

# MOBILITY, MUTUAL RECOGNITION AND ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING: THE ROAD TO SUSTAINABLE ASEAN INTEGRATION

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**Abstract:** *This paper analyses the role of international mobility and mutual recognition to regional community building in the ASEAN region by reviewing policy documents and international student mobility statistics. ASEAN policy directives have evolved from regional economic cooperation to ASEAN Community building despite the limited mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) on professional services, and low and unbalanced intra-ASEAN student mobility. However the non-ratification of the 2011 UNESCO Asia and Pacific Recognition Convention, and the slow implementation of various regional frameworks supporting the establishment of an ASEAN Higher Education Area have limited the potential contribution of mobility and mutual recognition to the ASEAN Community building project. Recommendations to enhance its contribution includes expanding and implementing ASEAN MRAs to all professional disciplines, the development and institutionalisation of an ASEAN quality assurance system, promoting a balanced intra-ASEAN mobility, and ratification and implementation of the 2011 UNESCO Asia and Pacific Recognition Convention (Tokyo Convention).*

**Keywords:** *ASEAN, regionalism, mobility, mutual recognition, community building*

## Introduction

Although officially established on the 22th of November 2015, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community still requires significant regional building initiatives. Progress in ASEAN regional integration has mostly focused on economic cooperation and integration, while education cooperation, until recently, has focused on ASEAN human resource development to support sustainable national and regional economic development.

The last decade, however, has seen ASEAN initiatives move beyond economic cooperation and integration, in the direction of establishing the foundations required to establish an ASEAN Community. In particular, this period saw a significant number of initiatives focused on the regionalisation of higher education in the ASEAN region.

Drivers of these developments are a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors include the various common challenges faced by ASEAN Member States, and the need to ensure competitiveness in the ASEAN region. Extrinsic factors include the acceptance of the knowledge-based economy discourse and of the role of higher education in sustainable economic development, the various regionalisation initiatives including in higher education (especially in Europe), and ASEAN's need to engage in inter-regional collaboration with different regions and regional initiatives.

Sharing common challenges, individual ASEAN member states have resorted to looking into regional solutions to build peace, prosperity, and sustainable economic development within the increasingly relevant ASEAN-led regionalism frameworks namely: ASEAN, ASEAN plus 3 (China, Japan,

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and South Korea) and East Asian Summit (which include Australia, India, New Zealand, United States of America, and the Federal Republic of Russia on top of the ASEAN plus 3 countries).

Within ASEAN, the concept of mobility has been strongly imbedded in its ASEAN Community building directive and initiatives. Mimicking Europe's four freedoms, ASEAN has been promoting and supporting the mobility of goods and services, investments, capital, and labor. However, ASEAN developments in the area of mobility of services and labor (especially professionals) has been lagging. The paper will briefly present a brief overview of ASEAN Community building, developments in ASEAN mobility and mutual recognition, which include ASEAN student mobility, and various ASEAN and non-ASEAN initiatives. This account will be followed by discussion of the role of mobility and mutual recognition of higher education qualifications in the ASEAN Community building project. The paper end by concluding and providing recommendations for consideration by the ASEAN Secretariat.

### **Regionalism and Regional Community Building**

The establishment of a regional community, such as the European Union and ASEAN, is brought about by the process of regionalisation, which leads to regional integration (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2000; Knight, 2012). Regionalisation (or the process of region building) can be seen in terms of: a project driven by actors; a process with its own internal dynamics, geopolitical and economic factors; and as products with regions (through regional organisations) as actors at the regional and global levels (Lagenhove 2012, pp.18-19).

Seen as a continuum, regionalisation has been categorised into four different phases, namely: early, old, new and comparative regionalisms. Early regionalism dealt with trans-local economic, political, social and cultural integration, while the latter three phases of regionalism have been conceptualised in terms of political (bi-polar Cold War, Post-Cold War, and multipolar (world of regions) world orders), and policy (e.g. policy direction, institutions, and agents) contexts (Soderbaum, 2015). Furthermore, old, new and comparative regionalisms are differentiated by their actors (state; state vs. non-state; and state and non-state) and modes of governance (nationalism; resisting/taming/advancing economic globalisation; and regions as part of multi-level global governance) respectively (Laursen, 2008; Soderbaum, 2013; 2015).

