commitment to negotiating a legally binding treaty by 2015. However, the historical responsibility regarding emission reductions is still an issue and the transfer of knowledge, technology and investment from industrialised to developing countries seems to be a prerequisite for further concessions made by developing nations. ASEM tries to offer a constructive environment in which Asian and European governments, academia, business and civil society can informally consult on these topics. This became explicit when European and Asian actors discussed REDD (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) on the final day of COP 15 in Copenhagen. While official negotiations were stalled, informal talks helped to find common ground on the role of the REDD scheme in the UNFCCC framework as well as on Asia-Europe cooperation on forest issues. Forests have been an issue since the beginning of environmental activities established by ASEM and ASEF32, but have gained further significance regarding Asia-Europe climate change cooperation because of increased emissions from deforestation in the tropics. The Panel discussion on the “Institutional set-up of REDD and the involvement of the private sector” also indicated the importance of the private sector for the functioning of a global carbon market and for ensuring sufficient funding. There are many controversies on various aspects of this topic such as governance and regulatory frameworks. What ASEM offers is a platform for discussions to find a common denominator on REDD. This function of the interregional dialogue refers more to rationalizing as to diffusion. So far, the rationalizing has been a strongly contested function of interregionalism.

The exchange of knowledge and best practice regarding climate policies as well as the transfer of technology are of specific concern in any kind of cooperative framework and dialogue organized and facilitated by ASEM. We can therefore assume that mutual learning and the localization of norms and policies is taking place in Asia-Europe relations. The institutional linkage and network-building can be identified and is a precondition for diffusion processes. To what extent ASEM initiatives leads to further institution-building and detectable policy diffusion remains to be seen. In order to analyse the concrete effects of the ASEM process we need to look at regional and national policies.

The Independent Civil Society Level: the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF)

AEPF is a case of ‘self-emergence’. The forum emerged as a reaction to the first ASEM summit in 1996 with a vision to build ‘alternative regionalisms’ to challenge the global economic order (Bersick 2008: 249). ASEM was designed as a top-down institution, allowing heads of state to discuss issues of common concern at the highest level (ibid.: 246). A formal civil society link was not intended. AEPF was therefore founded as an independent civil society forum alongside the first ASEM summit in 1996. It assembles grassroots organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), academics, trade unions and parliamentarians to give civil society a voice – understood as the non-profit and non-governmental sector in society - in Asia-Europe relations. The objective is to critically reflect on ASEM, to strengthen network building, to analyse issues of shared interest and to make recommendations for the current and future Asia-Europe dialogues and cooperation.33 In its 2010

briefing paper, AEPF calls for more democracy, transparency, equality, justice and sustainability in the process and joint activities. AEPF can thus be considered the normative voice of ASEM. We can observe that ASEM leaders ‘adapted’ to consistent AEPF activities by formally acknowledging the forum as part of “ASEM in society”. Nevertheless, ASEM does not comprehend civil society as a major actor in the process and is indecisive regarding the importance the Asia–Europe People’s Forum should have in the overall framework (Keva 2008: 108; Robles 2008: 164). The 6th ASEM summit was perceived as a breakthrough by AEPF. They interacted with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister participated in AEPF and there were new lobby opportunities with several governments. But compared to the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), the civil society dimension of Asia-Europe relations is more or less ignored. AEPF nevertheless served as a catalyst for increased horizontal networking between Asian and European NGOs (Bersick 2008: 251; Keva 2008: 105). Networking is a prerequisite for the exchange of ideas, norms and strategies. AEPF could therefore be an important platform for norm and policy diffusion in Asia-Europe relations.

With regard to the environment and climate change, AEPF is a strong promoter of ecological justice—a topic which is only marginally touched in the official ASEM process. This corresponds to AEPF’s self-understanding as the engine of alternative policy agendas in these interregional relations. It is interesting to see that the advocacy agenda of AEPF mainly reflects the works of the Transnational Institute (TNI), the Centre National de Cooperation au Développement (CNCD) and “Focus on the Global South”, two Europe-based NGOs and an Asia-Based NGO which also take the lead in organizing AEPF activities, as. It can be assumed that these NGOs have played a strong role in setting climate/ecological justice, alternative regionalism and water justice on the AEPF agenda. These topics as well as an analysis of the role of AEPF in the ASEM process fits into the research agenda of green IR theory. AEPF’s fundamental principles include “the promotion of environmentally, socially and economically sustained patterns of development” and the inclusion of environmental justice in the design of a post-Kyoto framework on climate change. As Hautala stated in 2008: “Those who are responsible for the warming of our planet, also have the responsibility to find a new, sustainable path.” AEPF clearly supports the principle of common but differentiated responsibility in combating climate change as a way to achieve ecological justice. In 2009, the AEPF Climate Justice Working Group was established. Climate Justice was reflected in the “Recommendations to ASEM8”, which supports a shift towards a low carbon economy. In order to achieve this, AEPF made several suggestions which, inter alia, urge European actors to significantly reduce emissions and to finance mitigation and adaptation measures. Furthermore, the proposal

