The Harmonisation of Higher Education Systems in ASEAN: An Analysis of Drivers and Impediments

Salita Soongsawang

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2018

Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne
Declaration

This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signed.................................................................

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<td>(Center for World-Class Universities (CWCU): Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2015, 2016)</td>
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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

The harmonisation of higher education systems (hereafter HE harmonisation) would enable the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to develop a more connected ASEAN Community and improve the competitiveness of local HE systems within the international context. However, progress in HE harmonisation within this highly diverse region has been incremental. To date, there are few studies of this issue. Addressing this gap, this thesis examines the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation in ASEAN. It provides an analysis of the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in this regional context. The thesis employs document analysis and interviews with 40 HE leaders and practitioners from ten ASEAN member states representing the key actors in the field; the government agencies responsible for HE, higher education institutions, and regional organisations with education mandates. The findings reveal that there is considerable demand for HE harmonisation. However, there are several challenges involved in efforts to achieve HE harmonisation, and this is especially the case in examining ideational and cultural aspects. In particular, the political will of ASEAN leaders; the commitment and priorities of HE policy makers and practitioners; and societal values regarding region-building have not sufficiently progressed. Given the norms embedded in ASEAN’s cognitive priors and the diversity among the member states, there remain challenges related to structures for implementing HE harmonisation initiatives; institutionalisation: governance and leadership in driving a common space in HE effectively. In addition to seeking to contribute to policymaking regarding the significance of the ASEAN Community and HE harmonisation, the thesis proposes five interrelated key structural considerations. These are: the development of an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; the adoption of functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; the development of a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; the strengthening of the monitoring and evaluation system; and, finally, the improvement in the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives. While emphasising a multistakeholder approach, the thesis proposes that an enhanced leadership role for ASEAN as a regional body is an essential precondition for the construction of a common space in HE.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The harmonisation of higher education systems (hereafter HE harmonisation) refers to the process of building policy infrastructure in HE systems, particularly those related to the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance and credit transfer. The development HE policy infrastructure constructs an ‘area’ or ‘space’ of knowledge in which HE cooperation and employment opportunities can be facilitated more effectively (Enders, 2004; Sirat, Azman, & Bakar, 2014; Wallace, 2000). Although HE harmonisation processes narrow variances in HE systems through the alignment of policies, structures and procedures, emphasis is placed on the recognition of local differences and an aversion to standardisation (Knight, 2013b; Sirat et al., 2014; Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014).

HE harmonisation may take place at the international, regional and local levels. Central to this thesis is regional HE harmonisation, which assumes the importance of regional HE cooperation in utilising resources in improving the quality and operational efficiency of domestic HE systems (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Chapman, Cummings, & Postiglione, 2010; Kot, 2010; Sakamoto & Chapman, 2010). This thesis defines regional HE harmonisation as a form of HE regionalism, which introduces and establishes ‘political instruments and mechanisms to organise higher education cooperation’ (Chou & Ravinet, 2015, p. 363). HE harmonisation efforts develop mechanisms, which provide the minimum requirements for participating HE systems to refer to such as frameworks, guidelines, and codes of conduct.

With the several challenges to HE development such as access, equity, employability of graduates, and international recognition; HE harmonisation has gained more attention over the past decade as an approach to enhance the quality and legitimacy of domestic HE systems within the international HE context (Eta, 2015; Knight, 2012b, 2013b; SEAMEO RIHED, 2008; Woldegiorgis, 2013). The Bologna Process (BP) since the 1990s, leading to the launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010, is widely regarded as an important source of inspiration for HE harmonisation for other regions (Chao, 2011, 2014; Hartmann, 2008; Huisman, Adelman, Hsieh, Shams, & Wilkins, 2012; Schriewer, 2009). At the same time, education leaders have been carefully exploring the possibilities for creating a
regional HE area to suit their respective contexts. This is also the case for the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

In 2007, broad consensus was reached regarding the importance of building regional HE policy infrastructure for a ‘common space’ in HE, as proposed by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED). The perceived key benefits involve promoting regional academic mobility, increasing employment opportunities and raising HE quality and standards (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008). In addition to improving the international recognition of local HE systems, HE harmonisation is pivotal to realising a more connected region, as envisaged in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a). Furthermore, developing such space would support other HE areas and the global knowledge community.

Progress has been made towards regional HE policy infrastructure, such as the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS), the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE), the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), albeit incrementally. The incremental progress involves several challenges in seeking to achieve HE harmonisation in this region. Moreover, there are limited studies on the topic (Yavaprabhas, 2014, p. 82). Little is understood about how a common space in HE can be effectively developed given the rich diversity among the ASEAN member states (AMS) and ASEAN’s cognitive priors such as minimal institutionalisation, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, and consensus-based decision making. In particular, the level of enthusiasm and concern of leaders and practitioners who plan and implement the HE harmonisation initiatives in ASEAN is crucial for improving current progress; yet this remains less well understood.

This thesis specifically examines the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation in ASEAN and analyses key conditions for constructing its common space in HE. In addition to document analysis, the thesis analyses data from interviews with 40 HE leaders and practitioners from ten AMS representing the key actors in the field comprising the national government agencies responsible for HE, higher education institutions (HEIs), and regional organisations with HE mandates.
1.1 Context

1.1.1 The Concept of Harmonisation

Harmonisation is neither a new concept nor phenomenon. The term can be traced back to early legal history – that of Roman law and early colonial law (Andenas, Andersen, & Ashcroft, 2012). Contemporary focus on harmonising transnational policies and standards primarily stems from economic theory regarding the Industrial Revolution in Europe, which is often discussed in association with regional integration (Cini, 2013; Woldegiorgis, 2017). The concept of harmonisation is explained in economics as processes in which various policies converge among nations in order to facilitate the development of a free trade area (DeLong & Dowrick, 2002).

Harmonisation does not only reflect isomorphic changes or policy convergence among participating nations, but also the possible heterogeneous responses at the local level. This argument is substantiated in this thesis by positioning the HE harmonisation processes within the convergence and divergence theses for interpreting globalisation outcomes (Li, 2013; Lujiten-Lub, 2007; Vaira, 2004). Convergence effects on HE may refer to the progressive global construction of HE reforms. In particular, the HE development trends have become similar across HE systems such as improving international HE quality and recognition, promoting graduates’ employability, and developing the comparability of HE qualifications across borders. In further promoting the convergence among HE systems, HE harmonisation efforts develop HE policy convergence across HE systems to build regional policy infrastructure for constructing a regional HE area/space.

Divergence outcomes may be perceived as the differential impacts of cosmopolitan trends shaped by localised responses to the globalisation process (Vaira, 2004). In particular, local influences from the political targets, history, traditions, culture, and priorities of an individual nation play a crucial role in the local adoption of international policies and practices (Kellner, 2006; Knight & de Wit, 1997; Teichler, 2006). Thus, in the harmonisation process only certain key dimensions converge in local HE systems, which does not lead to sameness or related concepts such as standardisation, uniformity, conformity, and homogenisation (Knight, 2013b; Sirat et al., 2014; Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014). Despite the HE harmonisation
efforts in ASEAN, incoherent policies and procedures, and differing quality of HE systems among participating systems is inherent and will continue to be a feature of domestic systems as a result of historical constructions and localisation processes.

The aforementioned position is further substantiated in Chapter Two. The international policy transfer perspectives, which reflect the convergence of international HE trends, shape analysis of the shared motives for HE harmonisation across regions. Norm diffusion perspectives shape the analysis of impediments to HE harmonisation in ASEAN. In particular, using Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework, this thesis emphasises the predominant role of local factors in shaping the forms and paths of HE harmonisation that reflect each region’s idiosyncrasies. This emphasis supports Yavaprabhas’s (2014) position that ASEAN HE harmonisation is comparable to Jazz management and European HE harmonisation to Orchestra management, as outlined in Chapter Two.

1.1.2 Driving Forces of Regional Higher Education Harmonisation

A series of interrelated global trends have triggered the emergence and development of HE harmonisation at the regional level. Informed by relevant literature, this thesis identifies the following trends as key driving forces of the phenomenon: the seeming dispersion of state-centric logic; the post-Cold War resurgence of regionalism; economic globalisation; the transition towards knowledge-based economies; and the rise of HE internationalisation and HE regionalisation.

Among the fundamental driving forces of regional HE harmonisation is the increased importance of supraterritorial space and non-state actors in global governance. In particular, the tremendous growth in supranational cooperation since the Second World War underlines the perceived comparative advantage of regional organisations in shaping national policies and solving transnational problems (Wunderlich, 2008b). Together with the resurgence of regionalism in the Post-Cold War era, region-building processes have expanded in many parts of the world such as Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. In addition to the broadened territorial scope, the functional scope of regional cooperation has spread beyond the political sphere, including to the field of HE.
Harmonisation has been triggered by the rise of globalisation over recent decades, which is defined in social theory in terms of the transnational flows of people, goods, services, and information beyond the purview of nations (Castells, 1996). Among globalisation imperatives, economic globalisation fosters international trade and market interdependence to the degree that ‘no nation in the industrialized or industrializing world can insulate its economy from global economic pressures’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 6). This context has further weaved interconnectedness among nations and deepened regional cooperation from loose collaboration to more structured efforts through harmonising related policies and structures.

In the field of HE, economic globalisation acutely influences educational governance and reform. Developing educational policies has to take into account inputs and procedures beyond those related to education, especially global structural transformations in non-educational policy sectors such as international trade, finance or employment (Dale & Robertson, 2007). HE harmonisation has emerged as an approach to overcome shared economic globalisation imperatives impacting the field of HE, particularly those relating to the marketisation of HE, the increased competition in international HE markets and graduates’ employability in a transnational workforce.

Drawing on harmonisation in economies as earlier stated in the chapter, HE harmonisation converges policies across systems to facilitate the development of a free trade area in the field of HE (DeLong & Dowrick, 2002). There have been international HE harmonisation efforts and mechanisms to foster an amicable setting for encouraging domestic opportunities in the international HE markets and vice versa. To support international efforts and ensure a robust global economy, HE harmonisation at the regional level plays an adjunct role in reducing national barriers to transnational HE interactions. Among the notable examples of international and regional agreements to encourage the liberalisation of HE services at the domestic level are the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation in 1995 and the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education.

Regional HE harmonisation has further accelerated through the global transformation into a knowledge-based economy with an increasingly international dimension in HE.
over recent decades. In particular, the increasingly intertwined relationship between
the education development level and national economic growth has spurred the search
by education leaders for effective approaches to developing local HE systems.
Developing HE harmonisation and an HE area or space at the regional level has
emerged as one of the strategies for improving the international competitiveness and
legitimacy of domestic HE systems over the past decade. This strategy encompasses a
broad assumption on the potential importance of a regional approach to strengthening
HE systems in the region and promoting the global knowledge community (Asian
Development Bank, 2012).

A combination of the aforementioned trends establishes a supportive context for the
internationalisation and regionalisation of HE, both of which generate direct triggers
of regional HE harmonisation. Based on the European Parliament’s (2015) revision of
Knight’s (2008) definition, ‘internationalisation of higher education’ is:

The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension
into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance
the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful
contribution to society. (p. 29)

HE internationalisation has flourished since the mid-1990s, as evidenced by the
popularity of this term in research, policy documents and as an objective of HEIs (see
for example, Scott, 1998; Teichler, 1996a, 1996b; Van der Wende, 1997). In the past
three decades, there has been increased competition among local HEIs to increase
international recognition in an international HE market. This has been accompanied
by various approaches developed to promote the international dimension of domestic
HE systems such as the mobility of students, academics and staff; research
collaboration; capacity building programmes; internationalisation of the curriculum;
international programmes; expansion of branch campuses; and joint degree
programmes. The effect of HE internationalisation has become greater with the
digitalisation of HE – the virtual mobility of HE services in digital learning and
collaborative online platforms (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 41).

The rise of HE internationalisation has further stimulated the ‘regionalisation of
higher education’, defined as ‘the process of building closer collaboration and
alignment among higher education actors and systems in a designated area or
framework, commonly called a region’ (Knight, 2013b, p. 347). HE regionalisation
has thus emerged as part of HE internationalisation, with a strategic focus on the regional scale (see for example, Knight, 2008; Lujiten-Lüb, 2007; Woldegiorgis, Jonck, & Goujon, 2015). Through promoting transnational academic mobility and international programmes among the member states, regional academic collaboration activities further contribute to the HE internationalisation strategy of local HEIs. Some scholars argue that the most macro-territorial scale in which the greatest impact of HE internationalisation takes place today is at the regional level (Knight, 2012b; Verger & Hermo, 2010). Furthermore, a regional approach to HE development is crucial for small to medium-sized HE systems (Gao, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2015; Marginson, Murphy, & Peters, 2010). Shifting from loose cooperation in HE regionalisation, HE harmonisation builds policy infrastructure to alleviate barriers in academic mobility and employment at the regional level.

Overall, global and regional dynamics generate vital driving forces of HE harmonisation. Among the important global trends, economic globalisation generates the crucial force underlying the regionalisation of HE (Verger & Hermo, 2010). Together with the rise of the internationalisation of HE, HE harmonisation has emerged in global regions as an approach to enhance the quality and legitimacy of domestic HE systems in the international HE context (Eta, 2015; Knight, 2012b, 2013b; SEAMEO RIHED, 2008; Woldegiorgis, 2013). At the same time, regional dynamics are important since the political and economic dimensions where a given region is embedded significantly affect national education policy (Verger & Hermo, 2010). More specific to this thesis, ASEAN policy and vision to create a more connected regional community constitute important drivers for HE harmonisation and the construction of a common space in HE in this regional context.

1.1.3 The Development of ASEAN in Southeast Asia

Geographically, ‘Southeast Asia’ refers to the countries located between India (in South Asia) in the West, and the Chinese mainland (in East Asia) in the East (Ooi, 2004). Official recognition of the term ‘Southeast Asia’ in international relations emerged during the Second World War, primarily by the use of the South East Asia Command (SEAC) to scope the area of operation in 1943 (Chia, 2003; Ooi, 2004). However, the SEAC at the time included Sri Lanka as well as Northeast India, and
excluded the Philippines. Ambiguity regarding the territorial scope of Southeast Asia was resolved by the formation of ASEAN over two decades later (Chia, 2003).

On 8 August 1967, leaders from the five founding member states – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand – established ASEAN in the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration). The ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) was established in Jakarta to coordinate plans of action and monitor progress. While economic growth may constitute a primary founding objective of many regional blocs, the establishment of ASEAN was mainly political, particularly accelerated by Cold War politics to avoid the ‘teetering dominos’ of communism (Chia, 2003; Guan, 2005; Murray, 2010a). Initial efforts by ASEAN to strengthen regional peace began with ‘the withdrawal of British troops from the region at the end of the 1960s’ and ‘the collapse of the American position in Indochina in 1975’ (Chia, 2003, p. 3). Western decolonisation in Southeast Asia resulted in the membership expansion of ASEAN, starting with Brunei Darussalam in 1984. The accession of four new member states – Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Myanmar (1997), and Cambodia (1999), known as the CLMV countries – increased the number of ASEAN member states (AMS) to its current number of ten, as shown below.

![Southeast Asia Map](image)

*Figure 1.1: Southeast Asia Map*

Federation of ASEAN Shipowners’ Associations (2004)

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1 After becoming a new sovereign state in 2002, East Timor or Timor-Leste applied for membership of ASEAN. Consideration of its application is ongoing (as of June 2018).
At first glance, ASEAN may seem to be ‘an unlikely union of ten nations’ (Woetzel, Tonby, Thompson, Burtt, & Lee, 2014). In addition to its rich diversity in political systems, languages, and religions, significant disparity exists among the member states. In particular, there is a large development gap due to the stark contrast of income levels between the CLMV and the rest of the member states. Nonetheless, the AMS have been interlinked through their shared histories and constructed norms under the common geopolitical framework of ASEAN for nearly five decades. Chapter Three further discusses ASEAN’s region-building culture and norms.

While progress towards deeper integration after ASEAN’s establishment had been slow (Cockerham, 2010; Guan, 2004), it has become more active since the beginning of the 21st century. Among the important accelerators are the increasing challenges that resulted from the Asian Financial Crisis and the effects of economic globalisation. Following on from the ASEAN Vision 2020 adopted by the ASEAN leaders in 1997, the 9th ASEAN Summit in Bali in 2003 witnessed another milestone decision. The ASEAN leaders agreed to establish the ‘ASEAN Community’, described in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II as:

A concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward-looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in a just, democratic, and harmonious environment, dynamic development and ever-closer economic integration and in a community of caring societies, conscious of its ties of history, aware of its shared cultural heritage and bound by a common regional identity. (ASEAN Secretariat, 2011)

The commitment to construct a regional community was reaffirmed by the ASEAN leaders signing the Cebu Declaration at the 12th ASEAN Summit in 2007 to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Community from 2020 to 2015. In addition, ASEAN launched several joint declarations and political agreements to direct it along the path towards realising the ASEAN Community. Of the fundamental documents, the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009-2015) established the blueprints to guide the development of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC); the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC); and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

Recognising the importance of enhancing ASEAN Connectivity to achieving the ASEAN Community with its three pillars, ASEAN leaders called for ‘a well-connected ASEAN that will contribute towards a more competitive and resilient ASEAN, as it will bring peoples, goods, services and capital closer together’ (ASEAN
The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) is ASEAN’s flagship project to realise a more integrated region (Teodoro, 2015). Figure 1.2 shows the interaction between ASEAN Connectivity and the ASEAN Community in MPAC.

Figure 1.2: Interaction between ASEAN Connectivity and ASEAN Community

ASEAN Secretariat (2011)

The three-pronged MPAC strategy illustrates ASEAN’s focus on increasing the physical, institutional, and people-to-people connectivity to enhance the holistic development of the ASEAN Community. This requires the harmonisation of policy in various fields to dismantle the barriers to a freer flow of goods, services, capital, and skilled workers. Directly supporting the MPAC strategy, the harmonisation of the ASEAN HE systems plays a direct role in promoting people-to-people connectivity through fostered regional academic mobility and employment.
1.2 Problem Statement

HE harmonisation in ASEAN is a relatively uncharted area of study. In addition to the limited attention paid to this topic, much of the literature on HE harmonisation tends to be Eurocentric (see for example, Gorga, 2007; Heinze & Knill, 2008; Huisman et al., 2012; Jarab, 2008; Schriwer, 2009; Voegtle, Knill, & Dobbins, 2011). Although there are studies on similar phenomena in Asia, their focus has tended to take a comparative approach and not specifically been on ASEAN (see for example, Chao, 2011, 2014; Hawkins, 2012a, 2012b; Knight, 2012b; Zeng, Adams, & Gibbs, 2012). Little research has been carried out to date on the development of ASEAN HE harmonisation, particularly the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation, and the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in this context.

Another current research gap concerns the limited cross-fertilisation across disciplines, particularly between political science and HE studies in the analysis of HE regionalism (Chou & Ravinet, 2015). Harmonisation per se is a difficult subject of discussion considering its varied interpretations, degrees and forms. More efforts are needed to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework or more well-grounded overarching theory of harmonisation that moves beyond fragmented disciplinary boundaries (Andenas et al., 2012). These might include, among others, examining the understanding of ‘harmonisation’ in various fields and contexts and engaging various perspectives to develop an analytical framework for analysing HE harmonisation in a given region and for comparative empirical studies.

HE and human capital development are indispensable in strengthening the competitiveness of ASEAN’s HE systems and the position of the ASEAN Community in the international context. While ASEAN education cooperation is promoted to realise these goals, it is still an under-researched topic (Koh, 2007; SEAMEO RIHED, 2008). There remains a crucial gap in the current research on ASEAN considering that parameters are mostly confined to issues concerning economics, politics, security, and trade development (Koh, 2007). According to McDermott (2017), ‘intra-ASEAN collaboration among universities has grown considerably over the past two decades and is set to continue apace’. However, harmonisation among the AMS is one noteworthy area of ASEAN’s integration progress, which is ‘often overlooked by regional and international commentators who are perhaps more concerned with
economic development’. Without adequate research and attention on education development and harmonisation, it would be challenging to realise a more connected ASEAN Community and a global knowledge society.

In addition to the research problems identified in the literature, the researcher’s own background has motivated the undertaking of this thesis. In particular, the researcher’s professional experience of encountering barriers to the implementation of ASEAN academic collaboration has raised the genuine concern for further improving related policies and practices to facilitate regional HE interactions.

1.3 Aims and scope

The purpose of this thesis is to improve the understanding of the development of HE harmonisation in ASEAN. Through analyses of the policy documents and interview data collected from ASEAN policy makers and practitioners, the thesis aims to provide insights into the drivers of and impediments to ASEAN HE harmonisation and propose recommendations on the key conditions for developing a common space in HE within the ASEAN context.

Examining drivers is critical for improving our understanding of the emergence of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, particularly the objectives and motivations of key actors. Examining the impediments reveals the challenges encountered by key actors, which hinder the progress of HE harmonisation efforts. Analysing the key conditions provides more informed decisions on improving related policies and practices to further promote HE harmonisation and effectively develop an ASEAN common space in HE. To establish a more holistic picture of the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN, this thesis examines the following subtopics: the meaning of harmonisation; characteristics; progress and approach undertaken; the governance of harmonisation; the leadership role of ASEAN; unintended consequences; and the way forward.

While this thesis is not a direct comparative study, it refers in a comparative context to the harmonisation of HE discourse and practices in Europe as a conceptual and empirical point of reference for the phenomenon. This practice supports Koh (2007) who refers to the EHEA ‘as a frame of reference because it provides a basis for wider discussion and imagining what pedagogical traffic should take place in the ASEAN Education Space’ (p. 192).
1.4 Questions and Preliminary Assumptions

Examination of the factors influencing ASEAN HE harmonisation is guided by two central questions:

1. What are the drivers of and impediments to ASEAN HE harmonisation?

2. What are the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN?

In addition, the thesis examines subtopics about HE harmonisation in ASEAN to form a ‘holistic account’ or create a ‘complex picture’ of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). These supplementary research questions include the meaning of harmonisation, characteristics, progress and approach undertaken, governance, the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body, the unintended consequences, and next steps:

1. What does the ‘harmonisation of higher education’ mean in ASEAN?

2. How can ASEAN HE harmonisation be characterised, for example, is it internally/externally driven, voluntary/coercive, ad hoc/strategic, incremental/or proceeding with quantum leaps, a bottom-up/top-down process?

3. To what extent and how has ASEAN HE harmonisation been developed based on Knight’s (2012) functional, organisational, and political framework?

4. How is ASEAN HE harmonisation governed?

5. What could be the path dependence of ASEAN HE harmonisation, particularly the perceived role of ASEAN as a regional body?

6. What could be the unintended consequences of ASEAN HE harmonisation?

7. What are the prospects and next steps for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN?

Drawing on the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter Two, this thesis makes the following preliminary assumptions. Firstly, the key actors in the field have a shared interest to harmonise ASEAN HE systems, influenced by academic, economic, political, and cultural factors. Mainly driven by economic globalisation imperatives,
the underlying rationale for HE harmonisation in ASEAN is to increase the competitiveness and legitimacy of domestic HE systems within the international HE context. The growing importance of regional dynamics to national policy and practice, particularly ASEAN’s policies to develop a more connected ASEAN Community, further drive the importance of developing HE harmonisation initiatives and constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN. The findings on drivers are presented in Chapter Five.

Secondly, despite the importance of HE harmonisation, the progress towards a common space in HE has been challenging due to several ideational and structural factors embedded within the ASEAN context. Ideational factors refer to ideas, culture and norms in local contexts. This thesis argues that fundamental impediments are those relating to attitudinal and cultural barriers. Importantly, regional awareness has not been adequately developed in ASEAN to effectively progress HE harmonisation efforts. Furthermore, local culture and regional norms limit the structuring and institutionalisation of a common space in HE in ASEAN. In particular, with the regional cognitive priors embedded in the ‘ASEAN Way’ of region-building, such as national sovereignty, consensus, and non-intervention, regional initiatives can only progress when they meet the interests and gain the consensus of all member states.

Structural factors concentrate on the structures and institutions for a regional HE space. Among the important structural factors, diversity and disparity among the AMS make HE harmonisation in this region a formidable task. In addition, there are limited structures at the national and regional levels for driving HE harmonisation such as a funding mechanism, functional mechanisms, a public outreach system, a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. Moreover, there is limited institutionalisation, particularly due to governance and coordination issues. The findings on impediments are presented in Chapter Six.

This thesis emphasises that ASEAN’s regionalism shape the path of HE harmonisation, particularly ASEAN’s principles and norms. Thus, the thesis supports the argument put forward by some analysts that a ‘small step’ or an incremental approach, focusing primarily on a series of minor milestones, seems to be most appropriate in advancing HE harmonisation in Asia (Hawkins, 2012a; Nguyen, 2009).
A radical departure or a revolutionary transformation, like that of the BP, ‘invites doubts and suspicions among Asian countries’ (Nguyen, 2009, p. 81).

Among crucial steps, the thesis emphasises the importance of further developing ideational conditions as fundamental key conditions. Specifically, cultivating the political will among the ASEAN leaders, commitment and priorities of HE policy makers and practitioners, as well as societal values regarding region-building and HE harmonisation would be required to develop ideational forces to construct the structural conditions for a common space in HE. The emphasised key structural conditions are: 1) the development of an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; 2) the adoption of functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; 3) the development of a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; 4) the strengthening of the M&E system; and 5) the improvement in the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives. Analysis of the key conditions is discussed in Chapter Seven.

This thesis emphasises that the optimal mix of key actors in HE harmonisation governance is vital. While arguing for a multistakeholder approach, particular attention is placed on the efforts of a regional body to further promote HE harmonisation as a regional development agenda. As regional organisations play a predominant role in promoting regional collaboration and the ASEAN Community is developing its momentum, the thesis specifically examines the relevance of an enhanced leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body as an essential precondition for the construction of a common space in HE in this regional context.

1.5 Rationale and Significance

Developing HE harmonisation has become critical in enhancing the competitiveness of domestic HE systems in the international HE market and graduates’ employability in a transnational workforce. Moreover, the core value of ‘harmonisation’ promotes transnational interactions with an understanding of differences across races, culture, and systems. Cultivating the value of harmonisation through various channels, such as academic exchange, curriculum and research, is urgently needed to create opportunities for the next generation of global citizens.
Studying HE harmonisation contributes to the literature in the related areas underpinning this phenomenon. Among them are the efforts to reconcile the debates on the impact of globalisation. As mentioned earlier, the convergence outcomes may reflect homogenisation while the divergence outcomes may reflect heterogeneity. Supporting Vaira’s (2004) argument that there is a third stream of thought focusing on blending global tendencies and local responses, this thesis emphasises the mediating role of harmonisation in the debates on the paradoxical effects of globalisation.

Positioning HE harmonisation as a part of HE regionalism driven by globalisation and region-building processes, this thesis examines HE harmonisation through the perspectives beyond the field of HE. Specifically, the thesis employs policy transfer, norm diffusion, and region-building perspectives to analyse the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation, as well as the key conditions for constructing an ASEAN HE common space. Drawing on both political and HE studies, this thesis develops a conceptual framework to analyse the characteristics and progress of HE harmonisation in a given region and in comparative analyses. This approach is crucial as it adds to theoretical foundations in the HE harmonisation literature and broadens HE regionalism as a research agenda.

ASEAN HE harmonisation is an important case study for HE harmonisation given its rich diversity among the AMS and constructed regional norms. In addition, studying HE harmonisation with a particular focus on this context contributes to a relatively uncharted area considering the large volume of studies regarding HE harmonisation in Europe or in a comparative context. Importantly, a critical analysis of the emergence and development of HE harmonisation in ASEAN is vital for improving current policies and practices to promote ASEAN HE harmonisation and the construction of a common space in HE within the ASEAN context.

ASEAN HE harmonisation has important implications for improving regional cooperation to enhance the competitiveness of local HE systems. Momentum has continuously gathered pace through several political mechanisms such as the ASEAN Vision 2020 in 1997, the Hanoi Plan of Action in 1997 and the Vientiane Action Programme of 2004. In addition, harmonising ASEAN systems is critical for developing a stronger and more connected ASEAN Community, as envisaged in the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community (2009-
2015) in 2009 and the MPAC. Following the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 declared at the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community at the 27th ASEAN Summit in December 2015 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a), developing a common space in HE in ASEAN is particularly crucial for realising the ASEAN leaders’ vision of a dynamic and harmonious community emphasised in the Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016b).

In addition to the direct contributions to the region, HE harmonisation in ASEAN is crucial for promoting a global knowledge society and employment opportunities. Primarily, developing ASEAN HE harmonisation has important implications for progressing larger HE areas such as the East Asian and Asia-Pacific HE frameworks. Currently, HE harmonisation in Southeast Asia is viewed as a promising platform for realising harmonisation efforts in Asia (Yavaprabhas, 2014). As previous studies on HE harmonisation in Asia suggest, significant progress has been concentrated at the subregional level, specifically in Southeast Asia (see for example, Byun & Um, 2014; Chao, 2014; Hawkins, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Nguyen, 2009; Yavaprabhas, 2014). There is considerable potential for a common space in HE in ASEAN to play a vital role in developing larger HE areas and skilled labour mobility. Furthermore, it may extend its benefits to a more robust global economy. Southeast Asia is ‘a strategically important, economically dynamic region at the heart of the Asia-Pacific’ (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). ASEAN has a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $2.4 trillion, which collectively forms the third largest economy in Asia and the seventh largest in the world, with a total population of 632 million people (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). Following China and India, ASEAN is the third largest global labour force within a burgeoning young population in need of skills, training and education.

1.6 Key Terms

‘HE harmonisation’ is the term used in this thesis for the harmonisation of HE systems. In addition to the definition provided at the beginning of the chapter, this thesis takes into account that stated in Southeast Asian HE harmonisation literature, referring to the process of establishing ‘a point of reference’ to compare ‘the qualities and capabilities of students from different universities in different countries’. The HE harmonisation process ‘aims to make higher education in the region “comparable” and
“compatible” while still able to retain its charm of identity and diversity’ (Yavaprabhas, 2014, p. 87).

In accordance with the HE harmonisation literature involving ASEAN, this thesis employs a ‘regional common space in HE’, rather than a ‘regional higher education area’ as used in the European context. The creation of a common space in HE ‘facilitates greater mobility and enhances better quality of regional higher education among HEIs and countries in Southeast Asia’ and provides ‘the instrument to facilitate academic activities between institutions as well as trainings and employment with business and industrial sectors’ (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008, p. 6). This view reflects the emphasis of this thesis on the importance of a multistakeholder approach beyond the education sector, especially the ASEAN governments, industry and employment sector, regional organisations, and the public to construct this HE space.

The other two important concepts in this thesis are ‘HE regionalisation’ and ‘HE regionalism’. Although both concepts might propose a regional approach to HE development, they can be distinguished in terms of approach and the key actors involved. Regionalisation concentrates on a bottom-up approach through the engagement of a variety of actors at the societal level. Meanwhile, HE regionalism is used when referring to ‘a “top-down” political project designated to region creation, in which political instruments and mechanisms are introduced to organise higher education cooperation’ (Chou & Ravinet, 2015, p. 363). This view supports Dent (2013) who relates regionalism to the political efforts of states and regionalisation to the efforts of economic actors such as multinational corporations.

This thesis relates HE harmonisation and the construction of a regional HE area to HE regionalism that focuses on a top-down approach or political and state-led projects (Chou & Ravinet, 2015; Olds & Robertson, 2011, 2014). In particular, these concepts may involve political efforts in establishing regional regulatory mechanisms to enhance regional HE competitiveness (Hoosen, Butcher, Khamati, & Njenga, 2009). These key concepts will be further discussed in Chapter Two.
1.7 The Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. This chapter establishes the context and outlines the preliminary assumptions for the remainder of the thesis. The next two chapters establish the conceptual framework for the thesis. Chapter Two introduces the analytical frameworks used in the thesis to examine HE harmonisation. Chapter Three outlines the ASEAN context which affects HE harmonisation initiatives. Chapter Four clarifies the research design and philosophical assumptions of the thesis.

In response to the research question concerning the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation in ASEAN, Chapters Five and Six present an analysis of the findings on the motivations and challenges of the key actors. Chapter Seven discusses the key considerations for developing a common space in HE in this region. In addition, the chapter discusses the unintended consequences of HE harmonisation and the implications of HE harmonisation in the ASEAN framework for the larger HE collaboration framework.

The concluding chapter provides an overview of the thesis and its key findings. The chapter examines how the findings answer the research questions and outlines the implications of the thesis for theory and practice. Finally, the chapter provides avenues for further research in this area of study.
CHAPTER 2
KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The preceding chapter outlined the emerging importance of HE regionalism in the context of international HE. It was argued that enhancing HE harmonisation across the AMS is vital to develop an ASEAN Community and a global knowledge society. This is the first of two chapters that provide the key concepts and analytical frameworks employed in this thesis.

Emphasising the need for the cross-fertilisation of the literature on political science and HE studies, this chapter begins by discussing the key concepts in region-building from regional studies. The chapter then focuses on the HE literature to explore the existing frameworks that can be useful for examining HE harmonisation. Drawing from both sub-disciplines, the chapter develops a framework for further analysing the key conditions for developing HE regionalism. Using an a priori theory may provide theoretical frameworks and preset codes as an analytical framework for this thesis. Nonetheless, it does not limit a reciprocal relationship between data and theory as the data emerging from the study is taken into consideration for the analysis.

2.1 Key Concepts in Region-Building

This section clarifies the fundamental concepts in the region-building process, to which HE harmonisation is closely related. Included in this thesis are ‘region’, ‘region-building’, ‘regionalisation’, ‘regionalism’, and ‘regional integration’. The root term of regional analysis is ‘region’, which is defined in this thesis as a group of countries within a designated area. This type of region can be understood as a macro region that comprises two or more, usually adjacent, sovereign states, as opposed to a micro region that is situated at the subnational level or an area smaller than a state but larger than a municipality (United Nations University, 2002). In other words, the focus of this thesis is on an international region, specifically Asia that comprises several subregions, one of which is Southeast Asia.

In addition to geographical features, regions can be ideologically constructed, or in other words, be politically, socially, functionally, and culturally defined (Hettne, 2005; Knight, 2012b). This echoes the view that there are in fact no ‘natural’ regions in contemporary international politics (Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013). Rather,
regions are ‘forged and constructed by the application of different norms, principles, identities and imaginations of the various actors involved’ (Wunderlich, 2004, p. 30). This thesis refers to ASEAN as a region as its presence as a geopolitical framework in Southeast Asia has gradually created an ASEAN identity and norms.

To encourage productive dialogues in regional studies, some scholars suggest that analysts shift their attention from focusing on defining regions to examining the complex processes of ‘region-building’ that are evident in global governance (see for example, Laursen, 2003; Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013; Schulz, Söderbaum, & Ojendal, 2001; Warleigh-Lack, 2008, p. 51; Warleigh-Lack & Robinson, 2011). Region-building refers to the process of enhancing regional ‘coherence’ and ‘identity’ (Farrell, 2005, p. 8). Through the region-building process, a mix of actors including states, non-state actors, organisations and social groupings develops mechanisms for increasing regional interactions and solidarity such as economic agreements for free trade areas, declarations for political integration and policy coordination. Central to the region-building process are ideological construction efforts to cultivate a collective identity and shared values among the member states. These efforts may involve soft mechanisms such as academic cooperation and people exchanges.

At a glance, regionalisation, regionalism, and regional integration seem to suggest efforts towards region-building.2 These efforts may provide a means to cooperate among states for achieving an agreed goal that is of benefit for all members of a regional body. Nonetheless, a nuanced view of these concepts has been presented by previous analysts, particularly in the literature on regional studies (see for example, Fawcett & Gandois, 2010, p. 619; Morgan, 2005, p. 4; Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013; Warleigh-Lack & Van Langenhove, 2010, p. 546). Primarily, ‘regionalisation’ is used in this thesis to emphasise the processes of region-building that are mainly informal and bottom-up (Fawcett & Gandois, 2010; Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013). This differs from ‘regionalism’, which emphasises top-down region-building processes, involving formal agreements among sovereign states.

2 For instance, based on Knight’s (2013b) definition of the regionalisation of HE, regionalisation can be understood as ‘the process of building closer collaboration among states within a defined area or framework called a region’ (p. 347). Dent (2008) defines regionalism as ‘the structures, processes and arrangements that are working towards greater coherence within a specific international region in terms of economic, political, security, sociocultural and other kinds of linkages’ (p. 7). De Lombaerde (2006) refers to regional integration as the ‘processes of complex social transformations characterised by the intensification of relations between independent sovereign states’ (p. 9).
‘Regional integration’ refers to the complex processes of region-building involving the grand objectives of economic and social transformations (Fawcett & Gandois, 2010; Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013). Integration often entails ‘a whole greater than the sum of its parts’ (Fawcett and Gandois, 2010, p. 619). The demand for HE harmonisation is closely related to integration in terms of economics, which involves ‘a series of voluntary decisions by previously sovereign states to remove barriers to the mutual exchange of goods, services, capital, or persons’ (Smith, 1993, p. 4).

Attempts in regional analysis to distinguish the characteristics of regionalisation and the typology of regions have provided conceptual tools for analysing regionalisation. A primary example of a conceptual guide for understanding the emergence and typology of regions is Hettne’s (2001, p. 4) three structural types of regions. The key criteria are ‘relative political stability’ and the ‘relative degree of sustained economic dynamics’ in the international political economy. Core regions are politically strong, economically constant, and technologically innovative. Considered the hegemonic economies of the world, core regions are often norm entrepreneurs for other regions, particularly in terms of political system and economic policy. Intermediate regions prepare to incorporate core-like criteria. They concentrate on enhancing economic growth and eliminating domestic political conflicts. Peripheral regions are politically unstable and economically inert. These regions constantly face political turbulence, war, domestic conflict and poverty. This tool also forms the basis of comparative regional analysis.

The analytical tool this thesis employs is the ‘regionness’ scale of Hettne and Söderbaum (2000). Table 2.1 presents a summary of the five types of regions, based on the work of Murray and Warleigh-Lack (2013), which is adapted from Hettne and Söderbaum (2000).
Table 2.1: The Regionness Scale
Murray and Warleigh-Lack (2013), adapted from Hettne and Söderbaum (2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of region</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional space</td>
<td>A geographically contiguous area, but one capable of transcending national borders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional complex</td>
<td>A regional space in which human contacts and trade patterns have begun to be shaped on a cross-regional basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional society</td>
<td>A regional complex in which cross-border regional transactions have intensified, become more multi-dimensional and made subject to new regional rules; non-state actors gain meaningful roles in regional governance, and regional institutions may be established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional community</td>
<td>A regional society in which the region itself has become an actor, with its own collective identity underpinned by civil society mobilisation at regional level, with national identities becoming less important and a sense of shared culture and/or polity deepening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region-state</td>
<td>A new, heterogeneous state forms from the regional community, characterised by internal diversity, pluralism, and a multilevel distribution of power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each type of region is further clarified in Figure 2.6, which presents a framework developed from this scale and the HE perspective. The framework is used as a conceptual tool to analyse HE harmonisation in this thesis, particularly to conceptualise the interrelationship of region-building and HE regionalisation. The next section explores the HE harmonisation process from the HE literature.

2.2 Understanding the Regionalisation of Higher Education

In addition to the concepts and theoretical perspectives in political science, it is necessary to explore this phenomenon in HE studies. This section is mainly based on Knight’s work on HE regionalisation. As stated in Chapter One, this thesis employs Knight’s definition of HE regionalisation as follows: ‘the process of building closer collaboration and alignment among HE actors and systems within a defined area or framework called a region’ (Knight, 2013b, p. 347). This definition is employed since it resonates with the positions taken in this thesis. Firstly, the definition suggests that HE regionalisation is an ongoing ‘process’. Secondly, this meaning suggests that increased connectivity and interactions in HE involve the interplay of ‘diverse actors’. Thirdly, it proposes that regions may be defined by several parameters and typologies, as indicated in the previous section.
In addition, Knight’s work provides a helpful conceptual guide to understand the characteristics of the regional HE interactions and approaches undertaken in HE regionalisation in ASEAN. Furthermore, Knight’s continuum of HE regionalisation terms forms a reference framework to analyse the understandings of interviewees of the concept of HE harmonisation, determine the progress of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, and distinguish HE regionalism.

2.2.1 Variables Characterising Higher Education Regionalisation

The thesis employs Knight’s (2012b) conceptual guide on the variables characterising HE regionalisation, as shown in Figure 2.1. In addition to establishing a shared understanding of the key variables and terms used to analyse the movement and progression of HE regionalisation, the conceptual guide is used to characterise the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN.

![Figure 2.1: Variables Characterising Higher Education Regionalisation](image)

The key actors involved in the HE regionalisation process are important variables. Primarily, the type of key actors involved is used to characterise the formality of HE regionalisation in a given region. The agreements made among the HEIs are often recognised as informal such as the bilateral and multilateral activities actively pursued at the institutional level. The process is characterised as formal when the actions and initiatives encompass legally-binding regulatory bodies at the governmental and/or intergovernmental level. Although this thesis focuses on HE regionalism, which concentrates on a formal approach, the thesis emphasises that both formal and informal interactions are complementary and vital to progress.
Formality is closely linked to bottom-up or top-down approaches. Initiatives from the HEI level are informal and move along a bottom-up stream, while regulatory agreements from the regional level represent a formal, top-down approach (Knight, 2012b). Emphasising this position in the HE regionalisation literature is important to avoid some important challenges. Primarily, interpretations of bottom-up or top-down approaches may be subject to the background of each analyst. For instance, some university representatives may recognise the initiatives derived from HEIs and agreements signed by presidents or rectors as formal and top-down approaches.

Another challenge is that governmental initiatives can be interpreted as either bottom-up or top-down. As Knight (2012b) states, initiatives from the national level may be considered top-down in many cases. This thesis considers ‘a top-down approach’ to describe the formal agreements of the HE regionalisation initiatives made by the intergovernmental arrangements in the field of HE. Joint agreements made by heads of state at the ASEAN level constitute the upmost top-down approach at the regional level. This position supports Woldegiorgis (2013, p. 19) in that the situation whereby ‘nation-states are the determinant factors for the success of any policy integration’ is considered a bottom-up process and ‘regional policy initiatives coming from regional organisations instead of nation-states’ are top-down activities.

Characterising whether internal actors from within the HE sector or external actors beyond the field of HE dominate the HE regionalisation process is another important variable in analysing the governance and path dependence of HE harmonisation within a given region. The key actors directly shape the strategic directions and expected outcomes of HE regionalisation. HE regionalisation that is internally driven by key actors from the education sector is likely to focus on academic motivations. At the same time, HE regionalisation that is predominantly steered by external actors or stakeholders outside the field of education may be directed towards outcomes that serve their specific motives. For example, the HE cooperation activities of regional organisations may principally aim to stimulate student’s regional awareness in response to their political motivation for regional integration. The regional academic collaboration of the private sector may be obliged through economic motivations to promote corporate social responsibility activities following the companies’ marketing strategy and mission statement to its relevant stakeholders. Moreover, the activities of
donors or dialogue partners may be driven by their economic and political motivations to become norm entrepreneurs.

Characterising the purpose of activities or initiatives is another important variable in further analysing the drivers and path dependence of HE regionalisation. Ad hoc projects are initiated with shorter-term goals to serve special objectives or solve particular problems. These projects may stimulate regional HE activities and form the foundation for intentional projects that specifically aim to enhance regional HE cooperation. As to whether these projects are ad hoc or intentional can be observed from the roles of the HE actors and how they engage with these projects. For instance, the key actors may: 1) react to the external drivers of HE regionalisation; 2) be proactive and recognise the future benefits of HE regionalisation; or 3) possess strategic vision on how to develop HE regionalisation and its contributions to society.

The complementary relationships among the aforementioned variables shape the type of progress of HE regionalisation in a given region. This thesis identifies two types of progressions: incremental progressions that gradually develop, and quantum leap progressions that evolve in a revolutionary manner with stimulating factors such as the intervention of regulatory bodies or formal declarations. The latter type is central to the research question concerning the key conditions for constructing an ASEAN common space in HE, which will be further discussed in Section 2.4.3.

2.2.2 Functional, Organisational, and Political Approaches to Higher Education Regionalisation

Knight’s (2012b) complementary approaches to HE regionalisation – the functional, organisational and political approaches (FOPA) – are used to examine the progress of and approaches taken in developing ASEAN HE harmonisation. Examining HE harmonisation with this tripartite ‘FOPA model’ involves paying attention to the progress (activities and initiatives), governance (key actors and organisational architecture), and formality (political agreements and treaties) of regionalisation. These approaches need to be developed in a complementary manner for the sustainable development of HE regionalisation, as shown in Figure 2.2.
The functional approach focuses on the development of HE collaborative activities to foster regional connectivity in HE. The activities are divided into two types: 1) converging regional higher education policy infrastructure, and 2) expanding regional higher education activities/programmes. The first type directly relates to efforts to harmonise HE systems. These include strategies to enhance the closer alignment and convergence of HE policy across a region, which form the regional policy infrastructure of HE. Some examples are adjusting national academic calendars across the region and ensuring that degree structures are regionally compatible. The second type focuses on regional collaborative programmes. Some examples of this type include academic mobility schemes and academic collaborative activities.

The organisational approach concentrates on the organisational architecture developed to systematise HE regionalisation initiatives. This includes the frameworks, structures and key actors or agencies. Key actors may be governmental/non-government agencies or state and non-state actors, organisations, institutions, foundations, and professional networks. They formulate, implement and monitor HE regionalisation initiatives.

Employing an organisational approach to analyse progress is important. It primarily focuses on the key actors involved in HE regionalisation in ASEAN. As emphasised earlier, the key actors are fundamental to the variables characterising HE.
regionalisation since the motivations of the key actors directly shape the drivers and direction of HE harmonisation. This focus helps us characterise whether the process is internally driven by the HE sector or employs a multistakeholder approach that engages actors from other sectors. A diverse set of actors could lead to divergent strategic visions and foci of HE regionalisation since it involves a combination of various motives. For example, some key actors may concentrate on pan-regional and some on subregional areas. Some may focus on the university level and some on the intergovernmental level. As such, their functional focus on activities may be prioritised differently. Taking these factors into consideration sheds light on the prominent actors that stimulate progress and the future direction of ASEAN HE harmonisation.

In addition to understanding the organisational architecture, examining the organisational approach in this thesis includes analysing the coordination and leadership capacity of key actors at the university, national and regional levels. The coordination aspect focuses on the interrelationships of key actors, particularly how their perceptions complement or conflict with the regional collaborative framework. The topic of leadership concentrates on understanding the key actors with their predominant roles and their potential impact on advancing regional policy harmonisation. The focus on leadership is closely linked to the political approach.

The political approach makes the process more formal and intentional. It particularly focuses on the ‘political will and strategies that put HE initiatives on the agenda of decision-making’ (Knight, 2013b, p. 358). Political will in this thesis refers to both the political will of the political leaders or heads of the AMS at the national level and that of the leaders and managers of HEIs at the university level. Knight (2013b) provides some examples of political strategies such as declarations, agreements, treaties, summits, task forces, and dialogues (p. 358).

It is argued in this thesis that ASEAN HE harmonisation requires the stronger political efforts of a regional body. In particular, an enhanced leadership role of ASEAN could contribute to promoting HE harmonisation as a regional development agenda and strengthening the key regional organisations. These contributions potentially strengthen ideational conditions such as the political will of the ASEAN leaders, the commitment and priorities of key actors, and societal values on ASEAN HE
These ideational conditions are fundamental for the materialisation of the structural conditions to promote HE harmonisation initiatives, especially the establishment of an ASEAN funding mechanism dedicated to constructing a common HE space in ASEAN. Examining the political approach and the role of ASEAN as a regional body will shed light on the current political mechanisms used to promote HE harmonisation within the ASEAN framework or lack thereof. Moreover, the findings characterise the HE harmonisation process in this region such as its formality and the approaches undertaken.

2.2.3 Examining Higher Education Regionalisation

Knight’s (2012b) map of HE regionalisation terms provides a helpful tool to conceptualise and categorise the various regional HE activities. Adapted from this map, Figure 2.3 presents the HE regionalisation activities mapped in a continuum ranging from voluntary, informal and loose cooperation at one end to the more organised, structured and formal interactions at the other. This thesis employs the map as a conceptual tool to analyse the interviewees’ understanding of ‘harmonisation’. The categories and definition of HE regionalisation activities are briefly provided in this section since this map is used as the foundation for developing the framework to characterise and analyse the progress of HE regionalisation in ASEAN, as presented in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.3: Mapping of Higher Education Regionalisation Terms
Adapted from Knight (2012b)
Positioning harmonisation within the range of HE regionalisation activities in this conceptual map suggests HE harmonisation as part of the HE regionalisation process. This view may account for the interchangeable usage of ‘harmonisation’ and ‘regionalisation’, as in the case of Africa (Knight, 2013b). While acknowledging that the term ‘HE regionalisation’ refers to all regional HE activities in this conceptual map, this thesis further distinguishes the concept of ‘HE regionalism’ and this term is used to specifically refer to ‘HE harmonisation’ and ‘a regional HE area’ construction. Perspectives from HE regionalism and regional studies further clarify these two notions as examples of HE regionalism, as outlined in the following section.

2.3 Higher Education Regionalism

HE regionalism is among several manifestations of education policy-making and coordination that occur in multi-level settings and involve a variety of key actors (Chou & Ravinet, 2016, 2017). HE regionalism is used as a more focused term to discuss the central phenomenon of this thesis that involves systemic policy adaptation at the institutional, national, international levels. Unlike HE regionalisation that may be driven by a bottom-up approach emerged from a societal level, HE regionalism concentrates on a top-down political project that introduces and establishes political instruments and mechanisms to organise HE cooperation (Chou & Ravinet, 2015, p. 363). Specifically, Chou and Ravinet (2015) describe HE regionalism as ‘a political project of region creation involving at least some state authority (national, supranational, international), who in turn designates and delineates the world’s geographical region to which such activities extend, in the higher education policy sector’ (p. 368). Perceived as examples of HE regionalism, this section explores the concepts of HE harmonisation and a regional HE area, and develops a conceptual framework for analysing the interviewees’ understanding of HE harmonisation in ASEAN.