A regional community, such as the ASEAN Community, is socially constructed by the interests and identities of its actors taking into consideration the interaction process and their subjective understandings (Chao, 2014b). Originally defined with geographical and inter-governmental restrictions (Haas, 1958; Ravenhill, 2001), (new) regionalism is now seen as "an outcome of the integration processes usually involving the coalition of social forces: markets, private trade, investment flows, policies, and decisions of organizations and state-led initiatives" (Robertson 2008, p.720). As a complex project, regionalisation should be disaggregated in terms of economic, social and political integration processes, and seen in relation to the degree of the transfer of sovereignty from the nation state (e.g. ASEAN Member States) to the region (e.g. ASEAN Secretariat) (Hettne, 2005). It should be noted that the spill-over effect of one type of regionalism may lead to deeper integration or to other types of regionalisms as seen in the European and ASEAN cases, where economic regionalism has led to social/political regionalism (Chao, 2014a).

Although endogenous (focused on the nation state, and other actors, desire and needs) and exogenous (reacting to globalisation) factors are both driving factors to region building (Soderbaum and Sbragia, 2010), tensions between universal ideas and norms, and aspirations for regional cultural, managerial and ideational autonomy exist (Acharya, 1997). With its non-resolution seen to deter institution (and region) building, Acharya (1997) advanced that the process of adaption and 'indigenisation' of ideas and norms is the only solution to address these tensions.

Although earlier studies on social interaction and regional community building had mixed results (Toth, 2012), two recent studies focusing on the Erasmus program provide support for Deutsch (1957) and Fligstein's (2008) argument that increased and prolonged social interaction may eventually lead to the formation of an integration community of states and nations, and/or a regional identity.

Studying 61 Erasmus students in three different universities in Turkey, Demirkol (2013) concluded that educational mobility programmes have a positive effect on cultural integration. Similarly, Stoeckel (2016), studying roughly 1,500 students at 38 German universities, concluded that social interaction contributes to a European identity. However, Stoeckel (2016) stated that it was most effective only in particular contact with other international students rather than contact with hosts.

Regional community building requires more than a slogan, such as 'one vision, one identity, one community' or regional and/or national policies. Consensus building for its regional (ASEAN) vision, and the actual formulation and promotion of a regional (ASEAN) ideal are necessary. Furthermore, it requires a 'sense of community', which can only be achieved through prolonged social interactions, such as through international (Intra-ASEAN) student and professional mobility especially when complemented with mutual recognition arrangements.

It is within the above-mentioned consensus building, identity formation, and promotion of a 'sense of community' that mobility and mutual recognition contributes to ASEAN Community building. These processes, however, are anchored on historical developments that form the current state of the ASEAN Community, international student (and professional) mobility, and mutual recognition in the ASEAN region, which are presented in the subsequent sections of this paper.

### **ASEAN Community Building**

After a series of failed regionalisation initiatives (e.g. Association of South East Asia; and the Malaysia-Philippines-Indonesia (Maphilindo) initiatives), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was officially established in 1967 by its five founding member states, namely: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Its membership later expanded with the accession of Brunei Darussalam in 1984, and Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia in the late 1990s.

The continuum between old and new regionalisms can be seen in the ASEAN region. Old regionalism can be seen with the various regional economic cooperation initiatives, such as the ASEAN Industrial Projects (AIP), Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTAs), and the ASEAN Industrial Complementation (AIC), later supplemented by the ASEAN Industrial Joint Ventures (AIJV), were set forth by the 1976 Declaration of ASEAN Concord. These initiatives were developed during the Cold War era as a response to the international commodity crisis and to promote intra-ASEAN trade on a number of preferential goods (e.g. food and energy) (Cuyvers and Pupphavesa, 1996). New regionalism in the ASEAN region can be seen to have started with the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992, which was a response to globalisation and neo-liberalism, especially with the rise of China and India in the late 1980s.