37 For further information about these two NGOs see http://www.tni.org and http://www.cncd.be (accessed March 17, 2012).
underlines the need for an ecological restructuring of the economy while at the same time integration the norm of environmental justice. Climate and environmental justice should not only be a primary goal in any kind of future agreement to tackle climate change but should be enforceable via a Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal.

The value of AEPF is not only to give civil society a voice in the ASEM process but also to connect European and Asian NGOs in a transnational network. It facilitates the diffusion of norms such as ecological justice and sustainable development as well as campaigning strategies. It also engages in institution-building, offering civil society an institutional platform by organizing regular events and establishing working groups. It sets an interregional normative and policy agenda which is made public and both directly and indirectly communicated to ASEM. Direct communication refers to personal contact with government officials, indirect relates to press releases, official statements and public campaigns. Regarding diffusion, AEPF is not necessarily a platform for policy diffusion but rather for policy advocacy based on environmental norms such as sustainable development and climate justice, including the ecological transformation of the current economic system. AEPF thus addresses intergenerational dependencies as well as spatial interdependence. Civil society’s push for climate justice also attends to the need for increased policy integration, thereby focusing on functional interdependence. The norms that are put forward in this interregional civil society network are generated on both sides. Sustainable development has been promoted by the EU and its member states for a long time and is part of the EU’s ‘normative ethics’ (Manners 2008). Climate or ecological justice is propagated by developing countries, social movements, environmental and development NGOs from the South and proliferated by Western NGOs. We can therefore assume that norm diffusion takes a two-way direction in this respect. AEPF brings together a wide range of civil society representatives with different backgrounds, which can learn from each other’s experience. The forum also helps to develop mutual understanding for the national constraints that Southern NGOs, in particular, face when campaigning for sensitive issues. The final statements, concluding each AEPF meeting, are thus a remarkable achievement as it shows the ability of the actors involved to find a common denominator for joint positions to be delivered to ASEM member states (Keva 2008: 106). The ASEAN People’s Forum (APF) is another example to illustrate the effect of this interregional networking strategy. This forum assembles Southeast Asian-based civil society actors to agree on shared interests and visions and to concur on a joint statement which can be delivered to ASEAN. In the APF6 final statement worked out in 2010, participants integrated sustainable development and climate justice objectives from developing countries’ perspectives, which ASEAN member states should actively pursue in multilateral negotiations. These issues were discussed at AEPF meetings and it should not be regarded as a coincidence that they are promoted in the ASEAN context as well.

To conclude, in order to increase civil society’s impact on the ASEM process and to foster the diffusion of the ecological justice norm, civil society and governments have to overcome the institutional barrier dividing these two spheres of action. Except for small windows of opportunity at the 6th ASEM summit, AEPF does not seem to have real access points to ASEM summits and the intergovernmental level. AEPF currently acts as a normative voice disseminating justice norms but institutionalizing AEPF as a regular ASEM body could strengthen democratic legitimacy of the ASEM process – if both AEPF members and governments have the mutual desire to take this step. Milliot argues that civil society does not have to be directly involved. Civil society actors could “help ASEM

evolve into a consultative and participatory forum and enhance its sustainability, transparency and visibility” by merely educating the public and by assisting in the practical implementation of various projects (Milliot 2003 as quoted in Keva 2008: 109). And yet, to integrate ecological justice and sustainable development into the ASEM dialogue requires civil society positions to be heard and acknowledged by ASEM member states – no matter if directly or indirectly.