2.3.1 Harmonisation of Higher Education

Studying the concept of ‘harmonisation’ in various disciplines and contexts provides a conceptual framework for further analysis in this thesis. A common usage of the term is that employed in the field of music, which generally means to create harmony among individual sounds into a consistent and cohesive whole. Comparison of the harmonisation process to musical band management suggests that harmonisation may
have various forms shaped by local context. According to Yavaprabhas (2014), HE harmonisation in ASEAN can be related to ‘jazz management’, as further discussed in Chapter Three, and in Europe to ‘orchestra management’:

The harmonization process in Europe can be compared to the orchestra management with the Bologna process as a conductor for others to play along. It is well plotted and well planned. In Southeast Asia, however, the harmonization process is more like the “jazz management”, with focus more on the improvisation of every player who takes turns to be the leader. What can be done will be done first, and eventually all will be completed. This is the ‘ASEAN Way’. (p. 101)

Harmonisation is also widely used in the field of law. The resurgence of interest in comparative legal studies and research since the end of the Second World War has particularly contributed to the unification and harmonisation of laws (Kamba, 1974). While unification refers to the process of supplanting two or more different legal systems into a single system, ‘harmonisation is designed to effect an approximation or co-ordination of different legal provisions or systems by eliminating major differences and creating minimum requirements or standards’ (Kamba, 1974, p. 501). Harmonisation has attracted the attention of policy makers since it does not ‘parachute’ directives as a legal instrument into the member states. Rather, it allows national governments to choose the form and methods of implementation by incorporating local factors (Hesselink, 2006, p. 48).

In the field of HE, harmonisation refers to the process of narrowing variances in key dimensions in HE systems to ensure their comparability while considering local factors. Although the HE harmonisation mechanisms might converge HE systems in the member states, the process does not lead to sameness and related concepts such as standardisation, uniformity, conformity, and homogenisation (Knight, 2013b; Sirat et al., 2014; Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014). This core essence of harmonisation is reflected in HE harmonisation literature across contexts. For instance, HE harmonisation in Africa is described as ‘the coordination of educational programmes with agreements to minimum academic standards and ensuring equivalence and comparability of qualifications between and within countries’ (Woldegiorgis, 2013, pp. 14-15). In Southeast Asia, HE harmonisation is a process to enhance the comparability and compatibility of HE systems while ensuring that the identities and diversity of the member states are not jeopardised (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008; Sirat et al., 2014; Yavaprabhas, 2014, p. 87).
2.3.2 A Regional Higher Education Area

HE harmonisation efforts build mechanisms or regional HE policy infrastructure to develop a regional HE area, which has become more apparent over the past decade as an approach to solve critical HE issues, such as access, equity, quality, employability of graduates, and the international recognition of local HE systems. Given as an example of HE integration in Knight’s map of HE regionalisation terms, a regional HE area is mostly driven through a regional integration scheme that involves complex political, economic and social transformations.

The BP leading to the establishment of the EHEA is an example of a regional HE area with the purpose and function not solely that of education. According to Voegtle et al. (2011), the BP is a form of soft governance that has resulted in the convergence of domestic HE policies. Furthermore, Croché (2009) studies the role of the European Commission (EC) in the BP, relating the importance of the study to an analysis of international strategy in a global knowledge economy. According to Croché, the BP forms ‘a new sociopolitical space of higher education in Europe’, which ‘has become a cooperation/competition area that changes the European and national balance of power’ (p. 489).

In Southeast Asia, the results of an international conference on ‘Raising Awareness: Exploring the Ideas of Creating a common space in Higher Education in Southeast Asia’, organised by SEAMEO RIHED in 2007, suggest demand for HE harmonisation in this region. Based on the findings from the study and this conference, a shared vision on the ideal form of a common space in HE in ASEAN is described as:

The future establishment of a common space for higher education or the SEA Higher Education Area should be consisted of a set of mechanism including frameworks or a reference point in different areas (e.g. quality assurance, qualification framework, credit transfer system and so on) to which higher education systems could refer. This could be in a form of general guidelines for cooperation to which higher education systems could refer or compare. However, the most important aspect of the common space or higher education area is the creation of a balanced system that recognises cultural diversities and national identities of each country.

Developing HE harmonisation and constructing a regional HE area does not mean standardising HE systems, as often reiterated in this thesis. Rather, the process creates general guidelines for HE components such as degree cycles, credit systems, quality assurance, and qualifications frameworks (Armstrong, 2009; Clark, 2007; Sirat et al., 2014). This position supports the view of Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) that
developing the region state in the regionness scale still retains internal diversity and pluralism. This view also reflects Knight’s (2012) emphasis that the HE regionalisation terms do not entail concepts suggesting sameness. Figure 2.6 provides a conceptual tool to further characterise and distinguish the concepts of HE harmonisation and a regional HE area.

2.4 Factors Influencing Higher Education Harmonisation: An Analytical Framework

Employing different perspectives beyond the HE literature responds to the demand for engaging political science and HE perspectives in the study of HE harmonisation. Specifically, this thesis employs international policy transfer, norm diffusion, and region-building perspectives to analyse the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation, and the key conditions for developing a common space in HE in ASEAN. In addition to these perspectives that establish an analytical framework for further analysis, this thesis explores the HE harmonisation literature in Southeast Asia and Asia more broadly to identify factors specific to the ASEAN context.

2.4.1 Drivers: A Policy Transfer Framework

Contextualising HE harmonisation in the international policy transfer processes sheds light on the emergence of HE harmonisation in ASEAN. The thesis employs the definition of policy transfer provided by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), which is ‘a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place’ (p. 344). In particular, the international policy transfer analysis and literature on the effects of globalisation on education provide a helpful guide to analyse the transfer of HE harmonisation ideas and norms among the global regions.

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3 References to policy transfer in the thesis include the various nomenclatures used in international policy transfer analysis despite their specific focus on, for example, lesson-drawing, policy borrowing and lending, policy convergence, and policy diffusion (Bennett, 1997; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Rose, 1991).
The Extent, Rationales and Forms of Policy Transfer

Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) suggest four categories of policy transfer that form a conceptual guide to analyse the extent of HE harmonisation policy transfer, the rationale for transfer and the forms of transfer. Copying refers to ‘direct and complete transfer’; emulation is a ‘transfer of the ideas behind the policy or program’; combinations employ ‘mixtures of several different policies’; and inspiration is the situation ‘where policy in another jurisdiction may inspire a policy change, but where the final outcome does not actually draw upon the original’ (p. 13). A combination of these may occur within the policy formulation and implementation stages of the policy-making process.

The four categories of policy transfer of Dolowitz and Marsh emphasises the importance of understanding why the key actors engage in the process of transfer. This conceptual tool has shaped this thesis to examine the motivations of key actors driving HE harmonisation initiatives. In addition, it guides the analysis of the emergence of HE harmonisation in ASEAN and the extent to which it progresses. This thesis considers the BP as a ‘source of inspiration’ for the HE harmonisation of many regions (Chao, 2011, 2014; Hartmann, 2008; Huisman et al., 2012; Schriewer, 2009). Indeed, this might also be the case for ASEAN. The interview findings on the motivations of the key actors and progress in Chapter Five will further demonstrate this assumption.

Furthermore, this thesis employs the policy transfer continuum of Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), as shown in Figure 2.4, to examine the emergence and development of HE harmonisation in ASEAN. This conceptual tool guides the analysis of the rationale and forms of policy transfer, which may emerge from lesson-drawing, voluntary, indirect coercive and direct coercive transfer.
Lessons-drawing occurs when ‘actors choose policy transfer as a rational response to a perceived process’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 14). However, actors may not be perfectly rational but act with ‘bounded rationality’. The bounded rationality of actors leads to ‘incomplete’ transfer since it is based on ‘mistaken information about the nature of the policy and how it operates in the transferring political system or about the difference between the relevant economic, social and political consequences in the transferring and the borrowing systems’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 14).

Voluntary transfer emerges from dissatisfaction or problems with the status quo. It is driven by perceived necessities such as global economic trends and the need to increase the legitimacy of a government for international acceptance. The perceived necessities increase the pressure for governments to adopt certain policies due to the fear of falling behind others, or, as Bennett (1991) puts it, ‘insecurity about being the odd man out’ (p. 43). This form of voluntary transfer may be driven by ‘the emergence of an international consensus’ or an agreement made by multilateral policy platforms on defining certain problems and solutions, which may pressure governments to reconsider and adapt their own policies on a respective agenda (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 346 – 349). This means the emergence of regional consensus among the AMS in the context of this thesis.

Recognising the need for further differentiation between indirect coercive transfer and direct coercive transfer as suggested by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), this thesis further distinguishes between these two types of transfer by focusing on the key actors. In particular, coercive transfer or direct imposition occurs ‘when one government forces another to adopt a policy’. In contrast, indirect coercive transfer involves policy
transfer that is mediated by other institutions. As illustrated in Figure 2.4, indirect coercive transfer can occur in two cases. The first is obligated transfer whereby governments adopt certain policies for complying with the regulations of supra-national institutions of which they are members. The second is the transfer that occurs based on the conditionality of supra-national institutions to member states such as: ‘the IMF will stimulate certain economic policies that have to be implemented if the loan is to be granted’ (p. 348).

In addition to analysing the rationale and forms of policy transfer in a particular context, this continuum is of benefit to comparative analysis. It represents a guideline to comparatively analyse similar phenomenon in different contexts. Although this continuum provides a helpful conceptual tool to systematically analyse the development of policy transfer, it is vital to note that clearly identifying these different forms of transfer may be challenging in practice. This is attributed to the fact that policy transfer is not static and the forms of transfer can merge with each other along the continuum.

Employing the policy transfer continuum as a reference tool, this thesis situates HE harmonisation in ASEAN as part of the voluntary transfer process, but driven by perceived necessities. Chapter Five will provide an analysis of ASEAN HE harmonisation in this continuum considering the findings on the rationales and motivations of the key actors examined in this thesis. To frame an analysis of a more specific rationale of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, the following sections explore these perceived necessities as documented in the relevant HE literature.

Global Education Development Models

The HE literature on the effects of globalisation on education supports the importance of international policy transfer processes, particularly the view on ‘global education development models’ which urge similar HE development trends to domestic HE systems. As Dale (2000) asserts, ‘the development of national educational systems and curricular categories is to be explained by universal models of education, state, and society, rather than by distinctive national factors’ (p. 428). This assumption shapes the initial focus of this thesis on drivers to the prominent role of such models, which
are mainly introduced by norm entrepreneurs, in promoting ASEAN’s HE harmonisation.

Given their focus on the isomorphic changes of HE trends that influence local HE systems, the ‘Common World Educational Culture’ and ‘Globally Structured Agenda for Education’ approaches might potentially explain the emergence of HE harmonisation among international HE trends in the past decade. As Meyer and Ramirez (2011) notes, ‘types of programs, and educational sequences and differentiation, seem strikingly homogenous and change in similar ways around the world’ (p. 131). This claim is reflected through the historical development of international education trends.

Kandel (cited in Steiner-Khamsi, 2002, p. 62) wrote in 1944 that ‘the development of education appears in most countries to have followed the same rhythm. The 19th century opened with a movement to establish systems of universal and compulsory elementary education’. Kandel presents the historical development from the expansion of secondary schooling to the implementation of vocational and technical education and claims that the establishment of an HE system would be the future of education development (Kandel in Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). This claim is given further weight by the massification of HE witnessed through the expansion of HE services since the 20th century. Also, the rise of HE internationalisation in the 21st century has triggered discussions on HE harmonisation and regional HE areas in several parts of the world such as Europe, Southeast Asia and Africa.

The dispersion of these ‘rhythms’ to promote the international dimension of HE can be understood as part of the ‘bandwagoning effect’, a term used in psychological theory. Colman (2015) defines bandwagoning effect as:

> An accelerating diffusion through a group or population of a pattern of behaviour, the probability of any individual adopting it increasing with the proportion who have already done so. It occurs in situations in which people believe that their interests are served by joining a fashionable movement. (p. 77)

In social science, the bandwagon effect describes the tendency of ‘persons to join or support a form of collective behaviour that has acquired momentum or whose success appears probable’ (Craig, 2002, p. 32). This may include the tendency of less

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powerful states to align with rising or dominant powers. For example, Masciandaro and Romelli conclude in their study that the ‘bandwagoning effect’ drives financial reforms, and ‘politicians are more likely to undertake reforms when their peers do so’. In some cases, the rapid spread of a dominant trend may be accelerated by the ‘ripple effect’ – the adoption of similar policies across countries within a specific timeframe (Bennett, 1997, p. 219).

The HE harmonisation phenomenon in several regions has emerged in part due to a bandwagoning effect influenced by the BP. Eta (2015) argues that the BP demonstrates how educational reforms in one national context can trigger reforms in other countries (p. 161). A study by Voegtle et al. (2011) further substantiates this assumption by examining whether transnational communication through the BP has led to the convergence of HE policies. The study found increased policy convergence in both among participating and non-participating countries. On a broader scale, the reforms or transfer of policy between countries may refer to a transnational phenomenon and its spread to other regions. Thus, in addition to the incremental diffusion across the regions induced by the BP, the ripple effect triggered by the establishment of the EHEA may further accelerate the rapid move of the HE harmonisation trajectory to other regions.

Importantly, the current context promotes opportunities for international policy transfer. Considering the driving forces mentioned in Chapter One, supportive conditions for dispersing similar ideas and norms have developed across several parts of the world over recent decades. The problems and prerequisites for development have become increasingly similar and this has seen a rise in the potential for increased convergence of policy options and trends across nations. Importantly, policy makers can easily learn how other systems react and respond to challenges through the global communication and technological developments that encourage solutions found in one HE system to diffuse into other systems. As Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) state, ‘technological advances have made it easier and faster for policy-makers to communicate with each other, [and] the occurrences of policy transfer have increased’ (p. 6).

Emerged through the international constructions of HE development policies, this thesis positions HE harmonisation as part of the efforts to build the international
harmonisation of HE systems and the global knowledge society. According to Halpin and Troya (1995), increased policy exchanges across education systems make ‘the move towards a “global village” become an increasing reality’ (p. 304). Efforts at the regional level play an adjunct role in achieving the global ends.

**Rationales and Motivations: Preset Codes**

This thesis positions regional HE harmonisation as a component of HE internationalisation. As stated in Chapter One, both trends may have shared underlying rationale and driving forces, particularly the necessity to increase the competitiveness and legitimacy of domestic HE systems within the international HE context. Informed by the HE internationalisation literature, this thesis takes the stance that shared interests among the key actors in voluntarily developing HE harmonisation are primarily driven by economic, political, academic, and cultural motivations.

These motivations are identified and defined based on a study by Kälvemark & Van der Wende (1997) on the rationales for HE internationalisation in Europe. In particular, economic motivations are related to direct economic benefits, such as short-term institutional income generation and the net economic effect of foreign students on host institutions and countries. In addition, these motivations may involve indirect or long-term economic effects, particularly internationally qualified graduates or foreign graduates being keys to the country’s trade relations (brain gain) (Lujiten-Lub, 2007, p. 31).

Political motivations focus on the benefits regarding ‘issues concerning the country’s position and role as a nation in the world (security, stability and peace, ideological influence)’ (Kälvemark & Van der Wende, 1997, p. 226). For the analysis of drivers in this thesis, in addition to the key actors’ motivations directly related to the APSC, motivations concerning the ASEAN Community are all considered as political motivations since they all contribute to the region-building process. These include, for example, the need to support the AEC and to promote people connectivity as a foundation for the ASCC.

Educational motivations concentrate on the benefits that involve ‘the aims and functions of higher education’ (Kälvemark & Van der Wende, 1997, p. 226). These include, for instance, the development of HE quality, productivity and the knowledge
society. Cultural motivations focus on the benefits concerning ‘the role and place of the country’s own culture and language and on the importance of understanding foreign languages and culture’ (Kälvemark & Van der Wende, 1997, p. 226).

Although these motivations are interrelated and influence each other, clustering them allows us to distinguish the predominant motivations for HE harmonisation. Supporting the earlier emphasis that economic globalisation forms the crucial driving force behind HE regionalisation, economic motivations are particularly emphasised in this thesis. Such emphasis supports the conclusion of Kälvemark and Van der Wende (1997) that economic rationale principally drive HE internationalisation in Europe:

> The educational and cultural rationales, reflected in measures like the mobility of students and staff, the improvement of the quality of education, a greater compatibility of study programmes and degrees, and an enhanced knowledge of other languages and cultures, seemed all to be derived from the overarching economic rationale of strengthening human resources for international competitiveness. [...] There has been a shift from more educationally oriented towards more economically oriented policies over the last few years. (p. 226)

More specifically, the liberalisation of international trade generates the strongest driving force behind HE internationalisation (Lujiten-Lub, 2007). This argument supports the emphasis of this thesis that the predominant motivation for HE harmonisation in ASEAN is promoting regional academic and professional mobility. In other words, HE harmonisation is necessary to allow for ‘a more fluid flow of students and scholars’ across the region (Hawkins, 2012a, p. 177). In particular, HE harmonisation fosters academic mobility as a foundation for training students and preparing graduates for a more competitive international labour market. In addition, HE harmonisation mechanisms are needed to promote the mutual recognition of qualifications for skilled labour mobility.

Although the HE internationalisation literature might contribute to our understanding of the perceived necessities of harmonisation, it is important to more specifically distinguish HE regionalisation from a generic rationale for increasing cross-border collaboration. According to Knight (2013b), regional HE activities encompass ‘regional’ motivations and expected outcomes (p. 368). Table 2.2 shows the rationales, objectives and outcomes that characterise HE regionalisation efforts. They include political, academic, economic, and cultural motivations, while also underlining regional goals. Specifically, HE regionalisation promotes region-building through the primary functions of HE such as teaching, learning, and research.
Table 2.2: The Rationales, Objectives and Outcomes Characterising HE Regionalisation
Adapted from Knight (2013b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Rationales, Objectives and Outcomes Related to Region-Building</th>
<th>The Rationales, Objectives and Outcomes Related to the Primary Functions of HE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) to promote peace, harmony and mutual understanding within a region and among different cultures and countries,</td>
<td>(1) to ensure that the quality of higher education programmes and research is strengthened through sharing of best practices and capacity building within the region,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) to enhance economic competitiveness at the global level by increasing scientific and knowledge capacity within the region,</td>
<td>(2) to address pressing national, regional and world issues through regional research networks, clusters and knowledge co-production,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) to develop human resources capacity and mobility to foster economic growth and diminish the divide between developing and developed countries within the region,</td>
<td>(3) to develop deeper understanding and appreciation in students, scholars and academics of the cultures, languages, values, histories within the region and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) to foster closer collaboration among knowledge communities to address regional and global issues that can only be solved through co-operation and,</td>
<td>(4) to educate and prepare students for citizenship and a career enhanced by critical perspectives and understandings of their role and contribution at the local, national, regional and global levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) to further develop a sense of regional identity and trust among nations in order to facilitate stronger political and security alliances.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to exploring the generic rationales and objectives of HE regionalisation, this thesis further explores literature on HE regionalisation in Asia, particularly on Southeast Asia to identify the more specific rationale of the key actors driving HE harmonisation initiatives in ASEAN. Based on a summary of the possible key motivations suggested by the current literature (see Appendix One for a summary of rationales for HE harmonisation in ASEAN), this thesis emphasises the following key rationales: 1) to promote academic mobility across the AMS; 2) to enhance regional HE quality and productivity; 3) to foster regional employment and economic opportunities; 4) to support the globalisation and internationalisation of HE strategy; and 5) to build a strong foundation for the ASEAN Community. Moreover, together with the emphasis on policy transfer and the role of norms entrepreneurs, this thesis identifies another important rationale: 6) to collaborate with and respond to the dialogue partners. These specific factors provide preset codes on rationales and motivations. These factors were taken into consideration in the analysis of drivers.
from the interviewees’ motivations and expected outcomes of HE harmonisation, as presented in Chapter Five.

Although a policy transfer perspective provide a conceptual framework for analysing the drivers of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, there appear some limitations in using it to explain the impediments to HE harmonisation. In particular, this framework tends to focus on the role of norm entrepreneurs in shaping international policy transfer. The following section moves from policy transfer to a norm diffusion framework, which shifts the attention of the thesis to local actors and norms.

2.4.2 Impediments: A Norm Diffusion Framework

The norm diffusion literature provides a framework for analysing the development of ASEAN HE harmonisation, particularly the interview findings regarding impediments in Chapter Six. Diffusion refers to the process by which institutions, rules and practices spread from one locale to another through specific social channels of communication over time (Jetschke, 2010). As a sociological view of international relations, a diffusion approach identifies the actions and decisions among actors that increase the likelihood of them adopting institutions, rules and practices from others (Jetschke, 2010; Jordana & Levi-Faur, 2005).

Related to international norm diffusion, Acharya’s (2004, 2009) constitutive localisation framework aims to explain how ‘local agents reconstruct foreign norms to ensure the norms fit with the agents’ cognitive priors and identities’ (Acharya, 2004, p. 239). In particular, the framework emphasises the prominent role of local agents or actors and cognitive priors in determining the path of new international norms within a local context. A cognitive prior is defined as ‘an existing set of ideas, belief systems, and norms, which determine and condition an individual or social group’s receptivity to new norms’ (Acharya, 2009, p. 21).

This thesis employs the constitutive localisation framework and shares a similar proposition that local agents do not passively accept emergent norms and incorporate them into the local normative context. Rather, they proactively take part in congruence-building processes, which involve re-interpreting, framing, grafting and pruning emerging (external) ideas and normative challenges to make them fit with

5 These foreign norms can be those of a neighbour and not necessarily of the norms entrepreneur or international arena.
existing (local) beliefs and practices. Figure 2.5 shows the local responses to transnational norms and factors conditioning norm diffusion, adapted from Acharya (2004, 2009) and Allison (2013).

This figure shows the three paths of emergent norms that occur under the scrutiny of local actors. These are norms displacement, localisation, and impediment or rejection. For the first path, the direct displacement of new norms to the local context may occur when a domestic norm ‘embodies a moral claim or function that has already been challenged from within’ (Acharya, 2009, p. 16). This framework focuses on the middle path – the localisation process of new norms in which ‘norm-takers perform the act of selection, borrowing, and modification in accordance with a pre-existing normative framework’ (Acharya, 2004, p. 269). For the third path, new norms are likely to be rejected if they are perceived by the local agents as perhaps threatening the legitimacy of a local identity and norms, or increasing domestic instability.

This thesis moves beyond the three distinctive paths set out in Acharya’s original framework by adding a minor path between localisation and rejection into the figure with the view that local impediments may arise during the localisation process. For
instance, although there is initial acceptance of new norms, normative challenges derived from domestic concerns about the practicality and suitability of new norms may occur and hinder the diffusion process. The findings on the impediments to harmonisation in Chapter Six will further illustrate this aspect.

Employing the norm diffusion perspectives substantiates several key arguments of this thesis. Primarily, engaging these perspectives responds to the current demand for bridging political science and HE perspectives to study HE regionalism. Studying the norm diffusion literature shapes this thesis by positioning HE harmonisation within the dispersion of norms and ideas in international relations. In addition, using a constitutive localisation framework, which Acharya uses to analyse Asian regionalism, accentuates the emphasis of this thesis on the relevance between regionalism and HE regionalism. In particular, the ideas and norms developed through historical constructions of regionalism in a given region play a significant role in shaping HE regionalism and may provide important implications to HE harmonisation. This position shapes the main argument of Chapter Three for the importance of examining ASEAN regionalism.

In addition, the norm diffusion perspectives allow us to reconceptualise the norm diffusion process by focusing on the active role of the local actors and context. In particular, Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework focuses on the second wave of norms scholarship that emphasises the local context and the reasons a local actor may refuse to accept certain international norms. This wave moves on from the emphasis of the first wave of norms scholarship that emphasised the role of universal moral entrepreneurs, as discussed in the previous section regarding policy transfer (Acharya, 2009). Emphasis on locality has shaped the focus of the interviewee selection in this thesis on representatives from the key actors in this context, namely, governments, HEIs, and regional organisations with education mandates in ASEAN, as further discussed in Chapter Four. Moreover, it has guided the thesis in critically examining the ASEAN context and the key actors’ views towards the factors constraining their HE harmonisation efforts in Chapter Three.

Another reason for employing Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework in this thesis is the emphasis of this dynamic theory of localisation on the ‘process’ of congruence building between new and existing norms, not the terminal condition. The
framework suggests that such a process takes time given that localisation provides a ‘constitutive impact’. This characteristic is relevant to this thesis in that it focuses on studying the ongoing process of HE harmonisation, rather than its final outcomes.

In addition to the usage for analysing impediments, norm diffusion perspectives shed light on the conditions for norms acceptance. In particular, the norm diffusion literature stresses the importance of local cultural filters, which shape ‘the impact of international norms and political learning in third states and organisations leading to learning, adaptation or rejection of norms’ (Kinnvall, 1995, pp. 61 - 71).6 Checkel (1999) regards norm diffusion as more rapid ‘when a cultural match exists between a systemic norm and a target country, in other words, when it resonates with historically constructed domestic norms’ (p. 6).

A constitutive localisation framework further substantiates this position by emphasising the importance of the complementarity of new norms to cognitive priors and the strategies of norm diffusion. According to Acharya (2009), ‘norms that can be made to fit local conditions and traditions spread more easily than those that cannot’ (p. 5). In other words, norm diffusion strategies that are likely to succeed are those that accommodate the local context as opposed to those that seek to dismiss existing norms. Acharya’s framework explains why the HE harmonisation trajectory in ASEAN does not bring about revolutionary HE policy reforms as has occurred with the BP. The interview findings on impediments in Chapter Six and conditions in Chapter Seven further support the predominance of historically constructed norms and existing culture within the local context in shaping the progress of HE harmonisation and the construction of a common space in HE in ASEAN.

**Impediments: Preset Codes**

Moving on from a generic framework to analyse impediments, this section turns to the identification of specific factors that may impede the progress of HE harmonisation in ASEAN. Identifying the preset codes for analysing the interview data on impediments was initially informed by the literature on international HE. Specifically, the model on factors influencing transnational HE collaboration by Sakamoto and Chapman (2011) suggests factors related to HEI participation in cross-border partnerships:

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6 See also Manners (2001, p. 14).
The willingness of HEIs to participate in cross-border partnerships is influenced by (a) organizational factors, such as anticipated payoffs balanced against their ability to absorb extra demands such programs would generate, (b) financial viability of the collaboration, (c) faculty interest in and incentives for participating, and (d) the larger political, legal, and regulatory environment in which the collaboration would operate. (pp. 7 – 8)

The categorisation of four factors shapes the initial cluster of preset codes for analysing impediments while acknowledging the complex and overlapping nature of issues. However, this model is not applied directly to this thesis as it acts more as a generic tool for cross-border HE partnership analysis, rather than HE regionalisation. Drawing on a synthesis of previous studies on HE harmonisation in Southeast Asia (see for example, Ratanawijitrasin, 2015; Sirat et al., 2014; Yavaprabhas, 2014; Zirat & Jantan, 2008), this chapter establishes preset codes for analysing interview data on the factors impeding the HE harmonisation efforts of the key actors in Chapter Six. These are: 1) a lack of supportive domestic context, 2) ideational and cultural barriers, 3) region-building culture and ASEAN’s cognitive priors, 4) inadequate resources and regional funding mechanisms, 5) limited structures for the HE harmonisation process, and 6) minimal institutionalisation: governance and leadership.

Despite the acknowledgement of the interrelationship and influence among these factors, they are clustered in this thesis to identify the predominant factors. This thesis emphasises the following as the key impediments to ASEAN HE harmonisation: the supportiveness of the domestic context, attitudinal and cultural barriers, and the resource constraints. This emphasis is based on their tendency to be the most prevalent issues indicated by the literature in the field.

2.4.3 Key Conditions: A Region-building Framework

Employing perspectives from comparative regional studies to analyse key conditions for effectively constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN in this thesis involves two fundamental assumptions. First, HE harmonisation is not exclusively an academic phenomenon but also comprises economic, political, and socio-cultural region-building processes. In particular, this thesis positions HE harmonisation as a form of instrumental regionalism, which is one of four of Higgott’s (2007) approaches to regionalism; the others being de facto, de jure, and cognitive regionalism. Instrumental regionalism refers to the concerted efforts stemming from a collective interest that may be initially informal and later develop into regional harmonisation.
policy in a certain policy area. The case in point in this thesis is the regional approach to HE development that is developed into the harmonisation of HE systems.

Moreover, this thesis positions HE harmonisation as functional cooperation for region-building and neofunctionalism due to its connection to the ASEAN Community development, particularly through the AEC and the ASCC. This position draws on the two important characteristics of functional cooperation identified by Collins (2013, p. 5). Firstly, functional cooperation focuses on low politics or non-sensitive topics to national security and sovereignty, for example, cooperation to enhance education opportunities and food security. Such cooperation often covers non-traditional security issues to lessen the fears of the defection or desertion of the member states from the cooperation and ensure that, if objections occur, the cost is manageable. The second characteristic concerns the spill-over effect functional cooperation may have in encouraging cooperation in another area, which echoes the underlying assumption of neofunctionalism in regional integration theory.

Using the policy transfer and norm diffusion frameworks that emphasise the importance of ideas and norms, this thesis argues that the ideational and cultural factors are the most fundamental barriers to ASEAN HE regionalism. Specifically, inadequate ideational forces from the political will of political leaders, commitment and priorities of HE leaders and practitioners and societal values regarding region-building mainly obstruct the effective progress of HE harmonisation initiatives. Moving from policy transfer and a norm diffusion framework to region-building perspectives expands the emphasis of this thesis from the ideational conditions that focus on ideas and norms to the structural conditions that concentrate on institutions and structures. This shifted focus involves the second assumption on the importance of the key actors in strengthening the institutions and structures for a regional HE space. In particular, theoretical perspectives from regional studies frame the focus of this thesis on the leadership role of key actors in creating a supportive context for collaboration, and particularly ASEAN as a regional body.

The assumption of the significant role of ASEAN reflects several schools of thought in regional integration theory, which emphasise the key roles of regional institutions and structures. For instance, new institutionalism claims that strong institutions and institutional arrangements in regional settings are important prerequisites for a
regional community due to their mediating role among all actors and actions. In contrast, neofunctionalist accounts of regional integration put institutions and beliefs, as well as loyalties, at the core of regional integration processes (see for example, Haas, 1956, 1964; Rattanasevee, 2014). Liberal intergovernmentalists emphasise the importance of states and stress the crucial role of institutions in facilitating and accelerating regional integration by, for example, providing information, monitoring compliance, and establishing links across issues (Rattanasevee, 2014). Constructivism accentuates the relationships among norms, institutions, and identities. Constructivists view regional integration as a form of social interaction in international contexts in which states and institutions within a regional setting act as cognitive and correlative entities that construct state identities and interests (Rattanasevee, 2014). The interview data on the key conditions presented in Chapter Seven further emphasise the need for strengthening institutions and structures for a common space in HE in ASEAN.

The importance of regional organisations and political mechanisms in promoting HE regionalism is accentuated in the map of HE regionalisation activities in the region-building processes, as shown in Figure 2.6. The map is developed from the regionness scale of Hettne and Söderbaum (2003) and the conceptual map of Knight’s (2012b) HE regionalisation terms, as introduced in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.3 respectively. This conceptual map is developed in this thesis to analyse the characteristics, approaches to and progress of HE regionalisation in ASEAN.
Regional Community Building

An emerging socio-political region in which political, economic and socio-cultural connectivity have intensified by various actors through formal, informal, top-down and bottom-up approaches; embryonic collective identity, the leadership role of regional regulative bodies and governance has become more prominent.

Figure 2.6: Regionalisation of Higher Education Activities in the Region-Building Processes
Adapted from Hettne and Söderbaum (2000), Murray and Warleigh-Lack (2013) and Knight (2012b)
Combining the region-building and HE perspectives establishes a reference tool to conceptualise the emergence and key conditions for the development of HE harmonisation in relation to region-building processes. This conceptual tool can be used to distinguish HE regionalism from HE regionalisation activities. In particular, the groups of ‘harmonisation’ and ‘integration’ can be considered HE regionalism that reflects more formality, structured and institutionalised HE interactions, which may involve the leadership role of regional organisations and political agreements.

This thesis employs this tool to analyse the characteristics and progress of HE harmonisation in the ASEAN context by considering the complimentary relationships between HE harmonisation efforts and the development of the ASEAN Community. As shown in Figure 2.6, each category of Knight’s HE regionalisation terms is related to each state of regionness in Hettne and Söderbaum’s regionness scale. Specifically, Knight’s ‘co-operation/collaboration/partnership’ categorisation is related to Hettne’s ‘regional complex’; ‘coordination/coherence/alignment’ to ‘regional society’; ‘convergence/harmonisation’ to ‘regional community’; and ‘integration/community interdependence’ to ‘region state’.

A ‘regional space’ does not involve many HE interactions as it mainly focuses on geographical continuity. This type of region relies on physical barriers and ecological characteristics. Trans-local interactions or cross-border interactions among different groups may exist but mainly relate to symbolic kinship and social relations rather than market transactions. Thus, despite possible occasional cross-border HE interactions, a more structured form of HE regionalisation may remain absent.

Increased cross-border interactions, cultural influences and trade create a ‘regional complex’, producing an anarchic social system. This early form of interdependence suggests ‘a primitive security mechanism’ that forms ‘the real starting point for the regionalisation process’ (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 16). The constituent units and balance of power are formed to ensure security. Dependence among states occurs as far as a state’s own security is concerned. Economic ideologies are based on national interests which rely on exploitative patterns, particularly beggar-thy-neighbour policies. The focus of cooperation and interactions is mainly on economic advantage.

The increased economic connectivity of a regional complex triggers more activities in HE across countries, which reflect ‘cooperation’, ‘collaboration’, ‘partnership’ and
‘networking’ on Knight’s continuum of HE regionalisation terms. These terms denote the open and voluntary nature of HE interactions. There are no rigid regulations or codes of conduct to guide cooperation and its direction. Some examples are bilateral and multilateral activities among HEIs. Reflecting governance in the regional complex, governments and HEIs are the prominent HE actors, rather than regional organisations. Relationships among HE actors are based on a cooperation–competition game that focuses on their own benefits. Thus, HE actors distance themselves from agreements and initiatives which are not perceived to fulfil national and institutional interests.

Increased social interactions and transnational actors contribute to a ‘regional society’. There is the broadening of organised cooperation in multiple dimensions with a broader focus such as in the cultural, political, and economic spheres. This type of region forms a ‘transnational regional economy’ and ‘regional civil society’, which involve non-state transnational actors, as exemplified by Hettne & Söderbaum (2000):

 [...] markets, private business and firms, transnational corporations, transnational business networks, non-governmental organisations, social movements and other types of social networks formed on the basis of profession, ideological, ethnic or religious ties, which contribute to the formation of a transnational regional economy and regional civil society. (p. 19)

A regional society is a more formal and rules-based region. This type of region can also be understood in association with ‘network regionalisation’ in Warleigh-Lack’s (2006) typology of regionalisation (see Appendix Two for a typology of regionalisation). This means the role of the diversity of the actors in the regional identity-driven process is more prominent, particularly in response to globalisation. However, network regionalisation mainly relies on non-institutionalised or intergovernmental working methods.

The context of a regional society triggers the demand for a more structured form of HE regionalisation, which includes ‘coordination’, ‘coherence’, and ‘alignment’. Some adaptations of HE interactions are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the regional collaborative activities and complementary relationships among HE actors. These adaptations could mean establishing a set of guidelines to stimulate more formal types of relationships among actors. Some examples of HE interactions in this realm are organised networks, joint education programmes, and research partnerships across HEIs and systems. Similar to a regional society with transnational actors in
more prominent roles, the coordination, coherence, and alignment realm in the HE regionalisation continuum may suggest the increased role of regional organisations with an educational mandate. HE regionalisation activities rely primarily on minimal institutionalisation or intergovernmental arrangements.

A ‘regional community’ is a region that is more institutionalised and has increased its legitimacy in the international political economy. Although sovereignty may not be transferred to regional organisations, their role and governance becomes more prominent in solving shared challenges in a given region. For instance, there are more interdependent and regional mechanisms to warrant regional peace, particularly agreements among member states that avoid violent means of conflict resolution. In a regional community, a regional collective identity emerges through the possession of a certain level of social communication and a cognitive convergence of culture, identity, and fundamental values (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000).

A regional community requires the increased regional mobility of resources to support regional community building objectives. Central to this is the promotion of robust interactions and dynamism within the region through the freer flow of people, goods, services, and knowledge. This context demands closer HE interactions through the ‘harmonisation’ and ‘convergence’ of HE systems, which results in the systemic changes of HE systems both at the institutional and national levels (Knight, 2012a). These changes may stem from the institutional, national and intergovernmental efforts to develop regional HE policy infrastructure for promoting regional academic mobility and employment. Some examples are the development of regional frameworks to enhance compatibility among HE systems, particularly those related to the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance and credit transfer systems.

As the ‘region state’ introduces a complex, interdependent and formal form of region, it increases the obligations of member states to regional agreements. States become part of a political entity with pooled sovereignty and a highly institutionalised governance structure. Regional governance and decision-making are not centralised but are multilevel, ranging from the local to supranational. In particular, the leadership role of regional organisations plays a crucial role in promoting and facilitating the creation of a ‘formal’ region. This construct can be understood as a ‘community of states’ where a transnationalised regional civil society has a role to play. A regional
civil society may emerge from ‘below’ but it will eventually require support from formal and informal institutions and ‘regimes’ to ‘facilitate and promote security, welfare, social communication and the convergence of values, norms, identities and actions throughout the regions’ (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 22).

The context of a region state nurtures a demand for ‘integration’, ‘community’ and ‘interdependence’ on Knight’s continuum of HE regionalisation terms. These terms suggest more formalised, institutionalised and comprehensive levels of HE interactions, which may move beyond being an academic phenomenon (Knight, 2012b, p. 14). An example includes the construction of a common HE and research space, which requires a political approach to foster the robust and sustainable development of regional HE interactions. The leadership role of regional-level bodies is required for developing and ensuring the adoption of a regional HE collaborative framework, agreements or codes of conduct for promoting complimentary interactions among HE actors and systems.

Region-building and HE regionalisation processes, as stated earlier, are not static. Thus, positioning the progress of a region into a certain category given on the map is unlikely. As shown in Figure 2.6, this thesis positions ASEAN in a transitional stage between a ‘regional society’ and a ‘regional community’. This has taken into consideration the shared vision of the ASEAN leaders for a more connected region and the establishment of the ASEAN Community in recent years. However, there remains limited collective identity and strong regional institutions and mechanisms to warrant regional peace and security.

The positioning of ASEAN between a ‘regional society’ and a ‘regional community’ suggests its progress in terms of HE regionalisation between ‘coordination’ and ‘harmonisation’. Increased regional connectivity has led to the need to deepen ASEAN ties in HE, which have evolved from cooperation to HE harmonisation. Although there have been various regional efforts to harmonise HE, there remains limited regionally-agreed framework that has resulted in concrete and systemic changes in HE at both national and institutional levels.

While this map may be used for further analysis in a given region and from a comparative perspective, it is important to note that the map does not represent a linear progress. According to Hettne (2001), ‘there will be a movement of regions,
rising or in decline, as a consequence of the dynamics of regionalisation and globalisation’ (p. 3). Given the intriguing relationship between globalisation and regionalisation forces that constitutes an influential source of fluctuating regional dynamics, regions in international politics are part of a social construction in the making. This means they can be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed over time. Knight (2013b) notes that the continuum of HE regionalisation terms is ‘not a depiction of the phases of the regionalisation process’ since changes rarely occur in a systematic manner and progress may move from one state to another in either direction (p. 352).

Since the map does not represent a hierarchical or evolutionary logic, being characterised as a region state and an integration neither determines the success of a given region on region-building nor denotes a par excellence condition in HE regionalisation. This view supports Hettne & Söderbaum (2000) who argue that being a region state does not determine the success of regional integration. This is because every region is, to a certain extent, similar to all regions, similar to some regions, and dissimilar to all regions (Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013; Van Langenhove, 2011). This means all regions similarly promote the efforts of the member states towards a shared goal. Nonetheless, the regionalisation approach and strategies might be similar only among some regions. Hence, the processes and outcomes of the ‘regionness’ and ‘HE regionalisation’ of each region may differ from other regions considering their respective contexts. As Knight (2013b, p. 352) notes, objectives, anticipated outcomes, and regionalisation strategies all differ among regions. In addition, domestic culture and indigenous traits further contribute to the differing impacts and outcomes that make each region different. Thus, the analysis of progress needs to take into careful consideration the objectives of a given region in relation to its efforts towards respective objectives, contexts and outcomes.

Of further note is that the most integrated stage in both region-building and HE regionalisation processes does not infer homogeneity. As Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) argue, the outcome of regionness is dissimilar to the consolidation of a nation state. The region state establishes a distinctive regional collective identity while maintaining state heterogeneity, internal diversity and pluralism. This view echoes Knight’s (2013b) emphasis on the fundamental value or tenet of HE regionalisation that respects ‘differences and diversities among key actors, systems, and stakeholders
within a region’. Failure to recognise these leads to the ‘zipper effect’ that brings about ‘standardisation’, ‘conformity’, ‘uniformity’, ‘compliance’ and ‘homogenisation’, which are omitted from the map of HE regionalisation terms (p. 353).

Key Conditions for the Establishment of the European Higher Education Area

Considering the broad recognition on the influential role of European HE regionalism to other regions in developing HE harmonisation and a regional HE area, this section draws on literature regarding the key conditions for progressing the BP and the EHEA. The key conditions identified in the European context support the emphasis of this thesis on the ideational conditions that focus on the collective ideas and norms and structural conditions that accentuate the importance of institutions and structures.

According to Yavaprabhas (2014), both types of conditions are necessary for the successful development of European HE harmonisation. These conditions comprise: 1) a shared vision among multiple stakeholders, including politicians and high-level policy makers, university administrators, students, academic staff, and the employment sector; 2) a clear strategy and understanding of the key actors, action lines and time-specific goals; 3) strong commitment from the ministers responsible for HE and periodic monitoring and recommendations; 4) allocated resources from the EU and member states; and 5) approaches that are congruent with culture, and which are voluntary, participatory and transparent (p. 82).

Previous studies on the BP and EHEA tend to identify the leadership role of the European Commission (EC) as the key conditions for the establishment of the EHEA (Capano & Piattoni, 2011; Chou & Ravinet, 2016; Corbett, 2011; Gornitzka, 2010; Keeling, 2006). Supporting such emphasis, many authors view that the intervention of the EC, particularly by ensuring the alignment of the BP and EHEA with the EU’s Lisbon Strategy, has led to the most substantial change in European HE regionalism (Dale, 2007; Keeling, 2006; Verger & Hermo, 2010; Wolf, 2009).

Croché (2009) argues that the leadership role of the EC, more than anything else, has enabled the highly complex initiative of the EHEA to be established successfully.⁷ According to Barrett (2013), three political economy variables which influence HE

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⁷ See also Zeng et al. (2012).
reform for policy convergence and further underlines the importance of regional organisations. These variables are competitive economic pressures and globalisation; domestic politics at the national level; and leadership from the supranational European Union (EU) that socially constructs regional norms. The third variable is particularly crucial for facilitating policy implementation on HE harmonisation in the member states given its role as a norm maker in the region (Barrett, 2013).

Comparing two processes of HE regionalisation, the BP in Europe and MERCOSUR-Educativo in Latin America, Verger and Hermo (2010) identify the important factors contributing to greater HE regionalisation progress within the European context. They emphasise the importance of the political commitment of the member states to regional policy coordination, governance structures and resource availability. The EHEA is supported by ‘a much more solid supra-national organisation, which includes state and non-state education stakeholders’ (p. 117). In particular, there is the strong leadership role of a regional body in promoting regional HE initiatives, specifically ‘the role of the European Commission to make Bologna work for the European common labour market and for the trade and economic competitiveness strategy of Europe has given a boost to the process’ (p.117).

The enhanced role of the EC has promoted European HE harmonisation with more influential communications and incentives. For instance, the EC finances international seminars on issues related to the BP, which are organised back to back with the ministerial meetings (Verger & Hermo, 2010; Wachter, 2004). In addition to funding the Tuning project to facilitate the Bologna initiatives and aligning the project with the Lisbon Strategy, the Commission focuses on financing policies that supply incentives for key actors to further develop HE quality and innovation such as scholar’s salary schemes to productivity, tax incentives for university-enterprise cooperation and university funding formulas (Dale, 2007; Keeling, 2006; Verger & Hermo, 2010).

Despite the active role the EC in steering progress of the BP, its role in European HE regionalism has been complex, primarily due to its political and economic motives emphasis. As Reinalda (2008) argues, the BP is an example of European HE reform and a political phenomenon. The incorporation of the EC as an additional member implies that ‘although the BP is an institution in its own right, it cannot be understood without discussing EU politics and the relationship between intergovernmentalism and
supranationalism’ (p. 466). Veiga and Amaral (2006, 2012) view the implementation of the BP and the Lisbon Strategy among ways to enhance the role of the EC.

Although the enhanced role of the EC may foster HE harmonisation initiatives, its prominent political and economic motives bring about reluctance among existing key actors in the HE sector to accept its intervention, particularly at the beginning stage. While the EC shares an academic motive to build an appealing platform to encourage international academic mobility and develop the quality of European universities in a highly competitive HE market, it also stresses that the BP stimulate the international economic competitiveness of Europe (Verger & Hermo, 2010). In response to the goals of the Lisbon Strategy, the EC underlines the important role of universities in promoting employability and further accommodating the demands from the employment sector (European Commission, 2003). However, imposing such preferences often come upon resistance by existing key actors, especially by universities, which refuse to be relegated to concentrate on the politically and/or economically oriented motive (Neave, 2003).

The views on the catalyst role of the EC in establishing the EHEA have shaped the preliminary assumption on key conditions of this thesis to the enhanced leadership role of ASEAN in constructing a common space in HE. At the same time, considering the complexity in governing HE regionalism and the inclusiveness of various stakeholders in the BP is key to the successful launch of the EHEA (Van der Wende, 2000), this thesis emphasises the significance of a multistakeholder approach. The interview data concerning the leadership role of ASEAN and a multistakeholder approach is further discussed in Chapter Seven.

**Regional Cognitive Priors, Process Tracing and Path Dependence**

Although examining the European case sheds light on the key conditions required for HE harmonisation, exploring the literature on ASEAN HE harmonisation is necessary. This has taken into account the differences between European and ASEAN HE harmonisation. In addition to further identifying key conditions for constructing a common space in HE specific to the ASEAN context, examining the region-building and HE regionalisation processes establishes a foundation for analysing the path
dependence of ASEAN HE regionalism, as well as the role of ASEAN as a regional body in constructing an ASEAN common space in HE.

Examining the historical development of region-building and HE regionalisation processes in ASEAN is guided by Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework and the emphasis on regional cognitive priors. In particular, agency and structures in historical and current contexts play an important role in shaping the path dependence of subsequent developments. Chapter Three further explores the historical development of ASEAN regionalism and HE regionalisation.

Substantiating a constitutive localisation framework, the thesis additionally employs a process tracing approach as a tool and a method in research defined as ‘the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator’ (Collier, 2011, p. 823). A process tracing approach suggests the importance of analysing the trajectories of change and causation thorough casual-process observations. Particular focus is placed on causal mechanisms and social context by examining the ‘sequences of independent, dependent, and intervening variables’, which uncover critical turning points and the logic behind inference (Collier, 2011, p. 823). A process tracing approach can contribute decisively both to describing political and social phenomena and to evaluating causal claims’ (Collier, 2011, p. 823).

Employing a constitutive localisation framework and a process tracing approach, this thesis examines regional cognitive priors as the independent and intervening variables that trigger the progress of ASEAN regionalism and HE harmonisation. The region-building perspectives have further directed the focus of examining key conditions in this thesis on an increased formalisation and the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body. The specific potential roles of ASEAN as the key conditions for improving the ideational and structural conditions for an ASEAN HE common space are identified in Chapter Three. In particular, the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body in generating political will and mechanisms is important given the intergovernmentalism inherent in ASEAN institutionalisation. Specifically, the agreements made by the ASEAN leaders are needed for progressing the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN. As Zirat and Jantan (2008) argue, ‘typical of Southeast Asia, directives should come from the political masters’ (p. 52).
Despite focusing on these key conditions, it is important to note that the informal, formal, bottom-up, and top-down approaches are crucial to the development of HE harmonisation initiatives. This accentuates the emphasis of this thesis on the importance of a multistakeholder approach. Specifically, the active role of national governments, HEIs, the employment sector, and public awareness determine the sustainable impact of HE harmonisation efforts and a common space in HE in ASEAN. As further discussed in Chapter Three, all informal, bottom-up, formal, and top-down approaches play a crucial contribution to the revolutionary progress in both region-building and HE regionalisation processes. This position supports Knight’s (2013b) perspective that ‘an overly bureaucratic and stringent approach to regionalisation governance can smother initiatives and innovation; but, lack of a coherent and careful governance approach can just as easily lead to chaos, competition and conflict’ (p. 369).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the theoretical and conceptual tools to be used for subsequent analysis. Various perspectives beyond HE literature have shaped a conceptual framework for examining and analysing ASEAN HE harmonisation in this thesis. Specifically, the thesis draws on an international policy transfer framework for analysing drivers or the emergence and development of ASEAN HE harmonisation. International norm diffusion perspective, particularly the constitutive localisation framework, guides the analysis of the impediments to HE harmonisation efforts. A region-building perspective guides the analysis of the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN.