After the establishment of AFTA in 1992, various regionalisation initiatives, mostly focused on ASEAN Economic integration (ASEAN, 1995; 1998; 2009a), were initiated. However, a multi-tier (two-track) economic liberalisation, especially with the ASEAN Minus X formula, developed in the ASEAN region with the ASEAN6 (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) countries moving ahead of the CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) countries, with the possible exception of Vietnam.

Within the rationale of ASEAN Community building, and especially after its expansion in the late 1990s, ASEAN started initiatives to narrow the development gap between ASEAN Member States. These initiatives include the Initiative for ASEAN Integration and Narrowing the Developing Gap, have focused on narrowing the development gap between these two ASEAN sub-groupings (ASEAN, 2017; Chao, 2016) to realise a single market and to support the establishment and consolidation of the ASEAN Community.

The ASEAN Community building directive started with the ASEAN Vision 2020 and the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, which were adopted in 1997 and 2003 respectively (ASEAN, 1997; 2003). Officially established on November 2015 by the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, the ASEAN Community is anchored on three pillars namely: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (originally ASEAN Security Community), the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural

Community (ASEAN, 2015a). This advancement of ASEAN regionalism is meant to facilitate the free movement of goods, services, investment and skilled labor, and the freer flow of capital within the ASEAN region.

**Figure 1. ASEAN community vision 2025**

<b>ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (Kuala Lumpur Declaration)</b>		
<b>Consolidate</b>	<b>Envision</b>	<b>Complement</b>
Rules-based, People-Oriented & People-centered	Peaceful, Stable & Resilient	UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda
<b>Three Pillars of ASEAN Community</b>		
<b>Political-Security</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Socio-Cultural</b>
Implement ASEAN agreements	Highly integrated & cohesive regional economy <i>(resolution of non-trade barriers)</i> <i>(movement – investment, skilled labor, business persons &amp; capital)</i>	Committed, participative & socially-responsive <i>(accountable/inclusive mechanisms)</i>
Promote/protect <i>human rights</i>	Competitive, Innovative & Dynamic	Inclusive <i>(promotes/protects human rights)</i>
Promote/Strengthen <i>Peace-oriented values</i>	Enhanced connectivity & sectoral cooperation <i>(regional frameworks)</i>	Dynamic & harmonious <i>(identity, culture &amp; heritage)</i>
Strengthen <i>ASEAN unity, cohesiveness &amp; centrality</i>		Innovate & contribute to Global community

Source: Adapted from ASEAN (2015a)

Acknowledging the need to consolidate the ASEAN Community, the Kuala Lumpur Declaration also set directives to advance ASEAN’s vision of a peaceful, stable and resilient community of nations with “one vision, one identity, and one community”, one that complements the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (ASEAN, 2015a).

Figure 1 presents the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, with key characteristics in each of its three pillars. Of particular interest for ASEAN Community building is the focus on increasing ASEAN unity, cohesiveness and centrality, movement of investment, skilled labor, business persons and capital, enhancing connectivity and sectoral cooperation (including the use of regional frameworks), and a focus on dynamism and harmony particularly for identity, culture, and heritage. The above-mentioned focus highlights the need to develop and promote an ASEAN identity, implement regional frameworks, and enhance mobility, especially people to people mobility, to further consolidate the ASEAN Community.

**ASEAN Mobility and Mutual Recognition**

The World Trade Organization’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which came into effect in January 1995, has caused an increasing focus in the global trade of services. Given the focus on service liberalisation and the reframing of education as a commodity that is subject to the rules of trade, GATS contributed to the global acceptance of the knowledge-based economy discourse, which became prominent from the late 1990s or early 2000s.

Within this global context, ASEAN embarked on its own liberalisation of services within the AFAS framework (ASEAN, 1995), and eventually within ASEAN's directive to transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital, as set out in the 2007 ASEAN Economic Blueprint (Koty, 2016). ASEAN has acknowledged the contribution of highly qualified graduates to ensuring the region's competitiveness and the establishment of a regional knowledge-based economy.

Given the common challenges across ASEAN Member States including but not limited to increasing student enrolments, economic restructuring, financial constraints, access, equity, quality and relevance issues (Lee and Healy, 2006; Umemiya, 2008), a consensus emerged regarding the benefits and necessity for higher education cooperation (Chao, 2016).