**Conclusion: Eco-(Inter-) Regionalism as a New Research Agenda**

The aim of this paper was to elaborate a research agenda for comparative eco-(inter-) regionalism and to specifically ask about the potential of interregional relations to act as a platform for climate policy and norm diffusion. The theory discussion has shown that the analysis of eco-interregional relations needs an integrated approach which adds a more ecological perspective regarding the functions of interregionalism. The problem-solving capacity of eco-interregional relations has to be seen in the context of persistent uncertainty, intergenerational dependencies, functional and spatial interdependencies, ecological extreme impacts, environmental justice and legitimacy. To view interregional relations as part of a social-ecological system requires an orientation towards complex systems theory. This means participants in interregional relations have to be considered as adaptive agents, institutionalized cooperation has to be evaluated in terms of self-emergent systems and the aspects of authority and openness should be reflected. These features have to be integrated with the functions of (soft) balancing, institution-building, agenda-setting, rationalizing and collective identity-building. A crucial aspect in eco-interregional relations including interregional climate cooperation is the potential for norm and policy diffusion. The interregional level has a broker position between the global and the regional level and related functions to facilitate the multilateral process such as UNFCCC negotiations through interregional cooperation is important. And yet, the diffusion of effective environmental and climate policies as well as the dissemination of best practice has a practical value. The UNFCCC process, for instance, triggered vital discussions on how to combat climate change. It also sparked off the establishment of new institutions and funds. However, further innovation on policies, research or technologies as well as the implementation of multilaterally agreed on policy measures happen on sub-global levels. Concrete strategies are developed by smaller groups on sub-global levels. Learning processes and the exchange of knowledge are managed easier on sub-global levels. In sum, the interregional level bears a great potential to generate innovative climate and environmental policies and to effectively contribute to the global climate change and environmental regime complex. The key function here is policy and norm diffusion. I therefore asked about the institutional linkage and networks as well as agenda-setting a prerequisite for diffusion processes.

The case study on ASEM has shown that sustainable development and climate change issues were set on the agenda of ASEM summits and ministerial meetings. The thereby identified topics serve as a guideline for further cooperation on other levels. Energy issues and technology transfer as a means to achieve win-win-win solutions, i.e. to achieve green economic growth, reduce poverty and protect the environment, are high up on the interregional agenda. This is mirrored in the ASEM work programme, ASEF initiatives and institution-building. Examples include the ASEM Green Growth Forum, the Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre or the ASEM SMEs Eco-Innovation Centre. The intergovernmental level certainly helps to raise mutual awareness of existing environmental and climate policies in both regions and to thus foster mutual learning. And yet, the intermediate level connecting the intergovernmental to the civil society level bears a higher potential for policy and norm diffusion because multi-stakeholder cooperation is made easier on this level. It is therefore not surprising that most of the ecological initiatives occur under the auspices of ASEF.
Even though the summits and ministerial meetings clarified the normative grounds on which environmental and climate cooperation is build, environmental justice themes are not intensely discussed – neither on the summit level nor on the ASEF level. The AEPF therefore acts as a corrective in this respect. Ecological justice is a key theme in its advocacy work. ASEM, however, opens up slowly to AEPF so that it remains to be seen to what extent AEPF’s work has an impact on the official process. With regard to norm diffusion, AEPF is certainly one of the most promising communication channels.

Having explored the institutional linkages and actors involved in eco-interregional relations, the next step would be to identify policies, strategies and best practice that were diffused. An interesting result of the case study is that diffusion does not only take place horizontally between Europe and Asia but there is clear evidence that it also happens vertically from the global to the interregional level. Official statements often correlated with key international conferences such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) or UNFCCC. It would therefore be valuable to identify both vertical and horizontal communication channels in this respect. The vertical-horizontal communication matrix also applies to the interregional level where ideas, norms and policies are diffused from the intergovernmental to the civil society and business level and between civil society and business networks.

Can interregional climate dialogues act as an alternative climate governance model and circumvent gridlocked multilateral climate negotiations? My answer to this question is no because it is not an alternative governance model – it is part of the overall environmental and climate governance model. The interregional level can complement multilateral processes but not substitute them. It can assist in spreading successful policy models, disseminating best practice, raising mutual awareness for specific regional problems and contexts and strengthening and deepening intergovernmental, multi-stakeholder and civil society cooperation and networks. It cannot set global standards because interregional cooperation is always contextual. Nevertheless, once multilateral negotiations are gridlocked, interregional cooperation and dialogues can help to keep climate change, sustainable development and urgent environmental problems on the agenda, the development of effective policies on track and cooperative frameworks alive. Despite the often justified criticism, the interregional level is merely a talk shop without any kind of significant results it should nevertheless not be underestimated. To serve as a platform for deliberation processes with the effect of policy and norm diffusion is certainly one of the biggest assets of eco-interregional relations.
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