The use of constitutive localisation perspectives suggests the importance of the local context where new norms will be embedded. The following chapter examines the ASEAN context. Exploring the historical development of region-building and HE regionalisation in ASEAN, the chapter identifies contextual factors that may have significant implications for HE harmonisation.
CHAPTER 3
THE ASEAN CONTEXT

Chapter Two emphasised the importance of the domestic agents and norms in determining the path of new norms. It situated HE harmonisation within the region-building process and emphasised the predominant role of the historical construction of regionalism in shaping how HE harmonisation will develop in a given region. This chapter examines the ASEAN context to further identify the contextual factors that may have significant impacts on the development of HE harmonisation in this region.

The chapter has three main sections. It begins with a brief overview of region-building development. The second section explores the evolution from ASEAN cooperation on education to HE harmonisation, and the key actors involved in ASEAN HE regionalisation. Employing a process tracing approach and emphasising the importance of regional cognitive priors, the third section identifies the prior choices and intervening variables that have triggered progress in both processes to analyse the path dependence of HE harmonisation. Particular focus is on the relevance of enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body in constructing a common space in HE. The factors identified in this chapter establish a framework for analysing the impediments to HE harmonisation and the key conditions for constructing a Common Space in HE in ASEAN.

3.1 ASEAN Higher Education Regionalism

To further analyse the progress of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, this section outlines the key actors and related initiatives in this region. It sheds light on the various key actors and the evolution from ASEAN cooperation on education to HE harmonisation. In addition, this section delineates the overlapping multilateral platforms in HE in Asia as a foundation for further discussion in Chapter Seven on the implications of the ASEAN HE harmonisation process on the broader framework.

3.1.1 ASEAN Cooperation on Education

ASEAN cooperation on education focuses on the collaborative education programmes and activities directly implemented and overseen by key policy bodies within ASEAN’s institutional framework. Following the increased structure and
institutionalisation of ASEAN regionalism in the 1990s, there were two significant advances in ASEAN HE cooperation on education: the establishment of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) in 1995; and the collective decision to convene a regular ASEAN Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASED) in 2005.

Although many references to education development had been made since ASEAN’s Bangkok Declaration of 1967,\(^8\) ASEAN cooperation on education became more visible during the 1980s. An early initiative was the ASEAN Education Ministers meeting in Manila in 1977. There have also been other initiatives by the ASEAN Sub-Committee on Education in collaboration with the ASEAN Education Task Force to develop projects for the ASEAN Network of Development Education Centers (ASEAN Secretariat, 1977). However, early initiatives in education cooperation tend to concentrate on basic education.

The early ASEAN aspiration for HE harmonisation was the idea of developing an ‘ASEAN University’ or a similar mechanism to foster closer collaboration among the HEIs in the AMS, which emerged in 1977 at the first ASED. Nonetheless, it was only after the 1990s that the idea of establishing an ASEAN University was reconsidered by policy makers. After much consideration of issues such as the funding, location, and management of an ASEAN University, the idea evolved into creating an ASEAN University Network (AUN). This formed a network of existing universities in the region, starting with the flagship universities in each AMS. The AUN was established in 1995 with the signing of its charter by the ASEAN ministers responsible for HE and the agreement on the establishment of the AUN by the presidents/rectors/vice-chancellors of participating universities.

From 13 member universities in seven AMS, the membership now comprises 30 universities from all ten AMS (as of March 2017). The AUN has been playing an active role at the university level by planning and implementing activities such as student and faculty exchange, quality assurance, information networking among ASEAN universities, conferences and training sessions, seminars, and collaborative research. According to the ASEAN Secretariat (2014b), the AUN serves as an ASEAN mechanism to:

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\(^8\) For instance, ‘to provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres; [...] To promote South-East Asian studies’) ASEAN Secretariat, 1967.
(i) Promote cooperation among ASEAN scholars, academics, and scientists in the region; 
(ii) Develop academic and professional human resources in the region; (iii) Promote information dissemination among the ASEAN academic community; and, (iv) Enhance the awareness of a regional identity and the sense of ‘ASEANness’ among members.

The 11th ASEAN Summit in 2005 was the setting of another prominent move in strengthening ASEAN education cooperation. The ASEAN leaders announced a collective decision to organise an annual ASEAN Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASED). In addition, the leaders set directives to develop regional cooperation by identifying four priorities for ASEAN cooperation on education: (i) promoting ASEAN awareness among ASEAN citizens, particularly youth; (ii) strengthening ASEAN identity through education; (iii) building ASEAN human resources in the field of education; and (iv) strengthening ASEAN University Networking’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014b).

Stronger institutionalisation of ASEAN has resulted in an increasingly complex organisational framework and more structured ASEAN cooperation on education. Adapted from the ASEAN Charter-based bodies and the AUN’s structure, Figure 3.1 sets out ASEAN education cooperation within the ASEAN institutional framework.

![Figure 3.1: ASEAN Cooperation on Education](Adapted from ASEAN Secretariat (2008) and AUN Secretariat (2011a))

Since the specific function of each body is already outlined in the ASEAN Charter, this section briefly describes the potential key policy bodies or the channels through which the HE harmonisation agenda can progress. The ASEAN senior officials meeting on education (SOM-ED) administers the implementation of programmes and
activities, and reports to ASED, which oversees policy-making and planning at the ministerial level. SOM-ED coordinates with the AUN on HE cooperation matters. Since the AUN directly participates in both ASED and SOM-ED, it can provide input and reports to ASEC. ASEC facilitates the ASEAN meetings, including the ASEAN sectoral ministerial bodies and high officials meetings through the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council (ASCCC) and the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC).

In this ASEAN Institutional Framework, the ASEAN Summit serves as ‘the supreme policy-making body’ of ASEAN, comprising the head of state or political leaders of the AMS (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008, p. 10). This thesis supports the assertion by Yavaprabhas (2014) that proposing ASED agreements to the ASEAN Summit is vital to progress the HE harmonisation agenda since they ‘have greater potential to be put into practice’. In particular, agreements with proposals of national leaders in the meetings ‘have high potential to be effectively implemented’ (pp. 92 – 93).

The Significant Others

In addition to the ASEAN framework, several important actors contribute to HE linkages in this region. An initial form of institutional arrangement for HE cooperation in Southeast Asia can be traced back to 1956 when the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL) was founded to ‘assist member institutions to strengthen themselves through mutual self-help and to achieve international distinction in teaching, research and public service’ (The Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, n.d.). Its membership has now expanded beyond Southeast Asia.

Established in 1965, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) provides important intergovernmental arrangements on education cooperation in Southeast Asia. It works in parallel with ASEAN, particularly on the

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9 The typology of cooperation can be characterised according to the actors involved. According to Lee (2012), institutional arrangements focus on HEI efforts such as the International Association of Universities (IAU) (1950), the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) (1993), the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP) (1995), the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) (1997), and the Asian University Federation (AUF) (1998) linked to the World University Federation. Non-governmental arrangements are made up of individual members such as the Asia-Pacific Association of International Education (APAIE). Intergovernmental arrangements emerge from the efforts among governments such as the United Nations Education Science Communication and Culture Organization (UNESCO).
relevance of policy platforms. For instance, the SEAMEO High Official Meetings (SEAMEO HOM) can relate to SOM-ED and the SEAMEO Council Meetings (SEAMEC) to ASED. However, the core foci and the membership of the two organisations differ. SEAMEO membership is broader as it includes countries beyond Southeast Asia as associate members, and organisations as affiliate members.

Despite ASEAN’s progress in education cooperation, it recognises SEAMEO’s contribution to the field as having preceded ASEAN’s establishment. To increase efficiency and avoid any duplication of work, ASEAN emphasises the importance of closer integration and complementarity between the two organisations:

In recognition of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization’s (SEAMEO) contribution to human resource development in the region since 1965, the Education Ministers agreed that the existing ASEAN and SEAMEO forums on education should integrate their respective programmes and activities in a complementary manner. The priorities of ASEAN cooperation on education would be undertaken through collaboration with SEAMEO. (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014b)

The ASCC Blueprint outlines the function and governance of ASEAN HE cooperation, which accentuates the close collaboration between ASEAN education cooperation and SEAMEO.

V. Promote education networking in various levels of educational institutions and continue university networking and enhance and support student and staff exchanges and professional interactions including creating research clusters among ASEAN institutions of higher learning, in close collaboration with the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN). (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009)

SEAMEO aims to promote cooperation in education, science and culture. To achieve this aim, SEAMEO has established several specialised institutions as regional centres within its network. Originally conceived in Singapore in 1959 as the Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development (RIHED), it underwent reorganisation to become the centre of SEAMEO that specialises in HE. The centre is now known as the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED). SEAMEO RIHED aims to be a catalyst in the development and reform of HE by conducting education cooperation programmes (training, workshops, seminars, conferences and research) and disseminating information (SEAMEO RIHED, n.d.). Complementing ASEAN’s mechanism on HE, or the AUN that focuses on the institutional level, SEAMEO RIHED provides intergovernmental policy platforms specialising in the policy, planning, management, and administration of HE.
In addition to the actors within Asia, inter-regional collaboration such as the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) plays a crucial role in influencing HE policy reforms. At the international level, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a multilateral platform that has contributed to HE development in Southeast Asia (Hayden, 1965). Its regional office, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, was established in 1961 in Bangkok and is concerned with education at all levels.

Strengthening of regional and inter-regional platforms is necessary not only to enhance global linkages in HE but also to consolidate the multiple HE regional collaborative frameworks in Asia. This context complicates the development of a single geopolitical framework for Asia and even East Asia (Chao, 2014). Considering the several collaborative platforms in Asian regionalism, such complexity is evident in the intra-regional network, which includes narrower and broader scales than the ASEAN framework; for instance, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), the ASEAN + 3, the ASEAN + 6, the East Asian Summit (EAS), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

In particular, several existing regional organisations contribute to ASEAN HE regionalisation. The current challenge is to motivate these actors to exert their full capacity to lead HE harmonisation initiatives in ASEAN (Yavaprabhas, 2014). In particular, SEAMEC and ASED have great potential to further promote the HE harmonisation agenda to ASEAN leaders through the ASEAN Summit. Their joint statement is crucial as it ‘can help in effectively implementing policies to broaden targets and further gain supportive resources’ (p. 101).

3.1.2 The Development of Higher Education Harmonisation in ASEAN

The concept of HE harmonisation is not new to ASEAN. In 1983, the UNESCO Regional Convention on Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific was adopted in Bangkok, which set up an early mechanism to introduce harmonisation in the Asia–Pacific. To reflect the changing HE context and issues, such as massification, privatisation, and internationalisation of HE, the Convention was revised and adopted in Tokyo in 2011.
**Origin, Objectives, and an Intended Model**

While early HE cooperation in Southeast Asia focused on the institutional level (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008), one of the key actors driving the HE harmonisation agenda through several intergovernmental policy platforms is SEAMEO RIHED. It submitted a proposal regarding the harmonisation of HE systems to its main policy platforms, namely the Governing Board Meeting and the Director General/Secretary General and Commissioner Meeting in 2007. The proposal was tabled at the 30th SEAMEO High Official Meeting in 2007 and the 43rd SEAMEO Council Meeting in 2008. The objectives of the proposal were:

- to raise awareness of policy makers and high ranking officials in SEAMEO Member Countries on the significance of an inter-governmental process leading to a regional framework for higher education harmonisation and to help facilitate possible development and future establishment of ‘a common space in higher education’ in Southeast Asia by 2015. (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008, p. 7)

In 2008, SEAMEO RIHED convened a project to raise awareness among policy makers and academics in the region regarding the harmonisation agenda. As briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, a study and an international conference on ‘Raising Awareness: Exploring the Ideas of Creating a common space in Higher Education in Southeast Asia’ was conducted. RIHED’s study involved government agencies responsible for HE, HEIs, and the business/employment sector from five ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The results from SEAMEO RIHED’s study suggested broad agreement on the benefits of HE harmonisation and a regional HE area. There was a shared interest among the key actors despite uncertainty among some participants as to how these ideas can be realised considering the rich diversity in the region. While many participants referred to the BP and the EHEA, there was a clear emphasis that if a common space in HE was to be developed in ASEAN, such a space would not emulate the European model but be developed with respect to the local context.

While ASEAN HE harmonisation may develop a regional space for HE, it does not aim to create one system but a compatible and comparable network that fosters a supportive environment for academic movement within the region and beyond. Such space forms a ‘point of reference’ that does not require all HE systems to adhere to a particular system. Zirat and Jantan (2008) propose ‘a system that become(s) a
reference or one that can be fitted into without jeopardising cultural diversity and national identity’ (p. 51).

**Development and Action Lines**

Almost a decade after official discussions on the HE harmonisation agenda started in Asia, the related initiatives remain under discussion or in their infancy (Chao, 2014). To date, there is no official ASEAN common space in HE or Southeast Asian HE Area. However, progress has been made towards a regional HE infrastructure and the increased convergence of HE systems. There have been continuing efforts such as multilateral and bilateral agreements at the intergovernmental and institutional levels along several action lines.\(^{10}\) Yavaprabhas (2014) categorises the four main systems directly related to HE harmonisation in this region as follows: 1) degree systems, 2) quality assurance (QA) systems, 3) credit transfer systems (CTS), and 4) academic calendar systems (p. 86). This categorisation is used to analyse and present the findings on progress in Chapter Five.

Due to the growing importance of regional student mobility, the CTS and QA systems appear to be the most active action lines of the four main HE systems. A prominent example of efforts at the institutional level is the development of the ACTS, which is applied to the AUN member universities to facilitate student exchange programmes. In addition, the AUN-QA was initiated in 1998 and guidelines were developed to improve the QA system and assessment in the region (ASEAN University Network Secretariat, 2004, 2005, 2011b). Among the important efforts at the intergovernmental level, SEAMEO RIHED has been working on mechanisms to facilitate academic mobility, for instance the ASEAN International Mobility for Students Program (AIMS) and the Southeast Asian Credit Transfer System (SEA–CTS). With support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), RIHED is also developing an Academic Credit Transfer Framework for Asia (ACTFA), and the GMS University Consortium to promote student mobility.

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\(^{10}\) Initial action lines were indicated in the RIHED study as five key mechanisms for harmonisation. These include 1( quality assurance; 2( a closer connection between existing education and research areas ); clusters; 3( a credit transfer system; 4( a mobility system; and 5( a lifelong learning system (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008). Progress has been made by RIHED on the focal areas, for instance ASEAN Research Clusters )ARC( and an ASEAN Citation Index )ACI(.
For degree systems and the mutual recognition of qualifications, there have been discussions on learning outcomes and a Qualification Framework (QF). ASEAN is developing a common reference framework, referred to as the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework (AQRF), to function as ‘a device to enable comparisons of qualifications of skilled labour across the ASEAN Member States’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014c). The AMS may voluntarily comply with the AQRF at their own pace and capacity, noting that the referencing process will start by 2016, or at the latest by 2018.

Harmonising the academic calendar seems to be the most controversial issue among all systems. Nonetheless, there have been changes to academic calendar systems in the region. Thailand adopted a new calendar in 2014 which moved the start of the academic year to August instead of June, while in 2015 some HEIs in the Philippines also moved theirs to August (Ateneo De Manila University, 2014; Ramirez-Cohn, 2014).

Dialogue partners greatly contribute to HE harmonisation in ASEAN. For instance, the official launch of the four-year project ‘European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (EU-SHARE)’ (2015–2018). Funded by the EU, this project aims to ‘strengthen regional cooperation by enhancing the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education’ by building on current convergence initiatives and sharing the practices of the EHEA (European University Association (EUA), 2015). This project is conducted in close collaboration between ASEAN and the European partners.\(^\text{11}\)

As a result of learning from European experiences and receiving support from European partners, there have been similar developments and action lines in creating a regional HE area within the ASEAN region. However, ASEAN HE harmonisation does have its idiosyncrasies. Among the important differences, the construction of an HE community in this region appears to be HE sector-centric, rather than being a broader political project driven by a multistakeholder approach as was the case in

\(^\text{11}\) The European partners include the European University Association, which is a consortium partner in the project together with the British Council (lead), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), EP-Nuffic, Campus France, and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). They closely collaborate with the key actors in the field in ASEAN such as the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN), the ASEAN University Network (AUN), and the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) (European University Association (EUA), 2015).
Europe. In addition, there exist great differences in the leadership role of the regional body, the availability and sustainability of funding mechanisms, and the political will of national leaders, as discussed in Section 3.3.

**Actors and Governance: Higher Education Area Frameworks in Asia**

While the focus of this thesis is on the ASEAN context, the HE collaborative frameworks in Asia are presented due to their close connection to initiatives in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, this overview of Asian multilateral platforms in HE collaboration forms a foundation for further discussion on the way forward and the implications for HE harmonisation beyond ASEAN in Chapter Seven. Figure 3.2 sets out the key actors and prominent regional HE area initiatives in Asia based on the work of Chao (2014) and Yavaprabhas (2014).

![Figure 3.2: Higher Education Area Development Frameworks in Asia](image)

Adapted from Chao (2014) and Yavaprabhas (2014)

The two key actors driving the HE harmonisation agenda in Southeast Asia are under the direction of SEAMEO and ASEAN. The intergovernmental educational policy platforms of SEAMEO RIHED and the leading university platforms of AUN...
complementarily contribute to the progress of HE harmonisation. AQAN,\textsuperscript{12} which was established in 2008 and co-organised by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and SEAMEO-RIHED, is another important actor in the harmonisation of QA systems and procedures.

Other actors – some of which may not explicitly refer to a harmonisation agenda – also contribute to promoting regional academic mobility and QA development. These actors have varying action lines and territorial focus; for instance, the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), the University Mobility in the Asia Pacific (UMAP), the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP), the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Subregional and regional HE space/area initiatives developed in Asia over the past decade accentuate the overlapping nature of Asian collaborative frameworks. In addition to ASEAN, East Asian and Asia-Pacific platforms are also relevant to ASEAN HE harmonisation. East Asian HE regionalism emerged via the intergovernmental arrangement to establish a student exchange programme, following the 2nd Trilateral Summit of China, Japan, and Korea in 2009. Collective Action for the Mobility Program of University Students in Asia (CAMPUS ASIA) was launched in 2012 to promote networking and improve the international competitiveness of local universities (National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, n.d.).

On a broader level is the Asia Pacific Higher Education Area (APHEA) (Australian Education International: Australian Government, 2012; Chao, 2011, 2014). The initiative emerged from the Asia-Pacific Education Ministers’ Meeting in 2006, at which ministers and senior officials from 27 countries agreed to encourage regional HE collaboration and signed the Australian-led Brisbane Communiqué. The initiative was well received by various actors in the region and progress has been made to achieve the BC goals (Senior Officials’ Working Group, 2007).

\textsuperscript{12} Complementing the ASEAN QA systems and the AUN, AQAN is an intergovernmental platform whose members are national government agencies from the AMS, which enables it to focus on a broader number of HEIs. Its main objectives are to promote networking among ASEAN QA agencies, to learn about each other’s systems of assuring quality in higher education, and to consider the establishment of an ASEAN QA network (ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, n.d.).
Outlining various related actors in addition to the ASEAN framework is crucial since ASEAN has an open economic regionalism framework (Murray, 2010b). Hettne (2001, p. 4) defines open regionalism as ‘open economies with some preference for privileging one’s own region, within the multilateral rules of the game’. Indeed, this characteristic is reflected in the open regionalism in Asia (Acharya, 2009). This openness denotes inter-regional collaboration, which seeks collaborative platforms between Asia and other regions. A prominent example in the field of education is the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Although having various collaborative platforms may contribute to progress on HE regionalisation, they may raise concerns about the assurance of national commitments to HE harmonisation and prevent a member state from defecting from ASEAN agreements. These issues regarding an organisation approach and governance will be discussed in Chapter Six.

### 3.2 The ASEAN Context and Implications for HE Harmonisation

Drawing from the literature on ASEAN regionalism and HE harmonisation in Asia, as discussed in Chapter Two, this section identifies six contextual factors that may have significant impact on the development of HE harmonisation in ASEAN: 1) the diversity and supportiveness of domestic contexts; 2) ideational barriers and culture; 3) ASEAN’s region-building culture and norms; 4) resources and funding mechanisms; 5) the structure of HE harmonisation; and 6) institutionalisation: governance and leadership. These preliminary observations drawn from existing literature establish a priori codes for analysing and reporting findings with regard to impediments in Chapter Six. These factors are also reflected in the discussion on key conditions in Chapter Seven.

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13 Open economic regionalism can be understood in relation to the historical development of regionalism in Asia, which comprises two significant phases: old and new regionalism. Old regionalism is more introverted or oriented towards exclusive and closed forms of regionalism while new regionalism is more extroverted and inclusive of participating countries and fields of cooperation. Neubauer (2012) explains that the initial phase covered the period of 1950 to 1980 and new regionalism has proliferated since the 1980s. Old regionalism focuses on ‘peer economies, intra-regional interactions, trade and security and education’ while new regionalism reflects ‘neoliberalism, economic liberalism, and market deregulation in the rise of broader-based interregional organisations’.
3.2.1 The Supportiveness of Domestic Contexts

The domestic context focuses on ‘the larger political, legal and regulatory environment in which collaboration would operate’ (Sakamoto & Chapman, 2010, p. 8). Contextual issues mainly focus on the disparate and diverse economic statuses, HE systems, and political systems in ASEAN. In addition, there are issues concerning the level of the supportiveness of domestic conditions such as political stability and cross-sectoral national regulations.

The diversity and disparity prevalent within AMS illustrates the great differences in a variety of aspects such as the size, population, legislation, administrative systems and governance, economic conditions, political ideologies, religions, languages, and ethnic groups of the member states. One chief challenge to regional cooperation is the variety of languages used in the region such as Austro-Asiatic (Khmer and Vietnamese), Austronesian (Indonesian, Malay, Tagalog, Sudanese, etc.), Sino-Tibetan (Burmese, Mandarin, and Cantonese), Lao, Thai, and countless dialects (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008).

The development gaps in terms of economic performance and HE capacity are persistent challenges to regional initiatives. In moving towards the ASEAN Community, Desker (2015) argues that ‘there is a real worry that a “two-stage” ASEAN is emerging, with the six earlier members plus Vietnam leading the way while Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR remain mired in their least-developed country status’. Singapore in particular stands out with by far the highest GDP per capita at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). Table 3.1 presents general information on the AMS and illustrates the diversity among these countries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Geography-size (km²)</th>
<th>Total Population (July 2015 est.)</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita (PPP) ($)</th>
<th>Political System</th>
<th>Official Language</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Literacy Rates (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>5,765</td>
<td>429,646</td>
<td>79,900</td>
<td>Constitutional Sultanate</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>181,035</td>
<td>15,708,756</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>Multiparty Democracy Under a Constitutional Monarchy</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1,904,569</td>
<td>255,993,674</td>
<td>10,700</td>
<td>Republic</td>
<td>Bahasa Indonesia</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>93.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>236,800</td>
<td>6,911,544</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>Communist State</td>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>329,847</td>
<td>30,513,848</td>
<td>25,100</td>
<td>Constitutional Monarchy</td>
<td>Bahasa Malaysia</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>676,578</td>
<td>56,320,206</td>
<td>4,800</td>
<td>Parliamentary Government</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>100,998,376</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>Republic</td>
<td>Filipino, English</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>5,674,472</td>
<td>83,100</td>
<td>Parliamentary Republic</td>
<td>Mandarin, English, Tamil, Malay</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>513,120</td>
<td>67,976,405</td>
<td>15,600</td>
<td>Constitutional Monarchy</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>96.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>331,210</td>
<td>94,348,835</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>Communist State</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,479,621</strong></td>
<td><strong>634,875,762</strong></td>
<td><strong>240,200</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLMV</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,425,623</strong></td>
<td><strong>173,289,341</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,800</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASEAN6</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,053,998</strong></td>
<td><strong>461,586,421</strong></td>
<td><strong>221,400</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another important issue related to the supportiveness of the domestic context stems from the political context. Considering the diversity of political cultures and political ideologies in the AMS, there are vast differences in governance, legislation and administration systems. These will indeed make the realisation of ASEAN HE harmonisation challenging. In particular, there are higher costs related to policy adjustment among diverse states when compared to policy transfer among countries with more similar policy legacies and institutional configurations (Heinze & Knill, 2008).

In addition, political instability from frequent changes in government results in policy discontinuity, which may cause HE harmonisation to stagnate. Many AMS are in the nation-building process and experiencing political unrest. While internal political tensions in Thailand and Malaysia are likely to subside (Nehru, 2011), Myanmar is very much still in transition (Renshaw, 2013). Existing conflicts – both within nations and cross-border disputes – make regional initiatives, including HE harmonisation, uneasy tasks. Despite efforts to facilitate people-to-people connectivity in ASEAN, concrete cross-sectoral mechanisms to promote academic mobility and HE harmonisation systems in the region are yet to emerge.

Important contextual factors that have direct impact on HE harmonisation development are embedded in the HE context in Southeast Asia, which refers to approximately 6,500 HEIs and 12 million students in HE (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008). The HE systems in ASEAN operate in different administrative and political contexts (Beerkens, 2004). These differences are the direct and indirect influence of the West since most ASEAN HE systems are rooted in non-Asian systems through their colonial legacies such as French, Dutch, Spanish, and British systems. Table 3.2 outlines the diverse elements of education systems in the AMS, including the duration of study, the number of credits required to complete a degree and grading systems.

As touched upon earlier, another example of difference in HE systems that challenges effective academic mobility is the differing academic calendars (see Appendix Three for general information on academic calendars in the AMS). The AMS only have a common academic calendar for two out of all 52 weeks (Yavaprabhas, 2014). Moreover, the level of autonomy of HEIs varies (see Appendix Four for key characteristics of governance in HEIs with greater autonomy in selected AMS).
Table 3.2: General Information on Education Systems in the ASEAN Member States  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading systems</th>
<th>Basic education</th>
<th>Bachelor</th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Doctoral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Years (minimum)</td>
<td>Credits required</td>
<td>Years (minimum)</td>
<td>Credits required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei A–F (5.0–0.0)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>2 (Some programs =1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia A–F (4.0–0.0)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4–6</td>
<td>120–160</td>
<td>2–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia A–E</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos A–D</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia 2.7 to 3.00/3.70</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>140–200</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines A–C</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Varied</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore A–F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>≈3–4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>≈1–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand A (4.00)–F (0.00)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam 10 points</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>135–140</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information in this table is from Hotta (2010)

*Minimum number of required years is for programs in general. Certain programs such as medicine may have different numbers of years

It should be noted that the numbers of hours required for each credit in different countries are varied.
The significant disparity among the AMS means the ASEAN HE context presents critical challenges for advancing HE harmonisation. Zirat and Jantan (2008, p. 27) opine that constructing a common HE space is ‘insurmountable’ due to the high disparity of structure and performance among the HE systems and HEIs in Southeast Asia. While Singapore is widely recognised as a leading global player for academic excellence, the HE systems of most AMS struggle to be visible internationally. This large intra-regional gap in HE performance is central to the sluggish and uneven progress towards HE harmonisation in ASEAN. The interests differ in HE harmonisation among the AMS. This has resulted in a currently low-level of regional HE policy infrastructure, particularly in terms of QA standards for harmonising QA systems in Asia (Yonezawa, Kitamura, Meerman, & Kuroda, 2014).

3.2.2 Ideational Barriers and Culture

Ideational and cultural implications concern two related aspects: ideational forces and culture. The first concentrates on awareness and the societal values that influence the political will of ASEAN leaders, and the commitment and priorities of HE policy makers and practitioners. The second refers to cultural and normative factors such as language barriers and organisational cultures. These two aspects are important to HE harmonisation as they directly shape the ideas, beliefs, and values of individuals as concerns the significance of developing the ASEAN community and HE harmonisation.

Ideational and cultural challenges mainly derive from a strong adherence to nationalism. National safeguards concerning the uniqueness of HE legacies and national priorities are crucial challenges for key actors when planning and implementing HE harmonisation initiatives. Despite efforts to harmonise the diverse HE systems in the Asia-Pacific over recent years, they ‘have often run up against powerful nation-specific priorities’ (Hawkins, 2012a, p. 177). An emphasis on nationalism influences a lack of a regional consciousness, particularly a ‘we feeling’ and an ASEAN identity. Consequently, HE regionalisation falters as these processes come up against a limited regional consciousness and a lack of strong commitment both at the national and institutional levels (Hawkins, 2012a; Nguyen, 2009; Yavaprabhas, 2014).

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14 Only a few HEIs in the AMS were ranked above 200 on international university ranking systems. For example, the 2016 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) includes National University of Singapore (83rd), and Nanyang Technological University (101-150th) and only National University of Singapore (101-150th) is present in the 2015 ranking (Center for World-Class Universities (CWCU): Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2015, 2016).
According to Desker (2015), there barely exists any ASEAN mindset, except among some policy makers, academics, and journalists. Current loyalties and affinities of the AMS ‘are centered on the local level, with the idea of commitment to the nation state receiving more traction today’. An ASEAN community still ‘remains an illusion’ widely considered to be ‘a diplomatic community with little impact on the lives of most people in its 10 member states’. The general public is oblivious to the regional community and how it could affect their lives, or why it is necessary for them to get involved.

Attitudinal and cultural aspects discernibly challenge the development and implementation of HE harmonisation in ASEAN. From a Malaysian perspective, Zirat and Jantan (2008, p. 24) discuss several concerns regarding attitudinal barriers, for instance, issues of trust and self-interest, and social perceptions of those in the academic world, particularly students, lecturers and universities in general. Specifically, they emphasise existing ‘territorial’ constraints due to the national safeguards of the uniqueness of educational programs. They additionally indicate the challenges, especially for student mobility, related to cultural diversity and language barriers. Linguistic differences are widely mentioned in Asian HE harmonisation literature (see for example, Hawkins, 2012a; Nguyen, 2009). Other cultural factors are related to the region-building culture, as outlined in the following section.

3.2.3 Region-Building Culture and ASEAN’s Cognitive Priors

Although there had been previous attempts at regionalism, such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), it was ASEAN that became the core regional body in Southeast Asia. Since ASEAN’s establishment in 1967, it has constructed a geopolitical framework that can successfully move the AMS towards a more consolidated regional community. Lessons learned from the flaws of initial efforts, such as SEATO and ASA, were taken into consideration by the founding members in order to prevent ASEAN from encountering similar problems. For instance, the member states of ASEAN have been limited to those within Southeast Asia. In addition, the structure of the organisation has been adapted to be more flexible, which has resulted in soft institutionalisation as a prominent feature of ASEAN regionalism. These adjustments through a historical construction of region-building in Southeast Asia have constructed ASEAN’s culture and norms.

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15 SEATO was established and active from 1954 to 1977 and ASA from 1961 to 1967.
The historical construction of regionalism in a given region influences the way in which HE regionalism advances. ASEAN’s cognitive priors have a significant impact on the institutional structure of HE and the pace of HE harmonisation development. These cognitive priors refer to the region-building culture and norms embedded in the ‘ASEAN Way’, which is characterised by informality, organisational minimalism, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, non-confrontation, consultation, and consensus (Acharya, 2001, 2009; Ba, 2009a; Bulut, 2012; Busse, 1999; Murray, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013).

The preference for informality and a loose institutional structure can be characterised as a ‘minimalist’ brand of regionalism (Tan, 2012, p. 157). On the one hand, ASEAN’s soft institutional design fundamentally accounts for ASEAN’s longevity since it encourages the AMS to collaborate at their own comfort and pace. On the other hand, soft regionalism allows for only a certain degree of progress in regional integration. In particular, ASEAN facilitates regional initiatives with an aversion to forceful legislation and rigid bureaucratisation (Acharya, 2009). This characteristic is inevitably carried forward to HE regionalism and is a challenge to HE harmonisation initiatives that involve the development of regional HE policy infrastructure.

The minimalist regionalism of ASEAN is primarily related to an emphasis on respecting sovereignty and nationalism, which has resulted in state actors taking the central role in regional development. The state-centric operation reflects the preference in ASEAN regionalism for intergovernmentalism rather than supranationalism (Bulut, 2012; Cockerham, 2010). Yoshimatsu (2006) differentiates ASEAN from the EU since ‘ASEAN members have little interest in transforming the organization into a supranational body, or in being led by a hegemonic regional power that has the willingness and capability to enforce the rules of interaction on other states’. Hence, progressing ASEAN HE harmonisation is challenging since ‘at the end of the day it is the nations and the individual HEIs who are the deciding actors who will determine the progress of this idea of harmonization in the region’ (Hawkins, 2012b, p. 103).

Consultation and consensus decision-making methods have prevented ASEAN from using dispute settlement mechanisms to solve any arising problems. The progress of HE harmonisation can be sluggish since any regional agreements can only be made with the consensus of all AMS. In accordance with the non-intervention and non-confrontation
principles, the AMS avoid interfering in the internal affairs of other members. Nonetheless, HE harmonisation may require legislative procedures to adjust HE regulations in the AMS. In addition, it may involve adjusting domestic regulations in related sectors, such as immigration and employment, for the holistic development of the ASEAN Community and a more cohesive common space in HE.

A holistic development issue is another important aspect of ASEAN’s region-building culture which could affect progress towards HE harmonisation. Although the ASEAN Declaration in 1967 set out shared aspirations regarding political stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia, progress towards these different fields appears unbalanced. This may relate to the fact that ASEAN primarily emerged from the political concern of the communist threat to the region during the Cold War period. Thus, its early efforts concentrated on building regional peace and political security such as the signing of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) treaty, and the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) treaty. It took approximately two decades for ASEAN to undertake its first economic initiative by creating an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) (Tay, Estanislao, & Soesastro, 2001).

The region-building processes in ASEAN tend to proceed without adequate emphasis on HE development issues, particularly on using HE harmonisation as an effective tool to foster regional academic and professional mobility. This situation is not unique to ASEAN. Reinalda (2008) comments as follows on the case of the EU:

> Education has remained a topic of subsidiarity rather than supranationalism. This assumption implied that the EU was not meant to develop educational policies, albeit with a small exception in the field of vocational training in relation to the promotion of worker mobility. (p. 466)

### 3.2.4 Resources and Funding Mechanisms

To systematically examine the challenges pertaining to resources and funding mechanisms, this thesis focuses on financial viability and the sustainability of resources dedicated to promoting HE harmonisation. Financial viability refers to the current ability of the key actors ‘to raise the funds required to meet the functional requirements in the short, medium and long term’ (Lusthaus, Adrien, Anderson, Carden, & Montalván, 2002, p. 124). Issues related to this aspect may include the availability of resources, incentives for participation, and funding mechanisms. Furthermore, this thesis considers resource diversification or the existence of alternative sources of income for supporting HE
collaboration. Funding sustainability involves the ongoing ability of related actors to generate the adequate resources to ensure future financial viability to support HE harmonisation.

Resources are among the most significant challenges to HE regionalisation, as the lack of resources is widely mentioned in previous studies on HE regionalisation in Asia (see for example, Hawkins, 2012a, pp. 185 - 186; Nguyen, 2009, pp. 22 - 23). This could be due to the limited economic development of the majority of the AMS. In addition, there is a lack of a concrete funding mechanism at the ASEAN level specifically dedicated to promoting HE harmonisation. Developing a regional funding mechanism can be understood as part of the structuring and institutionalisation of HE harmonisation, which is the focus of the following section.

3.2.5 The Structures for Higher Education Harmonisation

To provide a supportive context for facilitating HE harmonisation initiatives, developing structural conditions is crucial. Structuring may involve fundamental steps such as generating clear goals or specific targets, establishing prioritised areas or functional mechanisms, and identifying timelines for implementation. As stated in the preliminary assumptions in Chapter One, the important structures for HE harmonisation this thesis emphasises are: 1) the development of an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; 2) the adoption of functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; 3) the development of a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; 4) the strengthening of the M&E system; and, finally, 5) the improvement in the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives.

Structuring the HE harmonisation process closely concerns institutionalisation. In particular, strengthening the institutional arrangements of the collaborative framework provides a vital basis for systematically developing HE harmonisation structures. March and Olsen (1998, p. 948) define an institution as ‘a relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations’, and institutionalisation as the ‘emergence of institutions and individual behaviour within them’. Strengthening institutional structures makes the HE harmonisation process in a given region more formal, intentional and strategic. This can
be understood in relation to Knight’s political and organisational approaches, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Examining the relevance of improving structural conditions with the development of HE harmonisation process stems from the argument in this thesis that the minimal structures embedded in ASEAN regionalism directly shape HE harmonisation in ASEAN. Region-building efforts over five decades have suggested the importance of the ‘ASEAN Way’ as regional cognitive priors and norms. Nonetheless, ASEAN has been strengthening regional structures and institutionalisation, particularly since the beginning of the 21st century. As outlined in Chapter One, ASEAN launched several joint declarations and political agreements to direct the path towards an ASEAN Community such as the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II in 2003, the Cebu Declaration at the 12th ASEAN Summit in 2007, the blueprints on the three pillars of the ASEAN Community and MPAC. These further steps into stronger institutionalisation revealed the greater acceptance of legislative frameworks and progress towards the construction of a more rules-based ASEAN Community.

The endorsement of the ASEAN Charter in 2008 has constructed an institutional framework and established new administrative bodies for ASEAN. The Charter has strengthened the foundation for operationalising the ASEAN Community with a more structured institutional framework and complex governance. Importantly, it has conferred the Association with a legal personality as an international organisation and its leading role in promoting regional initiatives. According to Bulut (2012), the adoption of the ASEAN Charter is evidence of ASEAN’s shifting axis towards stronger institutionalisation.

These examples of strengthened structures and institutionalisation to advance ASEAN regionalism has shaped the preliminary assumption concerning key conditions on the importance of improving structural conditions, in addition to ideational conditions, as outlined in Chapters One. In particular, political approaches driven by the ASEAN Summit and declarations by political leaders are crucial for advancing the HE harmonisation agenda and an ASEAN common space in HE. Despite these emphasises on structures and a political approach, this thesis supports the argument by several scholars that a ‘step-by-step approach’ will remain appropriate for developing HE harmonisation in Asia (see for example, Hawkins, 2012a; Nguyen, 2009), and that HE
harmonisation is likely to incrementally progress, rather than undergo the revolutionary transformation of HE regionalisation.

3.2.6 Institutionalisation: Governance and Leadership

Examining institutionalisation in this thesis focuses on two aspects: governance and the leadership capacity of key actors. Specifically, it examines the institutional arrangements for governing the HE harmonisation process and ways in which the leadership capacity of existing actors and related collaborative frameworks can be strengthened, rather than establishing new institutions to operationalise the process. These two aspects closely concern the following contextual factors.

Governance refers to the decision-making processes for HE harmonisation in ASEAN. Among the primary implications of the current governance structure is the inadequate use of a multistakeholder approach, particularly the engagement of key actors beyond the field of education. A study from a Malaysian perspective shows limited awareness of the HE harmonisation agenda among other stakeholders besides HEI managers and academics (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008; Zirat & Jantan, 2008). In comparison to European HE harmonisation, employers and students play a much less significant role in this region (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008; Yavaprabhas, 2014). These views from existing studies may suggest the HE sector-centric nature of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, as illustrated in Section 3.2.2 that key actors are mainly government agencies related to HE, HEIs and regional organisations with education mandates.

The ‘jazz management approach’, as outlined in Chapter Two, will be used to further analyse the governance and leadership of ASEAN HE harmonisation in Chapter Seven. This derives from an assumption in this thesis that this approach responds to ASEAN’s cardinal principles such as informality and sovereignty. Furthermore, it aligns with ASEAN’s preference for shared leadership in driving regionalism. This means different member states take turns to lead regional HE initiatives based on divided responsibility according to their expertise. This approach may provide a greater chance of the successful and sustainable development of HE harmonisation initiatives through the enhanced sense of ownership of the regional HE area among the member states and related actors.
The leadership role of institutions is a widely discussed issue in the Asian regionalism literature (see for example, Ba, 2009b; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004; Webber, 2001; Yoshimatsu, 2006). Of fundamental concern is the leadership capacity of regional organisations to strongly drive multilateral platforms in Asia, including the ASEAN, the EAS, and the APEC. According to Byun and Um (2014, p. 138), there is no powerful supranational body ‘to forge a strong consensus that cuts across national agendas’.

Webber (2001, p. 339) argues that the ASEAN and the APEC ‘are handicapped by the political and economic diversity of their member states and the absence of a benevolent dominant state or coalition of states’. An emphasis on nationalism and the lack of regional consciousness result in reluctance among the member states ‘to allow a regional organization to make surveillance and enforcement decisions on their behaviour, and they lack a dominant state that takes a leadership role in advancing the collective interests of the entire region’ (Yoshimatsu, 2006, p. 121). The soft leadership in ASEAN regionalism inevitably creates formidable obstacles to harmonise HE policy and build a concrete regional infrastructure for HE (Hawkins, 2012a, 2012b; Nguyen, 2009).

Several analysts have expressed concerns about the leadership capacity of key actors at the regional, national, and university levels to promote Asian HE regionalisation (see for example, Hawkins, 2012a; Nguyen, 2009). Primarily, regional organisations in the field tend to have limited capacity to stimulate concrete HE cooperation (Hawkins, 2012a, pp. 185 - 186). Among the important key regional organisations, the strength and weakness of the AUN is often discussed in the existing literature in the field (see for example, Hawkins, 2012a; Knight, 2012b; Nguyen, 2009). The AUN proceeds on an institutional basis with an elite universities model, primarily focusing on the leading universities in ASEAN. Considering the readiness of top universities to engage in international collaboration, initially focusing on them can benefit further HE regionalisation that includes other types of HEIs. The elite model serves the AUN’s aspiration to keep initiatives focused and maintain quality when conducting cooperative activities.

However, as HE regionalisation in ASEAN expands, the AUN is facing greater pressure to include the participation of other universities (Knight, 2012b). Hawkins (2012a)\textsuperscript{16} points out that the elite approach of the AUN is ‘somewhat self-limiting’ (pp. 185 –

\textsuperscript{16} See also Hawkins (2013).
He suggests that one of the challenges of HE harmonisation is the ‘weak approach by the AUN and other such organizations to play an aggressive role in building some sort of cohesive community’. The AUN model and future directions will be further discussed together with the leadership capacity of other key actors at the regional, national, and institutional levels in Chapter Seven.

At the national level, the active role of national governments in incorporating HE harmonisation initiatives into national HE systems tends to be challenging. The limited role of national governments in regional initiatives may reflect the emphasis on national interests over common or collective interests in ASEAN regionalism (Cockerham, 2010; Narine, 2002). At the university levels, there remains a preference for bilateral and multilateral agreements across HEIs over regional agreements on credit transfer systems.

3.3 The Leadership Role of ASEAN

While emphasising a multistakeholder approach by engaging various types of key actors in driving HE harmonisation, this thesis examines the relevance of the leadership role of regional institutions. Informed by the region-building perspective in Chapter Two, particular focus is on examining the relevance of ASEAN as a regional body and its role in improving the ideational and structural conditions for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN.

Examining the relevance of strengthening the leadership role of ASEAN derives from expectations inside and outside the region on empowering the leadership role of ASEC in solving complex transnational issues in recent years. These expectations are borne out of its potential to engage with the AMS in comparison with extra-regional partners. As Prabandari (2011) explains:

> ASEAN has the potential to engage with Myanmar and has succeeded in doing so before. During the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, when Myanmar rejected all international aid, ASEAN’s “constructive engagement” resulted in it being the only organisation allowed to distribute aid inside the country.

A demand for strengthening ASEAN’s leadership role relates to recent calls from the member states to adapt the traditional norms for ASEAN to make significant progress towards a more connected regional community. For example, Tantowi Yahya, Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives Commission overseeing the foreign affairs of Indonesia refers to ASEAN’s response to the Rohingya migrant crisis and argues, ‘the
non-interference principle must change. What happens in one country will eventually become the problem of other member countries’ (Nolan, 2015).

Palatino (2015) argues that a prompt response by ASEAN to the Rohingya refugee crisis is necessary, and that the crisis directly concerns human rights. ASEAN’s delayed response to this issue contradicts the regional group’s theme on building a ‘people-oriented and people-centered ASEAN’. Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Foreign Minister of Malaysia, envisions that building a people-oriented ASEAN community would make ASEAN a more powerful vehicle ‘for the realisation of the peoples’ aspirations in good governance, transparency, higher standards of living, sustainable development, empowerment of women and greater opportunity for all’. To counter the criticism of elitism within the organisation and ASEAN being the domain of the political and bureaucratic elites, ASEAN needs to build a more people-oriented community that would logically require the Association to reconfigure its traditional norms and practices (The Malaysian Insider, 2013).

Furthermore, Guan (2015) argues for the need to re-evaluate ASEAN’s role as a regional body in developing a truly people-centered ASEAN Community. He argues for adjusting the ‘ASEAN Way’ to strengthen ASEAN’s capability to openly address difficult issues and encourage genuine cooperation among multiple stakeholders:

ASEAN will not be effective in addressing those threats if it continues to function as usual. While the ‘ASEAN Way’, characterized by the norms of informality, non-confrontation, and consensus-building may have served it well in the past, developing a truly people-centered ASEAN […] involves “…all sectors of society in ASEAN’s work”.

These recent calls to enhance the leadership role of ASEAN and to strengthen the institutionalisation are also attributed to the historical path of both the region-building and HE regionalisation processes. As covered in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, strengthening the institutionalisation of ASEAN contributes to the greater progress of ASEAN regionalism. Importantly, ASEAN HE regionalisation has become more structured and strategic following the strengthening of ASEAN’s institutional structure. ASEAN’s political mechanisms, such as regional agreements and joint declarations or statements, were stimuli for two significant steps in ASEAN HE regionalisation – the establishment of regular ASED meetings and the AUN. Noticeably, after the declaration of ASEAN Vision 2020, the ASEAN leaders set the strategic directions for cooperation on education
and collectively agreed to hold an Education Ministers Meeting on a regular basis from 2005.

ASEAN as a regional body can play a crucial role in driving HE regionalisation initiatives. In particular, it can strengthen the political approach to increase political attention on the HE regionalisation agenda by cultivating the political will of the ASEAN leaders and generating political mechanisms in the ASEAN Summit. The AUN’s establishment exemplifies the importance of ASEAN’s mechanisms. As stated earlier in the chapter, the idea of establishing a regional university was initially raised at the 1977 ASEAN Ministers’ Meeting but it was not brought into being until 1992. The issue of the establishment of an ASEAN university came to the attention of the ASEAN leaders and the AMS following the declaration of the ASEAN leaders at the fourth ASEAN Summit that ‘ASEAN should help hasten the solidarity and the development of a regional identity by considering ways to further strengthen the existing network of the leading universities and institutions of higher learning in the region’ (National University of Singapore, n.d.).

The aforementioned expectations of ASEAN to solve complex transnational challenges shape the focus of this thesis on examining the relevance of ASEAN as a regional body to HE harmonisation and how it may provide a leadership role in constructing an ASEAN common space in HE. Nonetheless, the demand for enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN is by no means expected to reach the extent of the EC, which has been recognised as a crucial actor behind the successful launch of the EHEA (Barrett, 2013; Chao, 2014; Croché, 2009; Verger & Hermo, 2010; Yavaprabhas, 2014).

Despite emphasis on the enhanced leadership role of ASEAN and stronger institutionalisation and structures to the progress of HE regionalism, this thesis does not suggest ASEAN HE harmonisation and a common space in HE emulate the BP and EHEA. This means the thesis only partially supports the argument by Bulut (2012, p. 53) that the charter signals a ‘shift of the axis’ in ASEAN’s institutionalisation which may lead ASEAN towards ‘an EU-style community’ and accelerate the community construction process. Although the ASEAN’s move from being an informal and loose organisation to having a stronger institutional structure has in turn strengthened institutionalisation and progress towards the ASEAN Community and HE regionalisation, this thesis draws on a constitutive localisation framework and
emphasises that the norms embedded in the ‘ASEAN Way’ are likely to remain central to the region-building process in ASEAN.

ASEAN’s role in constructing a common space in HE is likely to concentrate on further promoting the HE harmonisation agenda. Particular emphasis of the potential role of ASEAN is on improving ideational forces, especially the political will of the ASEAN leaders, commitment and priorities of HE policy makers and practitioners, and societal value and public awareness of regional HE harmonisation. This view supports Hawkin’s (2012a) argument that a main goal of the current crop of regional organisations in Asia ‘is to raise awareness in the region about the value of regionalization’ (p. 185). Moreover, ASEAN can play a greater role in structuring the HE harmonisation process. Ratanawijitrasin (2015) argues for the enhanced leadership role of ASEAN in promoting the HE harmonisation agenda as currently, ‘a clear vision and concrete collective actions for the harmonisation and development of regional higher education remain absent from the Association’s official policy priorities’ (pp. 234 – 235).

Drawing on the literature on HE regionalisation in Asia, this thesis particularly emphasises the potential role of ASEAN as a regional body as follows: 1) further generating political support for the HE harmonisation agenda; 2) empowering the capacity of key regional organisations; 3) establishing an HE harmonisation funding mechanism; and 4) promoting a public outreach system on HE information and harmonisation. An analysis of the findings on the leadership role of ASEAN is discussed in Chapter Seven.

3.4 Conclusion

Following on from the emphasis of the importance of contextual factors in Chapter Two, this chapter has examined the ASEAN context. Recognising the importance of regional cognitive priors on shaping the path dependence of HE harmonisation, this chapter has also explored the development of two complementary processes: region-building and HE regionalisation in Southeast Asia. To understand how the HE harmonisation process has reached its current form and pace in ASEAN, the chapter has employed a process tracing approach to explore the historical development of ASEAN HE regionalisation and outlined the key actors in the field. In addition, the chapter has explored ASEAN regionalism and its implications for HE harmonisation. Examining the institutional
change of ASEAN and its growing expectations has provided the context for further analysing the relevance of enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body as an essential precondition for the construction of a common space in HE.