This is evident in the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan and the Hua Hin Declaration which highlighted the centrality of education in ASEAN's commitment to build the ASEAN Community (ASEAN 2009b; 2012, p.3). The ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan in Education was developed to support ASEAN principles of peace and stability, sustained economic growth and shared prosperity, cooperation and consensus, rule of law and good governance, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are enshrined in the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN, 2012). In fact, the Work Plan was a response to the decision of the Fourth ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting in 2009 (4<sup>th</sup> ASED) "which considered the importance of having a work plan to guide the work of the Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED) in an integrated manner towards the building of an ASEAN Community" (ASEAN 2012, p.4).

Furthermore, the four priorities in the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan in Education are intended to "support ASEAN programs that raise awareness of regional identity; promote access to and improve quality of primary, secondary and tertiary education; support regional mobility programmes for students, teachers, and faculty and strategies for internationalisation of education; and support for other ASEAN sectoral bodies with an interest in education" (ASEAN 2012, p.vii). Aside from acknowledging the need for consolidation of the ASEAN Community, ASEAN's focus on increasing access to quality education, improving quality of education, and cross-border mobility and the internationalisation of education highlights the importance attached to student (and professional) mobility to ASEAN Community building.

International student and professional mobility can facilitate the inter-cultural and social awareness and understanding required in any community building exercise (Demirkol, 2013; Toth, 2012; Stoeckel, 2016; Vaughn, 2016). Given the identity formation role of education, particularly in higher education, and of increasing regionalism in the global world order, the role of intra-ASEAN mobility and mutual recognition of ASEAN higher education qualifications is becoming a necessity for ASEAN Community building.

### *ASEAN Student Mobility*

As this section looks into ASEAN mobility and mutual recognition issues, it is necessary to briefly discuss the developments in ASEAN international student mobility in higher education. Although ASEAN student mobility has been increasing over the past two decades, intra-ASEAN student mobility is quite low. ASEAN outbound student mobility has significantly increased from 154,289 to 256,945 from 1999 to 2015 respectively (see table 1). Within the same period, intra-ASEAN student mobility has also increased from 1.87% to 6.92% of the total ASEAN outbound students from 1999 to 2015 respectively (see table 1).

Intra-ASEAN mobility is significantly hosted by Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, three countries which respectively hosted 53.89% (12,467), 22% (5,138) and 9.78% (2,262) in 2010, and 57.70% (10,253), 27.55% (4,895), and 12.22% (2,171) in 2015, of ASEAN internationally mobile students. Although Singapore should also be a key host of ASEAN international students, no information is available in the UNESCO UIS dataset.

**Table 1. ASEAN Student Mobility**

	1999	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
ASEAN outbound	154,289	143,643	164,176	223,021	228,272	228,568	231,347	237,097	256,945
Intra-ASEAN	2,882	7,643	4,728	23,133	19,694	18,496	8,524	12,190	17,769
	1.87%	5.32%	2.88%	10.37%	8.63%	8.09%	3.68%	5.14%	6.92%

Source: Calculated by author from UNESCO UIS database

Malaysia and Singapore are widely regarded to be key international higher education hubs in the ASEAN region, each hosting a number of foreign university branch campuses (Chao, 2014b; Clark, 2015; Dessoiff, 2012). Malaysia hosts a significant number of Indonesian, Singaporean and Thai students, while Thailand and Vietnam host mainly ASEAN students from the CLMV countries (see table 2). Of particular interest is the fact that Malaysia has sent a large number of students to Indonesia during the period 2005-2010 (see table 3). Given that this is atypical for Malaysian student mobility, the rationale and driving factors for Malaysian student mobility to Indonesia during this period requires further investigation.

In spite of the increase in intra-ASEAN student mobility, it continues to lag behind the increase in ASEAN outward student mobility, especially starting in 2006 (see figure 2). ASEAN’s regional capture for ASEAN outbound students has only been focused on Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam (and Singapore, being a global higher education hub, in spite of the missing data). Furthermore, it is also apparent that there is an Islamic (Indonesians studying in Malaysia), and geographic (CLMV countries going to Thailand and Vietnam; Singaporeans studying in Malaysia) preference within ASEAN higher education. Socio-economic status of ASEAN Member States and its students may have also contributed to international mobility decisions along with language, culture, quality and affordability of education in ASEAN Member States.

ASEAN mobility and mutual recognition initiatives can be seen within the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation – Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO-RIHED), and ASEAN itself. These are complemented by various higher education initiatives undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), particularly through its Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the European Commission (EC) and its partners. In particular, the EC’s ‘European Union Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region (EU-SHARE)’ Project is supporting ASEAN initiatives, through the AUN, develop the regional architecture for ASEAN, and ASEAN-European Union, higher education mobility and mutual recognition.

**Table 2. ASEAN Students Hosted by Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam**

	Malaysia			Thailand			Vietnam		
	2000	2010	2015	2000	2010	2015	2000	2010	2015
Brunei Darussalam	265	310	548				214	517	
Cambodia	137	229	273		1,009	1,182			381
Indonesia	5,296	8,955	5,700		191	274			6
Lao PDR	20	17	16		1,254	793	358	1,744	1,772
Malaysia					129	100			
Myanmar	301	396	404		1,205	1,620			

Philippines	113	350	371		170	148			11
Singapore	306	840	960		39	30			1
Thailand	457	1,316	1,361					1	
Vietnam	64	54	620		1,141	748			
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,959</b>	<b>12,467</b>	<b>10,253</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5,138</b>	<b>4,895</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>2,262</b>	<b>2,171</b>

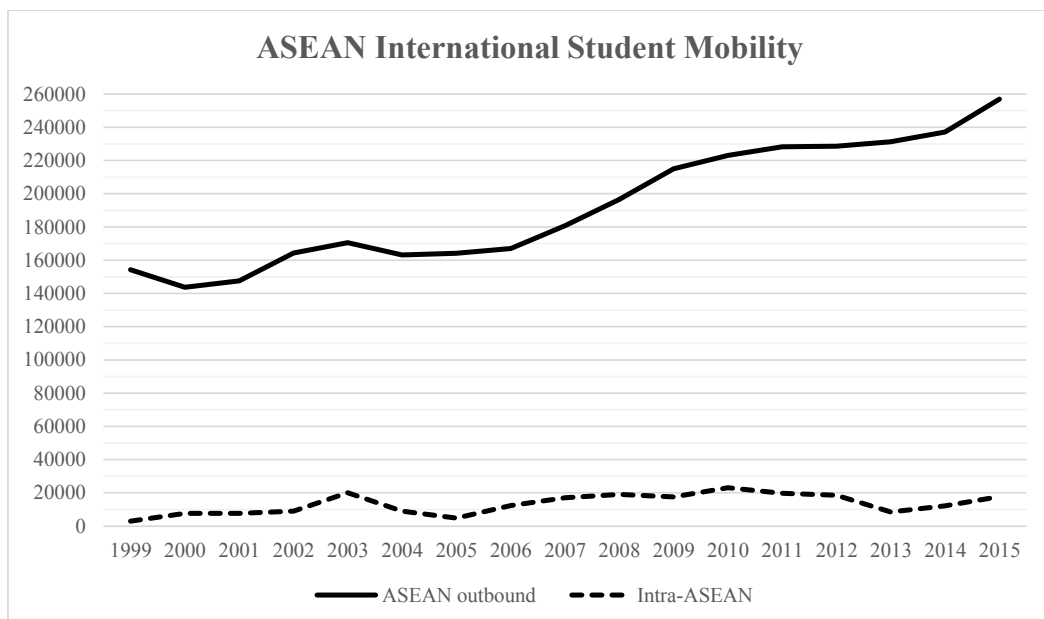
Source: Calculated by author from UNESCO UIS database

**Table 3. Malaysian Students in Indonesia**

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1,052	2,775	2,882	2,227	Not available	2,516