This chapter has established a foundation for further analysis of drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation and the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE by focusing on the ASEAN context. The next chapter will discuss the research design of the study, including how the study is conducted and its philosophical assumptions.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous chapters have introduced the context and theoretical framework for this thesis. This chapter clarifies the research aims and questions underpinning the overall research design. It outlines the methodological framework, the rationale and methods for the data collection, the data analysis and interpretation, the credibility, and the limitations of the thesis.

4.1 Overall Research Design

Chapter One sets out the aims of this thesis, namely, to examine the drivers of and impediments to the harmonisation of HE and the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN. Considering these aims, the thesis asks two main questions. First, it asks what the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation initiatives in ASEAN are. Secondly, it asks what are the key conditions and how an ASEAN common space in HE in ASEAN might be constructed more effectively. In addition, the thesis asks subquestions about the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN on the following: the meaning of harmonisation, characteristics, progress and approach undertaken, governance, the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body, the unintended consequences, and next steps. Specific questions were identified in Chapter One. These research questions frame the interview questions in this thesis.

In response to these aims and questions, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach given the suitability of this approach to the research problem, which concerns an open-ended and complex social phenomenon. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this thesis considering that the existing literature yields little information, specifically on the factors influencing HE harmonisation in ASEAN, and particularly from the perspectives of the policy makers and practitioners in the field. The exploratory nature of a qualitative study is useful when there are inadequate studies to understand a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Moreover, a qualitative approach suits research on a topic which has never been addressed as concerns a certain sample or group of people (Creswell, 2003, p. 22). This study is guided by the overall research design and the examples of procedures shown in Figure 4.1. It should be noted that the figure does not represent a linear process. These steps can occur simultaneously and progress can move in both directions.
To gain insights into the perspectives of the key actors, the thesis employs multiple qualitative methods to collect data, including document analysis, interviews, field research, and observations. The thesis incorporates data from document analysis, particularly policy documents and reports issued by these actors, and in-depth interviews with 40 representatives of government agencies in education and HEIs from the ten ASEAN member states, as well as regional organisations in the field.
To reduce the distance between the researcher and the phenomenon, field research was used as a supplementary data collection method. Being in natural settings allowed the researcher to make observations on the current state of affairs that enhanced an understanding of the phenomenon. This included a one-month internship at a relevant organisation, six country visits to interview participants, and the observation of meetings.

Interview transcripts and field notes were analysed by coding for meaning and interpretation. Using an adaptive theory, deductive and inductive techniques of analysis were used (Layder, 1998). The results were communicated through written reports and international conference presentations, which contributed to the credibility of the study.

4.2 Methodological Framework

This thesis is primarily based on social constructivism within interpretive social science. This involves the assumption that there are multiple realities and subjectivity, as individuals develop subjective meanings about objects and phenomena based on their own experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the purpose of social constructivist research is to understand multiple socially constructed realities through the participants’ views of a situation. Diverging from the more conventional paradigm of post positivism, which narrows meanings into a few categories, constructivists look for a complexity of views (Creswell, 2003, p. 20). As mentioned, the researchers attempted to reduce the distance between themselves and the situation under study, and this forms the fundamental justification for employing in-depth interviews and field research in this thesis.

A constructivist paradigm is closely connected to qualitative research, which is often called interpretive research (Mertens, 1998; Creswell, 2007). Interpretivists interpret what participants think about realities, acknowledging that the interpretation can be influenced by one’s own experiences and background. Relying on these positions, this thesis attempts to portray the essence of interviewees’ views on HE harmonisation. The findings may not represent each individual’s view but rather the researcher’s interpretation of the overall data and the attempt to make sense of the situation based upon intersubjectivity.

In addition to these fundamental assumptions, social constructivism is chosen due to its alignment with one of the theoretical frameworks employed in this thesis.
Constructivism as a research paradigm emphasises the importance of historical and cultural norms in shaping individuals’ worldviews. Constructivism as introduced in Chapter Two accentuates the role of cognitive priors, which are socially constructed through the historical and cultural development of a domestic context (Acharya, 2004, 2009).

4.3 Data Collection

This section outlines the following main procedures in collecting data for this thesis: locating research sites, gaining access and establishing rapport, selecting participants, collecting data, making ethical considerations, and managing data. The data collection process took place between 2013 and 2014.

4.3.1 Research Sites

The study involved analysing the perspectives of policy makers and practitioners from 30 organisations in the ten AMS. The research sites comprised government agencies, HEIs, and regional organisations with education mandates in Southeast Asia. These sites were purposefully chosen due to their presence as key actors contributing to HE harmonisation. The data collection took place in six AMS: Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Of the three types of key actors, regional organisations were chosen as the primary source of data collection for four main reasons. Firstly, these organisations play a predominant role in HE regional collaboration and the international policy transfer process. Secondly, selecting key informants in these collaborative platforms where English was mainly used helped eliminate the language barriers between the interviewees and the researcher. In addition, this group participates actively in education policy platforms in Southeast Asia. The interviewees’ familiarity with the topic together with their English proficiency furthered the potential for fruitful interviews.

Thirdly, the interviews were conducted alongside regional forums, which served as HE policy platforms, organised by regional organisations. This made it possible to interview policy makers and practitioners from all ten AMS within a limited timeframe and with limited funding as they often converged in one place at these events. Finally, interviewees were chosen based on the researcher’s familiarity with some of these organisations, which facilitated access and the rapport processes.
Prior to attending the forums, the participants’ background information was collected and reviewed to profile their characteristics and experiences. Interviewees were selected based on their professional positions and advice from the respective organisations. This initial review led to the focus on interviewees from six countries. All types of key actors were focal to interviews during the regional meetings in Myanmar and Thailand. However, given the time limit of these events, the remainder of the interviews occurred during four country visits to Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. During the country visits, the researcher collected data from the government agencies and HEIs in the respective country.

To gain access and build rapport, the researcher contacted the heads of the prospective organisations to inform them about the study and to seek the possibilities for data collection. Interviews commenced following ethics approval and participant selection.

4.3.2 Participant Selection

The study employed a purposeful sampling technique that concentrated on a homogenous sample, where interviewees with certain characteristics were purposefully solicited to participate in the study (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Helen, 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The primary trait was the relevance of their professional background to education collaboration in Southeast Asia. Snowball sampling occasionally occurred as some interviewees linked the researcher to other key informants in their network.

Policy makers and practitioners from the key actors were chosen as key informants for two main reasons. First, they are considered ‘insiders’ due to their professional engagement in education collaboration within the region. This enhanced the probability of selecting information-rich individuals both in terms of the central phenomenon and the regional context. Second, this group possesses authority in formulating and making changes to HE policy. Their expertise in the field allowed them to share insights regarding their motivations, challenges and recommendations for the future direction of ASEAN HE connectivity. This sampling technique furthered the possibility of obtaining the necessary information (Neuman, 2011).

As the national and professional background of the policy makers and practitioners might influence their beliefs and practices, participants were grouped by country of
origin and type of organisation. Importantly, careful choices were made to include interviewees from all ten AMS. The selection of interviewees from ten AMS was shaped by Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework, which emphasises the role of local actors and the domestic context in which international norms are potentially becoming embedded. This consideration led to a focus on the key actors in the ASEAN context rather than external actors. Examining the interviewees’ opinions in clusters allowed for the identification of certain trends and whether they could be correlated with a certain actor type. Table 4.1 presents the demographic information of the interviewees.

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of actor/ Country of origin</th>
<th>Regional organisations</th>
<th>National government agencies</th>
<th>HEIs</th>
<th>Total interviewees by country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ASEAN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total interviewees by type of actor</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewees by professional background included:

- Secretary General of Office/Director/Deputy Director of a Higher Education Commission or equivalent divisions, Ministries of Education.

- Rector/President/Chancellor/Vice Chancellor/Deputy Vice Chancellor/Dean or equivalent level/Director of International Relations Affairs Division, HEIs.
• Director/Deputy Director/Education officer of regional organisations with education mandates in Southeast Asia.

After ethics approval from the University of Melbourne had been granted, procedures for gaining access and building rapport began.

4.3.3 Instruments and Procedures

The methodological framework of this thesis led to the use of three qualitative research methods. The primary means for developing an understanding of HE harmonisation were document analysis and semi-structured interviews. To further supplement data collection, observations in the field study were also undertaken. This section clarifies the procedures and justifications for selecting such methods.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was conducted systematically and closely alongside the literature review. Based on Creswell’s (2003) three placement locations, the initial scholarly literature review was conducted to set the scope of the research problem and frame the central propositions for this thesis. This step provided the theoretical assumptions that refine the preliminary observations based on the researcher’s experience. A second form of review developed the context and background of the study. A final form of review was conducted to compare and contrast this study’s findings with existing theories.

The literature review involved defining and refining the topic, designing a literature search, locating research reports, evaluating research articles, and taking notes (Neuman, 2011). Primarily, a theoretical review was undertaken to explore the concepts and theories, which were drawn from the HE and political sciences literature. A context review was undertaken to explore existing knowledge about the main research questions: the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation, and the key conditions for effectively developing a common space in HE in ASEAN.

In addition, the researcher compiled and analysed current knowledge on the subquestions, for instance, the historical background of HE harmonisation efforts, the progress of related initiatives, the characteristics and the approaches undertaken, the governance of the process, and the regional policy infrastructure of HE. Although priority was placed on literature regarding HE collaboration in Southeast Asia, the
review was not limited to the ASEAN context. Literature on the phenomenon in other regions, such as Europe, Latin America, and Africa, was also reviewed to shed light on current practices in other locales and future directions.

In planning the review, several sources of literature were located. The concepts and theories from previous studies and the findings of previous research were mainly located using journal databases and websites. Much of the literature regarding the progress of HE harmonisation in this region is grey literature – annual reports, master plans, minutes of meetings, unpublished documents from related organisations, and other documents identified by the interviewees. This type of literature was acquired from the relevant actors such as the government agencies of the AMS and regional organisations.

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with policy makers and practitioners in the field. Interviews conducted with this group were used as the primary means of knowledge construction given that discussions on HE harmonisation in Southeast Asia predominantly occur at the policy level. Interviews allowed the researcher to gain insights into perspectives of the phenomenon that could not be collected from a literature review alone; for instance, sensitive issues that may rarely be brought to the surface or explicitly discussed.

The interviews were semi-structured, defined as ‘interview[s] with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3). This type of interview allowed for flexibility in the course of the interview. Although questions were prepared in careful consideration of the interview objectives, and were sent to interviewees for their consideration prior to the interviews, the researcher was also able to use follow-up questions to invite interviewees to express themselves more freely (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40).

The interviews employed open-ended questioning that comprised broad and general questions. This style of questioning is recommended for exploratory qualitative research as ‘the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting’ (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). This method allowed interviewees to construct the meaning of the phenomenon throughout the discussions. To determine the appropriateness of the interview questions, the questions were pilot tested
with peers to ensure their usability. The questions were revised based on suggestions from the pilot test with ten people, including PhD students and the researcher’s acquaintances. The questions were further refined as the interviews took place based on the interviewees’ suggestions and the researcher’s consideration for more preciseness.

The interviews comprised four main sections: the interviewee’s background, key concepts, current practices, and future directions. Details concerning the interviewees’ backgrounds were helpful to determine the commonalities and differences of their perspectives with regard to their country of origin and professional experiences. The main objective of the interviews was to understand the essence of the phenomenon of harmonisation within the ASEAN context. The researcher asked predetermined questions to key informants to gain insights into their perspectives, particularly on the motivations and obstacles for increasing regional HE cooperation, and the key conditions required for stimulating the progress of HE harmonisation. The interviews finished with questions regarding future improvements and open comments on the phenomenon (see Appendix Eight for the interview schedule).

Interviews took place at the interviewees’ offices and at other appointed public places. Interview duration was approximately between 30 to 45 minutes, with the shortest being 25 minutes and the longest about 80 minutes. An individual and face-to-face interview was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a personalised view and to observe nonverbal communication (Neuman, 2012). Although the majority of interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis, other forms were also occasionally taken due to time constraints, particularly at forums. Of the 40 interviews in the dataset, 37 were individual interviews, two interviewees from the same organisation were simultaneously interviewed, and one chose to provide responses to the interview questions via email.

**Field Study**

This thesis included a one-month internship at a relevant organisation, observations of regional HE policy platforms and six country visits. After gaining access and entering the field, the researcher developed rapport with insiders through direct, face-to-face social interaction in a natural setting (Neuman, 2011). During the internship, the researcher engaged in activities at the organisation and was assigned tasks at forums held by the organisation. Participating in HE policy platforms in Southeast Asia improved the
researcher’s understanding of the current state of affairs. Meanwhile, visiting the AMS enhanced the researcher’s familiarity with the local culture and context.

This immersion into natural settings allowed the researcher to make observations on individuals’ behaviours, take part in regional collaborative activities, and conduct informal interviews without predetermined questions. Individuals were allowed to talk openly about the situation and broader topics, which revealed some underlying issues that did not appear at first or were not ascertained through documents and interviews.

4.3.4 Ethical Considerations

This thesis was conducted in accordance with the regulations of the Central Human Research Ethics Committee (CHREC) of the University of Melbourne. Several fundamental ethical considerations were taken into account, including the research problem statement, the purpose statement and the research questions, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and the dissemination of the research. The CHREC approved this study as a minimal risk research project.

Although the study does not address sensitive topics, it does involve human subjects and was conducted outside of Australia. It is critical that a study involving research participants be clear and transparent as regards ethical concerns surrounding human subject protection (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Important ethical principles to be taken into consideration include protecting participants from harm, ensuring that participation is informed and voluntary, limiting the use of deception in research, and ensuring the confidentiality of participants (Neuman, 2012). The data collection procedures were carefully reviewed by the CHREC.

Emails were sent to prospective interviewees including the heads of prospective organisations informing them of the study and seeking their support (see Appendix Five for email texts to prospective interviewees). The emails included a review of the three main documents sent out for interviewee recruitment: Plain Language Statement (PLS), Informed Consent Form, and Interview Schedule (see Appendices Six, Seven and Eight respectively).

17 All research at the University is expected to comply with the University’s Code of Conduct for Research to ensure responsible and ethical conduct. The overarching framework is the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, which clarifies the ethical design, conduct and dissemination of results (Office for Research Ethics and Integrity (OREI), 2015).
The PLS was used as a measure to ensure that the researcher fully informed the interviewees about their participation. It clarified the objectives of the study and how the data would be used. The interview schedule outlined the predetermined questions that were sent prior to the interview to safeguard the interviewees and to allow them to be prepared. This was done to ensure that the research problem and interview questions would not cause any problems or distress for the interviewees. The PLS and Informed Consent Form addressed several ethical principles: voluntary participation, informed consent for being audio-recorded, privacy and anonymity through the use of a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research, confidentiality of research data, and the interviewees’ right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. With an agreement to participate, each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form and the researcher obtained this form prior to the interview.

In addition to ethical concerns, consideration was paid to research conduct etiquette, and in particular, interview commandments (Berg, 2003). For instance, care was taken not to dominate as the speaker during the interview (Creswell, 2007). Relating more specifically to this thesis were considerations regarding interviewing elites and subjects across culture. Firstly, care needed to be taken to politely respond to the possible intellectual challenges young female researchers may face when interviewing elites such as pressure and challenging questions from elites that may be stimulated during the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Secondly, it is important to respect local customs such as the appropriateness of attire as befits the local culture and religious beliefs.

4.3.5 Data Management

Data management primarily involves recording and data storage procedures. Recording information or ‘logging data’ (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 66) in this thesis ranged from informal processes such as jottings and descriptive summaries to more formal processes through the use of interview protocols or a predesigned form to record interviews (Creswell, 2003; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The data obtained was recorded and stored as documents (hard copies) and electronic documents such as word document files and audio files (soft copies). To ensure confidentiality, electronic files were stored in a password-protected computer that could only be accessed by the researcher. All hard
copy interview data collected during the research process was organised into labelled folders in a secured cabinet.

Data collected from the literature review and document analysis was recorded in Word document files by creating notes, literature maps and abstracting studies (Creswell, 2003). Bibliographic information was stored in EndNote software. Interviews were recorded using interview protocols in a predesigned form (see Appendix Nine for interview protocols or a predesigned form to record interviews).18 This was an important tool, especially when interviewees opted for a non-audio recorded interview. A predesigned form was also used in the field study to take descriptive summaries or field notes on the activities and interactions at the research sites (see Appendix Ten for field notes or a predesigned form to record field activities).19

QSR NVivo (Version 10) was used to manage qualitative data and facilitate data analysis. Its applied functions include storing data, organising data, assigning labels or codes to data, and retrieving data by searching data or locating specific texts (Creswell, 2012). For the purpose of storing and organising data, all the interview transcripts and field notes were electronically recorded in Word document files and imported to NVivo. The interview transcripts were organised according to the interviewees’ codes, and field notes were organised in chronological order. This software was also used to store and organise electronic information regarding the phenomenon, particularly website content.

**4.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This thesis employs the adaptive theory approach as the overarching strategy and methodological justification for the data analysis approach. Proposed by Layder (1998), adaptive theory is a combination of the hypothetico-deductive approach (where theory is used as a framework for hypotheses) and grounded theory (whereby theories are inductively generated from data). This approach offers an alternative to conventional canons of methodological design by reconciling the distance between theory–research and research–theory links. In this thesis, although coding was informed by preconceived

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18 The form included space for the interviewees’ background, the date and time, and interview questions following an interview schedule which provided space for taking notes.
19 The form indicated the date and time of the activity, followed by two columns: ‘descriptive notes’ and ‘reflective notes’ (Creswell, 2007).
theoretical frameworks and a priori codes, the researcher also allowed the interview data to inform concepts, hypotheses and explanations (Becher & Trowler, 2001).

Although this thesis is not a grounded theory study given the interplay between deductive and inductive approaches throughout the study, a grounded theory approach did provide it with a useful guide for data analysis.\(^{20}\) In particular, this approach emphasises the importance of an inductive principle and openness to emerging data from interviews. The core embedded assumption is that theory-development is ‘grounded’ or generated in data from participants who have experienced the process’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 63).\(^{21}\) Therefore, grounded theorists generate an explanation (theory)\(^{22}\) of a process, action or interaction by grounding that theory in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 8). It was expected that this strategy move this thesis beyond depicting or describing the situation to developing explanations for the continuing process of HE harmonisation in ASEAN.

The initial steps in analysing interview data included creating electronic interview transcripts, importing and organising interview data in NVivo, and reading transcripts. For interviews that were audio recorded, audio files were transcribed word by word to produce a verbatim transcript for subsequent analysis. Once all transcripts were checked the interview data was coded into themes using NVivo.

Interview analyses focused on meaning, thus coding was a vital process in the analysis. Coding can be understood as ‘the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized and integrated to form a theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 3). The study followed the coding procedure outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Neuman (2011), which identifies three stages of data coding.

Open coding reduces or condenses data by assigning preliminary codes or labels that succinctly capture the main idea of chunks of data (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Helen, 2011). This involves a line-by-line analysis for meaning through coding or indexing. Axial

\(^{20}\) The grounded theory approach was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later expanded on by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The grounded theory approach involves ‘a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11).

\(^{21}\) See also Strauss and Corbin, 1998.

\(^{22}\) Strauss and Corbin (1998) define theory as ‘a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena’.
coding systematically develops categories by identifying connections or relationships between codes, and organises them into categories and creates a hierarchy of categories. Selective coding integrates and refines the theory or explanatory scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involves scanning earlier data and codes to reorganise and selectively elaborate on major themes (Neuman, 2011). Further interpretation of the meaning of results encompasses comparing and relating findings to existing theories and concepts, discussing them in relation to the research questions and presuppositions, and relating interpretations to the broader social context.

4.5 Credibility

To examine the rigour and limitations of the study, this thesis employed the notion of credibility. Credibility is frequently used in qualitative research to encompass ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ (Fraenkel et al., 2011). Reliability concentrates on the reproducibility of the study and the extent to which it can be replicated to provide consistent results over time and context. This involves concepts such as generalisability, transferability, and dependability. Validity focuses on the confirmability of accuracy and the usefulness of findings, which directly concerns both instrument validity and internal validity (Fraenkel et al., 2011).

This thesis applied several strategies to enhance its credibility. These can be broadly divided into the internal checks of the components of the study by the researcher, and the external checks that involved people other than researcher. For the internal checks, empirical evidence was corroborated with different data sources to shed light on HE harmonisation. This strategy is important since it potentially minimises the bias that can arise in self-reporting techniques, particularly interviews (Neuman, 2011), which form a primary threat to reliability. Another strategy addressing this concern was the triangulation of theory. This constitutes the significance of engaging multiple theoretical perspectives to examine HE harmonisation.

The credibility of the study was enhanced through the data collection process. As stated earlier, pilot testing of the interview schedule was conducted to check the face validity of interview questions before conducting the main study. Although the researcher avoided using leading questions or a suggestive formulation of the questions that could have led to a particular answer, some interview questions were repeated in different ways in order
to confirm the reliability of the interviewees’ responses and to verify the interpretations of the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 164-172). To ensure the quality of audio files and transcriptions, more than one recording device was used during each interview and data was backed up for subsequent verbatim transcription. Field notes were carefully recorded with as much detail as possible.

The study also adopted member validation, or member checks (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), to ensure the accuracy of the findings from the standpoints of both the researcher and the informant. To conduct member checking, researchers solicit the views of one or more informants in the study on the credibility of findings and interpretations (Fraenkel et al., 2011). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this is considered the most critical technique for establishing credibility. For this study, the researcher solicited the views of two informants to reflect on what was missing and to review the accuracy of the thesis.

Having informants as experts in the field makes member validation for this thesis closely related to expert consultation. Seeking expert consultation and judgement on content-based evidence and the empirical grounding of the study is another means for ensuring credibility and determining the real meaning of data and analysis. Expert validation was used to verify the accuracy of the findings and to confirm that a true picture of the phenomenon was being presented. In addition, peer validation or peer debriefing ‘contributes to the credibility of an inquiry by exposing the researcher to searching questions from the peer aimed at probing biases and clarifying interpretations’ (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 91). The researcher presented parts of the research to peers within the university and at international peer-reviewed conferences. This process involved critical reviews and questions, which ensured that this thesis reflects the views of people other than the researcher.

4.6 Limitations

Some limits were set to make the thesis both focused and manageable. Given the complexity of HE regionalism, this thesis particularly examined the drivers of and impediments to HE harmonisation and key conditions for developing a common space in HE in ASEAN. Caution needs to be taken in generalising the results of this thesis. Although the key informants were from all ten AMS, the thesis only examined the
perspectives of a small proportion of the ASEAN population. This group was a purposeful sample, which was drawn from individuals and sites that could enhance the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon and best inform the research (Creswell, 2007; Neuman, 2011). Considering the potential to be rich informants since key drivers tend to be from the HE sector, the sample comprises 40 policy makers and practitioners from related government agencies, HEIs, and regional organisations engaged in ASEAN academic collaboration. The sample does not include and is therefore not representative of other stakeholders that could be important in the process, such as students and the employment sector.

In addition, the representatives from HEIs are specifically from flagship HEIs in the AMS. The concentration on elite universities stems from the homogenous and snowball sampling techniques used as part of the purposeful participant selection process. Elite universities were selected since they currently are the most active and powerful players in the context of international HE compared with other types of universities (Gao et al., 2015; Geuna, 1998). Furthermore, these representatives are from a small number of HEIs given the substantial expansion of HEIs in Southeast Asia witnessed over recent decades.

Moreover, it should be noted that this thesis engaged the voluntary participation of interviewees. This may denote their interest in ASEAN academic collaboration or concerns about HE harmonisation and the sample may potentially be biased. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014. The perspectives of interviewees may have altered from what is presented in the thesis, particularly considering the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015. Furthermore, recent moves by global powers towards state-centric approaches may influence peoples’ views as to the importance of regionalism in global governance. These include, for instance, Brexit and Donald Trump’s presidential victory along with radical foreign and immigration policies.

Importantly, the findings do not represent the perspectives of every key informant in the study. The interpretive position of the study means that the examination and analysis cannot be neutral. Biases and orientations may have impacted the approach to, and interpretation of, the data. The interpretation of this thesis was influenced by the researcher’s academic and professional experience in the field of academic collaboration.
The analysis was underpinned by the researcher’s interpretation of the overall data and the validation of the findings.

There are also limitations related to the diversity of language in ASEAN. The interviews were conducted in English. Although it is the working language of ASEAN and the interviewees and interviewer are familiar with English due to their professional experience in regional meetings, English was not the native language of the majority of key informants and also the interviewer. Despite applying appropriate techniques to ensure the accuracy of data, it is possible misinterpretation may have occurred.

Finally, the findings of this thesis do not determine definite answers to the research questions. This reflects the view that qualitative researchers do not try to generalise beyond their particular study but let the reader assess the applicability of the original findings (Fraenkel et al., 2011). Also, it serves constructivist assumptions that there are multiple realities as social interactions of people create beliefs about reality (Creswell, 2003, p. 20). Meanings of subjects and phenomena depend on how people in a particular context define, accept and understand them. The findings presented in this thesis may differ from research on similar topics, which is conducted with a different sample group and/or in a different setting. While recognising the limitations on generalisability, continuing research on HE harmonisation in other contexts, particularly in comparative analysis, is encouraged to improve our understanding of HE regionalism. Suggestions for future research are further identified in Chapter Eight.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research design and the underlying rationale for the methodological choices of this thesis. A qualitative approach – primarily based on constructivist assumptions within interpretive social science – was chosen to examine the central questions. In addition to providing a methodological framework for data collection and analysis, the chapter identifies the credibility limitations of this thesis.

The following chapter is the first of two chapters discussing the summary and analysis of the findings. In response to the research question concerning the drivers that lead to the emergence of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, several factors contributing to increased HE interactions in ASEAN will be identified and discussed.
CHAPTER 5
DRIVERS AND PROGRESS

The aim of the preceding four chapters was to establish the context and framework for examining the factors influencing HE harmonisation in ASEAN. This first findings chapter focuses on the drivers of HE harmonisation. It argues that global and regional dynamics generate crucial driving forces, particularly the effect of economic globalisation on education and ASEAN policy to build a more connected ASEAN Community. The findings in this chapter support a policy transfer framework, which is employed to explain the emergence of HE harmonisation. The international HE development trends introduced by norm entrepreneurs have triggered the emerging importance of HE regionalism. In addition to the growing significance of international dimensions in HE and increasingly competitive international HE markets, the development of the BP leading to the establishment of the EHEA has provided a source of inspiration for ASEAN.

The interview data on drivers suggests that ASEAN HE harmonisation is voluntarily driven by the shared interests of key actors in the field to promote regional HE interactions. Supporting the preset codes on the rationales and motivations stated in Chapter Two, the findings reveal the following six interrelated key rationales: academic mobility; HE quality and productivity; employment and economic opportunities; globalisation and internationalisation of HE; construction of the ASEAN Community; and dialogue partners. These rationales reflect the academic, economic, political, and cultural motivations of the key actors. These drivers have contributed to the progress of HE harmonisation efforts in functional, organisational, and political approaches. However, the initiatives tend to progress in an incremental manner, rather than through quantum leaps. This could be attributed to the characteristics of ASEAN HE harmonisation, which appear to be internally driven. Despite involving both top-down and bottom-up efforts, the key actors are predominantly from the HE sector.

Prior to discussing the motives and rationales for HE harmonisation among the key actors in ASEAN, this chapter begins by presenting an analysis of their understanding of ‘harmonisation of higher education’. This is followed by the findings regarding the progress of HE harmonisation in this region. Finally, the chapter discusses the possible
relationship between the interviewees’ backgrounds and their understanding of and view on the importance of harmonisation.

5.1 Understanding ‘Harmonisation of Higher Education’

Analysing the key actors’ conceptualisations of HE harmonisation is crucial for developing an operational definition of the phenomenon in the ASEAN context. In addition, the absence of a shared understanding of the central notion among the key actors who are driving the process may lead to differing aims and procedures, which can be detrimental to the collective efforts and progress of HE harmonisation in the region.

Most interviewees were aware of the concept of HE harmonisation. Of the 40 interviewees, the majority (32) suggested that harmonisation does not refer to creating identical HE systems; rather, the purpose is to create comparable measures and a point of reference that respects and recognises the diversity of the AMS. A senior government official described harmonisation as an approach that encourages different systems to interact with and complement one another in order to improve the performance of each, ‘but still maintain the characteristics and uniqueness’ (#4 Indonesia). This means that harmonisation involves the convergence of some HE policy across systems rather than the homogenisation of all regulations and standards. This understanding is consistent with the meaning provided in previous studies, as discussed in Chapter Two (Knight, 2012b; SEAMEO RIHED, 2008; Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014; Zirat & Jantan, 2008).

Several interviewees, particularly regional organisation representatives, emphasised that HE harmonisation does not aim for standardisation. Nevertheless, a few interviewees related the concept of harmonisation to standardisation. A director of a national government agency described harmonisation as the situation whereby ‘students from different locations are offered the same quality of education regardless of higher education institutions or less developed countries’ (#3 Cambodia). A vice-rector of an HEI commented that harmonisation ‘is an attempt to set one regulation. For example, when students in this region would like to go for an exchange, they can use one form’ (#15 Cambodia).

While most interviewees were able to describe what HE harmonisation is, a small number mentioned that the concept was unclear. One interviewee chose not to respond.
The views of interviewees seemed to be influenced by their national and professional backgrounds, which will be discussed in Section 5.5.

5.2 Key Motives and Rationales

Despite minor differences in the way representatives of key actors described HE harmonisation, there was a shared view that deepening ASEAN HE collaboration is important. Based on an analysis of the interviewees’ motivations for, and expected outcomes of collaboration, Figure 5.1 summarises the related motives and rationales for HE harmonisation that reflect the preset codes previously stated in Chapter Two. Considering the various motivations for HE harmonisation expressed by the interviewees, ASEAN HE harmonisation may be located as a voluntary transfer process on the policy transfer continuum of Dolowitz and Marsh (2000).

![Figure 5.1: Drivers of ASEAN HE Harmonisation on a Policy Transfer Continuum](image)

Adapted from Dolowitz and Marsh (2000)

While acknowledging that motives overlap and influence each other, Chapter Two has clustered them to guide the analysis of the predominant drivers. At a glance, the academic motive appears to mainly necessitate increased ASEAN HE connectivity. Half of the key rationales mentioned by interview participants were academically-oriented, with the majority of interviewees raising the urgent need to enhance academic mobility.
However, determining academic motivations as the primary driving forces of HE harmonisation might be inaccurate since academic and economic motivations are increasingly intertwined in a knowledge-based economy. A regional organisation representative stated that, ‘the issue of regional HE harmonisation is linked closely to the economic aspect of workers mobility’ (#32 Singapore). Supporting this view, a regional organisation director referred to the close links between economics and HE:

Looking from an economic perspective, we have established a free trade agreement in having more open exchanges of goods and services, and free movement of talents. Free trade of talents now will imply employment. When you talk about employment, it will require qualifications. When you talk of qualifications, it will lead on to higher education. Everything is connected.  

#31 Philippines

Supporting the emphasis of this thesis on economic motivations for ASEAN HE harmonisation, expected economic benefits seem to appear in all rationales, as further discussed below. This emphasises the effect of economic globalisation on education and the vital role of HE harmonisation in realising the internationalisation of HE, which focuses on the economic benefits of strengthening human resources for international competitiveness (Kälvemark & Van der Wende, 1997; Lujiten-Lub, 2007).

Although regional HE initiatives seem to be tightly connected to region-building goals, the construction of an ASEAN Community is not the most prominent rationale for ASEAN HE harmonisation. Instead, the growing importance of economic globalisation and the internationalisation of HE influence nations in their adapting local HE systems and policies to meet international HE trends and standards. This is evident in all rationales that suggest the importance of globalisation impacts. In particular, facilitating international academic and professional mobility is the most reported expected contribution from the HE harmonisation process. The results of this study emphasise the supporting role of regional efforts in accelerating local adjustments to global trends. As Foot (2012) concludes about regional governance, regional organisations predominantly play ‘a useful adjunct rather than primary role’ in fostering global governance (p. 14).

The interview findings support the preliminary assumption that the overarching rationale for HE harmonisation in ASEAN is to increase the competitiveness and legitimacy of domestic HE systems and outputs such as graduates, qualifications, and courses in the international HE context. There is a clear emphasis on ubiquitous global trends and policy options, especially the motivations of key actors to improve the international
competitiveness and recognition of local HE systems. This emphasis affirms the relevance of a policy transfer perspective and the ripple effects and bandwagoning policy transfer processes outlined in Chapter Two in shaping the emergence of ASEAN HE harmonisation.

5.2.1 Academic Mobility

The predominant rationale for HE harmonisation stems from the need to stimulate transnational academic mobility. Almost all (39) interviewees related their motivations for HE harmonisation to the need to promote regional academic mobility for students, faculty, and academic resources. Many particularly emphasised the benefits of academic mobility to human resource development. For instance, regional organisation representatives noted the importance of promoting ASEAN HE collaboration, particularly student exchanges, to develop knowledge and enhance the learning experiences of students (#36 Thailand and #37 Thailand).

A university director noted that HE harmonisation initiatives would reduce barriers for academic mobility and encourage knowledge flows. This promotes resource sharing that subsequently enhances the capability of HEIs, students and staff. Increasing the ability to access expertise and resources in other institutions is necessary because ‘not one university has the knowledge of one or an entire discipline […] the harmonised academic program of universities will allow us to connect easily, in terms of faculties and student mobility’ (#22 Philippines).

The motivations of the key actors support Knight’s (2013) rationales and objectives characterising HE regionalisation efforts, as presented in Chapter Two. For example, regional HE mobility is believed to contribute to political, economic, and sociocultural linkages that strengthen regional connectivity. As a deputy dean of an HEI noted, ‘when people move, it creates solidarity and social cohesion. Then, the by-product of that social cohesion, in terms of regionalisation, is that people get to know each other’ (#26 Thailand). A government official added that the social value of people-to-people connectivity promoted by regional mobility enhances linkages among people in the AMS (#10 Thailand).

More harmonised HE conditions among the AMS are crucial, particularly for regional academic mobility and employment that will be increasingly important in the near future.
A senior government official noted that ‘we can be one unique cooperative region. Students and workers can freely move in and out of the region’ (#8 Myanmar). HE harmonisation is expected to provide a common ground for ASEAN HE. As a senior government official indicated, the AMS need to ‘agree on a common language of instruction and system of education so that one recognises the educational quality and standards of the other’ (#1 Brunei). Emphasising a more connected region, another senior government official added that it is very important to ‘harmonise academic systems in order to work together and to mobilise students in ASEAN. Without this [harmonisation of HE systems], HE cooperation is very difficult and impossible’ (#10 Thailand).

5.2.2 Academic Excellence: Higher Education Quality and Productivity

Amid the motivations for deepening ASEAN HE collaboration, the majority (36) of interviewees emphasised the need to improve HE quality and productivity in the AMS. According to one head of a regional organisation, ‘you ignore the quality, and the world will ignore you’ (#30 Malaysia). The priority of building international competitiveness is closely related to globalisation and HE quality assurance imperatives, which are changing the definition of ‘quality’ to increasingly include an international dimension.

The HE harmonisation idea has gained the attention of key actors due to the expected contributions from the process to elevate the overall quality of HE and standards in ASEAN. A university president considered HE harmonisation a means to raise the bar for ASEAN HE competitiveness:

The idea of harmonisation is that you work around a common standard, but reaching the standard is not the objective. The standards provide a minimum goal but competition will make sure that HEIs will go beyond the standards. There will be temporary disruption with the harmonisation. But eventually, others will catch up and there will be new norms, new minimum standards, which are much higher than the original minimum standard. #20 Philippines

Several interviewees suggested that HE harmonisation can improve the academic standards of domestic HE systems by developing HE constituents, productivity, and the capacity of HEIs. For instance, a director of a national government agency noted:

When we are talking about ASEAN HE harmonisation, it means Cambodia is still lagging behind other countries. So in this context, Cambodia has to develop, you see? We have to develop the framework like how to become a lecturer at higher education institutions. They should hold some kind of education degree. In terms of facilities, what kind of facilities should they have? What kind of curriculum standard should they develop? This is in
the process of improving our higher education quality, also as part of, and to integrate in ASEAN.

#3 Cambodia

In addition to regional competitiveness, HE harmonisation is expected to improve the international comparability of domestic HE productivity and services. One senior government official who noted that the main aim of HE harmonisation was ‘to improve the quality in HE and to build higher HE standards’ believed that HE harmonisation would improve the productivity of HE by ensuring that research and journal publications meet international standards and that they are recognised by both the ASEAN and international communities (#4 Indonesia). As for the expected contributions to the capacity of HEIs, a director of an Indonesian HEI believed that harmonisation would strengthen local universities by providing a good platform for collaboration among ASEAN universities (#16 Indonesia).

5.2.3 Employment and Economic Opportunities

Two connected economic motivations for ASEAN HE harmonisation were drawn from the interview findings: regional employment and the economic benefits from HE harmonisation. The findings emphasise the importance of an economic impetus generated from global and regional driving forces as discussed in Chapter One, particularly the implications of economic globalisation on international employment and trade liberalisation. One regional organisation representative believed that what’s beneath this [HE harmonisation] process is the need to stimulate freer movement of skilled labour as part of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement on opening the market (#40 Non-ASEAN). In response to these trends, efforts at the regional level further promote international employment. Specifically, ASEAN’s policies to develop a more connected ASEAN Community and the single market objective of the AEC will result in the tremendous growth of regional academic and skilled labour mobility.

The contributions to promoting regional academic and professional mobility are among the prevalent responses concerning the drivers of HE harmonisation. A senior government official noted, ‘a regional context will be different from the past when there were very few graduates from ASEAN countries working across the region’ (#10 Thailand). This statement was further supported by a regional organisation representative who commented that, ‘HE harmonisation would allow greater movement of talent among the member states’ (#31 Philippines).
There is an expected role of HE harmonisation in developing the mechanisms for facilitating regional employment. Key actors indicated the urgent need of the mutual recognition of HE degrees and qualifications among the AMS. A university president noted, ‘graduates in the Philippines should be able to work in Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The skills developed in the Philippines should be acceptable in other countries as well. It’s not possible without the harmonisation of HE in the region’ (#20 Philippines). In realising this vision, a director of a government agency specified the need for a regional HE framework whereby graduates from one AMS can have their HE degrees and qualifications recognised in another. This regional framework requires a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to enhance the mutual understanding that ‘a Bachelor of Science in this country equates to a level six in the NQF. If they want to work in Thailand, for example, Thailand will know more about the level of our graduates’ (#5 Indonesia).

In addition to facilitating international employment, HE harmonisation is expected to provide economic benefits by enhancing the legitimacy of local HE services in a competitive global market. HE harmonisation initiatives potentially foster a common language, training, and quality across the AMS with reference to international standards, which develop the skills of human capital and the employability of graduates in a more competitive workforce. One regional organisation representative viewed that the HE harmonisation process would help ASEAN graduates to be certified and transferred to other countries (#40 Non-ASEAN). This view was given further credence by a regional organisation director who stated that ‘harmonisation mechanisms would ensure that your graduate is qualified in the world market’ (#35 Thailand). A university president related the importance of HE harmonisation to regional employment:

In the economic front, graduates would be competing not only with graduates from the home country but other ASEAN countries as well, with the increased mobility of skilled workers. So education systems that are not harmonised with the others will have a hard time competing regionally. #20 Philippines

HE harmonisation is expected to contribute to the current need for developing ‘qualified’ human capital and a ‘competent’ workforce, particularly one equipped with regional knowledge and international experience. According to a senior government official, HE harmonisation will ‘prepare the people to be familiar with the culture and environment to
work in the regional and international context, not only in their home country’ (#12 Vietnam). A university president concurred with this view:

> The companies will be looking for the people who can manage business across the region, which means that businesses will need graduates who understand what is going on in different countries. Competencies in regional practices are important, and the harmonisation of HE would help provide that.

#20 Philippines

Another important economic motivation for ASEAN HE harmonisation is related to the rise of the knowledge economy, which has contributed to the closer relationship between HE development and economic growth. A director of a regional organisation considered one expected contribution from HE harmonisation to be the development of an ASEAN knowledge society: ‘as a region, you can only become a high-income region if you are a knowledgeable society […] HE harmonisation allows the exchanges and knowledge sharing that constitute a knowledge-based society’ (#30 Malaysia).

Economic motivations also involve expectations that the harmonisation process will improve the currently limited linkages between HE and industry. For instance, developing an agreed-upon regional qualifications reference framework creates a mechanism to improve employers’ understanding of applicants. As one university representative noted prior to the launch of the ASEAN Community in 2015:

> When we enter the ASEAN community in the next two years, we are going to have more mobility at the level of student mobility or manpower, personnel I mean the mobility of workers and graduates. The pro is that we will have some kind of references or framework that we can rely on, for example the qualification framework or the diploma supplement. If we can develop it, it will be beneficial for all the employers to understand what are the contents of those graduates and diplomas.

#26 Thailand

Furthermore, the harmonisation process is expected to contribute to the expansion of HE services, particularly among the mid-income AMS. A university director indicated that the rationale for HE harmonisation is ‘related to markets, maybe like Thai and Malaysian universities and so on. Some consider that this [HE harmonisation] creates a market for their university to recruit students’ (#16 Indonesia).

In addition to the expansion of HE services to other countries, some motivations for harmonising ASEAN HE systems concern developing the quality of HE systems and HEIs, making them attractive to foreign students. A deputy director of a regional organisation commented: ‘it [harmonisation of HE] will help the member states in strengthening their universities, help [the] HE system per se, which will help attract more
foreign universities coming in’ (#38 Thailand). The need to expand HE services and entice foreign students, academics, and further collaboration is influenced by HE internationalisation, which is central to the next rationale.

5.2.4 The Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education

ASEAN is not about the close knit region or the regionalisation of the Southeast Asian nations. ASEAN itself is an open region. The process of regionalisation is an open process, meaning that it’s not about Southeast Asia. It’s about how Southeast Asia is located and related in the world society.

ASEAN HE harmonisation needs to be discussed as relates to the global context. The interview findings accentuate globalisation among the key triggers of the international policy harmonisation processes. Primarily, all rationales identified in this chapter suggest globalisation imperatives involving economic globalisation that liberalise international trade and the expansion of international HE. Furthermore, most interviewees emphasised globalisation as their key motivations for driving ASEAN HE collaboration.

One director of a regional organisation believed that the diffusion of the HE harmonisation idea across the global regions directly stems from globalisation imperatives. According to this interviewee, ‘globalisation is the decline of distance, we get really close. The closer we get, the easier it is for us to look at and focus on our commonality’. This interviewee further added that developments in the globalisation era including ‘the advancement of communication technology, the internationalisation of knowledge, and easier access to airline travel all facilitate the movement towards HE harmonisation’ (#30 Malaysia).

Among the important motivations for HE harmonisation is the need to increase the international competitiveness of ASEAN HE systems. One university dean believed that the driving force of this phenomenon is ‘not only within ASEAN, but also globalised forces push us to move ahead’. The AMS discuss the idea of HE harmonisation ‘not because (of) the ASEANISATION of HE, but because they want to be part of the global HE’ (#25 Thailand). This view was further supported by a regional organisation director who perceived HE harmonisation as an approach to link domestic HE systems more closely to the global level and that it is crucial ‘so that this region is able to compete and join the global arena in education’ (#39 Thailand).
In addition, there is a motivation for increasing regional HE collaboration as a foundation or a stepping stone for cultivating global citizenship and world views. A university vice-president viewed globalisation as the primary driver of ASEAN HE harmonisation and expected HEIs to play a key role in promoting global awareness and international competency in students:

It’s the realisation that what we often called globalisation is real, and it’s manifested in a broad range of areas. We must train our students to navigate that globalised and complex world […] I think in the end, it’s a sense of global citizenship, the ability of institutions such as universities to foster global awareness both in terms of cultural communication and also in global competency where students understand issues beyond those within the borders.

#21 Philippines

HE regionalisation is a primary step in cultivating an identity and awareness beyond national boundaries. According to one vice-president of an HEI, ‘everybody now talks about the global citizen, so why don’t we start with the ASEAN citizen before talking about the global? Global is something that is still very broad’ (#29 Vietnam).

As stated in Chapter One, the internationalisation of HE is a predominant globalisation imperative that directly drives HE harmonisation in ASEAN. This is evident in interviewees’ motivations, which include achieving international prestige, recognition, status, and increasing the competitiveness of local HEIs at the regional and international levels. As a director of an Indonesian university commented:

From our university perspective, I think we would like our students, our degrees, our qualifications to be recognised in ASEAN because that’s important to our internationalisation strategy and output. But I think for other universities in Indonesia, they want to be a member of ASEAN so the graduates can be recognised and accepted.

#16 Indonesia

The development of university ranking systems is one of the key triggers of HE internationalisation, which stimulate domestic HE systems to promote international collaboration as a way to raise their international recognition and standards. A university dean made a comment regarding the current situation that such an international recognition tool has placed great pressure on local HEIs to internationalise, as they are ‘very much worried about their global ranking’ (#26 Thailand). The emphasis on the need to improve international recognition and acceptance has contributed to the overarching rationale identified earlier in the chapter, which is to increase the recognition and legitimacy of domestic HE systems and outputs such as graduates, qualifications, and courses within the international HE context.
The increased international dimension of HE and the competitiveness in the global HE market have made regional HE harmonisation more crucial, as briefly suggested in previous rationales. One deputy director noted the importance of HE harmonisation to build international competitiveness: ‘the reason we support the harmonisation of higher education is to push collaboration in higher education to a further stage, to keep people working closely together, and to use the resources, strengths of each country and each university in the region to be competitive in the world’ (#12 Vietnam).

The aforementioned views may suggest complementary relationships between HE regionalisation and internationalisation. In particular, ASEAN HE harmonisation forms part of the move to promote international HE collaboration. As a senior government official noted, ‘if we open ourselves to the world, we will be recognised’ (#5 Indonesia). However, a greater focus of the AMS on the internationalisation of HE may have a detrimental effect on the progress of HE harmonisation and the regional HE context. The next chapter will further discuss this issue.

5.2.5 Construction of the ASEAN Community

ASEAN’s vision to create a more connected ASEAN community is a key motivation for HE harmonisation for over half of the interviewees. Representatives from regional organisations particularly emphasised this rationale, possibly due to the prominent role of these organisations in promoting regional initiatives. One regional organisation representative believed that ASEAN has to prepare for the ASEAN Community by encouraging the freer movement of people. Academic movement in HE directly helps the process. It establishes the need for ASEAN countries to develop a regional HE framework (#40 Non-ASEAN).

HE harmonisation is expected to promote ASEAN values and an ASEAN identity through ideological constructions, which are fundamental to the interrelated political and cultural motivations for regional-building. This concerns the need to foster regional HE collaboration to enhance the understanding and trust among the AMS. A director of a regional organisation stated that strengthening regional HE cooperation is necessary since ‘we have looked outward far too long. It’s time to look inward in the region, work among ourselves more, and mobilise, and let our students learn about neighbouring countries and the member countries’ (#35 Thailand).
In addition to the expected contributions of HE harmonisation to raising ASEAN HE quality and promoting regional employment, the ideological conditions that HE harmonisation mechanisms may provide are fundamental for realising region-building goals. In particular, harmonising regional QA systems provides a crucial means to enhance trust and confidence in HE systems among the AMS. A director of a regional organisation added that the harmonisation of QA processes ‘will lead to confidence and trust in a) the qualifications, and b) the learners who hold those qualifications. Then, there will be a natural momentum that allows for exchange and mobility. In the end, harmonisation is about that’ (#30 Malaysia).

Reflecting the core value of harmonisation that recognises the importance of creating unity in diversity, HE harmonisation is expected to promote the mutual understanding of different cultures and build a harmonious and peaceful society. A senior government official anticipated a future environment in which ‘there will be a lot of mobility and a freer flow of labour and workforce in ASEAN, (the) young generation must learn how to live together in a multicultural environment’ (#10 Thailand). One regional organisation director suggested that ‘regional awareness can be created among young people so that, in the near future when ten ASEAN countries integrate into one community, we can live together peacefully’ (#35 Thailand).

HE harmonisation is believed to enhance a culture of peace by encouraging intercultural competence through regional mobility. This is closely connected to the assumption that direct experiences in regional collaborative activities broaden individual’s perspectives and alleviate the psychological divide that may have emerged from misperception towards other countries. A commissioner of a national government agency elaborated that ‘when you live with a Thai family or an Indonesian family, you might say, “Hey, it’s about the same”. It would break down the prejudice, and it could also strengthen the ASEAN bond’ (#9 Philippines). A regional organisation representative emphasised the creation of a culture of peace and believed that HE harmonisation will cultivate an ASEAN identity that makes the ASEAN Community more competitive, not only by increasing economic strength but also by having a more united culture (#40 Non-ASEAN).

Finally, HE harmonisation is expected to alleviate disparities across the AMS. Article Eight of the ASCC Blueprint focuses on ‘the social dimension of Narrowing the
Development Gap (NDG) towards bridging the development gap among Member States’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, p. 1). In view of one senior government official, increasing regional HE collaboration in the region is essential because ‘regional collaboration will help the region to be developed and reduce the development gap’ (#8 Myanmar). A university vice-president added that HE harmonisation initiatives form ‘the driving force for all countries to push forward their development and learn good experiences from others’ (#27 Thailand).

To build a strong foundation for the ASEAN Community, there are motivations for reducing the development gap between the ASEAN Six and Four (CLMV) and levelling the playing field to encourage fair competition in HE markets across the region. Some participants emphasised the need for HE harmonisation as a way to increase inclusiveness and opportunities for participation. A senior regional organisation representative noted that harmonisation is needed ‘not necessarily for them [AMS] to achieve parity, but to make sure that those CLMV countries are given opportunities to raise their game’ (#32, Singapore).

5.2.6 Dialogue Partners

Dialogue partners play an influential role in transferring the idea of HE harmonisation to the ASEAN region. This rationale was mainly emphasised by regional organisation representatives. According to a regional organisation director, ‘a lot of external pressure forced the region to think about the regional higher education area and harmonisation’ (#35 Thailand). The same individual further commented on the engagement of the EU with ASEAN:

The EU is already successful at a certain level in the EHEA. Therefore, they go a little bit further up to the qualification framework and degree recognition. They would like to ensure the quality of the graduates from this region is comparable with their degree.

#35 Thailand

One regional organisation representative further emphasised the importance of dialogue partners and viewed the driving forces for HE regionalisation are derived from outside ASEAN, especially from China, Japan, and Korea (#40 Non-ASEAN). In addition, the Brisbane Communiqué proposed by the Australian government is part of the effort to develop a regional HE area/space and promote TAFE – vocational education and training (TVET). The engagement of dialogue partners in promoting the concept of
harmonisation was acknowledged by some interviewees as a way to fulfil their economic and political interests. As a senior government official commented:

The reason behind that is because they would like to be closer with ASEAN in order to promote trade and business. In terms of politics, they need friends. There are some conflicts around this region. If we use education as a means, better understanding can be improved. 

#10 Thailand

The interviewees considered economic motivations in particular to be the primary objectives of dialogue partners in promoting HE harmonisation in ASEAN. HE harmonisation stimulates the liberalisation of the HE market, which serves the dialogue partners’ interests in expanding HE services to this region. As the head of a regional organisation noted, ‘they [dialogue partners] want to diffuse norms, and from norms, it’s commercialisation. They expect something in return like commodity in education, innovation on education, computers and programmes. Nobody gives things for free’ (#39 Thailand).

The engagement of the EU may be perceived as an attempt to diffuse the norms and values that legitimise the role of the EU as a norm entrepreneur in the ASEAN region, which bolsters the EU’s drive to become a global actor. Primarily, HE regionalisation strengthens the EU’s relevance to ASEAN. Noticeably, interviewees often referred to the Erasmus programme, the BP, and the EHEA when describing HE harmonisation. Such recognition empowers the EU’s ‘model’ in HE harmonisation. Strengthened regional cooperation in HE legitimises regionalism per se, which supports a regional governance architecture that accommodates the EU’s political interests.

5.3 Harmonisation of Higher Education in Practice

The above section has presented the key actors’ understanding of and motivations for promoting ASEAN HE harmonisation. This section summarises the key findings on the practical application of the concept of HE harmonisation in ASEAN.

5.3.1 Approaches to Higher Education Harmonisation in ASEAN

With reference to the characteristics of HE regionalisation provided in Chapter Two, the findings suggest that ASEAN HE harmonisation is characterised as intentional and moving to more systematic and strategic approaches. Figure 5.2 summarises the findings on some initiatives contributing to ASEAN HE harmonisation in Knight’s FOPA model.
It is important to note that progress within each of the presented elements (initiatives, actors and platforms) varies and there can be additional examples in each approach.
The Functional Approach

There have been efforts to build regional HE policy infrastructure in four main HE systems, as categorised in Chapter Three. Over half of the interviewees referred to specific HE harmonisation initiatives and progress in terms of harmonising credit transfer systems (28), quality assurance systems (28), degree systems (27), and academic calendar systems (21).

Credit Transfer Systems

Strengthening regional infrastructure in terms of a CTS is perceived as a primary step for HE harmonisation. According to one university president, a credit transfer system is a very tangible action line that will drive the process of HE harmonisation in ASEAN (#20 Philippines). With regional academic mobility increasing in importance, there is a growing need to develop a system that allows students to take a course at a university in another member country and transfer their credits. A senior government official emphasised the importance of harmonising CTSs:

Credit transfer is very important. Once you have that recognition, credit transfer is easy. You don’t want to go on exchange if whatever you do there does not count. It’s ok if you want to go for holidays but for doing your HE, you want to spend time there and at the same time you can bring back your credits.

#7 Malaysia

Among efforts to develop regional CTSs that are widely used in the AMS, which include the AUN–ASEAN Credits Transfer System (AUN–ACTS) and the UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS) (Yavaprabhas, 2014, p. 99), the most recognised mechanism tends to be the AUN–ACTS, as mentioned by many of the interviewees. One university vice president noted, ‘it [AUN–ACTS] could be one of the first steps towards what we might call ‘harmonisation’ (#29 Vietnam). In addition, a few interviewees talked of the UCTS and one mentioned SEA–CTS and ACTFA.
Quality Assurance (QA) Systems

Because of the quality pace, harmonisation is not about agreements between governments. It is not about I agree your credit is three and you go to my university. It’s not about that. It is about QA bodies agreeing on standards and mutuality of the quality assurances processors and procedures.

#30 Malaysia

Developing the comparability of QA systems, practices and QA mechanisms in ASEAN was believed to be the most crucial foundation for the successful implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives. This is particularly due to the potential contribution of regional QA harmonisation in promoting mutual confidence and trust in the quality of HE systems across institutions and nations. One deputy director general of a governmental organisation emphasised the need to focus on developing QA harmonisation as it directly involves ‘accountability and transparency for our people to believe in each other’ (#12 Vietnam).

Importantly, ASEAN’s QA mechanisms are fundamental for strengthening an accreditation system in HE at the regional level. A university deputy vice-chancellor emphasised the importance of harmonising QA systems:

We can be assured that whatever quality produced from other institutions actually has been accredited […] It is not an ASEAN accreditation counsellor but something at that level so that we know something that’s been produced in Myanmar, for example, is at a certain quality comparable to Malaysia.

#18 Malaysia

There have been concerted efforts to increase the comparability of HE QA systems through the development of QA networks such as APQN and INQAAHE and frameworks or guidelines developed by these networks. In the ASEAN region, AQAN emerged as an intergovernmental effort to harmonise HE QA systems comprising related government agencies. Progress of the QA also includes an agreement to establish a task force to develop the ASEAN QA Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE), which was reached at the AQAN Roundtable Meeting in 2011, and a study on developing the Southeast Asian Quality Assurance Framework (SEAQAF) by SEAMEO RIHED in 2012.

At the institutional level, the AUN-QA assessment is a prominent initiative. The AUN Actual Quality Assessment at Programmed Level is led by a group of Chief Quality Officers of the AUN member universities. The assessment is mainly conducted among the AUN Member Universities, but other universities can also request to be assessed
(Yavaprabhas, 2014). Along the journey of developing the ASEAN QA framework, the AUN has also developed the AUN-QA Guidelines and the AUN-QA Manual for the Implementation of Guidelines (ASEAN University Network Secretariat, 2004, 2005).

Having both intergovernmental and university efforts specifically focusing on the AMS are crucial. As one deputy director of a national government agency emphasised, ‘building a system of confidence must be developed by the QA agencies within ASEAN such as AQAN’ (#7 Malaysia). A regional organisation director further stressed the strength of the network: ‘AQAN’s composition is the national assurance body agency of the ten countries’ (#35 Thailand). Currently, AQAN and AUN are collaborating closely to further develop QA practices. In addition, the AUN-QA assessment is widely known among many participants. A senior government official described it as ‘a kind of ASEAN accreditation (system)’ (#4 Indonesia).

Degree Systems

Harmonising the degree systems across the AMS is vital to develop the mutual recognition of HE qualifications in response to the growing importance of regional academic mobility in the ASEAN Community. A dean of an HEI noted the need to create a ‘conversion’ mechanism to ‘connect’ and ‘compare’ HE systems:

We need to find a way to connect and compare the HE systems in the ten countries. If the programmes and degrees are not readable and compatible, it will be difficult to compare and if we cannot compare, we cannot connect. […] Like in the world today, we have pounds and kilograms, different sizes in women’s clothes, currencies, you can convert. If you have that kind of conversion system, it means we can connect them together.

#25 Thailand

While many interviewees identified action lines concerning degree systems that reflect the BP, such as degree cycle alignment, learning outcomes, and a qualifications framework, there appears no agreed framework for harmonising HE degree cycles among ASEAN’s HE systems. Rather, according to some participants, although there are discussions on different durations or lengths of degree programmes, establishing the same degree cycle as in the BP is unlikely. As a university representative noted, ‘the idea is quite like what’s happening in Europe, but it doesn’t mean it has to be one system. It can be a different system, but we need to find a way to compare them’ (#25 Thailand).
Rather than focusing on the degree cycle and duration, efforts to harmonise degree systems concentrate on learning outcomes or the graduate’s competence after achieving their qualifications. According to one government official:

> If you study political economy in Chula, and you do in UKM, it needs not be the same because that year you study in the context of the Thai political system. […] The student must be able to think critically. That’s the learning outcomes. Whether they learn in the Thai system or Malaysian system is immaterial, but students who go through the programme must be able to critically analyse the political system. Then, that’s ok.

#7 Malaysia

Progress is being made in developing a regional qualifications framework (RQF). The current situation in the AMS differs from the BP in that the education qualification framework of each member state is linked to a regional qualification framework but not all AMS have an NQF. According to one university deputy dean, ‘many countries in ASEAN are developing it [NQF] right now. The first that is very successful in developing it might be Malaysia. They have been very successful in developing it for about a couple of years now’ (#26 Thailand). The interviewees additionally referred to efforts in developing the NQF in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

Diploma or degree supplements (DS) used in Europe to state the learning outcomes of students to enhance the compatibility of their qualifications seem to be of limited interest in Southeast Asia. Only two interviews mentioned diploma supplements. The findings support Yavaprabhas’s (2014) observation that ‘there are no specific policies and no broad implementation plans regarding the diploma supplement’ in the HE harmonisation process in Southeast Asia (p. 95).

**Academic Calendar Systems**

Aligning academic calendar systems across the AMS is another action line among all four HE systems. A deputy director general of a government agency provided evidence of harmonisation by explaining that ‘most of the academic calendars are more or less in harmony. We start the new academic term at almost the same time. We have a semester break almost at the same time’ (#7 Malaysia). As noted by one regional organisation director, Thailand adjusted the start of its academic year from June to August in 2014 (#35 Thailand).

However, the regional academic calendar has proven to be one of the most controversial action lines. There were vastly contrasting views on its positive and
negative impacts. On the one hand, academic calendar adjustments were perceived to be crucial as they foster regional academic mobility. Many interviewees expressed the challenge of developing collaborative programmes due to the different starting times of the academic year in the AMS. In addition, according to some interviewees, a more coherent academic calendar in the AMS with other HE systems in the world would increase the numbers of incoming international students.

On the other hand, there existed the view that adjusting the academic calendar would not promote regional academic exchange. Furthermore, there were concerns about the possible consequences to existing traditions and domestic contexts. Despite some movements regarding academic calendar adjustments, such as those in Thailand and the Philippines, there has been persistent local impediments to such changes. This aspect will be further discussed in the next chapter on impediments.

In addition to functional efforts pertaining to HE systems alignment, interviewees indicated several regional collaborative activities. These include, for instance, the ASEAN International Mobility for Students Programme (AIMS) or the M-I-T; ASEAN research clusters; the ASEAN citation index; the ASEAN curriculum content; the ASEAN Graduate Business Economic Programme (); and scholarships from the AUN member universities for ASEAN students.

**The Organisational Approach**

ASEAN HE harmonisation is internally driven or HE sector-centric. When discussing the progress of HE harmonisation, most interviewees referred to regional organisations with educational mandates (39), governmental sectors responsible for HE (19), and HEIs (16). In addition, some interviewees (6) emphasised the role of the QA agencies, particularly AQAN, as a mechanism to enhance trust and confidence in the quality of HE systems. The current key actors or agencies systematising HE harmonisation initiatives are mainly those from the existing organisational architecture of ASEAN HE regionalisation. Negligible progress has been made towards the establishment of organisations to formulate, implement and monitor HE harmonisation in ASEAN.

Of the different levels of HE harmonisation efforts, regional organisations were widely mentioned as the predominant actor in driving the HE harmonisation agenda.
A representative from a regional organisation noted the absence of strong motivations among the member states and believed that the harmonisation of higher education is mainly driven by the regional and international organisations, rather than the political will of AMS (#40 non-ASEAN). As a result, regional organisation representatives may be more familiar with HE harmonisation initiatives than other groups of interviewees, as further discussed in Section 5.4.

The AUN and SEAMEO RIHED appear to be the most active in leading the HE harmonisation process, with the AUN focusing on institutional platforms or universities, and the SEAMEO RIHED on intergovernmental initiatives. Over half of the interviewees mentioned AUN (33) and SEAMEO RIHED (22). This supports the view of Yavaprabhas (2014, p. 90) who emphasises the important roles of the AUN and SEAMEO RIHED in promoting the harmonisation of higher education over the past decade. Moreover, Hirosato (2014) argues that both organisations are further ‘expected to play complementary roles in harmonising higher education systems’ (p. 149). To improve the progress of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, particular focus may be given to further strengthening these organisations.

Being internally driven is beneficial in that it emphasises the academic drivers and directions of ASEAN HE harmonisation. However, a multistakeholder approach, especially the engagement of employers and students, is crucial for improving the practicality of HE harmonisation instruments. Furthermore, prominent political actors may be needed to significantly advance the HE harmonisation agenda in ASEAN. The issue concerning the lack of a multistakeholder approach in the governance structure will be further discussed in the next chapter.

In addition to the stated actors at the supranational, national and university levels, the ASEAN HE harmonisation process is promoted by regional organisations, some of which do not possess an explicit agenda for HE harmonisation and have a broader level of focus or membership than the AMS. A few interviewees referred to broader frameworks that may contribute to promoting and systematising ASEAN HE harmonisation initiatives, such as UNESCO Asia-Pacific, APRU, ASAHIL, INQAAHE, and UMAP. This suggests a close relationship between ASEAN HE harmonisation and the broader Asia HE harmonisation framework, which will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.
The Political Approach

Since the official discussions on HE harmonisation in Southeast Asia in 2008, the HE harmonisation process has become more formal and intentional. Progress in terms of a political approach has been made through the use of political mechanisms to promote HE harmonisation within the ASEAN framework. Most interviewees viewed that ASEAN and SEAMEO are important regional policy platforms that can potentially place HE harmonisation on the agenda of decision-making bodies at the state and HEI levels in the AMS. In particular, the AUN and SEAMEO RIHED have convened several policy dialogues to generate the political attention and visibility of the HE harmonisation agenda.

As identified by the interviewees, the ASEAN platforms that can generate political support include the ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASED) and the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED) for collaboration at the intergovernmental level. At the institutional level, there are the AUN policy platforms for university leaders and managers such as the AUN Board of Trustees Meetings and Rectors Conferences. The SEAMEO policy platforms include, for instance, the SEAMEO Council Conference, the South East Asia Ministers of Education Organisation High Officials Meeting, and the SEAMEO RIHED Meeting of Directors General, Secretaries General and Commissioners of Higher Education in Southeast Asia.

Although these education policy platforms support ASEAN HE harmonisation initiatives, they focus on the senior officials and ministerial levels. Interviewees suggested the need for political mechanisms or policy platforms to cultivate political will and awareness among the ASEAN leaders or heads of state of the importance of harmonising ASEAN HE systems. Supporting this view, some interviewees proposed the importance of the ASEAN Summit to potentially generate political strategies such as declarations, conventions, agreements, treaties, task forces, and dialogues. These strategies were believed to provide a stronger impact at the national level (#7 Malaysia, #10 Thailand, and #25 Thailand). These views tend to support the preliminary assumption regarding the importance of an enhanced ASEAN leadership as a regional body for the construction of a common space in HE, as further discussed in Chapter Seven.
In addition to meetings and summits, the interviewees identified a political approach that extends beyond ASEAN. Some examples of these instruments include the ASEAN Plus Three Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED+3), the Brisbane Communiqué, the Chiba Principles for quality assurance in higher education in the Asia-Pacific, and the Asia Pacific UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications (Tokyo Convention), the APEC, the EAS, and the ASEM.

5.3.2 The Extent of Overall Progress

The emergence and development of HE harmonisation in ASEAN is clear as nearly all of the interviewees (38) held the view that it is happening within the region. As illustrated in the previous section, there have been significant developments in functional, organisation and political approaches. However, the interview findings on the extent of the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN further suggest the incremental progress, as it was mostly considered to be at an initial stage of development.

The EHEA or European HE harmonisation is often regarded as an example of an advanced stage of harmonisation. Although it is reiterated in this thesis that the BP is not considered ‘a gold standard’ in HE harmonisation since milestones for each region vary, referring to the European case provides a practical reference tool for discussion. This is mainly attributed to its application as a benchmark for measuring progress both in terms of regionalism and HE regionalism. For instance, Wunderlich (2008a) notes that the EU is ‘the most developed example of region-building and taken as a benchmark against which to measure other regions’ (p. 138). Furthermore, Jayasuriya (2010) argues that ‘the Bologna Process is an exemplar of the regional regulation of higher education’ (p. 8).

After a decade since official discussions on HE harmonisation and a common space in HE in Southeast Asia took place in 2007, HE harmonisation in this region has progressed but broadly perceived to remain at the initial stage of development. This takes into consideration the 17 interviewees who regarded ASEAN HE harmonisation as currently at the beginning stages and the 16 who suggested the developing stage of development. However, five interviewees believed that harmonisation is progressing but the extent of progress is unclear. One interviewee was uncertain as to whether the harmonisation concept has actually been applied in ASEAN. Another interviewee argued that HE harmonisation has yet to emerge in the region. Similar to interviewees’
understandings of the concept of HE harmonisation, their differing views tend to be associated with their national and professional backgrounds and individual experiences, which is the focus of the following section.

5.4 Different Understandings and Motivations

Despite shared emphasis on the importance of HE harmonisation in ASEAN, the interviewees differed in their views regarding the HE harmonisation process. This may be attributed to the different roles played by each AMS. In addition, the interviewees’ national and organisational backgrounds, as well as individual experiences and beliefs, may influence the diverse understandings of HE harmonisation, motivations for promoting HE harmonisation initiatives, and opinions on the extent to which ASEAN HE harmonisation has progressed.

5.4.1 Different Roles of the ASEAN Member States

The conventional classification of the development gap in ASEAN is often the two-stage ASEAN or the 6-4 typology, which places the original and new AMS into two groups. This thesis finds that there is a 2-4-4 cluster related to participation in and progress of HE harmonisation. The first cluster comprises the most affluent member states: Brunei and Singapore. The second cluster comprises the mid-income member states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Finally, the third cluster comprises the CLMV countries. Nonetheless, since Vietnam is now narrowing its economic gap with the Philippines and has been engaging in regional HE harmonisation processes, a 2-5-3 categorisation seems to be increasingly apparent.

The second group, or the mid-income AMS, play the most active role in steering the HE harmonisation agenda. One university director noted that the core interest of the richer countries is not at the regional level. They aspire to be leading global players. Meanwhile, economic constraints restrict the poorer countries from fully participating in HE harmonisation (#16 Indonesia). Several interviewees clearly indicated that the second country cluster was the most active in working toward regionalisation and HE harmonisation. A senior government official noted that ‘most of the countries are very active in this one [harmonisation of HE], especially countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines. They are very active in having all the countries in the community’ (#11 Vietnam). Among the four countries in the second group, Indonesia,
Malaysia, and Thailand were singled out as the major drivers of HE harmonisation. According to a dean of an HEI, ‘if Malaysia, Indonesia, [and] Thailand can negotiate and agree, we can pass many issues and advance the agenda’ (#25 Thailand).

The first cluster was reported to have limited interest in regional HE collaboration. According to one dean of an HEI, ‘Brunei is far away and can be on its own’ and ‘Singapore is using the world as its playing field’ (#25 Thailand). This claim is supported by the responses regarding the key rationales and motivations of the interviewees from the first cluster, which tended to focus on international HE quality, standards, and HE internationalisation. For instance, Singaporean university representatives emphasised the need to improve HE quality in ASEAN and develop regional quality assurance systems (#23 Singapore and #24 Singapore). A Bruneian university director viewed the harmonisation of HE as ‘a process to facilitate academic mobility’ and explained that the main driver of the process is ‘the internationalisation of HE. We see more significance on staff mobility and closer collaboration’ (#14 Brunei).

Expanding HE services provision to other AMS did not seem to be of interest to interviewees from the first cluster as they did not raise this aspect. Rather, interviewees from the mid-income cluster mentioned this among their motivations for HE harmonisation. This is regrettable since Brunei and Singapore possess great potential to economically benefit from HE harmonisation, particularly by expanding HE services that attract students from other countries in the region. In addition, both have a long tradition of using English as a medium of instruction compared to the other AMS.

5.4.2 Interviewees’ Background

National Background

Understanding of the concept of and progress towards HE harmonisation differed among participants from different national backgrounds. Those who related harmonisation to standardisation, responded that the concept was unclear, or did not respond, and as presented earlier, were mainly from the CLMV countries. It is noticeable that despite the recognition of the importance of deepening regional collaboration, interviewees from the third cluster often emphasised national priorities.
This could be due to their focus on nation-building processes, which limit the opportunities of these interviewees to engage and familiarise themselves with regional initiatives, specifically HE harmonisation.

The disparate national development among the AMS and the unequal progress toward HE harmonisation shaped varied motivations. For instance, both representatives from Singapore and Laos emphasised economic imperatives but for different interests. A university vice-president from Laos emphasised academic exchanges because of their potential contribution to national economic growth through human resource development (#17 Laos). In contrast, a Singaporean university assistant vice-president suggested the need for more innovative initiatives beyond conventional academic exchanges, and especially the need to develop regional experiences and the knowledge of students for future regional employment and business:

> The students can enhance their knowledge of the region and prepare them[elves] for working life. The key benefit is mainly for economic development. Many Singaporean companies are involved in regional business. You are likely to be spending a lot of your time dealing with regional customers. It’s particularly important for Singaporean students in general to have a good knowledge of the region.

#23 Singapore

Thus, given the differing needs and interests, it is challenging to ensure that HE harmonisation initiatives suit the interests of all AMS. This issue can be attributed to the large development gap of the AMS, as further discussed in the next chapter.

Furthermore, the national background of each interviewee tends to influence their perceptions on the progress made. Interviewees who expressed the view that HE harmonisation in ASEAN is at the developing stage were mainly from mid-income AMS. This may be because these five countries were part of the country study by SEAMEO RIHED, which explored the idea of creating a common space in higher education in Southeast Asia in 2008. Some of these interviewees may have witnessed progress due to their engagement in subsequent HE harmonisation initiatives.

**Professional Background**

Familiarity with the HE harmonisation process is closely connected to interviewees’ professional backgrounds and organisational contexts. Interestingly, regional organisation representatives often emphasised what harmonisation ‘is not’ when

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24 Not all interviewees from the respective countries shared a similar view.
describing the concept of harmonisation. For instance, one regional organisation representative firmly believed that harmonisation is not a process of standardisation and emphasised that ‘harmonisation means unity in diversity’ (#40 Non-ASEAN). An emphasis on non-standardisation might indicate their awareness of the ambiguity of the term and the intended extent of HE harmonisation.

The number of years engaging in HE regional collaboration did not seem to influence an individual’s understanding of harmonisation. In fact, interviewees who had directly engaged with regional organisations that explicitly have strategic direction in developing HE harmonisation tend to be more aware of the issues and progress towards HE harmonisation compared to other groups, including veterans who had been engaging in regional collaboration.

Despite the various configurations of motivations, there appears to be shared interests among representatives from certain types of institutions. For instance, motivations regarding the ASEAN Community and dialogue partners were prevalent among the responses of interviewees from regional organisations. National government representatives were highly motivated by the need to improve the competitiveness of HE systems and outputs.

Meanwhile, university representatives widely mentioned the rationale regarding HE internationalisation, which suggests its importance as an explicit strategic priority of many HEIs. This group widely emphasised the economic benefits, particularly from transnational academic and graduate mobility. This emphasis on economic returns may suggest increased pressure to finance HE and the international workforce. Many university representatives also stressed motivations related to globalisation and HE internationalisation, which suggests the growing impact of the international standards of HE on ASEAN’s HE systems.

**Individual Experiences**

Individual experiences and beliefs also shape different interests and values in regional HE harmonisation. For instance, a senior government official referred to direct experience in regional activities during tertiary education as a fundamental motivation for promoting ASEAN ties in HE. This interviewee further emphasised the importance of people-to-people connectivity in ASEAN: ‘...people-to-people interactions, like
host families. I myself stayed in some ASEAN homes, too, and when they grow older, they would have that connection. That would really contribute towards harmonisation’ (#9 Philippines).

This example suggests the importance of promoting youth participation in regional HE initiatives considering the direct experience of youth potentially nurtures ideational forces for and value in promoting regional collaboration in their subsequent careers. The example also supports the study of Seedokmai (2013) that youth participation in ASEAN HE collaboration positively influences ASEAN awareness and the value of the sample group. To effectively promote the people-to-people connectivity and sustainable development of HE harmonisation, promoting youth engagement to foster the ideational values related to regional collaboration needs to be prioritised.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has identified several drivers of ASEAN HE harmonisation. Supporting the preliminary assumption of this thesis regarding drivers, the motivations of key actors accentuate the globalisation and regionalisation impacts on local HE systems. In particular, the growing global economic interdependence, HE internationalisation and ASEAN policy to develop a more connected ASEAN Community are among the primary driving forces. Considering the rationales and motivations of key actors, HE harmonisation in ASEAN might be perceived as a voluntary transfer in the policy transfer continuum of Dolowitz and Marsh. In other words, the HE harmonisation efforts have emerged voluntarily but been driven by the various perceived necessities of the AMS, particularly to legitimise HE systems in the international HE context.

Progress in HE harmonisation has been made in ASEAN but tends to remain at an initial stage of development. The findings in this chapter reveal some issues that may contribute to this incremental progress. In particular, disparate national development results in different understandings of, motivations for, and opinions on the extent of ASEAN HE harmonisation. This may involve the unbalanced representation of member states and key actors, considering that current predominant drivers are from the mid-income cluster of the AMS and the HE sector. The next chapter specifically presents the findings on several other factors that impede ASEAN HE harmonisation.
CHAPTER 6
IMPEDEMENTS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The findings on drivers indicate that key actors hold a common understanding and accept the importance of HE harmonisation to regional development. However, the progress towards HE harmonisation appears to have been incremental. This chapter argues that there is a strong impediment embedded within the ASEAN context. Existing ideas and norms in the domestic context to HE harmonisation development, particularly the ‘ASEAN Way’ of region-building, influence incremental progress and limited structures of HE harmonisation in this region. The pace and form characterising ASEAN HE harmonisation occurs as part of ‘a dynamic process of congruence building through which local actors accept foreign ideas in accordance with their “cognitive priors” or existing beliefs and conduct’ (Acharya, 2009, p. 145).

Drawing on the factors impeding ASEAN HE collaboration reported by interviewees, this chapter identifies the following six interrelated clusters of impediments: 1) a lack of supportive domestic contexts; 2) ideational and cultural barriers; 3) ASEAN’s region-building culture and norms; 4) inadequate resources and funding mechanisms; 5) limited structures for HE harmonisation; and 6) minimal institutionalisation: governance and leadership. These clusters reflect the relevance of a norm diffusion framework and Acharya’s (2004) constitutive localisation framework, as outlined in Chapter Two. They also support the preset codes regarding impediments stated in Chapters Two and Three, which emphasise the importance of the local context and actors in shaping the path of emergent norms.

6.1 A Lack of Supportive Domestic Contexts

The operating environments in the AMS are the most apparent challenge to the planning and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives. In particular, diversity and disparities were considered to affect HE harmonisation development the most. Almost all (38) of the participants identified one or more issues regarding the diverse economic, HE or political contexts in ASEAN. As an HEI representative noted, ‘one of the biggest problems that ASEAN is facing is the huge diversity – be they economics, standards, practices, and so on. I think that applies to HE as well’ (#23
Singapore. Another important aspect concerns limited supportive domestic regulations to accommodate growing regional HE interactions.

6.1.1 The Economic Context

The limited economic growth of most AMS and the large economic development gap generate important concerns about the economic context. Primarily, the majority of the member states are less affluent countries. As a regional organisation director noted, ‘we have more poor countries than rich countries’ (#39 Thailand). Limited economic growth in most AMS is a critical issue since it results in the lack of financial support for HE harmonisation initiatives.

In addition, despite numerous efforts to reduce the development gap among the AMS, such as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) and the NDG launched in 2000, the large economic divide remains a significant issue hampering regional initiatives. This is clearly evident in the findings of this thesis in which the economic gap, particularly between the founding and new member states, hinders the planning and implementation of regional academic collaborative activities.

In particular, one-way mobility is a persistent issue for the implementation of ASEAN’s HE initiatives. Many university representatives reported that the highly contrasting economies obstruct the effectiveness of student mobility programmes. In particular, it was difficult to ensure the participation of institutions and individuals from higher and lower income economies in regional activities. As a university director noted, ‘when we have the exchange programme for students and faculty, it’s very difficult to invite students from the more developed countries like Singapore to go to other ASEAN countries’ (#16 Indonesia). Meanwhile, students from the less developed countries might have difficulty in going on an exchange to Singapore due to the cost of living, which can be quite prohibitive (#14 Brunei and #23 Singapore).

In addition, a variety of economic developments directly influence the needs and interests of the AMS, leading to the various levels of national representation in HE harmonisation. One senior government official noted:
The different level of economic development of some countries inhibits the process and the representativeness of each country, whether each country can be represented in full. Harmonisation can be easier and more successful if we have it let’s say between the countries that are quite comparable and similar in terms of development in the country. If the level of development is quite different, then it’s more difficult to harmonise.

Among the more active nations, one regional organisation representative emphasised the prominent role of Thailand in this process viewing that these active regional organisations [RIHED, AUN, ASAIHL] are mainly funded by the Thai government (#40 Non-ASEAN). Another regional organisation representative mentioned the strong role of Indonesia, ‘Indonesia is pushing the RQF as part of the priority areas of the ASCC as well as part of the chairmanship of the education sector. That’s Indonesia’s interest and sense of importance but not some others’ (#32 Singapore).

The incoherent national representation is a fundamental issue impeding the significant progress of ASEAN HE harmonisation. According to a senior government official:

Many countries, especially Thailand, play a leading role in the process of harmonisation in ASEAN. […] However, other countries, with many other reasons, cannot catch up with each other. You can see that some may go ahead, some are in the middle and some are behind. That’s why the process is not as good as we expected.

The issue of representation supports the findings presented in the previous chapter on the more active role of the mid-income AMS than other country clusters.

6.1.2 The Higher Education Context

Primary issues concerning the HE context are diversity in HE systems and disparities in HE development in ASEAN. Interviewees referred to several differences in the HE system such as academic systems, academic calendar, curricula, content, admission requirements, accumulation systems, programmes, courses, and teaching and learning pedagogy, governance, and regulations. These differences are attributed to the colonial legacies of the AMS. According to a university president, ‘many HEIs are coming from different traditions. The Philippines education system is very much based on the US system whereas some have the influence of the European traditions’ (#20 Philippines).

In addition to the differences in HE systems, high disparity in the HE development of the AMS is a persistent challenge in developing ASEAN HE collaboration. A university representative noted, ‘the needs of the less and more well off universities
differ greatly’ (#23 Singapore). A vice-president of an HEI further explained: ‘it is challenging to plan and implement even basic regional academic collaboration because of the unevenness of our development. It’s very difficult to think of a program or an initiative that would involve only universities at the same level’ (#21 Philippines).

HE harmonisation efforts involving HE policy adjustments, which require a deeper level of collaboration than regional collaborative activities, seem to be far from being realised at this moment in time. As one university deputy dean argued:

You have a cluster like Thailand and Philippines, a cluster like Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar. Then, you have a cluster like Malaysia and Indonesia. All of them have different kinds of regulations, governance systems, and also quality. That’s why it’s ‘impossible’ or very difficult for these ten countries in different clusters to have a harmonised policy because you come from different settings, different levels of development.

#26 Thailand

A critical challenge is the construction of a regional HE harmonisation framework that embraces the large differences in the levels of HE development and HEI capacity. As noted by one university representative, ‘it’s very difficult to come out with a common system that everyone is willing to accept, everyone is willing to cling onto to advance themselves. That is the biggest difficulty – the large disparity’ (#24 Singapore). Undoubtedly, there remains no regionally accepted HE harmonisation mechanisms commonly employed across the AMS.

A university rector commented on the progress of harmonising credit transfer systems: ‘many efforts are noticeable but a challenge is that there is no regionally accepted credit transfer system’ (#19 Myanmar). A regional organisation representative further stressed the challenge to create a regional CTS: ‘whenever we talk about CTS among the member states, […] there is always a question of what would be the acceptable parameter of HE standards among the Member States’ (#31 Philippines). Developing a regional qualification framework is another case in point. A regional organisation representative noted that ‘not every member state has a national qualification framework (NQF) and in the absence of a qualification framework at the national level, it is very hard to establish it at the regional level’ (#32 Singapore). A senior university representative explained the difficulty of constructing a regional qualifications framework:
There is some resistance in some of the areas, as they don’t want this kind of framework. Therefore, it would take some time for the ‘ten’ countries to have the ‘same’ qualifications framework or the ‘agreed’ ASEAN qualifications framework. They might have their national qualifications framework but for the regional one, I think it might take a lot of effort to do that.

#26 Thailand

The disparities in HE advancement and the capacity of HEIs, which are mainly influenced by the large economic development gap, contribute to the unequal national representation in ASEAN HE harmonisation. According to one regional organisation representative, the HE harmonisation agenda is not mutually valued and prioritised due to ‘disparities in terms of HE, whereby one member state is at a very advanced stage, another is still at the developing stage, and some are trying to have a proper HE sector’ (#32 Singapore). A Singaporean university representative described the current situation and the readiness of HEIs:

It’s true that some universities are not ready and you can’t blame them. They don’t have the resources. They are just not ready to enter into a regional standing. They are still struggling with the basic fundamentals to survive at their own country level. Forget about the ‘regional’ level.

#24 Singapore

Although the diversity of HE systems and disparities in HE development fundamentally account for the need to harmonise HE systems, the high level of differences constitute an important challenge to ASEAN HE harmonisation. A deputy director general of a government agency mentioned this issue as a principal difference between ASEAN HE harmonisation and the BP:

We have adopted many different higher education systems. In Europe, they moved to the Bologna Process without a very big gap but ASEAN is not like that. Each country is now still transforming higher education. They still have some debates about what is the higher education system model. For example, in Vietnam, we also have a debate between Bologna system and North American system. Even now I still don’t have a clear picture about the higher education system that the ASEAN countries could fit.

#13 Vietnam

6.1.3 The Political Context

Although diverse political systems are among the crucial variables influencing the possibility and differing impact of policy transfer across countries, they were not widely raised as an issue by the interviewees. A small number of interviewees who referred to differences in terms of political ideologies in this region emphasised that political differences in this region must be respected. This might reflect the sensitivity of the topic, which interviewees tended to carefully avoid commenting on. For
instance, when asked about the impediments, a senior government official commented on several issues and opined ‘I don’t want to jump into politics’ (#10 Thailand).

Another reason may involve the argument stated earlier in Chapter Two that HE regionalisation is a form of functional cooperation in low-politics. HE harmonisation may be developed in the context of political diversity. As a deputy director of a national government agency commented: ‘it’s not that we need one common political system. Political system doesn’t matter as long as we agree on our HE recognition system. Then, that’s ok’ (#7 Malaysia).

Among the few interviewees who mentioned issues related to domestic political context, their concerns involved the restless internal political changes in many AMS, which may lead governments to continue to be preoccupied with nation-building efforts. As one university director commented, it is difficult to advance HE collaboration in ASEAN since ‘we all have our own problems and priorities, let alone thinking about others’ (#16 Indonesia). Considering that changes in government lead to fluctuations in government policy (Andenæs & Andersen, 2011), the political instability of the AMS makes HE harmonisation an arduous task. Connecting the gradual progress of HE harmonisation to this issue, a head of a regional organisation commented that ‘the continuity of the policy that is being implemented in a certain period of time may be stopped because the new political will is coming’ (#39 Thailand). A university dean further elaborated:

> You need to accept the reality that there are always changes in leaders. When you have the number one of the non-politician staff that want to push through the policy, they know how to do it but the staff always change. When it changes, it is always a kind of step back or stand still for a few months before it can move on. This always happens.  
> #25 Thailand

In addition, inter-state conflicts among some member states still endure in the region. Against this backdrop, the political context in ASEAN will continue to afflict the progress of regional initiatives, including HE harmonisation efforts.

### 6.1.4 The Domestic Regulations Context

In addition to the overall economic, HE and political circumstances, some issues arise from the administrative and legislative environments that are yet to accommodate increased transnational academic mobility and HE interactions. A university dean noted that ‘a challenge that happens everywhere and is not very easy to cope with is
immigration’. To move from one country to another using a student visa remains a problem for the AMS. According to this participant, ‘the immigration law hasn’t been changed to facilitate this kind of exchange yet, which may be the same with other countries’ (#25 Thailand). A senior government official also expressed concern regarding immigration:

In terms of mobility for lecturers and students, we always use KITAS or VITAS for short-term visitors. Sometimes students have the visa for two months. To get a student visa and stay longer, they have to go to the immigration office and stamp again. If they are in Jakarta, it’s ok but Indonesia is too wide. If they are in small cities, it might be inconvenient because they have to travel to the capital city to do this.

#5 Indonesia

A university representative shared another example of regulations that have not accommodated the implementation of student exchange programmes. Recognising medical documentation among countries remains an issue. In many cases, outgoing students need to undergo an additional medical test in their host country despite the provision of medical results from their home country (#25 Thailand).

The supportiveness of regulations is closely connected to the issue of holistic development, as enhancing HE connectivity is not limited to the HE sphere. As a university vice-rector suggested, ‘rules and regulations of the ASEAN countries should facilitate regional cooperation on higher education too’ (#15 Cambodia). The issues of a holistic perspective and cross-sector development are further discussed in Section 6.2 on ideational barriers and Section 6.3 on region-building culture.

6.2 Ideational and Cultural Barriers

Emphasising the emphasis of constructivism on ideas and values, the gradual and uneven progress of HE harmonisation derives from the limited ideational forces that are fundamental to driving HE harmonisation initiatives. In addition, local cultural filters generate domestic impediment to HE harmonisation efforts. The following subsections present the findings on two interrelated aspects: attitudinal factors; and language, culture, and norms.
6.2.1 Attitudinal Factors

Despite key actors having a common interest in developing HE harmonisation, as presented in the previous chapter, ideational forces for region-building have not been sufficiently developed to stimulate significant progress in ASEAN. Attitudinal factors, such as beliefs, mindsets, and societal values, shape key actors’ varied priorities and commitment to the HE harmonisation agenda.

Fundamentally, there is a limited sense of urgency for HE development. The HE development agenda has been reported to gain less attention and investment compared to other fields. This might involve the broad perception that HE is less immediate than others due to the education development level of most AMS. According to some interviewees, basic education is still in need of development in most Southeast Asian countries, partly due to the pressure to accomplish UNESCO’s Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (#25 Thailand and #39 Thailand). In addition, some time is needed for HE development projects to bear fruit. As each government has a defined period in power, investment is often allocated to more immediate and visible matters, for instance, public capital or the construction of physical infrastructure systems for communication. A head of a regional organisation argued: ‘there are limited resources and willingness to invest. When I say resources, it doesn’t mean there’s no money over there but there is too little investment in HE in the region in comparison to other areas’ (#37 Thailand).

Another core ideational challenge concerns a lack of awareness and understanding of HE harmonisation both among policy makers and at the public level, which influences personal belief in ‘harmonisation’. A deputy dean of an HEI noted, ‘we have a problem understanding this term [harmonisation] among policy makers and also the ASEAN people. I don’t think the ASEAN countries do have this kind of understanding of the usefulness of harmonisation’. Although the term ‘harmonisation’ is used from time to time, it is not an indication of the acceptance of a concrete definition or policy in the region (#26 Thailand). This view was supported by a regional organisation representative, who suggested that the term ‘harmonisation’ has not been fully understood by the ASEAN member states (#32 Singapore).

Some key actors understood HE harmonisation as a linear process in which internal harmonisation is a prerequisite for regional efforts. These include views such as ‘even
within each nation, incompatibility is to be expected’ (#3 Cambodia) and ‘even in one country it’s already difficult to harmonise, let alone ASEAN’ (#16 Indonesia). This perception may challenge the greater progress of HE harmonisation that involves complex and multifaceted processes being simultaneously driven at different levels.

There are concerns regarding a holistic perspective or cross-sectoral collaboration, specifically the beliefs in the importance of HE to the more macro development. In particular, HE development may be used to contribute to the AEC and the ASCC, which are the two pillars that ‘play an independent but reinforcing role in promoting the well-being of ASEAN citizens’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2013, p. 132). However, several interviewees reported that HE has not been used as a key mechanism to build a strong foundation for region-building. As noted by a university deputy dean, ‘we (ASEAN) don’t use the harmonisation of HE as a means to increase our competitive advantage as the EU does’ (#26 Thailand). Concerns on a holistic perspective for region-building are related to region-building culture, which is discussed in Section 6.3.

Another significant impediment derives from ASEAN values and consciousness in which loyalty concentrates ‘within’ the nation and ‘beyond’ the region, rather than ‘in’ the region. As one director of a government agency commented on the issue as pertains to the ASEAN mindset, ‘the difficulty is how to get the same perception about ASEAN itself and how important we are to our neighbours, and we have all of the excellence in each country that we can share the excellence with each other’ (#5 Indonesia). There remains the strong ‘within the boundary mindset’, particularly among practitioners. As a university president noted:

The old view is that this university was created to serve the Philippines. It’s not here to worry about other countries. Our main responsibility is to address the challenges by ‘this’ country. This has to change because if that mindset stays, it’s not possible to harmonise. Because the design of the programme of this university cannot be made without taking into account what’s happening in the other ASEAN countries.

#20 Philippines

Importantly, a ‘look West’ mindset in this region was reported as being the prominent perception of the populace. This societal value influences students’ choices of host country for academic mobility. According to a director of a regional organisation, ‘a student from an elite university in the Philippines would think of the universities in the
US, Georgetown, Harvard. If they were [given an] offer by a university which is as
good but is in China or Thailand, they would prefer the US’ (#32 Philippines).

Preferences for host countries are not limited to the Western HE systems but also
more affluent Asian nations that are perceived to have internationally recognised HE
systems. The following responses of an HEI director and a regional organisation
director illustrate this point:

In terms of attitude towards one another, most ASEAN students or faculty members tend
to look to the West like Australia, the US, Europe so if you ask them to go to other
ASEAN countries, maybe no one wants to go, to a certain extent, National University of
Singapore maybe. [...] This is one of the big challenges we face. How do we mobilise the
students or faculty members to collaborate more in the ASEAN countries?

#16 Indonesia

A lot of faculty members, researchers, as well as students still look to the West, and
developed countries for opportunities to collaborate. A challenge is how to emphasise
that the perspective for the region is also equally, if not more so, important.

#37 Thailand

In addition to persistent nationalism and preferences for more developed countries,
limited ASEAN values mainly stem from the current situation whereby many ASEAN
HE systems have not adequately developed to increase trust and confidence in each
other’s HE products and services. As a university deputy vice chancellor emphasised,
‘there are the issues of trust and doubt concerning the credentials of academics and
faculties in other HE systems in ASEAN’ (#18 Malaysia).

The aforementioned societal values negatively affect the key actors’ commitment on
and prioritisation of the HE harmonisation agenda at the national level. Despite the
presence of drivers, a regional organisation representative stated that ‘there is no
serious commitment to achieve a harmonised higher education of the ASEAN
Member States’ (#32 Singapore). Currently, the HE harmonisation agenda is not
considered a national priority. According to one university dean, ‘I don’t think the
ASEAN leaders will put this [harmonisation of HE] in their agenda because they have
more things to do’ (#25 Thailand).

In addition to the limited prioritisation of the HE harmonisation agenda, the progress
is unequally valued by the AMS. According to a regional organisation representative,
‘the issue of harmonisation of HE has no equal importance from the different Member
States. Harmonisation of HE is not desirable and not important for some countries’
(#32 Singapore). A university manager further added the following regarding the
difficulty of HE harmonisation: ‘it’s our motivation. This is the first big one. To what extent do we want this harmonisation in ASEAN? Maybe Thais want it more, Singapore with economic motives, Indonesia, Malaysia. I don’t see the common ideology among ASEAN countries’ (#16 Indonesia).

The unequal prioritisation of the HE harmonisation among the AMS is closely related to the national representation issue influenced by different levels of HE and economic development, as stated in Section 6.1. This issue is shaped by the unequal value and representation of the AMS in the region-building process. A university director noted that ‘except maybe Thais that are so aware and conscious about the ASEAN Community. The others, I don’t think they are that conscious as the Thais about the ASEAN Community in 2015’ (#16 Indonesia).

A combination of the aforementioned ideational issues limits progress towards an ASEAN common space in HE. In particular, regional HE harmonisation mechanisms that all AMS agree to or commonly employ remain absent. Among the important ideational barriers, the findings support the emphasis of this thesis on the importance of the political will of the ASEAN leaders and practitioners’ commitment to drive the HE harmonisation initiatives at the regional, national and institutional levels. These factors are further discussed in Section 6.5 on the leadership capacity of key actors.

6.2.2 Language, Culture, and Norms

Language differences in the AMS are among the most significant challenges, as widely mentioned by representatives from the university, national and regional levels. One university president put forward the query, ‘how to harmonise when courses are being taught in different languages?’ (#20 Philippines). As a university director explained: ‘many universities in this region use the national language at the undergraduate level. That’s one challenge in setting up programmes like joint degrees, student exchange’ (#16 Indonesia).

Currently, English is a main medium of instruction in a few HE systems in the AMS. According to a senior government official, ‘the medium of instruction used in the institutions of higher learning whereby countries like Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines commonly use English but not in the remaining ASEAN member countries’ (#1 Brunei). To further enhance more harmonised conditions
across ASEAN’s HE systems, a deputy director of a regional organisation suggested, ‘if we can overcome the language difficulty, there would be fewer problems when we engage in collaborative projects or collaborative activities’ (#36 Thailand).

The process of aligning academic calendar systems across the AMS exemplifies norms contestation emanating from cultural challenges. As one senior government official noted, ‘changing the academic calendar to be more similar is not easy’ (#4 Indonesia). There are several consequences of aligning a national academic calendar to a regional system. A president of a university added:

The academic calendar has very strong cultural roots. It reflects cultural practices in the country and the timing of many activities. It synchronises with the harvesting of crops especially in the rural areas. The semester ends before the harvest season. So if you change the calendar, it effects the lives of many people but since many countries are getting operose so there might be less and less influence of cultural practices. It has to be synchronised with the religious practices. The Philippines is the Catholic predominant country so it observes the holy week. It’s a weeklong celebration and it usually coincides with the December break between two calendar years.

Changes to the academic calendar have direct impact on students and academics because ‘universities will run classes during the hottest time of the year – April and May. Many university buildings lack air conditioning. And they may have to start the academic year when monsoon rains start in September and frequent floods occur’ (Ramirez-Cohn, 2014). In addition, proposing similar university holidays, which coincide with many countries in the world, may have significant implications for the tourism industry and related consequences such as a rise in travel fees and increased demand for travel and accommodation bookings during this period.

Considering the aforementioned cultural implications, norm contestations tend to occur despite the perceived benefits of academic calendar alignment across the AMS. There have been local moves on calendar adjustment. This suggests that local actors are not yet fully convinced of the value that calendar adjustment may provide and its congruence to normative priors. For instance, in the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education has suggested that local universities carefully analyse the proportion of students who may benefit from the change and cross-border activities in order to assess whether changing their academic calendar would be of more benefit than harm (Ramirez-Cohn, 2014). This may not directly reflect a rejection of norms but rather a grafting process in which local actors search for possible solutions to compromise
between the emerging and existing norms. For instance, in the case of the Philippines, ‘one of these might be a quarterly system or tri-semester to provide more entry points for foreign students coming in and ours going out’ (Ramirez-Cohn, 2014). In addition, there have been active moves in Thailand to reconsider changes to the academic calendar.

Last but not least, parenting culture poses some limitations on effective regional HE student exchange programmes. The differences in terms of child-raising culture and parental guidance may shape students’ attitudes towards pursuing overseas study experiences. As a university dean commented:

> The most difficult thing is the attitude of our own students. They are not as adventurous as those from America or from Europe who would like to spend half a year or one year abroad. Our kids usually like to stay close to their family. It’s quite comfortable for them to stay home. [...] And their parents want their kids to stay close to them. I think our children are quite pampered comparing to the West.

#25 Thailand

### 6.3 ASEAN’s Region-Building Culture and Norms

Although embedded norms in the ‘ASEAN Way’ of region-building, such as national sovereignty, consensus, and non-intervention, may account for the longevity of ASEAN (Cockerham, 2010), they tend to also constrain the progress of HE harmonisation efforts. A university representative commented on ASEAN’s principles and procedural norms and argued: ‘considering the non-intervention and the absence of the supranational government, trying to come up with the same policy of the government [of all member states] is very unlikely’ (#26 Thailand).

HE harmonisation has proceeded cautiously due to states’ primary concerns about their interests and sovereignty. One senior government official noted, ‘our integration can only be at a certain level. ASEAN countries cannot intervene in internal affairs. [...] Harmonisation in one sense can only go so far because you have to deal with these territorial boundaries and sovereignty’ (#9 Philippines). With an emphasis on nationalism, ASEAN is progressing on an intergovernmental basis by having ASECE as a facilitator. The soft governance of ASEAN is perceived as one of the key factors limiting progress of ASEAN HE harmonisation. As a university deputy dean stated:

One of the factors that contributes to, I wouldn’t want to use the word ‘failure’ but it’s more or less like failure, is that ASEAN is different from the EU. You don’t have a supranational government so there’s no central government that would govern the countries in terms of using the same policy, even though it’s social and cultural policy.
Another thing is ASEAN itself has a non-intervention principle so I don’t think that we would have the so-called, harmonised policy. I think cooperation is possible but not harmonisation. It might take a very long time for us to process this. The policy makers themselves don’t understand the wording quite well. It might take a long time for those policy makers and also the people of ASEAN to process and understand this kind of deeper cooperation.