Source: Compiled from UNESCO UIS database

**Figure 2. ASEAN student mobility**



Source: Calculated by author from UNESCO UIS

### *AUN, SEAMEO-RIHED and ASEAN*

Since its establishment in 1995, AUN has been engaged in strengthening university cooperation within ASEAN, promoting cooperation and solidarity among scholars, academicians, and researchers in ASEAN Member States. In 2008, AUN became one of ASEAN's sectorial ministerial body responsible for higher education cooperation and development which mandates its serving as a policy-oriented body in ASEAN higher education. Re-established in 1993 (originally established in 1959), SEAMEO-RIHED's mission has been to foster efficiency, effectiveness, and harmonisation of higher education in South East Asia through systemic research, empowerment, development of mechanisms to facilitate sharing and collaborations in higher education.

Both AUN and SEAMEO-RIHED have been engaged in quality assurance, international student mobility, credit transfers and internationalisation of higher education in the ASEAN region. However, AUN activities are located within its network of AUN member universities, and recently through associate member universities, while SEAMEO-RIHED engages at the regional level (e.g. the ASEAN International Mobility Scheme, among others).

ASEAN has also contributed to the harmonisation of ASEAN higher education with its development and adoption of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) in 2014. ASEAN Member States are also required to reference their respective national qualifications frameworks to the AQRF. Indirectly, the AQRF also promotes the development of national qualifications frameworks in ASEAN member states.

Since 2005, ASEAN has concluded and signed several Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA) and/or Framework Agreements on Mutual Recognition on Engineering, Nursing, Architectural, Medical, Dental and Accountancy Services, Tourism Professionals, and Surveying Qualifications. Furthermore, an agreement for visa exemption for ASEAN nationals and the ASEAN Framework on Movement of Natural Persons were signed in 2006 and 2012 respectively. These agreements and frameworks are positioned to increase the mobility of professionals and support the free movement of trade in services within the ASEAN region.

In AFAS, probably the first ASEAN document with reference to mutual recognition of educational qualifications, article 5.1 facilitated the recognition of education, experience, requirements, licenses or certifications granted in another ASEAN Member State for the purpose of licensing or certification of service suppliers. However, the same article clarifies that such recognition may be based on agreement/arrangement with concerned Member States or even be accorded autonomously. As such, the above-mentioned ASEAN MRAs are an ongoing development as part of ASEAN ongoing economic integration initiative especially in services. This argument can also be supported by ASEAN's ongoing development of an ASEAN Trade in Services Agreement (ATISA).

### *Non-ASEAN Factors*

Aside from policy directives and projects from ASEAN and ASEAN-related organisations, non-ASEAN organisations have also contributed to (and to a certain extent directed) initiatives related to ASEAN mobility and the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications.

UNESCO's regional recognition conventions have strongly influenced the global and regional discussions on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications (Chao, 2015), while the ADB has supported SEAMEO RIHED's projects related to harmonising credit transfers in the ASEAN region. Furthermore, given their experience in the regionalisation of higher education and international student mobility, the European Commission, and its partners from its Member States, have also supported ASEAN in developing ASEAN (and EU-ASEAN) international student mobility and mutual recognition of higher education qualifications. The latter's ongoing EU-SHARE project, which runs from 2015 to 2018, aims to harmonise ASEAN higher education and create a bridge between ASEAN and European higher education (Chao, 2016).

UNESCO's 1983 Asia and Pacific Recognition Convention and its revised version, the 2011 Tokyo Convention, have framed the discussions on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia and Pacific region. Its recent revision, the 2011 Tokyo Recognition Convention, expanded this conversation to incorporate regional collaboration of national information centers, the use of national and regional qualifications frameworks, and even the use of transparency instruments such as the UNESCO diploma supplement (Chao, 2015). However, only Lao PDR, the Philippines and Indonesia have ratified the 1983 Asia and Pacific Recognition Convention, and the 2011 recognition convention has not entered into force given that only three (China, Australia and New Zealand) of the required five UNESCO Asia and Pacific Member States have ratified the revised convention (Chao, 2015).