#26 Thailand

Issues relating to nationalism and the strength of regional organisations are further discussed in Section 6.5 on the leadership capacity of key actors.

As outlined in Sections 6.1 and 6.2, concerns exist regarding a holistic perspective and cross-sectoral interaction for region-building. Such concerns are closely related to the region-building culture and norms of ASEAN. Despite efforts to enhance a more comprehensive approach to region-building, particularly the MPAC, Desker (2015) argues that there are difficulties, even among policy makers, in relating concerns in one sector to issues affecting other sectors. This situation was reflected in some interviewees’ concerns about the limited cross-sectoral interaction across the three ASEAN Community pillars.

While categorising the three pillars is essential to structure operations and initiatives, these pillars are often discussed by the key actors and general public as being in silos. Directly affecting the development of HE harmonisation, a university deputy dean commented on the limited linkages between the economic and socio-cultural spheres:

> ASEAN has ‘perfectly’ separated each sphere from each other: political sphere, economic sphere, and socio-cultural sphere. It’s very clear that they don’t want them to be mixed up. [...] Therefore, you wouldn’t see HE, which actually belongs to the socio-cultural community, as a catalyst or a major force to increase economic advantage because it’s clearly separated.

#26 Thailand

Meanwhile, there appears an unbalanced emphasis among the three ASEAN Community pillars. In particular, some interviewees perceived that the main focus of ASEAN’s region-building process has not been on the socio-cultural pillar. According to a deputy director general of a national government agency, ‘ASEAN all this while has been talking about leaders coming together to talk, to decide on political issues, to decide on economic building bloc but the exchange between people and culture has not been very successful’ (#7 Malaysia). The unbalanced emphasis, particularly on the socio-cultural pillar, is a critical issue since it directly influences the progress of HE harmonisation initiatives.
The community building in ASEAN was predominantly believed to concentrate on the economic pillar. In the view of one regional organisation representative, ASEAN HE harmonisation is unlike that of the European case in which there has been clear interest in harmonising many things since the start of the regionalisation process. However, ASEAN focuses mainly on the economics pillar (#40 Non-ASEAN). This view is reflected in greater awareness among the ASEAN people of the AEC than the APSC, ASCC and also the ASEAN Community. As observed by a deputy director of a regional organisation: ‘people don’t really talk about the ASEAN Community in particular. They talk about the AEC more’ (#38 Thailand). This can be attributed to the concentration of ASEAN policies to develop regional economic growth in combination with the national policies of the AMS to prioritise economic development.

The issue of a holistic perspective for development does not only reflect ASEAN’s region-building culture but also the tradition of HE development in this region. According to Yavaprabhas, policy makers and the general public have not seriously raised how HE issues, such as access, equity, participation, and quality, are closely connected to the overall structure of HE systems within the region (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008, p. 77). In addition, there is inadequate emphasis on using HE as a means to improve regional economic competitiveness. As one university representative noted, ‘we [the AMS] don’t use HE as the means to an end to increase competitiveness by investing in people. For ASEAN, I don’t find any concrete statement about using HE as a basis for economic development’ (#26 Thailand).

An inadequate holistic approach to development in ASEAN is also reflected in the limited linkages between HE and industry. According to the deputy dean of an HEI, although there have recently been increased policy discussions about employability and how HEIs can serve industry, ‘the separation of HE from the economic sector is still evident’ (#26 Thailand). Such a situation is closely connected to the lack of a multistakeholder approach in developing HE harmonisation in ASEAN, as discussed in Section 6.6 regarding governance and leadership.

Another challenge embedded in ASEAN’s region-building culture concerns the norm of reciprocity among the AMS, which also exists in the EU. There appeared a view that the reciprocal level of exchange of assistance among the AMS, both in the form
of contributions from the more developed countries to the less developed countries and vice versa, was insufficient to generate mutual benefits in the region-building process. A head of a regional organisation expressed this concern among the impediments to ASEAN HE collaboration: ‘there is the absence of the well […] meaning rich countries and poorer countries; they should help each other more’ (#39 Thailand). The situation may be attributed to the lack of fundamental ideational conditions, such as collective regional values and an ASEAN mindset, as mentioned in Section 6.2.

Regional collaborative culture shapes the progress of regional initiatives. According to a senior government official, ‘you can see in Europe, after they agree or have an agreement, they can follow that quite strictly. […] It is because of the context of their culture or the way they work’ (#12 Vietnam). An interviewee related the incremental and uneven progress of ASEAN HE harmonisation, as mentioned in Section 6.2, to the extent of its familiarity with regional collaboration, working principles and the collaboration culture of each member state:

The reason is because of the culture. In some countries, for example, in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, people are more active and involve in regional activities. They are familiar with collaboration. But in some countries, like in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, they might be more passive. The national culture also affects the way they work and act.

#12 Vietnam

A non-confrontation principle is another concern about the region-building culture that has contributed to problems in consolidating the region and the incremental progress of ASEAN HE harmonisation. To avoid arguments or debates, some government representatives choose to remain silent despite their disagreement with proposed regional HE initiatives. According to one deputy director of a regional organisation:

In the meeting, we see the excitement and commitment of policy makers in driving the cooperation. They discussed the challenges and the ideas on what would benefit the region but when people follow up, those items might be ignored’ […] perhaps it might be the cultural aspect. Some people may not have that agreement but they don’t say it out loud.

#38 Thailand

The inconvenience of some government representatives to openly express contrasting views in meetings may additionally derive from the strong hierarchical culture embedded in many AMS. The compliance culture that places an emphasis on
conforming to higher authorities and seniors in meetings may inherently result in the sluggish progress or stagnation of regional initiatives that require consensus from the member states. According to some interviewees, there are many cases where initiatives cannot progress beyond the statement of intent due to a lack of consensus among the AMS, despite initial broad agreements on an initiative and the seeming commitment of representatives in previous meetings or policy dialogues (#32 Singapore and #33 Indonesia).

The European socio-political ‘space’ is characterised by ‘cooperative competition’ (Croché, 2009; Zeng et al., 2012, p. 322). Cooperative competition culture, which refers to cooperation in a competitive environment, is analogously present in ASEAN. According to a regional organisation director, ‘HEIs and governments like to collaborate but all of them operate in a competitive environment’ (#37 Thailand). In such a competitive setting, while there is the aim to increase HE collaboration, as one university deputy vice chancellor put it, ‘there’s always a competition […] people are afraid that if I help you, you might compete with me later on. I think we have to learn to cooperate in competition’ (#18 Malaysia).

6.4 Inadequate Resources and Regional Funding Mechanisms

Resource limitations are crucial operational impediments reported by all types of key actors. Over half of the interviewees, especially regional organisations and HEI representatives, expressed their concern regarding resource constraints. An analysis of interviewees’ responses suggests two interrelated resource issues: resources availability and funding mechanisms.

Funding is the most prominent concern about resources availability. According to a deputy director general of a governmental organisation, ‘our progress is very hard and slow because of financial issues’ (#13 Vietnam). Also, one deputy director of a regional organisation noted that despite the interest of member states in proposed initiatives, ‘when it comes to the funds per se, people will keep silent even though the fund doesn’t have to be much per country. I would say that funds have been the challenge’ (#38 Thailand). A university deputy vice chancellor emphasised the point:
Funding is the greatest challenge because the rest can be handled. If we do not have funding, we can forget about everything. Perhaps that’s the message to put across to the ASEAN leaders.

#18 Malaysia

From the more to less affluent nations in ASEAN, a lack of funding forms important challenges for ASEAN HE collaboration. A Singaporean university representative related the following financial concern for student exchange programmes: ‘moving students around involves a lot of costs like travelling, and accommodation. You have to take care of all the practical things like where to find the budget to cover the travelling’ (#23 Singapore). A Cambodian university representative added that a lack of financial support limits student participation in HE collaborative programmes:

University students want to join exchange programmes or other activities but they cannot join such activities if the host does not provide a full scholarship. There are many activities of the AUN that are useful like the exchange programme, ASEAN Student Leaders’ Forum, Educational Forum, and Young Speakers’ Contest, that students at my university would like to join but financial support is a significant matter for them.

#15 Cambodia

The limited financial availability for ASEAN HE harmonisation is mainly attributed to a lack of a concrete and effective regional funding mechanism dedicated to promoting HE harmonisation initiatives. Indicating funding to be the top challenge, one senior university representative explained the main source of funding as currently ‘either from the government or the university. Obviously, if the number of collaborations increases, we might not have enough to support all. [...] Currently, there’s no specific or dedicated funding only for collaboration’. As such, those who aspire to mobilise or engage regionally and internationally must use their own research grants for collaboration or special funding from the university, which is very competitive since there is not a large amount of funding available (#18 Malaysia).

Despite increased availability and diversification of funding, particularly from external grants, funding remains a prominent concern. As emphasised by a university representative, ‘“voluntary money” given on a benevolent basis is now very hard to find’ (#24 Singapore). In addition, when the major source of funding derives from external donors, rather than from the direct contributions of the AMS, this may result in grant-led initiatives. As one deputy director articulated it: ‘if you don’t have money, it’s difficult to initiate any collaboration. Worse than that, when you’ve got no money, you merely do things according to the donor’s nation from outside’ (#36 Thailand).
Importantly, existing funding mechanisms create concerns about funding sustainability since they place pressure on key actors, and particularly regional organisations, to secure funding to drive regional HE cooperative activities. An HEI director referred to the case of the AUN: ‘it [the AUN] is doing a lot of good but it’s really in danger of being over burdened by the work that is not formalised, by performing activities that do not have appropriate funding’ (#24 Singapore). Despite the existence of internal funding mechanisms that may alleviate sustainability issues, this participant argued that ‘self-funding is not enough for many activities that take place at the university. It’s just not enough’. Currently, ‘it [the AUN] is tapping too much into good will and there’s not enough on shared resources. […] Good will is going to run out sooner or later. It’s not going to last forever’ (#24 Singapore).

In addition to funding, there are limited material resources. A senior university representative expressed the concern regarding ‘facilities, which are very closely related to financial strength of each individual institution’ (#18 Malaysia). A university dean explained that hosting students and researchers from overseas is challenging at the moment due to a lack of infrastructure and facilities to accommodate incoming visitors, ‘we cannot accept so many students and researchers because we don’t have enough space. Assigning a workspace is difficult even for our own staff’ (#25 Thailand).

Human resources also form important challenges. The number of academics and qualified staff is insufficient to accommodate the increased volume of incoming academics and students. A university rector raised the point that ‘you can find that not many lecturers in universities can speak English well so how can they teach or conduct a lecture in English? There’s a big problem there’ (#28 Vietnam). Furthermore, there is concern regarding the turnover of skilled personnel. According to one university director, ‘it takes time to train expertise – be they trainers, assessors. However, after you train them and by the time they are ready to go for bigger things, they change job, and you have to start over again’.

Problems with regard to human resources are directly related to incentives for participation. As a deputy director of a regional organisation noted, HE harmonisation is ‘struggling because we don’t have enough financial incentives’ (#36 Thailand). Among several reasons for the insufficient remuneration to attract highly qualified
staff from the AMS, some interviewees perceived the situation as deriving from the current economic status of many AMS, as mentioned earlier in Section 6.1. One head of a university commented on the issues of incentives and human resources in Vietnam: ‘you can’t imagine the payment for our staff members and lecturers. With very low salaries and the salary structure does not change very much, the problem is how do we attract foreign lecturer, excellent lecturer from overseas?’ (#28 Vietnam).

Some interviewees particularly connected resource challenges to the limited structural conditions for promoting HE harmonisation to the absence of a dedicated regional funding mechanism to drive these regional initiatives. A regional organisation representative provided a comparative perspective on the budgetary mechanism between the ASEAN and the EU:

The ASEAN countries are very poor and there is no strong commitment from the ASEAN countries. Actually, many things have started but they can’t actively proceed because these countries lack financial support. When having new good initiatives, ASEAN always has to worry about funding mechanism since it’s not well institutionalised so there’s no sustainability in the funding. When there’s no funding, ASEAN can’t engage political leaders to implement the policy or initiatives at the national level.

#40 Non-ASEAN

6.5 Limited Structures for Higher Education Harmonisation

Earlier sections in the chapter identified the absence of some structural conditions for a common space in HE in ASEAN. More specifically, Section 6.1 outlined concerns regarding national conditions to accommodate increased regional academic mobility. Section 6.2 detailed the issues concerning functional instruments or ASEAN HE policy infrastructure. Section 6.4 outlined the lack of effective regional funding mechanisms for promoting HE harmonisation initiatives. This section identifies concerns as regards two additional significant structural conditions: a regional public outreach system to promote HE information and harmonisation initiatives, and the M&E systems.

Important concerns were those regarding the lack of effective regional HE information systems to promote ASEAN policy and strategy with regard to HE harmonisation. According to some representatives of the key actors, despite the emergence of HE harmonisation discussions and initiatives, specific goals and strategies remain unclear. One regional organisation director viewed HE harmonisation among the AMS as being challenging because 'the way to do the HE area is still not clear at the policy
level’ (#35 Thailand). A senior government official also made the comment: ‘the most important difficulty and also a challenge is to make a very clear and feasible goal’. This participant elaborated further on this issue by comparing the situation of HE harmonisation in Europe with that of ASEAN: ‘it is very clear in Europe that in the end we’d like that and that. Every country in that agreement will adapt the HE system, for instance three years plus one. But in ASEAN, there is no specific thing like this’ (#13 Vietnam).

The lack of HE information and communication systems reflects the limited regional structures of HE harmonisation shapes by ASEAN’s minimal institutionalism, as discussed in Chapter Three. In addition, the internal structure of the AMS plays a crucial role given that transparency in HE information directly concerns the autonomy of HEIs and the public outreach of information regarding HE at the domestic level. A university rector stressed the limited public access to information in Myanmar, that the information regarding regional HE collaborative activities is normally provided by the government, which has supreme authority over information announcements and selection procedures (#19 Myanmar). This situation may limit equal opportunities for prospective participants in HE harmonisation initiatives.

Current progress towards establishing a M&E system in the education sphere was reported to be limited. Some interviewees commented on a lack of effective follow-up systems in ASEAN to monitor the progress of HE harmonisation and provide updated statistical data (#13 Vietnam and #40 Non-ASEAN). This issue was evident as this thesis was conducted as the researcher encountered challenges in acquiring statistical data on the progress of HE harmonisation.

6.6 Minimal Institutionalisation: Governance and Leadership

Reported issues concerning governance structures and leadership include those related to a multistakeholder approach; the leadership capacity of the key actors; and coordination among the key actors or cross-organisational relationships. In addition to suggesting key impediments regarding the aforementioned aspects, these issues contribute to an analysis of the characteristics of HE regionalisation and an organisational approach, as outlined in Chapter Two.
6.6.1 A Multistakeholder Approach

At a glance, the HE collaborative framework in ASEAN seems to involve the complementary roles of state and non-state actors from multiple levels. The literature on Southeast Asian HE harmonisation emphasises the importance of a multistakeholder approach. According to Yavaprabhas (2014, p. 90), five types of key actors are crucial to driving Southeast Asia towards successful HE harmonisation: the governmental sectors responsible for HE; QA agencies, regional organisations; HEIs; and others such as the employment sector and student unions.

However, an analysis of the characteristics of, and an organisational approach towards, ASEAN HE harmonisation in the previous chapter emphasises the internally driven or HE-centric governance structure. In other words, the key actors appeared to be mainly from the HE sector. Despite the broad acceptance that engaging the employment sector and students in the process is important to improve the effectiveness of HE harmonisation instruments and initiatives, these actors tend to have a limited role in ASEAN. Some interviewees referred to the employment sector and students but mainly in terms of being direct beneficiaries rather than key drivers of the process.

The findings support the importance of a multistakeholder approach and how it distinguishes ASEAN HE harmonisation from the BP (Yavaprabhas, 2014, pp. 93-94). In particular, the industrial sector or employers play a much less significant role in this region than in Europe. Limited engagement of the employment sector may further emphasise the issue of a holistic approach to HE development, particularly the minimal linkages between HE and the industrial sector, as discussed earlier in the chapter. While student unions play an important role in governing the European harmonisation process, students are not encouraged to become involved in university management in most AMS. This also means limited student participation in HE harmonisation decision-making in ASEAN. The current situation accentuates the emphasis of this thesis on the importance of engaging actors beyond the HE sector, as further discussed in the following chapter.
6.6.2 The Leadership Role and Capacity of Key Actors

Supporting the assumption often reiterated in this thesis that ASEAN’s cognitive priors influence the way HE regionalisation develops, the interview findings suggest the influence of soft leadership in ASEAN regionalism is reflected in ASEAN HE harmonisation. One regional organisation representative emphasised the slow progress of HE harmonisation initiatives in ASEAN and related the situation to the lack of strong leaders (#40 Non-ASEAN). According to one university rector, ASEAN HE harmonisation struggles because ‘nobody [in the AMS] has enough power to help others raise everything [to advance progress]’ (#28 Vietnam). There are several factors limiting the capacity of key actors to lead HE policy harmonisation, some of which have been briefly mentioned in previous sections. These are presented in three levels: regional organisations, national governments, and HEIs.

Regional Organisations

Concerns were expressed about the absence of regional organisations to systematically lead and effectively monitor HE harmonisation initiatives. The current interests of the core regional body or ASEC are economic and political security. HE issues have not been prioritised in ASEAN’s education policy platforms for senior officials and ministers. A dean of an HEI noted that ‘the main concern of ASEC is not education […] For the ASED itself, if you go back and see the agenda, most of that is about basic education’ (#25 Thailand).

Supporting the previously mentioned concerns regarding the focus on basic education, some interviewees viewed basic education as being the main concern of many AMS due to the level of development and the current efforts towards UNESCO’s MDG (#25 Thailand and #39 Thailand). A senior government official explained: ‘the reason HE harmonisation agenda hasn’t been raised much at the ASED is mainly because it hasn’t been raised during SOM-ED. Currently, the delegates are mostly from basic education’ (#10 Thailand). Although the AUN promotes HE regionalisation under the umbrella of ASEAN, it is viewed as having limitations in terms of leadership capacity. According to an HEI representative, ‘the AUN serves only a small number of universities. They cannot do much. Also, their budget is partly from the Thai government and their budget is shrinking every year’ (#25 Thailand).
SEAMEO is perceived as a potential leader since it has a comparable policy platform to ASEAN with a more specific focus on education development in Southeast Asia. However, according to one university dean, ‘if you are talking about [the] SEAMEO Secretariat, their main concern is on basic education’ (#25 Thailand). Although SEAMEO RIHED oversees HE, limited financial and human resources remain among its important constraints. Furthermore, RIHED has been in a transitional period in terms of managerial and organisational restructuring in recent years.

Despite the limited leadership capacities of regional organisations in driving HE harmonisation, they play a more predominant role than other types of actors, particularly the member states. One regional organisation representative believed that many things have started but the initiatives are mostly initiated by the regional organisations like RIHED, AUN, ASAIHL rather than the member countries (#40 Non-ASEAN).

**National Governments**

The limited leadership role of the AMS in actively promoting HE harmonisation concerns several factors, some of which were mentioned earlier in the chapter. Primarily, the current economic status of many AMS results in the inadequate resources to promote the HE harmonisation initiatives and unequal national representation in the process. One regional organisation representative viewed that many countries in ASEAN are still weak in economics with low-income population. Singapore is established but too small and it looks forward to a global level (#40 Non-ASEAN). According to a senior national government official, ‘financial constraints limit their [the less affluent AMS] capability to apply commitment and agreement with ASEAN’ (#13 Vietnam).

The lack of leadership of the AMS fundamentally concerns the limited political will and commitment at the national level, which are shaped by several ideational barriers mentioned in Section 6.2. According to a regional organisation representative, ‘we are facing a challenge at both levels of commitment: policy and operational levels’ (#32 Singapore). For the policy level, a deputy dean of an HEI argued that ‘I don’t think there’s a political will and I don’t think the policy makers understand the processes very well’ (#26 Thailand). This view supports the belief of a regional organisation
representative that there is no strong political will of the ASEAN countries to create a higher education area (#40 Non-ASEAN).

In addition to the emphasis on the political will of political leaders at the policy level, commitment from the operational level is no less important. A university dean stressed the importance of the commitment of policymakers responsible for HE at the national level. The heads of the operational level are particularly important since ‘they are the ones who push the policy forwards. As for ministers, usually their attention is more towards basic education. Also, many ASEAN countries have frequent changes of ministers (#25 Thailand). Moreover, there is an emphasis on the willpower and commitment of university administrative and academic staff, which will be discussed in the next subsection on the university level.

The minimal degree of commitment from the national level challenges progress towards developing regionally agreed HE harmonisation mechanisms, which strengthen ASEAN HE policy infrastructure. A regional organisation representative referred to the case of developing a regional qualification framework or ‘the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework’ as an example of the currently limited level of commitment from the national level. According to this interviewee, ‘the reason why it’s called ‘reference’ is because this is just a guiding document. It’s not going to be something that the member states will need to legally bind themselves to. That shows you the commitment of the AMS’ (#32 Singapore).

The limited national leadership in HE harmonisation may be predominantly shaped by ASEAN’s cognitive priors embedded in the ‘ASEAN Way’ of region-building, particularly the respect for sovereignty and the non-intervention principle. According to a university president, ‘the sense of nationalism is very strong. When you talk about regional grouping, some aspects of sovereignty should be surrendered for the common good. That’s a big challenge’ (#20 Philippines). Each nation state aspires to safeguard the uniqueness of its educational legacy and is unwilling to be dictated to regarding their respective HE policy and systems. Enhancing HE harmonised conditions challenges norms that are inherent in the HE systems of the AMS since the process may involve adjustments of national regulations and legislation. According to a university director, HE harmonisation in this region is ‘always struggling. Changes to
educational systems will need laws. You need to enact legislation of that and it’s not very easy. That could be a hindrance to this slow process’ (#22 Philippines).

**HEIs**

The limited leadership capacities of HEIs in driving the HE harmonisation agenda at the institutional level appeared to be an important challenge. The findings from this thesis support the arguments of Hawkins (2012) who suggests that the main difficulties in implementing HE regionalisation initiatives are attributable to the implementers. The findings also support the view of Yavaprabhas (2014): ‘it seems that individual HEIs still have not sufficiently cooperated to allow significant progress’ (p. 93). A university dean described the current situation and suggested some issues that may limit the leadership capacity of HEIs:

> Can the universities do it [drive HE harmonisation processes] by themselves? Autonomy is not quite the same. Thailand and Singapore are quite autonomous but Singapore always aims for the West. Malaysia is quite centralised so the vice-chancellor can only do something, not everything. Universities in other countries may want to do it, like the Philippines and Indonesia, but they usually don’t have budget to do all of this. Brunei is so small and there are only few universities and they want to promote internationalisation. Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, they don’t have budget for promotion. Vietnam maybe coming up but still they have more to cover, not only this HE cooperation.

> #25 Thailand

The enactment of a series of HE reforms to increase HEI autonomy in recent years has led to more autonomy in the region. However, the governance and administration of HE in some AMS remain strictly centralised. As an assistant vice-president of an HEI commented: ‘in Singapore, universities are autonomous. We make our own decisions. We don’t need to consult the Ministry of Education. Things can be done directly from the university but I think the situation is different in some countries’ (#23 Singapore).

Another factor that may limit the leading role of HEIs involves a preference for bilateral agreements and networking among universities, rather than intergovernmental platforms, due to convenience. According to one senior university representative, ‘government tends to move slowly, so it’s always faster to collaborate through universities. Many universities in this region like Thailand, and Malaysia are very autonomous and if you work at the university level, things will move much faster’ (#23 Singapore). A university director added, ‘proceeding HE harmonisation on the university network basis is more preferable at the moment since working at the
national level requires national legislative action, which takes time and is difficult’ (#22 Philippines).

The main concerns on current HE harmonisation mechanisms were directed towards the convenience in proceeding with HE cooperation. According to a university director, ‘some universities don’t need this multilateral agreement’ (#16 Indonesia). A university deputy dean provided the case of a regional credit transfer system:

We might be lucky enough to get the ACTS but again, when you’re talking about things in practice, I think HEIs still prefer using bilateral agreements. It’s convenient to have the bilateral agreement between the two institutions and agree on the grading. You don’t have to use the ACTS because it’s easier. It’s more complicated to convert the grades in accordance with the ACTS.

#26 Thailand

The increasing importance of HE internationalisation is another important factor that may limit the leading role of HEIs in HE harmonisation. On the one hand, an international HE context prompts regional interaction in HE since the increased importance of an international dimension in HE necessitates cross-border academic mobility. On the other hand, the increased focus of local HEIs on the internationalisation of HE strategy simultaneously hinder regional HE harmonisation efforts. As noted by a head of a regional organisation, ‘university students and faculty members from universities in the region are interested in doing something internationally’ (#37 Thailand).

Given the importance of the prestige and reputation of prospective collaborators to the willingness of HEIs to collaborate, regional cooperation does not seem to be the core priority or primary interest for many HEIs. As a regional organisation director explained, ‘there is limited interest in intra-regional collaboration because most universities with rich experiences, resources, and expertise on the state of the art of the subject area of collaboration are viewed to lie outside of the Southeast Asian region’ (#37 Thailand). These findings further accentuate the emphasis of this thesis on ideational barriers and support Zirat and Jantan (2008) on the importance of improving social perceptions to the successful implementation of HE harmonisation.
6.6.3 Coordination

Examining coordination among the key actors responds to an additional scope for examining Knight’s organisation approach, as outlined in Chapter Two. At a glance, a different combination of key actors in the governance of a regional HE collaborative framework in Asia appears to be complementary (Hirosato, 2014, p. 149; Kuroda, Yuki, & Kang, 2014, p. 58). However, analysis of the findings reveals two coordination issues that might hinder ASEAN HE harmonisation: coordination among key organisations; and coordination of the commitment of the AMS on various collaborative platforms.

Among the concerns about key regional organisations, there appeared to be contrasting views on the complementarity of the two important organisations – ASEAN as a core regional body in this geopolitical framework, and SEAMEO as a regional organisation with a mandate to develop education in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, the complementary role between ASEAN and SEAMEO is emphasised in the ASCC, as stated in Chapter Three. The two were perceived to be parallel platforms given that the policy platforms of SEAMEO at the senior officials and ministerial levels progress in conjunction with ASEAN’s education policy platforms.

The SEAMEO-ASEAN Secretariats Coordination Meeting has been organised annually since 2011 (SEAMEO Secretariat, 2013). According to one head of a regional organisation, ‘the dual system that we [ASEAN and SEAMEO] have enhances each other and opens up more opportunities to work hand in hand. We meet each year to discuss a joint work plan and decide on what will be the duplication and new initiatives’ (#39 Thailand). A regional organisation representative noted that ‘the previous meeting was in June 2013, in which we also shared the ASEAN Secretariat and SEAMEO Secretariat coordination work plan and joint work plan. We explore what we should do and how we can achieve our goals together’ (#34 Indonesia).

On the other hand, despite existing efforts made to synergise work plans, some interviewees suggested a possible governance issue due to the implicit contestations between the two organisations. A regional organisation representative revealed concerns about the ‘coordination between the stakeholders in ASEAN HE collaboration, especially ASEAN and SEAMEO. The issue is how they can share their work plan and ensure their activities are not overlapping with each other’ (#34
Indonesia). In addition, a university dean noted the sensitivity of using the term ‘ASEAN’ in naming regional initiatives since ‘the use of the term ASEAN may be an issue for SEAMEO’ (#25 Thailand). This interviewee also viewed that the sensitivity could be attributed to the difference in terms of membership between ASEAN and SEAMEO. For instance, Timor-Leste is a Member State of SEAMEO but not of ASEAN (as of June 2018). SEAMEO has members that are institutions while ASEAN only has member states. Moreover, historical developments of the two organisations may result in contested leadership. While ASEAN has expanded HE regionalisation initiatives in recent decades, SEAMEO was established two years prior to ASEAN with one of its strategic goals being ‘to be a regional leader in the advancement of education, science and culture’ (SEAMEO Secretariat, n.d.). According to a director of a regional organisation, SEAMEO envisages itself as a ‘single window in education for ASEAN’ (#39 Thailand). This reflects SEAMEO’s position as a central entity to promote regional initiatives concerning education in this region.

Coordination between ASEAN and SEAMEO tends to influence the relationship between the organisations under their umbrella – AUN and SEAMEO RIHED. On the one hand, the two appear to complement one another since AUN and SEAMEO RIHED focus on different types of key actors. A director of a regional organisation argued that the AUN and SEAMEO RIHED work well alongside each other because they employ two different models: ‘RIHED has membership for country whilst AUN basically has a membership system for university’ (#37 Thailand). On the other hand, some interviewees raised the need for improving synergies between the work plans of the key organisations. A deputy director of a regional organisation commented on the current perception on contested leadership: ‘SEAMEO RIHED and the AUN are not competing. We are somewhat complementing one another but the views from outside still have a lot of questions on what kind of things we do’ (#38 Thailand).

The aforementioned situation concerning coordination may account for the incremental progress of the HE harmonisation agenda. Specifically, there is a lack of an appropriate channel for developing a political approach to generate sufficient

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25 After the reorganisation in 1993, RIHED was established as the regional centre of SEAMEO SEAMEO RIHED, n.d. The AUN was established under the umbrella of ASEAN in 1995.
political support for HE regionalisation initiatives. Although SEAMEO RIHED has been actively driving the HE harmonisation efforts, the policy-making bodies of SEAMEO or SEAMEC can take the HE harmonisation agenda up to the ministerial level. The ASEC could lead the HE harmonisation agenda to the highest level of political leadership in the AMS or the heads of states through the ASEAN Summit. However, despite the potential contribution of the ASEC to progressing the HE harmonisation agenda, ASEC may be reluctant to provide active leadership so that it can avoid tensions and duplication with SEAMEC. As a government representative commented:

ASEAN is basically a political and economic platform. If ASEAN shifts its attention to education, it will lead to duplication with other regional organisations in the field of education. [...] Even ASEAN has that capacity to push the agenda forward to the top, how do you move that education concern in SEAMEO to ASEAN? It will become a duplication.  

#7 Malaysia

The second aspect regarding the coordination issue involves concerns, particularly of regional organisation representatives, about the difficulty of coordinating the commitment and priorities of the AMS among the key players. According to a regional organisation representative, who considered coordination a primary challenge, there is the presence of various stakeholders such as SEAMEO, ASEAN, ASEM, and the UNESCO-Asia Pacific (#33 Indonesia). A senior regional organisation representative suggested, ‘it would be best if project proponents or Member States or a particular country prioritises their planning or their future activities and initiatives as to which platform they would like to pursue and prioritise’. However, the AMS may not consider it necessary to prioritise or commit to a certain multilateral platform in practice. As this participant concluded: ‘in the end, these platforms are basically just a vehicle to accommodate their interests’ (#32 Singapore).

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified several challenges encountered by the key actors in driving HE harmonisation initiatives in ASEAN. The findings support Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework, which emphasises the predominant role of local cognitive priors and agencies in determining the path of new international norms. HE harmonisation norms and ideas were scrutinised by local actors to assess how these norms might be in congruence with the domestic context and normative priors. Thus,
although the European BP might constitute a fundamental source of inspiration, ASEAN’s idiosyncrasies require the development of a unique model of ASEAN HE harmonisation.

The previous chapter presented the drivers of ASEAN HE harmonisation. This chapter discussed several factors impeding the efforts of the key actors. Understanding these key drivers and impediments is crucial to further analyse the key conditions for constructing an ASEAN common space in HE, which are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7
THE WAY FORWARD

The previous chapters have discussed the drivers of and impediments to ASEAN HE harmonisation. Drawing on these factors and an analysis of the key actors’ views on the key conditions required for developing the progress of HE harmonisation, this chapter discusses several key considerations for a common space in HE in ASEAN. Supporting the preliminary assumption of this thesis concerning key conditions, this chapter argues for the significance of further improving the ideational and structural conditions.

The most fundamental consideration concentrates on ideational conditions. In particular, there is a need to further cultivate the political will of ASEAN’s leaders, ensure practitioners’ commitment and prioritisation, and develop the societal values with regard to the importance of HE harmonisation in ASEAN. In addition, strengthening structural conditions to provide a more enabling context for HE harmonisation is crucial. The emphasised structural conditions are: 1) the development of an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; 2) the adoption of functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; 3) the development of a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; 4) the strengthening of the M&E system; and, finally, 5) the improvement in the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives.

In addition to considerations for improving the ideational and structural conditions for an ASEAN common space in HE, the chapter discusses the leadership role of the key actors in improving these conditions. The region-building perspective and historical institutional framework discussed in Chapter Two are revisited to analyse the path dependence of HE harmonisation in ASEAN and the role of ASEAN as a regional body. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the unintended consequences from increased regional HE cooperation, which require careful consideration to ensure positive long-term outcomes. Finally, the chapter discusses the implications beyond HE harmonisation in the ASEAN region.
7.1 Towards an ASEAN Common Space in Higher Education

This thesis proposes several areas of key consideration for developing an ASEAN common space in HE, as shown in Figure 7.1. The fundamental consideration concentrates on the ideational construction of ASEAN values and HE harmonisation, particularly for the ASEAN leaders, policy makers, practitioners, and the public. In addition, the strengthened structural conditions that provide a more enabling context for increased HE interactions are critical. Emphasis on the paramount importance of ideational and structural conditions echoes both constructivism and institutionalism approaches to key conditions, as outlined in Chapter Two. Furthermore, these key considerations reflect the balance within Knight’s FOPA model to HE regionalisation, as introduced in Chapter Two.

Figure 7.1: Areas of Key Consideration for an ASEAN Common Space in Higher Education

Supporting the emphasis of this thesis on ideational construction, several interviewees emphasised that improving ideational conditions is fundamental to a common space in HE. Important considerations include cultivating the political will of the ASEAN leaders; improving the commitment of policy makers and practitioners; making the
HE harmonisation agenda a priority at the policy and operational levels; and promoting societal values related to region-building and HE harmonisation. However, these attitudinal conditions do not simply emerge – they rest upon a nurtured structural context for cooperation. Reflecting the preliminary assumption regarding key conditions, the findings from this thesis emphasise the need to develop structures for a common space in HE. These include: 1) developing an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; 2) adopting functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; 3) developing a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; 4) strengthening the M&E system; and, finally, 5) improving the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives.

Emphasising the importance of a multistakeholder approach and jazz management in the governance architecture, the findings suggest that ideational and structural conditions need to be developed by various types of the key actors such as government agencies, HEIs, regional organisations, and industries. The optimal mix of actors is crucial for creating ‘the most appropriate balance of bottom up and top down, informal and formal, ad hoc and intentional strategies’ in the HE harmonisation process (Knight, 2013b, p. 369). To further improve the current progress of a common space in HE, the enhanced leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body is needed to drive the HE harmonisation agenda through more formal and top-down approaches. The findings from this thesis support the preset codes regarding the potential role of ASEAN, as outlined in Chapter Three. These are further generating political support for the HE harmonisation agenda; empowering the capacity of key actors with an HE harmonisation mandate; establishing an HE harmonisation fund; and promoting public outreach systems on HE information and harmonisation.

7.1.1 Ideational Conditions

Chapter Six identified the ideational forces among the key impediments of key actors to promoting HE harmonisation. This chapter further underlines their importance given attitudinal factors were the most referred to conditions in the interviews. Primarily, developing the political will and beliefs of the ASEAN leaders would be required to steer progress. In addition, nurturing HE policy makers’ disposition and agreement to accept the need for common policy goals remains a crucial step.
Importantly, it is an urgent task for the key actors to further promote an ASEAN collective identity and the social perception in the AMS on the significance of region-building and HE harmonisation.

Promoting political will at the planning and implementation stages is a crucial step. Considering that ASEAN progresses on an intergovernmental basis, the primary ideational condition involves the political will and beliefs of the ASEAN leaders. A regional organisation representative suggested, ‘we need to make sure that they [the member states] believe in the course. They agreed that harmonisation of HE is needed but as of now, not “all” member states see the value of regional harmonisation in the HE sector’ (#32 Singapore).

As defined in Chapter Two, political will in this thesis refers to both the national level, which focuses on the political will of political leaders or heads of state and policy makers in HE, and the institutional level that encompasses the interests and commitment of HEI leaders and managers. According to a deputy director of a regional organisation, ‘if we have commitment from both sides, top down and bottom up, I believe it would make things move forward’ (#38 Thailand). Nonetheless, particular emphasis appears to be on political will at the national level, and specifically the head of states, since it potentially stimulates resources and implementation. As a senior government official explained:

If I have to select one thing that would be the political will of ASEAN leaders because that is the highest level of leadership. [...] Once they see that the higher education harmonisation process within ASEAN is very important, they can do a lot. They can make good corridors, make good policy and even require other ministries, like finance, investment, to place it as priority, to funding, etc. So I think the political will is the most important.

#13 Vietnam

Developing the commitment and priority of the key actors the implementation level is crucial considering that commitment alone seems insufficient, as the progress of regional initiatives could stagnate in the presence of commitment. As the findings in Chapter Six showed, a regional organisation representative illuminated the subject with an example from an ASEAN meeting: ‘although the commitment is there, somehow they [the AMS] cannot reach consensus. It’s a very difficult situation but in ASEAN it can happen’ (#33 Indonesia). A deputy director of a regional organisation had shared a similar experience and assumed the possible reasons behind the lack of progress despite the presence of commitment as: ‘these high ranking people have a lot
of things to do and these things might queue up in their to-do list. They might have many priorities and are very busy so they don’t respond to the ideas that are being proposed and agreed upon’ (#38 Thailand).

For effectively implementing the HE harmonisation initiatives, further developing ideational forces and societal values regarding regional development is a critical consideration. A senior university representative noted that in the global market, ‘we should not be competing within ourselves. We should come and compete in the world as ASEAN, not as Malaysia, not as Thailand, not as Singapore. We should compete as ASEAN for international students for example’ (#7 Malaysia). Cultivating ASEAN values and identity among the ASEAN people is particularly important considering the current situation as emphasised by a university vice-chancellor:

> The main inhibitor is a lack of imagination […] to imagine precisely the establishment in the administration of education institutions to be directed to the region sphere. Many institutions particularly those funded by the state have the responsibility to support the agenda of the state, right? But in thinking that the states, and all of the other institutions alongside it, have to see themselves in regional terms, if this region is to be invented, I don’t think we are there yet.

#21 Philippines

Current efforts to promote awareness of ASEAN and an ASEAN identity tend to focus on youth, since this group accounts for future development. Further to this, the youth potentially provide a more positive response to the idea of region-building than older generations who have been exposed to historical conflicts with neighbouring countries. The fruits of efforts to promote the awareness of ASEAN and an ASEAN identity among young people were evident following the 2014 ASEAN Awareness Survey which has as its respondents over 4,000 undergraduate university students from 19 flagship universities in the region. The survey found that the majority were aware of ASEAN. For instance, most of them could list the 10 AMS and identify seven on the map, 85% could identify the ASEAN flag, and almost half knew the founding year of ASEAN (Lee, 2015).

However, knowing about ASEAN is one thing; actually valuing ASEAN is another. Further cultivating the social perceptions of academics and students remains a critical task to successfully construct a common space in HE. As Zirat and Jantan (2008) suggest, ‘there is a need to understand and mitigate (if necessary) the social perceptions, particularly those of academics and students’ (p. 27). This argument supports the findings in Section 6.2 that there appeared inadequate ideational forces to
promote HE harmonisation, which are predominantly derived from a lack of ASEAN values due to the ‘within the nation’ and ‘beyond the region’ mindset. To enhance the effective implementation of regional HE initiatives, academics can play a greater role in cultivating regional values in students. For instance, a university vice-rector suggested that academics can ‘explain the benefits of going to neighbouring countries. We don’t have to spend as much as the living cost is not too different. The food and culture is quite similar also, so it’s easy to get accustomed to’ (#15 Cambodia).

A comprehensive or holistic approach to HE harmonisation development requires urgent attention. This could mean generating cross-sectoral regulations to facilitate regional HE mobility such as immigration, procedures for academic mobility, and special tuition fees for ASEAN students. A holistic approach also means further promoting a shared perspective that HE development is critical to national economic growth and a fundamental foundation for the ASEAN Community. One regional organisation representative emphasised the importance of increased connection in many fields in developing the ASEAN Community. In particular, HE is one of the most important fields for ASEAN development (#40 Non-ASEAN). According to one director of a regional organisation:

We should look at the ASEAN Community not just focusing on or emphasising economic integration, but we need to see the economic development as something that is built on or sits on some foundations. Those foundations need to be strong. And one key foundation of economic development is education, and higher education in particular.

#37 Thailand

Although there have been efforts to raise awareness among the key actors about HE harmonisation, promoting their understanding of the key notion and the importance of this process remains a critical task. According to a senior university representative, ‘in ASEAN, I’m not sure whether the policy makers understand the concept of harmonisation and see the importance of us having the comparable policies, tools, and measures to refer to’ (#26 Thailand).

Responding to one of the ideational barriers presented in Chapter Six, it is important to shift the understanding of the HE harmonisation process from being linear to a complex to multidimensional process whereby different actors work in tandem. A senior regional organisation representative explained that the development of an RQF is sometimes seen as an ambitious move since ‘some ASEAN member countries do not even have their own qualification framework at the national level’. Nevertheless,
according to this interviewee, HE harmonisation initiatives must progress simultaneously at the national and regional levels. To tackle the increased challenges in an international context nowadays, ‘these national and regional initiatives have to go hand in hand’ (#32 Singapore).

The aforementioned considerations for developing the ideational conditions are fundamental since they potentially shape the political will of the ASEAN leaders regarding an ASEAN common space in HE, which is required to develop structural conditions. A university president indicated that the political will of the leaders is the key condition and emphasised the importance of their commitment to improving structural conditions. Resources from the AMS dedicated to promoting the HE harmonisation initiatives were considered to be of particular importance. According to this interviewee, ‘it [HE harmonisation] will not happen without the commitment of the top because the harmonisation of HE process requires the commitment of resources and that’s decided by the top leaders. They commit the resources and budget of the country’ (#20 Philippines).

7.1.2 Structural Conditions

While ideational conditions constitute a foundation for a common space in HE, improving its effectiveness requires several structural considerations to provide an enabling cooperative context. Supporting the preliminary assumption regarding structural conditions identified in Chapter One, the findings suggest the need to further 1) develop an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; 2) adopt functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; 3) develop a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; 4) strengthen the M&E system; and 5) provide supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives, as further discussed below.

A Funding Mechanism

Developing a more concrete ASEAN funding mechanism dedicated to promoting HE harmonisation is one of the most significant structural conditions. As the findings on impediments in Chapter Six revealed, the main concerns of key actors tend to be those of resources. In particular, resources are inadequate in supporting the mushrooming
regional HE development initiatives. Furthermore, there were concerns regarding the sustainability of current funding mechanisms that have limited national contributions, and mainly rely on external partners or individual countries and HEIs. A university dean emphasised the need to establish a regional endowment fund as an important condition to promote HE harmonisation:

If you want to advance this process, harmonisation, ASEANISATION, or integration, maybe what you need to do is to set up a kind of endowment fund for promoting an HE area in Southeast Asia or ASEAN. With this HE fund, you let the agencies like AUN or SEAMEO RIHED be the secretariat and push forward the policy. Then, it will work because without money, you can’t do much.

#25 Thailand

Establishing a more effective regional funding mechanism for HE harmonisation a critical consideration for improving the availability of funding. Many interviewees referred to the AUN cost-sharing system as one of the current funding mechanisms for promoting HE collaboration in the region. However, this self-funding mechanism at the university level is inadequate and may not be sustainable due to its voluntary basis (#24 Singapore and #25 Thailand). Particular emphasis was placed on the need for an intra-regional funding mechanism contributed by the AMS. A regional organisation representative who views funding as an important key condition suggested, ‘it will be best if all, or some of the ASEAN initiative projects are driven by the member states. They have ownership and they can come up with more sustainable outcomes’ (#33 Indonesia).

Developing the ASEAN funding mechanism for HE harmonisation may lessen reliance on donors. Although the diversification of funding sources through donor support is vital given the majority of the AMS are less affluent nations, reliance on external grants has some limitations. As pointed out by a university representative, there could be a chance of grants being discontinued following a constant shift of funding allocation to align with their changing interests (#24 Singapore). Moreover, donor-oriented mechanisms may create a grant-led situation, which restricts the autonomy of the AMS to design their own regional HE projects. This is because the strategic directions and the ultimate leadership of how the funds are allocated may be largely shaped towards donors’ interests or priorities.

There is broad acceptance among the interviewees on the importance of encouraging national contributions to developing an ASEAN funding mechanism on HE
harmonisation. However, realising this vision remains challenging. Primarily, it requires the steady economic growth of all member states to move ASEAN from being donor reliant to becoming more self-sustained. As a university dean revealed, ‘we have to accept it [external grants] because we don’t have money. […] Without funding, we can’t proceed’ (#25 Thailand).

In addition, establishing such a funding mechanism may require some reconfiguration of norms embedded in the ASEAN funding system. The focus of previous analysis has been on a system of equal contributions (Rattanasevee, 2014). This means lowering the requirement to a minimal level so that all AMS can provide financial contributions. However, as Wanandi (2006) argues, ‘the system now, whereby every member pays the same amount, is no longer realistic. A new formula that is more tenable and could increase the budget adequately should be contemplated’ (p. 87).

Strengthening the current funding system would involve a careful consideration of the norms of reciprocity, which was identified from the interviewees’ concerns in Chapter Six. In particular, considering the tremendously growing responsibilities of ASEAN, interviewees suggested the need for financial contributions from all member states. A regional organisation representative believed that every AMS should provide a financial contribution. According to this interviewee, despite having new good initiatives, ASEAN has to worry about a funding mechanism since there is the lack of availability and sustainability in the funding. When there is inadequate funding, ASEAN cannot engage political leaders to implement the policy or initiatives at the national level (#40 Non-ASEAN).

This does not mean that every country must contribute the exact amount of funding. It can take the form of financial resources and in-kind contributions that help advance the progress (#39 Thailand). Some alternatives may include member contributions based on their economic power. The EU’s GDP-based arrangement is proposed as one of the solutions. According to Emmerson (2007), ‘this step [the GDP-based contribution] would free the Association’s budget from being limited to ten times what the poorest or least supportive member is willing to pay’ (p. 438).

In addition to the diversification of reliable funding sources through donor reliance and the national contributions to ASEAN funding mechanisms, generating income from the process to continuously promote its initiatives is needed to further improve
the sustainability of funding. ASEAN may develop means such as taxation, import duties or licensing as ways to generate its own revenue and engage with people in the ASEAN Community (Rattanasevee, 2014). Some options for generating revenue for ASEAN HE harmonisation could be the development of an ASEAN accreditation of degrees and qualifications system, an ASEAN language testing system, an ASEAN skilled labour mobility testing system, and professional development and employment skills training programmes. Simultaneously, it is important to ensure the transparency of funding allocation and its usage in accordance with the philanthropic purpose of developing HE harmonisation. This means ensuring the generated revenue is primarily used to further develop HE harmonisation instruments and promoting regional academic mobility, particularly expanding more HE opportunities for young people in the AMS regardless of their background.

In addition to promoting the availability and sustainability of resources, an ASEAN HE harmonisation funding mechanism is necessary for the effective implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives. In particular, it potentially provides appropriate incentives to engage practitioners in leading HE harmonisation initiatives. Currently, most academics are already burdened with heavy workloads. One university deputy vice chancellor touched upon this issue when he further added, ‘how can we make people work together? People like to work among themselves and they have a lot of work already. Asking them to do extra collaborative research is going to be a bit tough’ (#18 Malaysia).

**Functional Instruments**

Developing functional instruments are crucial for strengthening ASEAN policy infrastructure in HE. These instruments can be understood in relation to the action lines discussed within a functional approach in Chapter Five, which involve degree systems, QA systems, CTS and academic calendar systems. Harmonising CTS and QA instruments appear to be of highest priority given that these two areas dominate the interview data compared to all four action lines. A university deputy vice chancellor emphasised that promoting a credit transfer system and the regional level of accreditation to ensure the quality of HEIs are fundamental to HE harmonisation. The ASEAN Credit Transfer exercise ‘is a good start for us to understand the educational system of each university’ (#18 Malaysia). At the same time, some
interviewees believed agreement on the standards and procedure pertaining to QA is central to HE harmonisation (for example #12 Vietnam and #30 Malaysia).

Despite efforts to harmonise ASEAN HE systems, the findings from this thesis suggest the absence of concrete functional instruments to develop HE policy infrastructure in ASEAN. The absence of these instruments mainly stems from the lack of ideational conditions among the ASEAN people, particularly ASEAN awareness and collective identity, as presented in Chapter Six. Therefore, in addition to developing the aforementioned four systems in HE, functional instruments refer to the means to promote an ASEAN dimension in HE. In particular, developing functional instruments to further promote an ASEAN dimension to content and curricula is needed to cultivate ASEAN values and identity in young people.

Some actions contributing to functional instruments development are underway such as delivering ASEAN studies as university courses, conducting collaborative research on ASEAN topics, designing and evaluating ASEAN studies curricula, and establishing ASEAN studies centres at the national level. To further increase the impact of the HE harmonisation process, it is important that the ASEAN dimension is integral to undergraduate curricula. A university vice-president suggested, ‘ASEAN should be one subject for the first year student’ (#29 Vietnam).

In addition to introducing the concept of ASEAN in university courses, promoting an ASEAN dimension in HE curricula may include the further development of ‘ASEAN lecture notes’ as well as adding some ASEAN languages into the programme. As a university vice-president suggested:

> We might team up the professors. For instance, the professors in economics sit down and develop something for ASEAN instead of using lecture notes from the US and Australia. Why don’t we develop cases in ASEAN? My subject about water resources, I talk about the Mississippi river. Why not talk about the case of the Mekong River. I can see we can share a lot of subjects in common. The professors must develop what I would call ‘ASEAN lecture notes’.

#29 Vietnam

Another important consideration is further encouraging ASEAN language courses at universities. Although ASEAN languages have already been promoted by some HEIs, they still gain limited interest among local students. A vice-president suggested a step-by-step approach from introducing the concept of ASEAN to the larger step of ‘including some ASEAN languages as an elective programme, just next to English, it
could be Thai, Vietnamese, Malay as a way of expanding students’ knowledge. It’s something I often call “value added” into the programme’ (#29 Vietnam). Promoting a short-term ASEAN language exchange programme across ASEAN universities may suit the current situation and interests of many students. As a university representative commented: ‘even though students are willing to learn Thai for example, they feel that they are not proficient in Thai. If they go to a Thai university that uses Thai in classes and exams, they will be disadvantaged’ (#23 Singapore).

Developing functional instruments to enhance an ASEAN dimension is not exclusive to the HE level. As a university deputy vice-chancellor emphasised, ‘ASEAN awareness and understanding can be made by education in primary school. If they understand each other more, they will collaborate better when they become adults’ (#18 Malaysia). A university vice-president added that children are easier to communicate with than adults (#29 Vietnam).

Another important dimension of HE harmonisation instruments is internationalising ASEAN HE systems. Taking into account the findings on drivers, the predominant rationale in the AMS is to increase the legitimacy of ASEAN HE systems in a global setting. The role of HE harmonisation in building functional mechanisms to promote an international dimension supports the argument that a regional approach is an important way to improve the effectiveness of international collaboration and initiatives at the local level. The ultimate contributions to the global level need to be heightened considering that ‘global governance and individual state governance, as opposed to regional governance, are likely to remain important to the Asia-Pacific for several years to come, with regional organisations predominantly playing a useful adjunct, rather than primary, role’ (Foot, 2012, p. 142).

HE harmonisation does not only focus on enhancing regional HE cooperation but also stimulates HE internationalisation in ASEAN. As a university president commented:

HEIs in the ASEAN countries should embrace the concept, the ideas, and the move towards internationalisation. That’s important. Having a closed mind and looking only at the universities in the country would not make it possible to harmonise across the region.

#20 Philippines

The development of functional instruments to promote regional academic mobility is a primary example of contributions to HE internationalisation. Specifically, HE harmonisation develops functional instruments at the regional level alongside
consideration of international policies, structures, standards, and practices contributing to the compatibility of ASEAN HE systems in the international context. A senior government official provided the examples of harmonising several HE constituents: ‘the medium of instruction used in the institutions of higher learning, and the system of education, admission requirements, semester system, the academic calendar, the duration of study, module credit points, etc.’ (#1 Brunei).

Emphasising the function or potential role of HE harmonisation in promoting HE internationalisation involves the use of English in local universities. Encouraging international programmes and English courses at the domestic level is an important step considering that language differences have been impeding HE internationalisation. The importance of integrating English into local university teaching was noted by one university vice-rector: ‘when students study abroad, they want to use English […] it [promoting international programmes] might stimulate exchanges in this region. At my university, there are not many foreign students now because the majority of subjects are taught in Khmer’ (#15 Cambodia).

Although English has always been ASEAN’s official language for collaboration, further promoting it as a common working language in HE still remains a crucial step. A university president emphasised the need for using English as a common working language in HE in ASEAN, especially in graduate programmes (#20 Philippines). In addition, a senior Malaysian government official pointed out the need to encourage the use of English in both graduate and undergraduate programmes. The same government official reported existing attitudinal and language barriers in the Malaysian HE context, where HE internationalisation is flourishing compared to other AMS:

In Malaysia, one interesting thing is, which is not taken in a friendly manner, if we have 20 students in the class in the Malaysian universities and there are 3-4 students from overseas, that course needs to be taught in English, just because of 3-4 students. The other 17 Malaysian students have to understand English and they are not very happy that they have to do [the class] in English because of 3-4 students in the class.

#7 Malaysia

In addition to further overcoming the current language barriers in ASEAN, promoting the use of English in HE is necessary to further advance HE collaboration such as through joint degrees, human resources exchange (academics, students, and staff), research collaboration, journal platforms, and citation indexes. Importantly, having a
shared common language in HE is an essential foundation for developing an ASEAN HE information centre, which is further discussed in the next consideration regarding a public outreach system.

Bringing together HE regionalisation and internationalisation objectives, promoting courses on ASEAN studies taught in English in the local universities would promote an ASEAN dimension in HE while additionally fostering the use of English. As emphasised by a senior government official, ‘what needs to be done is organising specific courses in English meant for foreign students […] not many universities in Malaysia offer ASEAN studies using English as a medium of instruction’ (#7 Malaysia). Importantly, having ASEAN studies courses and programmes in English would provide a platform for further structuring ASEAN studies exchange programmes to promote cross-border academic mobility and knowledge sharing about ASEAN. Academic exchange in ASEAN studies is a critical step to enrich ASEAN values and the understanding of ASEAN development from the context of host countries.

In addition to increasing the opportunity to promote people-to-people connectivity and raise ASEAN awareness among ASEAN students, opportunities can be extended to students from other regions. These efforts ultimately contribute to realising a vision envisaged in the ASCC Blueprint 2025 launched in March 2016 for a ‘dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture, and heritage with the strengthened ability to innovate and proactively contribute to the global community’. The blueprint further advocates the promotion of ‘greater people-to-people interaction and mobility within and outside ASEAN’ through the development of ‘an innovative ASEAN approach to higher education’. This will ultimately promote ‘the free flow of ideas, knowledge, expertise and skills to inject dynamism within the region’ leading to “strengthen regional and global cooperation in enhancing the quality and competitiveness of higher education institutions’ across ASEAN (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016b, pp. 3 - 20).

While improving the effectiveness of the HE internationalisation of local HEIs, it is critical a philanthropic role for HE harmonisation also be ensured in terms of improving social justice. The mainstay practices of HE internationalisation tend to focus on academic cooperation with Western and developed countries, yet HE
harmonisation encourages domestic HE development in an inclusive manner. Importantly, regional HE harmonisation focuses on broadening opportunities for non-flagship universities or those beyond first tier universities, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, to reap the benefits of HE harmonisation. This could mean providing opportunities to less privileged groups to engage in regional HE activities and in international HE dynamics. For instance, amidst the increased significance of English for future graduates and the escalating fees of international programmes in ASEAN HEIs, it is important that the key actors take into account the benevolent role of HE harmonisation and encourage affordable international programmes in ASEAN HE systems.

Promoting a peaceful international society is another important function of HE harmonisation to be considered by the key actors. Of particular significance is the need to incorporate the core value of harmonisation into HE teaching. It potentially makes a contribution beyond the region and improves social justice. In addition to curriculum content, extra-curricular activities could be developed to further cultivate attitudinal values related to promoting a harmonious society in diversity.

A Public Outreach System

Developing a public outreach system at the national and regional levels for promoting transparency of information on domestic HE systems and HE harmonisation initiatives is critical. In particular, developing national and regional HE information centres potentially alleviates the limited transparency of information concerning HE systems and academic collaboration opportunities in the AMS. As Chapter Six revealed, the lack of effective regional HE information systems constrains public access and student participation in regional HE collaboration activities.

Developing national and regional HE information systems requires effort at the HEI, national and regional levels. At the HEI level, one director of a government agency suggested the importance of HE information accessibility to ensure ‘a reliable and accredited English version of information on the official websites, in addition to a national language’ (#5 Indonesia). At the national level, a director of a regional organisation emphasised the importance of having a national centre in each AMS to monitor all the degree programmes under HEIs. This may involve a network of
national HE information centres, which could be government agencies within the Ministries of Education or other institutions in each AMS. Each HEI would need to submit the details of their agreed-upon standards and courses to the national centre. If a company needed to hire a graduate from a university in Thailand, for example, this centre could provide information on whether the graduate met the required level of qualification (#35 Thailand).

In addition to providing a collective source of HE information for a regional database on HE of the AMS, these national efforts would serve the current demand for a more effective channel or ASEAN HE communication ‘hub’ to communicate information about HE collaboration and employment opportunities in ASEAN. As a senior government official suggested, ‘there should be a more aggressive information campaign by ASEAN perhaps. It needs to make ASEAN HE collaboration information available’ (#9 Philippines).

So as to further promote HE harmonisation initiatives and progress, the significant functions of a regional HE information system include generating public awareness and raising the understanding of policy makers and practitioners in the field of the HE harmonisation agenda. Although regional HE policy platforms such as RIHED and AUN are working to raise awareness of HE harmonisation, there appears to be a call for a more effective approach to disseminate information, particularly to prospective implementers. Fundamental to this approach is the need to ensure the clarity of structures, plans, and strategies regarding HE harmonisation. As suggested by one regional organisation representative, ‘there should be a clear guideline where those initiatives, for example harmonisation, can be moved forward’ (#33 Indonesia). A deputy director of a government agency further added:

> In MOET, there are some people who say that we agree that ASEAN needs to work together in order to make our HE community stronger, but sometimes we don’t know how to start, what to start, and how to have that process. […] We need a clear model of where we want to go and how to do it. 

#13 Vietnam

Considering that a lack of clarity will obscure future direction and undermine the value of HE harmonisation, ensuring that clear goals and strategies are developed and widely promoted to the key actors is a critical consideration. Yavaprabhas (2014) emphasises this as one of the most important conditions for the success of European HE harmonisation, ‘the Bologna lines have laid out a clear way and strategy that can
answer all of the “who, what, and when” questions’ (p. 82). Clarity potentially contributes to improving the effectiveness of progress monitoring instruments, particularly by developing clear and well-targeted indicators.

**The Progress Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System**

Concerning the minimal structures in ASEAN HE information systems that arise in the embryonic stage of regional M&E system, improving the HE harmonisation M&E system is an important consideration. In particular, there is an urgent need to develop a more effective regional system to assess progress and enhance our understanding of how and the extent to which ASEAN HE systems are ‘harmonised’. Currently, it is challenging to acquire official statistical information concerning ASEAN HE harmonisation initiatives and progress, as directly experienced during this study.

Important efforts may include developing indicators for assessing the progress of regional academic and employment such as the number of ASEAN students who participated in HE exchange programmes to ASEAN universities, the amount of graduates mobility, the urgently needed field of studies and employment skills, the number of universities employing certain regional QA and CTS systems, the number of joint degree programs, the number of awarded degrees, and the patterns of skilled labour mobility. In addition, studying the career paths of alumni of ASEAN academic collaborative programmes may improve our understanding of long-term results.

Developing the regional HE harmonisation M&E system and a periodic review of the related indicators are both necessary to ensure the increased visibility of impact, effectiveness, and quality of harmonisation initiatives, in relation to the stated goals. More specifically, developing statistical information on ASEAN HE harmonisation potentially provides evidence on the contributions of a regional approach to HE development. These efforts are crucial considering that HE regionalisation tends to be undervalued. Referring HE regionalisation as ‘quiet achievers’, Yang (2012) argues that HE regionalisation predominantly prompts HE interactions between ASEAN and China, especially the less privileged provinces in China.

Integrating the regional M&E system in HE harmonisation into ASEAN’s monitoring mechanisms is necessary for further developing the ASEAN Community. Primarily, strengthening ASEAN statistical systems and data on education is needed to further
develop the evaluative culture and enrich the statistical data of ASEAN. In the ASEAN Community Progress Monitoring System (ACPMS), there are a few indicators related to education and only two concern HE – the ASCC indicators on educational attainment and school enrolment. Importantly, improving the statistical data on HE further complements the ASEAN’s endeavour to monitor the general outcome of its integration policy initiatives such as a monitoring system for the ASEAN Community developed from the ASEAN Baseline Report (ABR) and other compliance monitoring efforts.

Moreover, systematically monitoring the progress and achievements of HE harmonisation potentially contributes to the M&E framework on ASEAN Connectivity. This means providing updated statistical reports and recommendations for improving people-to-people connectivity through HE harmonisation activities while ensuring the efforts do not replicate existing monitoring exercises and mechanisms already in place. Specifically, the efforts should complement the joint monitoring efforts among the ASEC, the AMS, and stakeholders on measuring the progress of ASEAN Community performance in the AMS. Developing ASEAN M&E systems in HE harmonisation may extend its contribution to the current lack of statistical data on service sectors. Several initiatives ‘are cross-sectoral and detailed statistical information on services trade flows are limited in availability’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2013, p. 137). This is based on an assumption that while HE provision is part of the service sector, HE harmonisation requires cross-sectoral efforts.

26 The ACPMS is ‘a statistical report which contains outcome indicators of progress towards the envisaged characteristics of the ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community pillars of the ASEAN Community’. It is sponsored by the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program (AADCP) Phase II (2008-19). AADCP is a partnership between ASEAN and Australia, through the ASEAN Secretariat and the Australian Government’s aid program, aiming to ‘strengthen ASEC’s capacity through hands-on joint activities, and improve the effectiveness of support through alignment, harmonisation and ownership’ (The ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II, n.d.).

27 This outcome indicator shows the highest level of schooling completed by the population aged 15-64 years old (ASEAN Secretariat, 2013).

28 This outcome indicator shows the number of enrolled students divided by the size of the corresponding school-aged population, which includes primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and gender (ASEAN Secretariat, 2013).

29 Some examples of the regular annual statistical publications of ASEAN include the ASEAN Statistical Yearbook, ASEAN Community in Figures (ACIF), AEC Chartbook, the ASEAN Statistics Leaflet and the ASEAN Statistics on Trade in Services (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014a, p. 14). In addition, there are the AEC Scorecard and the ASCC Scorecard, which are closely related to HE harmonisation efforts.
Improving the structural consideration on M&E system is necessary for cultivating an evaluative culture and practices in ASEAN. This is critical for the improvement of statistical data on education beyond ASEAN such as in Asia and the Asia–Pacific. Importantly, it could contribute to the accumulation and provision of up-to-date statistical information on education by relevant international organisations such as the ADB, UNDP, UNESCO, and the World Bank.

Improving ASEAN’s M&E systems requires the consideration of various aspects, particularly the instruments, institutions and personnel, and implementation and development, as shown in Table 7.1. Some considerations may reflect the methodology and steps in the stocktaking process of the BP, which has established a framework for monitoring and evaluating regional HE harmonisation (Rauhvargers, Deane, & Pauwels, 2009). Taking this framework and the interview findings and into account, this thesis suggests the following general guideline for further developing ASEAN’s M&E system in HE harmonisation.

Table 7.1: Considerations for the ASEAN Higher Education Harmonisation M&E System
Adapted from Rauhvargers, Deane, and Pauwels (2009)

| INSTRUMENTS | • Identify measurable objectives and time specific goals for systematic monitoring and development (by key actors: a multi-stakeholder approach) • Identify the quantifiable indicators and criteria for quantitative mechanism such as scorecard and develop the qualitative analysis in monitoring progress • Ensure the accuracy and consistency of indicators across jurisdictions |
| INSTITUTIONS & PERSONNEL | • Determine a central regional body to update statistical data (new or existing body) and key data sources • Nominate focal person at the national level to act as a conduit for information between regional and national level |
| IMPLEMENTATION & DEVELOPMENT | • Ensure key actors incorporate HE harmonisation objectives into their design of regional HE collaborative programmes • Periodically collect data from targeted data sources • Periodically develop and update additional indicators to better reflect progress towards the time specific goals of HE harmonisation • Make regular recommendations for policy and implementation development based on the findings. |
For greater depth and breadth of progress analysis, M&E instruments need to be developed by the key actors from various sectors. It is important that these actors identify the timelines and objectives that allow M&E exercises to encompass both qualitative issues for assessment and quantitative methods such as indicators and scorecards. To ensure the accuracy of statistical data, the government agencies responsible for education (Ministry of Education) in each AMS are the main sources for data collection. The nomination of a focal person from the responsible government agencies to act as a conduit for information between the national and regional levels is required to reduce any redundancy in data collection efforts.

It is important to have a central regional body responsible for the HE harmonisation M&E system. This regional body needs to ensure the accuracy and consistency of indicators across jurisdictions. Furthermore, it needs to ensure that the key actors incorporate HE harmonisation objectives and progress M&E into their HE initiatives management. To encourage public outreach and accessibility, this core body should update statistical data on progress and send this statistical data to the ASEAN HE information centre, as outlined in the consideration of a public outreach system, and related stakeholders.

Periodic reviews of statistical data from data sources and indicators are necessary to further improve the implementation and development of the M&E systems in HE harmonisation. In particular, the review would better reflect the identified time-specific goals of HE harmonisation and make more relevant recommendations for improving the effectiveness of policy and implementation regarding HE harmonisation initiatives. These procedures require close collaboration among the data sources at the national and supra-national levels such as the national statistical offices of the AMS, the statistical unit of ASEC, and ASEANstats with guidance from the ASEAN Community Statistical Systems (ACSS) Committee.

**National Conditions**

Improving national economic growth and developing cross-sectoral regulations are central to the development of ideational and structural conditions for a common space in HE in ASEAN. Primary emphasis is on developing national economic growth and reducing the development gap. As a deputy director of a regional organisation
commented: ‘there is only one necessary condition, which is the economic growth of the countries in the region itself. Each country should have their own economic growth in order to catch up with others in the region’ (#36 Thailand). A university vice-president added:

I think in the end, each nation has to generate the resource to allow their youth to experience harmonisation right? I mean, a regional fund can be setup, but it will not be sufficient to allow harmonisation broadly speaking. Therefore, each country has to become prosperous. There’s no way around it I think.

#21 Philippines

Of the several needs for improving the economic development level of all AMS, solving communication issues in regional cooperation is one. Currently, there are limited opportunities for face-to-face intensive communication due to financial constraints at the national and regional levels. While digital channels of communication can be a useful alternative, they cannot replace traditional face-to-face meetings given the increased depth of discussion required as HE collaboration is deepened. Additionally, web conferencing systems are not well-established in all the AMS due to their differing communication technology capabilities. As one university representative commented:

The chief quality officers are from the university in the region and the AUN is in Bangkok. We have to meet more. We only meet once a year. [...] Communication is not enough. There’re so many things going on. How do you discuss complex issues over emails? It’s difficult. We need a better system of communication. We need to meet more often. Internet conference calls may be a solution but this requires readiness and communication technology in each country.

#24 Singapore

Another important domestic condition emphasised in the interviews is the need to develop regulations at the national and university levels to support HE harmonisation. Governments and universities can play an important role by developing these regulations, which will be further discussed in the following section on the governance and leadership of key actors.

7.1.3 The Governance and Leadership Capacity of Key Actors

Responding to interviewees’ concerns on the governance architecture and leadership capacity of key actors in Chapter Six, this section emphasises the need for promoting a multistakeholder approach in driving ASEAN HE harmonisation. It is important to further engage various types of the key actors to encourage cross-sectoral strategies. Moreover, there is a need for empowering the leadership capacity of key actors,
particularly through closer coordination and synergies of work plans. Related to the leadership of key actors, the findings on governance support Yavaprabhas’s (2014, p. 101) argument for the use of jazz management in governing HE harmonisation. As discussed in Chapter Three, jazz management promotes a collective leadership approach by encouraging a rotation of leaders within a cooperative framework. The approach allows flexibility and improvisation in planning and implementation, which reflect ASEAN’s operational norms and working culture.

**A Multistakeholder Approach**

Despite efforts to engage various types of the key actors in the planning and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives, as mentioned in Chapter Five, there appears the demand for a greater balance among the key actors in the governance architecture if an ASEAN common space in HE is to be effectively developed. This demand supports the findings in previous chapters on HE sector-centric governance, which predominantly comprises the government agencies responsible for HE in the AMS, HEIs, and the regional organisations with education mandates.

Although the active role of HE actors is indeed essential, particularly to ensure that academic motivations are central to the HE harmonisation process, the findings suggest the need for further engaging the leadership of key actors beyond academe. As presented in Figure 7.1, this thesis identifies the following four groups of key stakeholders that are particularly important to the development of an ASEAN common space in HE: 1) the national government agencies responsible for HE; 2) HEIs; 3) regional organisations related to ASEAN HE collaboration; and 4) industry/employers.

In addition to the important role of governments and regional organisation, the thesis suggests further encouraging the employment sector in developing functional mechanisms to improve the practicality of ASEAN HE harmonisation mechanisms and initiatives. Moreover, the more active role of academics and students, which is included within HEIs, is particularly crucial for the successful implementation of HE harmonisation mechanisms. As a university representative commented on a regional credit transfer system, the ACTS, ‘having or developing rules is one thing but in practice, what sort of practice a university is using is another story. It may take some
time for people and HEIs to understand how important this [ACTS] is’ (#26 Thailand).

Overall, promoting the active role of these four groups of key stakeholders would contribute to the three-levelled mode of participation. Firstly, policy-level participation involves a series of intergovernmental negotiations that produce political outputs such as joint statements, policies, frameworks, and guidelines. Secondly, the implementation of these political mechanisms occurs at the national and university levels, for instance through national legislation and university policies. Finally, further improvement of the practicality of the instruments involves input from students, the employment sector, and the public (Yavaprabhas, 2014). Demand for the increased leadership role of the key actors is further discussed in the next section.

**Empowering the Leadership Role and Capacity of Key Actors**

Emphasising the importance of a multistakeholder approach – increasing the role and capacity of multiple key actors – is a crucial consideration for further improving the progress of ASEAN HE harmonisation. Of the four groups of key actors mentioned in the previous section, strengthening the leadership capacity of regional organisations was particularly emphasised. Empowering the capacity of regional organisations to lead HE harmonisation is significant in as much as they act as a catalyst in the process and as mediators among the key actors. Importantly, regional organisations predominantly drive the HE harmonisation agenda, particularly through a formal approach and political mechanisms. Moreover, they provide collaborative platforms to cultivate the political will of ASEAN’s leaders and the commitment of policy makers on HE harmonisation. As some interviewees noted, regional organisations develop political mechanisms such as joint statements, guidelines, and frameworks for each government to drive HE harmonisation efforts at the operational level (#9 Thailand and #25 Thailand).

There is a call for a stronger regional institution or secretariat to act as a leader to push forward the HE harmonisation agenda and follow up with relevant policies and initiatives. Rather than establishing new institutions or organisations specifically for driving HE harmonisation, interviewees tend to emphasise empowering existing regional organisations. Specifically, improving their effective coordination and the
synergy of work plans is necessary. As a deputy director of a regional organisation commented: ‘there’s quite a number of organisations working in higher education so if organisations can foster and synergise their efforts, things can be a bit more effective. Currently, the SEAMEO and ASEAN Secretariats co-organise the meeting so that they can synergise’ (#38 Thailand).

There have been efforts to improve coordination and synergise work plans among the key regional organisations in the field. For instance, as stated in Chapter Six, SEAMEO and ASEAN Secretariats have been working closely to update activities and indicate priorities on education, which form part of the SEAMEO-ASEAN Joint Work Plan for Implementation (SEAMEO Secretariat, 2013). In addition, some interviewees noted that several key organisations in the ASEAN HE collaborative framework, as identified in Chapter Three, closely collaborate to drive HE harmonisation. However, these efforts seem to be inadequate. One university manager suggested the need to improve the clarity of work divisions among key regional organisations:

Currently, we have many stakeholders, AUN, RIHED, AQAN, and so on. They should divide their work altogether and not duplicate each other. For example, you think about the different dimensions of HE in ASEAN. RIHED could do more on capacity building and HE management or something. Then, AUN focuses on other areas, maybe social cohesion among young people and so on. If you want to do the same thing, for instance, student mobility, SEAMEO RIHED can work on private universities and AUN on public universities. This model will be useful. If we have several programmes and we do the same thing, it’s just duplicating. It’s a pity that your efforts and expertise have to go in that direction.

#16 Indonesia

In addition to stimulating the progress towards regionalism in HE, further improving the synergy of work plans through closer collaboration among key regional organisations is a vital task for developing a stronger ASEAN Community. Increasing socialisation among regional organisations potentially leads to a regional identity and regional consciousness (Wunderlich, 2008c). Importantly, these regional efforts potentially strengthen the leadership role of national governments in driving HE harmonisation initiatives at the domestic level, as further discussed below.

An emphasis on regional organisations by no means undermines the importance of bilateral agreements. An analysis of the findings suggests that both bilateral and multilateral platforms are necessary since they open up windows for ASEAN HE collaboration. According to one regional organisation representative, ‘the ‘government
to government’ and ‘university to university’ approaches will remain important in the region’ (#32 Singapore). Strengthening the leadership role of key actors at the domestic level, particularly national governments and universities, in driving the HE harmonisation initiatives is critical since they determine the impact of HE harmonisation on the local context.

Given the prominence of ASEAN’s principles and norms in emphasising the respect for sovereignty, particular emphasis was placed on the leadership of all AMS. As one government official suggested, the ‘political masters’ or ‘the ASEAN leaders, prime ministers, and presidents must be committed to what we have decided at the officers’ level. They must commit resources for that […] in order to move things forward’ (#7 Malaysia). In addition to the leadership role of political leaders in each AMS, strengthening the leadership capacity of policy makers and practitioners in related government agencies is needed to improve the impact of HE harmonisation initiatives at the national level. As a university dean noted:

How far I’m satisfied with the progress? I think it’s moving but maybe this is the fastest that it can move. It cannot move faster than this, quicker than this, because we don’t have a kind of champion who wants to push through this kind of policy, not at the Minister level, not at the leader level, it has to be done at the secretary and director general level.  

#25 Thailand

It is crucial that the national governments develop national conditions for supporting the implementation of HE harmonisation, particularly HE policies to support HE harmonisation mechanisms. In addition, there is a need to further improve the collaborative environment such as through economic growth, political stability, and cross-sectoral regulations to facilitate increased regional academic mobility and HE interactions. As one university vice president suggested:

First of all is the barrier for harmonisation or requirements in term of visas, and especially study permits. There is a bureaucracy to protect both the sovereignty and the interest of individual countries and those structures of protection sometimes militate against the engagement with each other. I think facilitation, you know, sort of bringing down the barriers, putting up the structures that precisely not only make it possible, but easier to connect with others would be a big advancement. 

#21 Philippines

Moreover, the leadership role of relevant government agencies is needed to further promote the leadership capacity of universities. A university deputy vice chancellor noted: ‘it [the HE harmonisation process] requires will power at every level, both the state and the university. If the states do not facilitate the collaboration and leave it to
the university, it’s going to be tough’ (#18 Malaysia). It was suggested that ASEAN governments empower the leadership role of universities. This could fundamentally involve promoting the autonomy of ASEAN HEIs as was widely suggested as another approach to strengthen the leadership capacity of universities in driving HE harmonisation (for example #7 Malaysia, #15 Cambodia, #16 Indonesia, #25 Thailand, and #26 Thailand). Additionally, it was further advised that each government encourage the universities to develop policies to promote HE harmonisation mechanisms and initiatives. According to one government official, ‘the government can encourage the universities to define policy to support the ACTS. Some universities have the capacity to do it. They can have a policy and encourage their students to get some credits from other countries’ (#12 Vietnam).

It is crucial that HEIs further develop policies to encourage the regional dimension in HE. Some examples may include providing reduced tuition fees and scholarships for ASEAN students, developing and implementing ASEAN curricula or lecture notes, and conducting joint research. Moreover, HEIs may provide appropriate financial incentives, such as key performance indicators (KPIs) and awards, to further encourage the participation of academics and staff in regional HE collaboration activities. Some functional instruments to promote the regional dimension as mentioned in Section 7.1.2 are those of promoting ASEAN languages, providing ASEAN studies as a compulsory or elective subject for first year students, and developing ASEAN studies exchange programmes – all of which could be useful in promoting ASEAN HE harmonisation.

In order to improve the practicality of HE harmonisation, HEIs may encourage the participation of academics, staff, and students in identifying existing gaps in implementing HE harmonisation mechanisms and initiatives. Inputs at the university level are necessary to further improve the effectiveness of these mechanisms at the national and regional levels. Moreover, HEIs need to provide regular updates of statistical data on ASEAN HE collaboration for strengthening the HE harmonisation M&E system such as the number of ASEAN students and ASEAN studies programmes.

In addition to strengthening the leadership role of key actors in the HE sector, developing multisectoral strategies for HE harmonisation remains a critical task. More
specifically, it is important to further promote linkages between HE and the employment sector to improve the practicality of HE harmonisation efforts. These may involve promoting collaborative research and drawing inputs from employers about HE harmonisation mechanisms and initiatives, especially a regional qualifications framework.

Furthermore, the industries and employers could play a pivotal role in developing HE harmonisation initiatives to improve the competence of young people in the regional and global labour market. A university representative suggested that ASEAN HE harmonisation initiatives should encourage opportunities for ASEAN university students’ participation in internship programmes in regional companies (#20 Singapore). Some interviewees particularly emphasised the importance of further encouraging public-private partnerships through developing corporate social responsibility projects on regional community development. Engaging ASEAN students in such projects was believed to provide important opportunities to cultivate students’ ASEAN bonds and social responsibility (#5 Indonesia and #10 Thailand).

Strengthening the leadership capacity of key actors in ASEAN HE harmonisation governance architecture requires both a formal approach to put forward the frameworks for HE harmonisation at policy level and an informal approach to enable the implementation of the framework at operational level. A senior government official emphasised the importance of both formal and informal levels when referring to key conditions:

The key condition would be having the right institution in place, for example, a shared commission on HE, putting the enabling framework, memorandum of agreement, and memorandum of understanding. It could be the ASEAN communiqué. But the informal level is also important, like people-to-people visits. You can have so many notes, but they may not be operationalised. [...] That could be in one sense the key factors, the enabling institutions of harmonisation at the formal international, national, and local level.

#9 Philippines

However, some interviewees particularly emphasised the importance of a formal approach. For instance, a university director called for a formal approach to improve progress to develop a regional HE policy infrastructure related to QA systems:

I think the arrangement of this ASEAN QA has got to be more formalised. Right now it has been on a cost-sharing basis. Everything is based on volunteerism. When you have a system that is based on volunteerism, you don’t get very far, unless people really want to, they are willing to help or they just help to a certain extent because it’s volunteerism. But when you formalise something, when you put hard real resources into it, dedicated
A formal approach to HE harmonisation can be understood in relation to Knight’s political approach, which aims to make HE regionalisation more formal and intentional. As stated in Chapter Two, a political approach focuses on generating the political will and the strategies to ensure the relevant decision-making bodies have HE harmonisation on their agenda. The interviewees’ emphasis on a formal approach supports the preliminary assumption regarding key conditions, which suggests the need for increasing formal and political approaches. This assumption shapes this thesis to examine the relevance of enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body in promoting the ideational and structural conditions for an ASEAN common space in HE, as further discussed in the next section.

7.1.4 Path Dependence and the Leadership Role of ASEAN

Analysing the historical development of ASEAN regionalism and HE regionalisation in Chapter Three sheds light on the path dependence or potential directions of HE harmonisation. The interview findings suggest that ASEAN HE harmonisation will continually progress. According to a regional organisation director, ‘if there’re no epidemics or disasters to disrupt the process, I would think that in the next ten years harmonisation, in the sense of exchangeability, readability, and comparability, will be in place in the ASEAN region’ (#30 Malaysia). As regards the driving forces specified in Chapter One and the motivations of key actors in Chapter Five, the momentum looks set to continue. In particular, the growing impacts of economic globalisation on HE, the HE internationalisation strategies of HEIs, and ASEAN’s policies to develop a more connected region primarily further necessitate ASEAN HE harmonisation.

Despite the continuing momentum, interviewees suggested that ASEAN HE harmonisation will progress incrementally. This view supports the assumption of this thesis that ASEAN HE harmonisation is likely to progress in small steps, rather than through revolutionary transformations. However, this does not mean a political approach to nurturing HE harmonisation efforts is unnecessary. One director of a regional organisation suggested:

It [the HE harmonisation process] should neither be forced, nor rushed. I think it would be developed naturally but it needs to be nurtured. The government must nurture it.
Public policy must nurture it. QA bodies must be in the forefront in nurturing this HE connectivity to increase mutual confidence.

#30 Malaysia

The aforementioned view further emphasises the importance of a formal approach and political mechanisms. Although this emphasis seems to support the preliminary assumption on an enhanced leadership role for ASEAN as a regional body as an essential precondition for the construction of a common space in HE, only four interviewees directly referred to ASEAN when asked about the key conditions. This may reflect the currently limited role and interviewees’ perception of the Association as a mere ‘facilitator’ in the HE harmonisation process, rather than a convener (#22 Philippines and #33 Indonesia). Considering ASEAN’s soft institutionalisation, the ASEC may envisage its role as a facilitator, which is not in a position to provide more leadership in driving the HE harmonisation agenda. According to a regional organisation representative:

The role of ASEAN Secretariat in this exercise [HE harmonisation] is just a facilitator. It caters for the member states and facilitates the [HE harmonisation] processes. It [the ASEC] cannot push or dictate that you should do this and that. In the end, it’s up to the member states whether they would like the HE harmonisation processes to move forward or not, and how they would like to do it. The conclusion should be reached by consensus.

#33 Indonesia

In contrast to this view, interviewees suggested the importance of enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN in developing HE harmonisation. According to a deputy director of a regional organisation, ASEAN has ‘a convening power’ to stimulate the process and ‘it would be better to have someone in the middle like the ASEAN Secretariat, better than being championed by one particular country or university. It would be difficult’ (#38 Thailand). This view was further supported by a government official who provided an example of the influential role of ASEAN in developing QA policy framework development in Vietnam:

I think ASEAN as a regional body can influence policy to increase the involvement of universities in the [HE harmonisation] process. […] I think ASEAN as a regional body in this process is really important and ASEAN can design the progress where we want to go and fast or slow in this area. Ten years ago when we developed quality assurance policy framework for the ASEAN countries, it was very difficult for us to convince our minister. We sent a letter to ASEAN secretariat and SEAMEO secretariat to convince our minister. They sent an official letter to ask our minister to support and discuss on our ASEAN quality assurance policy framework. After our minister got this official letter, they started supporting strongly. So you can see the ASEAN as a regional body is playing an important role in this process.

#12 Vietnam
It is salient to note, however, that the demand for enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN in this policy area does not require a transformational change of ASEAN institutionalisation. The emphasis on the leadership role of key actors and a formal approach through political mechanisms does not suggest the introduction of supranationalism since it would contradict the ‘ASEAN Way’ of region-building. Rather, ASEAN’s aversion to hegemonic leadership remains significant in driving ASEAN through the shared or collective leadership of the ten member states (Ong, 2005). The shared leadership further emphasises the importance of jazz management, as earlier discussed in the governance and leadership section.

The ASEAN intergovernmental approach and consensus decision-making method remain central to how HE harmonisation proceeds. In other words, although the role of ASEAN is strengthened, future directions largely depend on the AMS. As a regional organisation representative argued: ‘the ASEC can assist, facilitate, and support the member states if they come up with an initiative but since we don’t have a regional approach and decisions are decided by the member states, which should be based on consensus’ (#33 Indonesia).

The responses of interviewees who referred to ASEAN as a regional body suggested the variety of anticipated roles of ASEAN. As shown in Figure 7.1, this thesis identifies four interrelated considerations reflecting both ideational and structural conditions for a common space in HE. These considerations support the preset codes on the potential role of ASEAN identified in Chapter Three as follows: 1) generating political support for the HE harmonisation agenda; 2) empowering the capacity of key regional organisations; 3) establishing an HE harmonisation funding mechanism; and 4) promoting a public outreach system on HE information and harmonisation, as further discussed below.

**Generating Political Support for the Higher Education Harmonisation Agenda**

This primary expectation is principally attributable to ASEAN’s potential role to provide political mechanisms to greater advance HE harmonisation. Primarily, ASEAN’s meetings provide opportunities to disseminate regional norms and cultivate political attention for regional issues, which may deliver a formal framework for HE harmonisation. According to one university president, ‘the main role of the ASEAN
Secretariat is to create a formal framework of agreements. The actual implementation will have to rest on the HEIs in the region and organisations that bind these institutions together’ (#20 Philippines).

Regarding the importance of the political will of the ASEAN leaders or heads of states, the interviewees widely perceived the ASEAN Summit as a highly significant platform to drive regional initiatives. Thai interviewees particularly emphasised this as a crucial platform for increasing the visibility of HE harmonisation among ASEAN leaders (#10 Thailand and #25 Thailand). This view concurs with Yavaprabhas’s (2014) suggestion that related agencies and platforms may need to propose HE harmonisation policy options ‘to the ASEAN Summit in order to promote a joint statement of the ASEAN leaders’ (p. 101).

According to one senior government official, greater emphasis on HE harmonisation in the ASEAN Summit ‘will give more blessing on this because it means each country will continue supporting the programme and giving more financial support. That’s where the ASEAN leaders come to join and approve’. This platform is particularly important considering the current situation, as this interviewee noted:

HE issues have not been raised much at the ASEAN Summit mainly because they haven’t been raised much during SOM-ED. Delegates are mainly from basic education. They have to bring this issue to the attention of ASEAN leaders and have a clear statement from the ASEAN leaders on this issue. For example, we need to increase mobility in ASEAN countries, we need to support this process, we will provide financial support in respective countries, etc. Now I cannot see a very clear statement on this issue from the ASEAN leaders or in the ASEAN meetings. If the ASEAN Secretariat can do this, I think it will help very much.

#10 Thailand

While ASEAN leadership is called for to stimulate political attention on the HE harmonisation agenda, it is important to ensure that the increased role of ASEAN in educational harmonisation would benefit the works of both ASEAN and SEAMEO, as the latter has been central to education development concerns in Southeast Asia. A government official suggested:

ASEAN is basically a political and economic platform but the one that I’m talking about has a lot of potential, which is in existence even before ASEAN, is SEAMEO. SEAMEO is specifically for education so that is a good vehicle for ASEAN to move forward in terms of education processes. But ASEAN is able to attract countries with money to help us move forward such as ASEAN plus three. […] So ASEAN needs to be more engaged in the education process rather than just politics and economic development.

#7 Malaysia
Current political options regarding education are formed by synergies between the senior officials and ministerial levels in SEAMEO and ASEAN. These parallel platforms are important to promote regional collaboration on education, especially by gathering the HE policy makers to discuss and commit to the agreed initiatives.

**Strengthening the Capacity of Key Regional Organisations**

Considering the leadership role and capacities of the key regional organisations, as indicated in Section 6.6.3 on coordination, strengthening the capacity of these key actors in driving HE harmonisation efforts is necessary to overcome a possible governance challenge. In particular, the interview findings suggest the demand for a stronger secretariat to vigorously lead and monitor the HE harmonisation process. This fundamentally means strengthening the capacity of ASEAN as a regional body, which currently has only five full-time bodies. These are the ASEC; the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) with their Permanent Missions to ASEAN in Jakarta; the 10 ASEAN National Secretariats in ASEAN capitals; and the ASEAN Foundation in Jakarta. As of early 2016, the ASEC had a staff of no more than 300 (approximately 100 ASEAN nationals professional staff, 100 Indonesian professional staff and 100 Indonesian support staff). There is no direct role of the Secretary General and ASEC staff in policy decision-making since decisions are made by the ASEAN governments on the basis of consensus. ASEAN has a considerably limited bureaucracy when compared to the European Commission in Brussels, which has a total staff of 32,900, with various bodies to systematically handle regional issues (Chalermpalanupap, 2016).

Strengthening the capacity of ASEAN may positively contribute to the key regional organisations that drive HE harmonisation, specifically the SEAMEO and the AUN. Empowering the SEAMEO is significant for the advancement of the intergovernmental process at the policy level. Meanwhile, improving the capacity of the AUN is key to the successful implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives. The interviewees widely referred to the strengths and weakness of the AUN, which could be due to the direct connection of the AUN to ASEAN.

The AUN is a key implementing agency of ASEAN that promotes ASEAN academic collaboration across HEIs at the institutional, regional, and international levels. At the
institutional level, the AUN is a leading organisation that has a clear agenda to promote the harmonisation process at the university network level (Umemiya & Tsutsumi, 2008; Yavaprabhas, 2014). As one university director noted:

The experience with the AUN is about volunteerism. The member volunteers to host certain activities and so on, which I think works quite well. We are members of other networks as well, but I think the AUN is most successful in pursuing the members to contribute more. I think some models can be useful to start with.

#16 Indonesia

For the regional and international levels, the AUN ‘is the only body that can table proposals through ASED for the ASEAN Summit’, and the AUN is recognised as ‘the only gateway for cooperation between ASEAN and ASEAN partners’ (Yavaprabhas, 2014, p. 92).

Operating under the umbrella of ASEAN may reflect the shared characteristics and issues between ASEAN and the AUN such as funding and elitism. Strengthening the capacity of the AUN is widely discussed considering the concerns about its elite university model and the sustainability of funding, as discussed in Chapter Six. Various comments were made on the AUN flagship university model. On the one hand, it was viewed by some as a good model with which to start developing and implementing the harmonisation process, while ensuring a compatible level of quality among the selected universities involved. A university director’s opinion on the progress of ASEAN HE cooperation echoed the fact that elite universities prefer working with elite universities (Nguyen, 2009):

So far it’s the elites working together like the elite universities in the AUN. When you talk about others, not much has been done I suppose. From that point of view, the connectivity so far I think is still unsystematic. But then there’s a concern to what extent do we want to link all the thousands of universities because there’s a question of QA there. If it’s the top universities between the top universities, there’s no problem because we know each other. We know the quality. For example, if asking Chulalongkorn University to recognise a Myanmar university in a remote district, that’s out of question.

#16 Indonesia

On the other hand, the AUN’s focus on flagship universities in ASEAN, referred to by a university director as ‘an exclusive club of elite universities’ (#16 Indonesia), disparages the significance and impact of the AUN. One group of interviewees emphasised that HE harmonisation must progress more inclusively, particularly by expanding its membership and providing opportunities for non-member HEIs to reap the benefits of the process. Although the AUN has expanded its membership and allowed non-member HEIs to join its activities, these efforts have tended to be
inadequate. According to Knight (2012b), the AUN has yielded to great pressure to be more inclusive in terms of the AUN member universities over recent years. Agreeing with this view, a university president emphasised the importance of AUN membership enlargement and believed ASEAN could play a greater role in empowering the AUN:

The AUN has only 29 members so it doesn’t represent the majority. It only represents the top universities. But since the flagship universities are considered the model in playing the lead role, maybe that’s good to start with, but eventually the broader base of connectivity and harmonisation has to be undertaken and that’s where the ASEAN Secretariat could help promote the broader base for connectivity and harmonisation.

#20 Philippines

In addition to the emphasis on empowering the AUN, it is critical that the enhanced leadership role of ASEAN extends its benefit to key regional organisations such as SEAMEO and AQAN. In response to the prevalent concerns on inadequate resources, as discussed in Chapter Six, greater leadership by ASEAN in facilitating the development of a regional funding mechanism to promote HE harmonisation for empowering the capacity of regional organisations in the field is essential, as further discussed in the next consideration.

Establishing a Higher Education Harmonisation Funding Mechanism

While contributions from donors may remain important in this emerging region, it is vital that ASEAN establishes a regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism that encourages contributions from the AMS. This consideration is reflected in the expectations among some interviewees that ASEAN provides greater leadership to facilitate the initial development of a funding mechanism to promote ASEAN HE harmonisation initiatives. As a university deputy vice chancellor noted:

There should be assistance from the regional body, which is ASEAN, rather than (from) each member country only. It has to be an ASEAN thing. I do not see this [a regional funding mechanism for the HE harmonisation process] being done seriously. It’s up to the individual countries so the incentives for the member institutions to do all this are quite minimal.

#18 Malaysia

An HE harmonisation fund could be developed in close relation with existing ASEAN funding systems in the relevant fields. An MPAC funding arrangement could provide an important foundation. Primarily, the MPAC fund is a larger regional connectivity fund that is more systematic and structured. In addition, potential contributions from
HE harmonisation to improving interconnectedness in HE systems and people-to-
people connectivity support the aim of MPAC fund to increase regional connectivity.

Developing the MPAC fund started with identifying the MPAC projects that can potentially provide high and immediate impact. In determining possible funding sources, consideration was given to a diversification of funding sources to secure the required financial capital to support these regional connectivity projects. Thus, ASEAN has moved from traditional funding streams to the establishment of the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund (AIF) and the utilisation of public-private partnerships (Teodoro, 2015).

The development of an MPAC fund further supports the earlier emphasis that developing an HE harmonisation fund may involve some reconfigurations of ASEAN’s current norms regarding regional funding systems, as mentioned in Section 7.1.2 on funding mechanism. As Chongkittavorn (2012) notes, the ASEAN leaders approved the mobilisation of almost US$485 million dollars under the AIF to finance MPAC projects in 2012, yet this amount was inadequate. In addition to the ADB contribution of US$150 million, there is an urgent need to boost the financial contributions from all of the AMS to the MPAC fund. The currently highest national contributors are Malaysia and Indonesia, who contribute US$150 million and US$120 million respectively. Meanwhile, the ADB estimated that ASEAN would need approximately US$600 billion to establish the MPAC within 10 years (US$60 billion per annum).

Drawing on the development of the MPAC fund and considerations regarding a funding mechanism in Section 7.1.2, the diversification of reliable funding sources through donor reliance and the national contributions to ASEAN funding mechanisms is vital. In addition, it is important the ASEAN HE harmonisation fund generates income from the process to continuously promote its initiatives to ensure the sustainability of funding.
Promoting a Public Outreach System on Higher Education Information and Harmonisation

In response to the considerations stated in Section 7.1.2 concerning a public outreach system, some interviewees perceived the potential role of ASEAN in further developing a more effective regional HE information system. A call for an ASEAN HE information system directly responds to two important issues presented in Chapter Six. The first concerns the lack of an effective regional public outreach system to ensure transparency and provide up-to-date information on ASEAN HE systems. The second concerns the limited regional consciousness and public awareness of the HE harmonisation agenda and progress in related initiatives.

Fundamentally, ASEAN could facilitate the establishment of an ASEAN HE information centre to promote the transparency of ASEAN HE systems and raise the publicity of the HE harmonisation agenda. This centre may act as a regional hub that provides important information on HE systems to the public such as up-to-date information on ASEAN HE systems, regulations, accredited university degrees, international programmes, scholarships, and HE harmonisation initiatives and progress. It may additionally provide useful information for graduates and employers such as employment trends and regional job opportunities at the regional and international levels.

The main function of a regional information mechanism in HE would be to improve the transparency of ASEAN’s HE systems by providing up-to-date information on HE matters in ASEAN. This core function may be comparable to the European Network of Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility (ENIC Network) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC Network). These networks provide regularly updated information on the recognition of foreign HE qualifications; education systems in the member countries; opportunities for studying abroad, including information on loans and scholarships; as well as advice on practical questions regarding mobility and equivalence (ENIC-NARIC Networks, 2014). A government agency director emphasised the importance of transparency and the need for establishing a regional and national HE information centre:

The first thing we have to do is to be transparent in how to run HEIs and especially how to recognise the quality. Everything will be transparent and we can open information to ASEAN. It means that everybody studying in Indonesia, they are listed in the national
In ASEAN, transparency is the key factor and we have to open the information on regulation so everybody can know – if they want to go to Indonesia, are they going to be ready, in which aspects they have to be ready. Again information on regulation is the priority.

#5 Indonesia

An ASEAN HE information centre could play an important role in improving the effectiveness of an ASEAN HE harmonisation monitoring system. In particular, it could provide up-to-date statistical data on ASEAN HE systems by working in close collaboration with related authorities such as the national HE information centres or other national government agencies responsible for HE information. Moreover, an ASEAN HE information centre is critical for promoting regional academic mobility and the expansion of HE services. One government official related the need for an effective regional HE information system to promote cross-border HE exchanges, ‘we need to have a good system to support universities and students to understand and to know about good universities and about the good program before they are coming’ (#13 Vietnam). A regional organisation director clarified the function and benefits of a regional HE information system:

Each degree has to declare the qualification and has to be an archive so if one company would like to hire a graduate from university A in Thailand, this centre will be the resource centre to give the information or if this graduate is from engineering, it is up to the level or not. It’s in fact beneficial for the employer and provides more opportunity if your students are qualified in the world market.

#35 Thailand

While the key function of a regional HE information centre is to increase the transparency of HE information among the AMS, ensuring its practicality and capacity to engage public users at the regional and international levels is important. Significantly, developing an accessible and user friendly platform is crucial for promoting inter-regional and international HE linkages. This may include the use of a common HE information platform such as an up-to-date official website and an interactive ASEAN database that allows government agencies and HEIs in ASEAN to promote HE opportunities internationally. In addition, communication and information tools, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and a mobile phone application specifically developed for this purpose, could prove useful considering the habits of Millennials who tend to consume news and information on social networks. These channels may have great potential to provide news on ASEAN HE and employment opportunities to the younger generation, which is the main target group of various HE collaboration activities.
It is important to encourage several conditions needed for materialising an ASEAN HE information centre such as supportive policies, commitment from the member states, and resources. A director of a regional organisation explained the situation on a regional and national HE information network at the Asia-Pacific level:

One day we’ll need it but how long it’s going to take, it’s hard to say. It needs commitment from the government. In degree recognition convention, why have only less than 30% of the countries under the UNESCO Asia-Pacific signed? The rest refused to sign because each country has to build up a kind of national resource centre to do all of the archives to collect all the degrees. [...] This is different from Europe, which has the Lisbon convention. Every country has established the national information centre. [...] That’s understandable in the European system because the market is big and they would like to send their people to work in the whole region. Mobilisation is very important. But in this region, if we are not rich enough, we don’t have the money to invest and when we invest we have to ensure that the quality of all programmes is up to standard. That’s why the majority attended but did not ratify.

#35 Thailand

In addition to the development of a regional HE information centre, ASEAN may incorporate the HE harmonisation agenda into the broader ASEAN awareness promotion and public outreach plan. For instance, the agenda could be integral to the promotion of developing ASEAN Connectivity and the ASEAN Community. This approach might further enhance political attention and public awareness of HE harmonisation, which construct ideational forces for HE harmonisation. These include, for example, organising regional collaborative activities and road shows to promote understanding of HE harmonisation in ASEAN universities; increasing and encouraging more publications about ASEAN HE; developing the indicators for HE development in statistical publications on the progress of the ASEAN Community and ASEAN Connectivity; and providing funding for research on ASEAN HE harmonisation and related topics on regional HE development.

7.2 Unintended Consequences

The intended consequences of HE harmonisation refer to the academic, economic, socio-cultural, human and political benefits of regional interactions in HE to the member states and the region-building process (Knight, 2013a). This thesis has identified several intended consequences, particularly the expected outcomes, aspirations and motivations of the key actors in Chapter Five. Much less discussed in the current literature in the field, and also in this thesis, are the unintended consequences, or ‘potential negative consequences’ that may have occurred (Knight, 2013a, p. 122). Being mindful of unintended consequences is important to further
considerations on the planning and implementation of ASEAN HE harmonisation initiatives.

While most interviewees believe that the harmonisation process has more pros than cons, they did point out the possible disadvantages, undesired results and potential negative effects. Drawing on the literature and interview findings, this chapter identifies several unintended consequences. These include the increased emphasis and expansion of HE internationalisation; growing comparison and competition; reduced quality and accountability of HE; the shift from academic objectives; the loss of national uniqueness; cultural implications; political tensions; social problems; and threats to the fields of social science and humanities, as further discussed below.

Considering HE internationalisation as the main driving force for HE harmonisation, as argued in Chapter Five, there were concerns that the HE harmonisation process may accelerate the liberalisation of HE in ASEAN. This means further expanding the already mushrooming foreign HE services in the AMS. One university director commented that HE harmonisation should not lead to ‘the proliferation of HE franchises’ or ‘international universities on local soil’ and emphasised that ‘I want each university to be in its own country, strengthened, but allow mobility of students and faculty’ (#22 Philippines).

Given the increased expansion and marketisation of HE services, HE harmonisation may further stimulate comparison and competition in HE. On the one hand, a certain level of competition is advantageous. As noted by a university president: ‘competition among the different institutions could result in developing the best for students’ (#20 Philippines). On the other hand, increasing harmonisation efforts, particularly to promote HE quality assurance and ranking systems, may further emphasise the stratification of HE and threaten a healthy competitive culture. A regional organisation representative related the situation to small fish in a massively enlarged pond and expressed concerns that countries with lower HE development, especially Cambodia, Lao, and Myanmar, could be more marginalised (#40 Non-ASEAN).

Additionally, there appeared concerns surrounding the accountability of HE due to the increased emphasis on economic motivations for HE development in the rise of the marketisation of HE. As a regional organisation director commented: ‘the harmonisation process might open wider opportunities for people to look at education
as a market commodity instead of its role and value for the public good’ (#39 Thailand). For instance, the HE harmonisation process may encourage the expansion of international programmes, which further inflate the currently escalating costs of obtaining HE degrees. Hence, it is important to ensure that HE harmonisation is developed to foster social justice, particularly through providing opportunities to the less privileged HEIs and students to reap the benefits from the process. Meanwhile, the academic rationale of improving HE quality needs to remain prioritised by key actor. Importantly, developing an effective mutual qualifications recognition framework should not worsen the problem of ‘degree mills’ or illegitimate degrees and unqualified graduates.

Some interviewees raised concerns regarding the use of HE harmonisation as an instrument to achieve regional integration purposes. An example can be seen from the BP, which has been used as another approach to European integration. The leadership role of the European Commission in the BP, although forming a crucial condition for the successful establishment of the EHEA, comes with economic and political implications that may overshadow the underlying educational and cultural rationales (Verger & Hermo, 2010; Wolf, 2009). While the engagement of ASEAN is required to stimulate regional projects with political mechanisms, this thesis emphasises the need for developing an appropriate balance between the key actors in governance processes. Importantly, it is vital to ensure the HE sector remains the catalyst for HE harmonisation and that related initiatives adhere to the core values of education.

Among the most emphasised of undesired results, HE harmonisation should not become the agent of a zipper effect or standardisation, as introduced in Chapter Two (Knight, 2013a). The HE harmonisation process promotes the convergence of key HE systems across participating countries such as degree systems and quality assurance systems. Moreover, the process tends to support international HE development trends and standards. These may contribute to increasingly similar focuses on developing HE, for instance, HE governance and management; the transparency of the HE information; the autonomy of HEIs; teaching and learning pedagogy; curriculum development; critical thinking skills development; linkages with the employment sector and public and private partnerships; graduate attributes and employability; and mutual recognition of graduates as skilled workers. Some interviewees related this unintended consequence to the McDonald’s effect or the expansion of an international
franchise that could occur in the field of HE. As one regionalisation organisation representative elaborated:

It’s likely to lose traditional culture when everything is standardised. Take the mall for example, it has some similar features and shops everywhere in the world. Franchise food for example. You can find KFC, Starbucks, and McDonald’s worldwide. It’s boring. We need more variety and locality. If you are Thai, you should look Thai, act and dress like Thai. We have to preserve our identity.

#40 Non-ASEAN

To further prevent a zipper effect, ensuring the process of HE harmonisation accommodates and encourages the application of knowledge in new ways at the institutional level and in national policies is crucial (Knight, 2013a). A university president emphasised that the HE harmonisation process should be developed in a way that fosters HE excellence and does not smother innovation:

Harmonisation also should not necessarily result in a lack of competition to develop excellence. When harmonisation is there, we should not stagnate innovation, which will some point get out of the harmonisation shell and provide a basis to lift up the whole HE system in the region. So ‘innovation’ is something that I’d like to stay, which may temporarily go against the notion of harmonisation but in the end lift the whole system together towards excellence.

#20 Philippines

Much has been mentioned of the cultural implications, including the possible threat from HE harmonisation to national identity, uniqueness, and cultural legacies. Fundamentally, HE harmonisation may converge some local HE constituents such as academic calendars, accreditation systems, and degree systems. One regional organisation representative viewed that ASEAN countries might lose some of their national identity by placing more emphasis on ASEANESS (#40 Non-ASEAN). Moreover, the process might further encourage the dominance of English as the academic language, which according to Savage (2011), ‘puts vernacular languages and communication at a distinct disadvantage and resurrects a neo-colonial academic mindset’. In addition, an emphasis on Western teaching and learning pedagogy, especially critical thinking skills among youth, may be undesired in some AMS since it could present a threat to the political regimes and compliant culture.

Interviewees’ concerns regarding a neo-colonial academic mindset tend to reflect the view of Hartmann (2008) that the BP can be perceived as a new form of imperialism in the making (p. 207). This does not refer to the conventional imperialism emerging through military force as the prevalent means of global power in the 1960s and 1970s, but to ‘benevolent imperialism’ with the focus on the ideational dimension of the
power constellation. This ideational imperialism reflects the basic notion of cultural imperialism,\(^ {30}\) which usually involves the promotion and imposition of the culture and values of more economically influential nations over less powerful nations. Many dominant international HE exporters, such as the US, the UK, and Australia, may be promoting HE harmonisation and internationalisation as a way to induce norms and liberalise local HE regulations in ASEAN. Some interviewees believed the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN provides norms entrepreneurs with political and economic benefits (for example #10 Thailand and #39 Thailand).

As opposed to the original intention to promote regional mobility, HE harmonisation might instead strengthen the ‘look West’ mindset. There exists, it is argued, the potential role of norm-setting within international educational politics and education diplomacy through promoting new imperialism (Hartmann, 2008). The constant reforms in HE education systems globally since the 1990s are prominent examples that reflect a less state-centric mindset and a strong will for countries to synchronise local HE systems with international models (Gorga, 2007). If the BP provides a means for Americanisation and the projection of a set of European norms to empower the EU as a new imperialising power, this may result in the empowering of international HE exporters. In other words, the HE harmonisation practices may induce changes towards international norms and the so-called ‘global HE models’. These may benefit efforts to modernise or ‘Westernise’ local HE systems, particularly by Anglophone nations, which in turn strengthen their international HE hegemony.

Having mentioned ideational imperialism among the potential unintended effects, it is anticipated, however, that the extent of its impact on ASEAN is sifted through the mediating role of HE harmonisation in rebalancing ‘local’ and ‘international’ models. Taking into account the rise of nationalism following decolonisation in the AMS, local resistance may naturally emerge to balance the influence of the internationalisation norms trajectory on local HE systems. This is likely to be the case if such influence appears to provide a discernible threat to national identity and uniqueness. These concerns towards ideological imperialism reflect the need for

\(^{30}\) Livingston (2000) argues that ‘cultural imperialism’ is an early form of globalisation and the root of several other terms used, for example ‘cultural dependency and domination’ (Link, 1984; Mohammadi, 1995); ‘cultural synchronization’ (Hamelink, 1983); ‘communication imperialism’ (Sui-Nam Lee, 1988); ‘ideological imperialism’, and ‘economic imperialism’ (Mattleart, 1994).
periodically monitoring that the strategic direction of ASEAN HE harmonisation is not overly donor-driven but that the needs of the AMS are prioritised.

HE harmonisation may also bring with it other cultural and social implications. In particular, increased cultural diversity from greater mobility may create social tension, especially the need to address cultural barriers between international and domestic students, as discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, the situation might increase the growing significance of multilingualism. Increased international mobility and cross-cultural interactions through HE harmonisation and internationalisation might necessitate the importance of cultivating the intercultural competence and knowledge of more than two languages among the younger generation, particularly the Millennials. Furthermore, there were concerns among interviewees that increased mobility may result in several social issues such as uncontrollable migration flows, increasingly unbalanced global employment distribution, talent shortages, and unemployment rate growth. Moreover, such increased mobility may cultivate the culture of ‘rootlessness’ or the nature of not being rooted to one place, which may have psychological impact on individuals.

With the perception that one-way mobility from the less developed to more developed nations may trigger political tensions and social problems, it is essential ASEAN HE harmonisation be developed to improve the balance of regional academic mobility and HE development level. A government official raised concerns about the political tension that may emerge from the explosion of skilled, and importantly unskilled, labour migration to developed countries:

There will be lot of Indonesians going to Malaysia and Singapore because of the economic opportunity. ASEAN must develop as an economic entity and then you can develop the ASEAN community, and with that as a strong base, developing HE systems is the next level. Otherwise, it’s not possible. We can talk about it but it’s not going to happen. […] The worst output that we can have from this is when there’s a free flow of people. It creates political tension. Imagine people from Indonesia starting to flood the Malaysian employment market. Right now, it’s 1.5 million in Malaysia. If we have a single market in the AEC, probably we have 2.5 million Indonesian in Malaysia. That’s very undesirable.

#7 Malaysia

In response to the concerns of several HEIs representatives on one-way academic mobility, as mentioned in Chapter Six, developing innovative initiatives and increasing incentives to promote two-way mobility are essential. A Singaporean university director commented on the imbalance student mobility and suggested:
We have scholarships for students to come to Singapore. The scholarships have been taken up so there are more ASEAN students coming to Singapore more than Singaporean students going to ASEAN countries. [...] Singapore students would be more interested in internships than student exchange. I think we need to be innovative to find the right programme that encourages students to move to another country, which is definitely beneficial.

#23 Singapore

Finally, the emphasis on skilled labour mobility in the HE harmonisation process may endanger some disciplines, especially the field of social science and humanities. A regional organisation representative believed that there would be a stronger demand for subjects that lead to work and employment such as engineering, technical, and vocational programmes (#40 Non-ASEAN). While it is important to ensure the appropriate number of students in a market-oriented study programme in response to ASEAN demand, this should not be at the cost of making the arts, humanities and social sciences vulnerable, considering the contributions of these fields to further enriching each nation.

7.3 Beyond the ASEAN Higher Education Harmonisation Framework

Despite the several constraints and unintended consequences of HE harmonisation, this thesis has revealed a shared view among ASEAN policy makers and practitioners from the key actors that deepening regional academic collaboration is important. Importantly, developing ASEAN HE harmonisation and constructing a common space in HE might benefit the construction of other regional HE areas. This assumption involves the broad perception that ASEAN is the most structured multilateral framework in HE compared to HE harmonisation in other parts of Asia (Byun & Um, 2014; Hawkins, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014).

Regarding South Asian regionalism, progress has been minimal largely due to the continuing rivalry between India and Pakistan (Khasr, 2014). This also influences its progress with regard to HE regionalisation. For East Asian regionalism, despite the more suitable conditions given the relatively comparable level of economic development among the member states, progress in regionalism and HE regionalisation is critically challenged by strong historical tensions among China, Japan, and Korea (Ba, 2009b; Chia, 2007; Satow & Li, 2006).
The Brisbane Communiqué may have triggered the notion of an Asia–Pacific HE Area but it remains a distant goal since it seems to require a more active role of, and greater commitment from the Asia–Pacific nations. According to one regional organisation director, ‘even at the UNESCO level, they talked about degree recognition conventions in the Tokyo Convention, quite similar to the Lisbon Convention, but not all the members signed because it requires a lot of commitment from the government’ (#35 Thailand).

Fundamentally, strengthening ASEAN HE harmonisation is crucial for the development of a broader East Asian HE community (Byun & Um, 2014, p. 141). In particular, developing the ASEAN HE framework directly contributes to the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework, which comprises the AMS together with China, Japan and Korea. This APT platform actively promotes ASEAN Community development in various sectors, including HE. The Plus Three countries are active partners in HE collaboration at the ASEAN level. Importantly, HE collaborative activities and harmonisation mechanisms are central to the discussion in the APT education meetings. These APT meetings differ from the ASED meetings, which focus more on basic education and ASEAN’s efforts towards the UNESCO MDG’s vision of Education for All (ASED, 2014). However, the APT framework is currently based on the ASEAN framework since ‘there is no regional body comparable to ASEAN in Northeast Asia to be able to take a multilateral approach’ (Byun & Um, 2014, p. 132). ASEAN plays a mediating role, even though collaboration often operates on a plus one basis.

Perceiving ASEAN as one of the important HE markets of the Plus Three countries, supporting the development of ASEAN HE harmonisation is strategic to the their national economic interests. The participation of Japan and China in the BP Forums since 2009 may signify their uncertainty as to how the more ‘attractive’ EHEA would affect their position in ASEAN and the international HE market (Dang, 2015a; Kamibeppu, 2013). Together with the issue of ageing populations, which may threaten their position in the knowledge economy, the Plus Three countries are increasingly interested in attracting young, talented students and qualified human resources from the ASEAN region (Dang, 2015a). Student mobility programmes serve as a crucial means to produce brainpower and expand soft power to avoid skilled labour shortages. This may explain the enthusiasm of these countries in supporting the ASEAN
International Mobility for Students (AIMS), which has expanded the strategic boundary focus of the AIMS from the initial Malaysia–Indonesia–Thailand (MIT).

While ASEAN’s progress towards a more cohesive region has strengthened its position on inter-regional cooperation, developing HE harmonisation potentially contributes to inter-regional HE collaboration. In particular, in addition to the Asian HE collaboration framework, strengthening the ASEAN HE harmonisation process is fundamental to increasing greater cohesion and effectively driving the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) framework. According to Dang (2015a, p. 764), ASEAN has changed from being a collection of “third countries” to a strategic partner in Asia–Europe collaboration and inter-regional cooperation with the Bologna countries.

Enhancing harmonised conditions among the AMS may positively contribute to the greater balance of global knowledge flows, which is crucial for the development of a global knowledge community. In particular, developing HE harmonisation mechanisms to reduce barriers for academic mobility supports the HE internationalisation strategy of the AMS and its partners. The international dimension embedded in the ASEAN HE harmonisation process aligns with the internationalisation strategy of the BP. The strategy places an emphasis on identifying partner regions and growing dialogues with regions, over individual countries, for greater impact on a larger scale (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 2005).

Despite the importance of constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN, progress in HE harmonisation efforts within this region has been challenging. This thesis has revealed several impediments to HE harmonisation, particularly attitudinal barriers that bring about the one-way mobility trend. Within the context of the traditional one-way mobility from Asia to the West, which has constantly elevated fears of a growing brain drain, creating a new HE area that increases two-way academic mobility is ‘indeed a novel idea’ (Dang, 2015b). This raises concerns about how these constraints may impact the development of other HE collaboration frameworks, which cover related areas such as the GMS, the APT, the Asia–Pacific, Asia and Europe, and the international community.

Unlike the EU’s structures, the Asian region is a form of multilateralism that comprises a set of ‘tangled webs’ of highly fractured, overlapping, and multilayered
arrangements that are potentially undermined by bilateral agreements (Heydon & Woolcock, 2009; Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013; Tow, 2008). This fragmented Asian regionalism architecture is carried forward to the HE cooperation framework. Differing from the pan-regional HE harmonisation framework that the BP has produced in Europe, Asian HE harmonisation evolves through ‘multi-polar initiatives’ that emerge from several subregional frameworks (Yonezawa & Meerman, 2010).

Considering the potential contributions that extend beyond HE harmonisation in ASEAN, this chapter has proposed several ideational and structural considerations for advancing HE harmonisation in this region. Fundamentally, it has emphasised the importance of cultivating ideational forces regarding ASEAN HE harmonisation among fundamental considerations. In particular, it has emphasised the need for further cultivating policy makers, practitioners and the general public on the significance of an ASEAN Community and HE harmonisation. In addition, it is important to strengthen the structural conditions to provide a more enabling context for HE harmonisation, particularly by 1) developing an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism; 2) adopting functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure; 3) developing a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation; 4) strengthening the M&E system; and 5) improving the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives.

In addition to the need to further empower the key actors from various levels, this chapter has emphasised the importance of strengthening the leadership role of ASEAN to improve ideational and structural conditions for further developing an ASEAN common space in HE. The chapter particularly emphasised the potential contributions of ASEAN in generating political support for the HE harmonisation agenda; empowering the capacity of key regional organisations; establishing an HE harmonisation funding mechanism; and promoting a public outreach system on HE information and harmonisation.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

8.1 Overview

The main aim of this thesis was to understand the drivers of and impediments to the HE harmonisation process and the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN. In addition to document analysis, this thesis involves interviews with 40 policy makers and practitioners from all ten AMS. The interviewees are representatives of the key actors, comprising government agencies, HEIs and regional organisations in the field. The principal findings of this thesis are as follows.

The development of ASEAN HE harmonisation is driven by the academic, economic, political and cultural motivations of the key actors. The findings on drivers emphasise the importance of global and regional dynamics to domestic HE policies and practices. Of the key rationales is the need of ASEAN to increase the competitiveness and legitimacy of domestic HE systems in the international HE context, which is influenced by the rise of economic globalisation and its impacts upon HE. In addition, there is the need to develop a more connected ASEAN Community in response to ASEAN’s policies. With the perceived necessities of harmonising HE systems in ASEAN, the process has become intentional and strategic for ASEAN. Many significant developments that have been made, particularly since 2007; however, progress towards a common space in HE in this region has tended to move at an incremental pace.

Several factors impede the key actors’ efforts to drive HE harmonisation initiatives. Primarily, a lack of supportive domestic contexts remains a persistent challenge. In particular, concerns exist regarding the large development gap in terms of HE quality and economic growth, political instability and limited domestic regulations to support regional mobility and HE harmonisation initiatives. Moreover, ideational and cultural barriers are critical impediments. Specifically, the political will of ASEAN’s leaders; commitment and prioritisation of practitioners; and societal values on the importance of region-building and HE harmonisation have not been adequately developed. Despite a broad acceptance among the key actors of the importance of deepening regional HE cooperation, their understandings of and motivations for HE
harmonisation tend to differ. Such differences may result in the diverse interests and directions of the AMS in HE harmonisation, which in turn limits the progress towards a common space in HE in ASEAN.

In addition, driving the HE harmonisation efforts in ASEAN has been challenging given the strong regional cognitive priors embedded in the ‘ASEAN Way’ such as organisational minimalism, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, non-confrontation, consultation, and consensus. Importantly, the informality and a loose institutional structure in ASEAN region-building culture influences the limited structures for HE harmonisation at the national and regional levels, which are needed to provide an enabling context for a common space in HE. Moreover, there is limited institutionalisation, particularly due to governance and leadership issues.

The significance of the ASEAN context to progress of HE harmonisation substantiates the use of norm diffusion perspectives, particularly Acharya’s (2004, 2009) constitutive localisation framework, to analyse impediments to HE harmonisation in this thesis. The framework emphasises the prominent role of local agents and cognitive priors in determining the path of new international norms in a local context. The gradual pace of ASEAN HE harmonisation results from the constitutive norms localisation process, which allows congruence building between emerging foreign norms and an existing set of ideas, belief systems, and norms. The findings of this thesis support Dang’s (2015a) argument that although the BP may provide a point of reference for ASEAN, the dynamic process of constitutive norms localisation has constructed a unique HE harmonisation model for ASEAN. In other words, although ASEAN HE harmonisation may reflect similar action lines to that of the BP, ASEAN’s idiosyncrasies remain prominent in form and pace of progress.

The findings on the key conditions echo the views of Nguyen (2009) and Hawkins (2012a) that HE harmonisation in Asia will move forwards in small steps, rather than through quantum leaps or Bologna-type overarching transformations. Although this thesis suggests that momentum is building, it does not mean that a common HE space in ASEAN will naturally develop. Indeed, both ideational and structural conditions need to be nurtured. Fundamentally, there is an urgent need to cultivate the ideational conditions, particularly by promoting the political will of the ASEAN leaders; the
commitment and priority of HE policy makers and practitioners; and the societal values related to the ASEAN Community and regional HE harmonisation.

These ideational conditions are necessary to develop the structural conditions to provide an enabling cooperative context. This thesis emphasised the importance of several structural conditions: 1) an effective regional HE harmonisation funding mechanism, 2) functional mechanisms contributing to regional HE policy infrastructure, 3) a public outreach strategy on HE information and harmonisation, 4) the HE harmonisation M&E system, and 5) the provision of supportive national conditions for the acceptance and implementation of HE harmonisation initiatives.

To further improve the effectiveness of HE harmonisation efforts, an optimal mix of different actors and approaches is needed in the governance structure. Although a multistakeholder approach is believed to be important, the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN tends to be internally driven or HE-sector centric. Regional organisations with an HE harmonisation mandate particularly play a predominant role in driving HE policy alignments and HE collaboration activities. Moreover, considering the importance of bottom-up, top-down, informal, and formal approaches to developing a common space in HE; there is a need to further generate political support, particularly from ASEAN leaders or heads of state.

According to the findings, a stronger leadership role by ASEAN is believed to be important for improving ideational and structural conditions. This thesis specifically suggests four interrelated considerations to which ASEAN could contribute. These include generating political support for HE harmonisation; empowering the capacity of key actors; establishing an ASEAN HE harmonisation fund; and developing an ASEAN HE information system to promote the transparency of HE information in the AMS and public awareness of HE harmonisation initiatives and progress.

Finally, the findings from this thesis reveal the incongruities between current expectations on the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body in promoting the HE harmonisation process and its capacities. Despite the demand for ASEAN’s leadership, it was not widely thought of among the interviewees as an important condition for stimulating progress. Moreover, there was the perception that ASEAN’s role is that of a facilitator, rather than a convener. The incongruities may derive from the strengthening of ASEAN institutionalisation since the beginning of the 21st
century, particularly the adoption of the ASEAN Charter and several guidelines to develop the ASEAN Community. Meanwhile, the ‘ASEAN Way’ remains significant to region-building, including in the field of HE. If a common space in HE in ASEAN is to be effectively developed, this thesis argues that the reconfiguration of ASEAN norms may be required.

8.2 Contributions to Literature and Theory

This thesis contributes to the small body of empirical research on ASEAN HE harmonisation. Specifically, the findings from this thesis enhance our understanding of the drivers of, and impediments to, HE harmonisation and the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in ASEAN. As well as the direct contributions to further research on this topic focusing on this particular region, this thesis may benefit analysts of similar processes in other regions and comparative analysts of the HE harmonisation process between ASEAN and other contexts.

This thesis contributes to the current body of literature on HE harmonisation, which can be broadly divided into three groups. Appeared to be the large group of studies, the first group examines the European experience, many of which emphasise the BP as an exemplary model of a regional HE area (see for example, Barrett, 2011; Charlier & Croché, 2007; Jayasuriya, 2010; Laszlo, 2008; Van der Wende, 2000; Voegtle et al., 2011). Another group of studies concentrates on the comparative analysis between European experiences and those of other regions, many of which regard the European BP as a source of inspiration for HE harmonisation in other regions (see for example, Chao, 2011; Watson, 2009; Woldegiorgis et al., 2015). Focusing on the ASEAN context, which has been a relatively uncharted area, this thesis adds to the third group of studies, which mainly focuses on a similar phenomenon in a particular region outside of Europe (see for example, Eta, 2015; Zeng et al., 2012).

The important contributions of this thesis involve its approach to studying HE harmonisation, which engages perspectives beyond HE studies. In particular, the approach promotes sub-disciplines within political science and HE studies. As introduced in Chapter Two, the thesis employs a policy transfer framework to analyse drivers. The norm diffusion literature provides a framework to analyse impediments. An analysis of the key conditions and path dependence of ASEAN HE harmonisation.
is shaped by political science literature, particularly regional studies. Employing this approach has established the basis for expanding HE regionalism as a research agenda. In particular, this thesis has taken into consideration some relevant concerns from regional studies such as that of the leadership role of regional organisations and the limited legitimacy of a certain model in driving HE regionalism among regions.

Moving beyond disciplinary boundaries supports Andenas’s (2012) argument that harmonisation is not limited to legal science but discussed in other fields of study such as integration studies, international relations, European studies, sociology, and political theory. Studying harmonisation in the field of HE by drawing on perspectives beyond HE studies is necessary to further develop a theory of harmonisation. To tackle the fundamental theoretical issue of harmonisation being an obscure notion, this thesis develops a conceptual tool to analyse HE harmonisation. This framework combines the regionness scale of Hettne and Söderbaum (2003) and the continuum of the HE regionalisation terms of Knight (2012b). This framework was used to analyse the interviewees’ understanding of the ‘harmonisation’ of HE in the ASEAN context, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Moreover, this framework adds to the theoretical foundations of HE regionalism. Drawing on perspectives from political science and HE literature, the framework reflects the complementary relationship between the region-building process and regional HE interactions. This conceptual tool can be used to distinguish the notion of harmonisation within the wide-ranging regional HE interactions. Further to this, it can be used to analyse the characteristics and progress of HE harmonisation in a given region and for comparative analyses. The framework attempts to respond to the current demand for continuing efforts to construct a ‘default frame of reference for discussion and research’ on HE regionalisation that has ‘theoretical soundness and empirical veracity’ (Neubauer, 2012, p. 11).

As well as its emphasis on region-building through HE harmonisation, this thesis promotes a harmonious international society. It seeks to move beyond East and West dichotomies, which fundamentally involve the view that globalisation and related terms such as modernisation, universalism, and cosmopolitanism are in some way inherently Western. As Acharya (2009) argues, scholarship on normative change is biased in favour of good global norms or universal values, which are championed
mainly by the ideas and standards of Western norm entrepreneurs. Non-Western beliefs and practices are often seen as bad and illegitimate. Expanding upon the issue, Kellner (2000) opines that globalisation entails ‘the Westernisation of the world’ and the expansion of a ‘worldwide standardization of lifestyles’ (p. 23).

Employing Acharya’s constitutive localisation framework to analyse ASEAN HE harmonisation suggests that the seeming contestations between international and local norms can be reconciled through the continuing constitutive localisation process. Rather than an immediate and comprehensive defeat of one set of ideas and norms over another, normative and institutional change relies on the incremental and every day forms of congruence building between external norms and cognitive priors, where cultural and normative hybridity occurs (Acharya, 2009). This perspective echoes the underlying value of harmonisation.

8.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

Although the purpose of this thesis was to generate explanations on ASEAN HE harmonisation, its findings provide implications for developing a common HE space in ASEAN for consideration by the key actors at the regional, national and university levels. Given the predominant role of regional organisations in driving the region-building process and HE regionalisation in ASEAN, further empowering key regional organisations is imperative to improving the effectiveness of HE harmonisation initiatives. In particular, a stronger secretariat to vigorously lead and monitor the HE harmonisation process is required. This does not mean establishing new institutions to specifically drive and monitor HE harmonisation efforts. The emphasis tends to be on increasing the synergy of work plans among key organisations with an HE harmonisation mandate such as SEAMEO RIHED, AUN, and AQAN.

Related to this is the need to enhance the leadership role of ASEAN as a regional body in developing a common space in HE. In addition to empowering key regional organisations, there are expectations for ASEAN to play a greater leadership role in generating political support, particularly by further promoting the importance of HE harmonisation and the ASEAN Community among the heads of state, policy makers and practitioners responsible for HE. In addition, ASEAN may generate political mechanisms to raise the publicity of HE harmonisation, especially through the
ASEAN Summit and related ASEAN meetings. These mechanisms might include joint statements from each government to promote greater HE connectivity at the national level across the AMS. These expectations of the key actors support the conclusions of earlier studies that the main goal of current regional organisations is ‘to raise awareness in the region about the value of regionalisation’ (Hawkins, 2012a).

In addition to promoting ideational conditions, this thesis suggested the demand for greater leadership by ASEAN in improving the structural conditions for an ASEAN common space in HE. Particular emphasis was placed on developing a regional funding mechanism for promoting HE harmonisation. Moreover, developing functional mechanisms with a clear timeline for implementation is urgently needed to develop ASEAN HE policy infrastructure. This might include, for instance, adopting one credit transfer system among the many that currently exist. The final decisions need to be endorsed by ASED and the ASEAN Summit to improve the impact of these HE harmonisation mechanisms at the national level (Yavaprabhas, 2014). A deputy director of a regional organisation emphasised the need to have a ‘common’ regional framework in HE:

We need to have one common quality standard, one common qualification framework, one common language […] but be open to the independence and diversity that each country and each culture needs. Importantly, there must be only ‘one’ framework. Otherwise, all the talk about integration is nothing. There’s no such framework to cover everything under one roof.

#36 Thailand

To improve the availability and quality of statistical data on HE collaboration, which presents a great challenge to carrying out a meaningful exercise for HE harmonisation, ASEAN’s leadership is needed to strengthen the HE harmonisation M&E system. Important efforts may include developing indicators to measure the progress of HE harmonisation initiatives such as the number of ASEAN students participating in regional HE collaboration activities, and the proportion of ASEAN graduates and skilled labour mobility by country. Incorporating the statistical data on HE harmonisation into the ASEAN Community M&E system could further enrich the ASEAN Community statistics such as the ASEAN Statistical Yearbook, the ACIF, the AEC scorecard, and the ASCC scorecard.

Expectations prevail that ASEAN develop an HE information centre at the regional level to improve the HE information transparency of the AMS and public awareness
of HE harmonisation initiatives. Developing an ASEAN HE information centre to promote effective information and communication potentially improves public awareness of HE harmonisation, which contributes to the ideational conditions for realising the ASEAN common space in HE. Successfully developing a regional public outreach system for HE information implies the strengthening of institutional capacities in creating communication infrastructure and statistical data management, which may encompass efforts such as providing a bilingual website that includes English and local languages. Strengthening national capacities could mean developing a network of national HE resource centres or further strengthening existing HE information centres at the national level. Efforts at the domestic level are needed to improve the reliability and accessibility of official statistical information related to HE harmonisation at the regional level.

Given the importance of national sovereignty and the intergovernmental approach in the ‘ASEAN Way’, strengthening the leadership role of national governments is vital for increasing the impacts of HE harmonisation efforts at the domestic level. This emphasis supports the arguments of Zirat and Jantan (2008) that the implementation of HE harmonisation in this region ‘is only likely if it is driven by a national government agenda’ (p. 24). Given the ASEAN vision for a more connected ASEAN Community, it is imperative that member states formulate national HE policies, regulations and guidelines to support the development and implementation of regional HE harmonisation mechanisms.

Another critical task to improve progress at the national level is promoting the commitment to, and priority of, human resources at the implementation stage, particularly among the heads of the related national government agencies responsible for HE and practitioners. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure that national policies and cross-sectoral regulations and procedures facilitate regional academic mobility and skilled labour employment in a more holistic manner. Furthermore, it is important that government agencies play an important role in increasing university capacity to lead HE harmonisation through promoting university autonomy.

Related to the role of the national governments is the emphasis on enhancing the leadership role of the mid-income countries in developing an HE harmonisation framework and guidelines. This suggestion relates to the findings that reveal the
differing levels of interests and roles of the AMS in promoting HE harmonisation. As discussed in Chapter Five, rather than the ASEAN Six and Four, the thesis revealed the configurations of 2-4-4 or 2-5-3 and emphasised that the mid-income countries tended to give greater priority to harmonisation initiatives than the more and less affluent country clusters. In particular, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand often take on active roles in driving the initiatives forward.

To effectively implement HE harmonisation initiatives, improving the active role of universities is particularly important. Temple (2014) refers to the European HE policy harmonisation process and emphasises that ‘making changes to national policies towards higher education is one thing (albeit an essential one); achieving change at [the] institutional level is another and perhaps more difficult one’ (p. xviii). Some important roles of universities identified in this thesis include developing ASEAN student tuition fees and funding schemes; promoting ASEAN studies and exchange programmes; encouraging the participation of academics, staff and students in developing HE harmonisation mechanisms and initiatives; seeking collaboration with the private sector; and developing incentives for academics to engage in regional joint research and collaborative programmes.

Finally, this thesis emphasises the importance of further promoting a multistakeholder approach in the HE harmonisation process. The optimal mix of key actors is necessary to improve the practicality of regional HE harmonisation initiatives and mechanisms. In particular, there is a need to further engage the industry or employment sector in the HE harmonisation process in ASEAN. Encouraging closer collaboration between HE and the industry or employment sector remains a critical and urgent task to implement HE harmonisation mechanisms as effectively as possible. Overall, the active engagement of regional organisations, government agencies, HEIs, and the public in all AMS is required to improve the practicality and sustainability of HE harmonisation initiatives and a common space in HE in ASEAN.
8.4 Pathways for Future Research

There is broader scope for future research on HE harmonisation. Many aspects about this phenomenon remain unclear and warrant more critical analysis such as the implications of HE harmonisation on global HE policy convergence and domestic HE systems; the impacts of HE harmonisation on international policy makers and practitioners; the legitimacy of a particular ‘model’ for HE harmonisation; the accountability of harmonisation initiatives; and governance and institutional arrangements. In addition, the benefits of HE harmonisation are not self-evident. More research on the short-and long-term outcomes of HE harmonisation initiatives and their impact on global, regional, national, and individual development would provide additional insights with empirical evidence.

Viewing HE harmonisation as an example of regionalism in the HE sector, this thesis supports Chou and Ravinet (2015) that it is important to encourage future research to expand ‘HE regionalism’ as a research agenda. This would fundamentally mean engaging with perspectives beyond HE literature to analyse HE harmonisation. Specifically, this thesis employs perspectives from policy transfer, norm diffusion, and region-building. This approach may contribute to the current need for a more innovative and cohesive study, which combines perspectives from different disciplines to develop a ‘common core’ in harmonisation theory (Andenas et al., 2012, pp. 574 - 575). In addition, with the increased importance of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research to solving complex international issues over recent decades, the approach may have innovative and practical implications for improving HE harmonisation initiatives.

More specifically, the thesis touched upon important questions from regional studies such as the relevance of enhancing the leadership role of ASEAN as a key condition for developing a common HE space, and the importance of ASEAN’s cognitive priors in determining the impact and legitimacy of the BP for ASEAN. However, these are not the core questions of the thesis. More studies critically examining these issues would further improve our understanding of the path dependence of HE regionalism in ASEAN, whereby regional initiatives can only progress when they are in congruence with ASEAN’s cognitive priors, as discussed in Chapter Three.
Although the thesis is not a direct comparative study, it encourages a comparative analysis of a variety of HE regionalisms in future work. This could mean examining some key questions from regional studies to the future studies of HE regionalism such as what accounts for the differential impact of regionalism in different regions? Are there particular conditions conducive to regionalism? Moreover, what is the legitimacy of certain ‘models’ or ‘gold standards’ for regionalism? Noting the currently little empirical analysis and data on inter-regionalism that exists, more research using a comparative approach would generate meaningful accounts in the field (Chou & Ravinet, 2015, 2016).

Influenced by political science and HE studies, the thesis developed a conceptual framework for analysing HE harmonisation. Primarily, it was used in this thesis as a reference tool to conceptualise the close relationship between the region-building process and regional HE interactions in ASEAN. Furthermore, it was used as a frame of reference to analyse the notion and characteristics of harmonisation from a multitude of regionalisation terms. Moreover, it was used to analyse the progress and key conditions for developing HE harmonisation. Employing this tool in future work is encouraged to further develop a frame of reference for theoretical discussions of HE harmonisation within a given region and comparative analyses of HE regionalism.

The thesis has explored the emergence and development of the HE harmonisation phenomenon in ASEAN, rather than specifically examining functional mechanisms. More in-depth studies on means to develop each HE harmonisation mechanism is of pressing importance to the current context of a more connected ASEAN Community. Future research may examine the development of these mechanisms and their usability such as the ACTS, the AQAFHE, the AQRF, and academic calendar alignment. In particular, there was a demand from interviewees for more research on the development of a Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) in the services sector in ASEAN to further promote regional and international skilled labour mobility.

Although the thesis has touched upon the governance of HE harmonisation and the role of ASEAN as a regional body in improving the ideational and structural conditions needed for a common HE space, these were not the focal points of the thesis. More studies critically examining governance and the leadership role of ASEAN in developing the HE harmonisation process would contribute to the current
demand for future research and reflection on ‘how to develop the optimal mix of actors and the most appropriate balance of bottom up and top down, informal and formal, ad hoc and intentional strategies’ (Knight, 2013b, p. 369).

On a final note, it is crucial that future research is conducted in a direction that encourages the planning and implementation of HE harmonisation for sustainable development and for the greater good. As a university president suggested:

Whatever is done; we should keep in mind why we do things. For example, it’s really to uplift the HE of the people in ASEAN. The success of harmonisation of HE should be measured against the ability to address this concern of poverty and the sustainability of development. Harmonised HE systems should result in sustainable economic development where natural resources are reserved for future generations and the environment is protected to provide the sustainable basis for all.  

#20 Philippines

This could fundamentally mean ensuring HE harmonisation efforts prioritise the objective of furthering graduates’ competitiveness for the contemporary labour market and improving high levels of educational achievement. Furthermore, the core value of harmonisation, particularly to promote productive cross-border interactions while recognising local diversity, needs to be emphasised in future research and practices to create a peaceful and harmonious international community. This serves ASEAN’s intention to enhance both regional and global connectivity. As one university dean noted: ‘in the end, we are not a part of only ASEAN but a part of Asia. We will be a partner with Europe, the US, the UK, and more. It will be difficult to be ASEAN without others. We are all connected’ (#25 Thailand).
Appendices
## Appendix One

### A Summary of Rationales for HE Harmonisation in ASEAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Rationales: Goals/Benefits/Expected Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| RHED SEAMEO RIHED (2008, p. 10) | Key findings about the future process of harmonisation of higher education in Southeast Asia: key benefits | • Greater student mobility;  
• Widening access and choices for students both in terms of quality and cost;  
• Provide greater opportunity for HEI cooperation (e.g., joint programmes and academic research);  
• Widening regional pool of human resources and a greater chance for collaborative investment on human capital;  
• ASEAN or SEA dimension of higher education will attract more international students; easier to align with other higher education areas in the future; and  
• Better understanding in the region. |
| Zirat and Jantan (2008, pp. 22, 24) | The expected outcomes of the process and benefits of creating a future Common Higher Education Space in Southeast Asia (Malaysian perspective) | Academic and Employment Mobility: Students’ academic and employment mobility will be enhanced. They should be able to work anywhere in Southeast Asia upon graduation; Number of International Students: The number of international students in Malaysia will increase; Staff Exposure: Academic staff will have more opportunities to gain experiences working and doing research in Southeast Asian countries, particularly Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV); Expatriates: There will be a much higher number of foreign academic staff and researchers working in Malaysian HEIs. |
| Hirosato (2014, p. 149) | Rationales of HE harmonisation and networking in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) | More harmonised higher education systems and strengthened higher education networks will help narrow development gaps and contribute to the ASEAN Community from 2015 and beyond. |
| Umemiya (2008, p. 277) | The driving forces of regional quality assurance activity in HE in Southeast Asia | ASEAN’s policies, such as reducing the economic gap within the region and creation of a single market, and member countries’ policies to internationalise higher education institutions have brought about a strong need to improve the quality of higher education and to foster harmonisation of higher education systems, which have been the driving force behind this regional quality assurance activity. |
## Appendix Two

**A Typology of Regionalisation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of regionalisation</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structured regionalisation</td>
<td>A complex multi-issue entity, using informal politics despite deep institutionalisation. No hegemon exists; substantial power is delegated to the new centre in many policy areas, and is costly to 'repatriate'.</td>
<td>European Union (EU); African Union (in aspiration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance regionalisation</td>
<td>An alternative to a global regime, established by regional/global hegemon to counter threats to its power from other regionalisation processes or states. Focuses on narrow range of issues, with emphasis on trade.</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security regionalisation</td>
<td>Focus on security issues, either military or socio-economic. May be geographically contiguous or transregional in membership.</td>
<td>Euro-Mediterranean Partnership; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network regionalisation</td>
<td>Regional identity-driven response to globalisation. May acquire significant or more limited range of powers, but relies primarily on non-institutionalised or intergovernmental working methods.</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); African Union (in actuality); South American Common Market (Mercosur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjoined regionalisation</td>
<td>Strategic partnership of one regionalisation process with either another such process or with key states outside the region, for the sake of economic or foreign policy advantage</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); putative Free Trade Area of the Americas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Warleigh-Lack (2006)
Appendix Three

General Information on Academic Calendars of the ASEAN Member State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Academic Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Jun to Mar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Jan to Nov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Jun to Mar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Aug to May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Aug to Jun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Aug to Jun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Aug to Jun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Sep to Jun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Jan to Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>Jan to Nov</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ngamsangchaikit (2012)
Appendix Four

Key characteristics of Governance in HEIs with Greater Autonomy in Selected ASEAN Member States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization type</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>PULE</td>
<td>(Corporatized), AU planned</td>
<td>PAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public HEIs with autonomy</td>
<td>All 5</td>
<td>15/80</td>
<td>HEIs which fulfil CHED’s requirements</td>
<td>Selected (11)</td>
<td>Selected (9) (expect 5 more autonomous HEIs in 2015)</td>
<td>Selected (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest policy decision body</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>University Council</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>Governing Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of HEI top executive</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>University Council</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial management</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI and ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set tuition fees</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>MOE guideline (undergrad)/ HEI (graduate)</td>
<td>HEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee status</td>
<td>University employee</td>
<td>Dual tracks</td>
<td>Civil servants</td>
<td>Dual tracks</td>
<td>Civil servants</td>
<td>Mainly civil servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set academic degree programs and courses</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>HEI proposes for ministry’s approval</td>
<td>HEI proposes for ministry’s approval</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Compiled with information from ADB (2012), Varghese and Martin (2013), and personal communications

HEI: Higher Education Institution, MOE: Ministry of Education, CHED: Commission on Higher Education

Ratanawijitrasin (2015)
Appendix Five

Email Texts to Prospective Interviewees

Dear X,

I am currently undertaking a PhD study at the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the University of Melbourne. The aim of my thesis is to examine the drivers of and impediments to the harmonisation of higher education systems in ASEAN. The thesis will provide an analysis of the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in this regional context. This study is supervised by Dr Chi Baik and Professor Philomena Murray of the University of Melbourne and Professor Supachai Yavaprabhas of Chulalongkorn University.

The interviewees of this qualitative study include approximately 40 policy makers and practitioners at the management level from the ten ASEAN member states representing national governments, higher education institutions and regional organisations. The interview should take between 25 – 30 minutes.

With your rich engagement in the field of higher education, I am interested in your views on higher education harmonisation in the ASEAN context. For your reference, I have attached a copy of the Plain Language Statement and the interview questions. Please note that the project has been approved by the Education Faculty Human Ethics Advisory Group (HREC No.: 0711120).

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely,

Salita Seedokmai
PhD Candidate

Enclosures:
1) A plain language statement
2) A sample of interview questions
3) A consent form
Appendix Six

Plain Language Statement

Dear X:

You are invited to participate in a PhD research project by The University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education. This project is conducted by PhD Researcher Salita Seedokmai, supervised by Dr Chi Baik and Professor Philomena Murray. The aim of this study is to examine the drivers of and impediments to the harmonisation of higher education systems in ASEAN. The thesis will provide an analysis of the key conditions for constructing a common space in HE in this regional context.

I seek policy makers and practitioners at the management level from ten ASEAN member states representing national governments, higher education institutions and regional organisations to participate in an interview taking no more than 30 minutes. During the interview, I will ask you a series of questions about how you view the factors influencing the ASEAN harmonisation of higher education, particularly the drivers, impediments and key conditions for advancing progress.

Although the interview will be audio-recorded, individuals will not be identified and the tapes will only be used by for transcribing purposes. The data will be analysed by me as the principal researcher, under the guidance of my supervisors. We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your response to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the raw data, which will be stored in password protected and locked storage facilities. While the raw data will be destroyed after a minimum period, a report of the overall findings will be produced and made available to you and the University.

If you choose to participate in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form which states that you agree to be involved in the project; that you agree to be audio-taped; and that you understand your rights as a participant. To inform your convenience for the interview, kindly contact me any time at +61 43 875 0688 or at salitas@student.unimelb.edu.au.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw consent at any time, to withdraw any unprocessed data you previously supplied, to stop an interview in progress, or to have any identifying information irreversibly removed from processed data. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer for the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics at +61 3 8344 2073.

Yours sincerely,
Salita Seedokmai (PhD Candidate)
Appendix Seven

Informed Consent Form

Project title: The harmonisation of higher education systems in ASEAN: An analysis of drivers and impediments

Name of participant: ...................................................................................................................

Name of researcher(s): Dr Chi Baik, Professor Philomena Murray, and Ms Salita Seedokmai

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep,

2. I understand that my participation will involve an interview and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

3. I acknowledge that:
   (a) I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
   (b) The project is conducted for research purpose;
   (c) The confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
   (d) With my consent, the interview will be audio recorded and I understand audio files will be used for transcribing purpose only. After these audio files are used, they will be stored at the University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;
   (e) My name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;
   (f) The small sample sizes may have implications for protecting the identity of the participants;
   (g) Once this consent form is signed, it will be retained by the researcher;
   (h) A copy of the summary of the research findings will be sent to me, if I wish.

I consent to this interview being audio-taped for transcribing purpose.
☑ yes ☐ no (please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings.
☑ yes ☐ no (please tick)

.................................................................................................................................

.................................................................................................................................

Signature Date
Appendix Eight

Interview Schedule

1. Could you please tell me briefly about your current role and to what extent it relates to the ASEAN higher education cooperation?
   - Do you have other terms for this process that you think are more suitable to the ASEAN context? Why?

2. What is your understanding of the ‘harmonisation of higher education’?

3. Do you think that the harmonisation of higher education efforts have emerged in ASEAN?
   - If yes, to what extent? Please share some examples of achievements.
   - If no, why not?

4. What do you view as the main drivers of increased ASEAN academic collaboration or impetus for the harmonisation of higher education initiatives?

5. What are the main impediments to the harmonisation of higher education initiatives in your opinion?

6. If you have to specify one thing, what do you view as the key condition required to significantly progress the higher education harmonisation efforts?

7. In recognition of the ASEAN vision to develop a more connected ASEAN Community:
   - What do you think should be the role of ASEAN, as a regional body, in the harmonisation of higher education processes?
   - To what extent and how has the strategic direction of your organisation promoted the harmonisation of higher education process? Kindly provide some examples.

8. What do you expect to see and not to see as the outcomes of the process?

9. What do you view as the priorities in the next five years towards the harmonisation of higher education?

10. Finally, do you have anything to share in relation to harmonisation of higher education in ASEAN? e.g. issues, concerns, etc.
Appendix Nine

Interview Protocols or a Predesigned Form to Record Interviews

Name: ________________________________________________________

Gender:  □ Male  □ Female

Country of origin: □ Brunei □ Cambodia □ Indonesia □ Laos □ Malaysia □ Myanmar □ The Philippines □ Singapore □ Thailand □ Vietnam

Type of organisation: □ Government Agency □ HEI □ Regional Organisation

1. Could you please tell me briefly about your current role and to what extent it relates to the ASEAN higher education cooperation?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

2. What is your understanding on the ‘harmonisation of higher education’?  

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Do you have other terms for this process that you think are more suitable to the ASEAN context? Why?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
3. Do you think that the harmonisation of higher education efforts have emerged in ASEAN?
   - If yes, to what extent? Please share some examples of achievements.
   - If no, why not?

4. What do you view as the main drivers of increased ASEAN academic collaboration or impetus for the harmonisation of higher education initiatives?

5. What are the main impediments to the harmonisation of higher education initiatives in your opinion?
6. If you have to specify one thing, what do you view as the key condition required to significantly progress the higher education harmonisation efforts?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

7. In recognition of the ASEAN vision to develop a more connected ASEAN Community:
   - what do you think should be the role of ASEAN, as an institution, in the harmonisation of higher education processes?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

- To what extent and how has the strategic direction of your organisation promoted the harmonisation of higher education process? Kindly provide some examples.

____________________________________________________________________________________

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8. What do you expect to see and not to see as the outcomes of the process?

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9. What do you view as the priorities in the next five years towards the harmonisation of higher education process?

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10. Finally, do you have anything to share in relation to harmonisation of higher education in ASEAN? e.g. issues, concerns, etc.

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Appendix Ten

Field notes or a Predesigned Form to Record Field Activities

Date: ________________________________________________________________

Time: ________________________________________________________________

Location: _____________________________________________________________

Activities: ____________________________________________________________

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Observation: ____________________________________________________________

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Comments: ____________________________________________________________

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Author/s:  
Soongsawang, Salita

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