Discussions on establishing an AHEA, however, started in mid-2007 with SEAMEO-RIHED's Japan Foundation-funded which includes exploring the benefits of establishing a regional framework



for higher education harmonisation. This project evolved into an agreement to develop various regional frameworks/mechanisms for quality assurance, credit transfer systems, mobility schemes, and lifelong learning systems (Chao, 2011; 2016; SEAMEO-RIHED, 2009).

ADB's support to SEAMEO-RIHED's project 'Harmonising Credit Transfer Systems in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and beyond' facilitated the discussion and initiatives to establish an ASEAN Higher Education Area (AHEA) or Common Space, and led to the development of the Academic Credit Transfer Framework Agreement (Chao, 2014b; 2016). The ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education was developed with the support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Rectors Conference (HRK) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) supported the development of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (Chao, 2016).

Furthermore, the European Commission's EU-SHARE project, in collaboration with its implementing partners, infused 9.6 Million Euros to strengthen regional cooperation within ASEAN, and between ASEAN and Europe, higher education (Chao, 2016; EU-SHARE, n.d.). In fact, the first ASEAN mobility forum was held on 2017 in Manila which was co-organised by the EU-SHARE project and the Philippines Commission on Higher Education focused on intra-ASEAN student mobility and aims to encourage deeper socio-cultural integration in ASEAN through people-to-people mobility (EU-SHARE, 2017). The support highlights ASEAN's recent priority in higher education, and its role in the ASEAN Community building process.

## Discussion

The previous sections have presented the various developments within ASEAN higher education and the ASEAN Community building project. Various ASEAN policy documents have explicitly called for enhanced cooperation through the liberalisation of trade in goods and services, the free flow of professionals, and mutual recognition of professional credentials. Within the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan in Education, education has been identified as a cross-cutting sector covering all three pillars of the ASEAN Community with human resource development, ASEAN awareness, and strengthening higher education cooperation, being key themes within the ASEAN Community building project.

Based on these observations, the discussion on mobility and mutual recognition in the ASEAN region will be presented in relation to: service sector liberalisation; higher education mobility and mutual recognition; development of regional frameworks; and ASEAN Awareness.

### *Service Sector Liberalisation*

Even before the ASEAN Community building project, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services, adopted in 1995, sought to enhance liberalisation of trade in services within the GATS framework to realise a free trade area for services. As early as 1995, within the same document, mutual recognition of education, experience and requirements were first mentioned, however, this was framed within the context of licensing and certification of service suppliers.

Within the ASEAN Community building project, the themes related to mobility and mutual recognition can be seen in its various policy documents. The community building project started with the ASEAN Vision 2020, which was adopted in Kuala Lumpur in 1997, which envisions "ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies" (ASEAN, 1997). This was further elaborated in the 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, which stated that the ASEAN Community shall be composed of three pillars: the ASEAN Security Community (later renamed to ASEAN Political-Security Community); ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community to build sustainable peace, stability, and shared prosperity in the region (ASEAN, 2003).

These policy documents highlight the vision of how human and natural resources contribute to the development and shared prosperity, the commitment to narrow the development gap within ASEAN Member States, and to enhance human resource development in all sectors of the economy through quality education, upgrading of skills, capabilities and training. In particular, the later document specifically mentioned the need to enhance cooperation and integration activities including human resource development and the recognition of educational qualifications to realise a fully integrated economic community.

Looking into the various action plans related to the ASEAN Community building project, the Hanoi Plan of Action (1999-2004), Vientiane Action Plan (2004-2010), and the Hua Hin Declaration (2009-2015) have specifically mentioned mobility and mutual recognition related issues.

The Hanoi Plan of Action stated strengthening the AUN, and its eventual conversion into the ASEAN University, strengthening of Member States education systems, and establishing a network of professional accreditation (ASEAN, 1999).

The ASEAN Economic Community was initially envisioned to be a single market and production base by 2020 (later advanced to 2015) with a free flow of investments, capital, goods, services and skilled labor within and across ASEAN Member States, while the Vientiane Action Plan aimed to undertake activities to promote and facilitate regional trade in services and movement of business persons, experts, professionals, skilled labor and talents (ASEAN, 2004).

Not only did the Hua Hin Declaration reiterate the need to facilitate movement of business persons, skilled labor and talents and the need for recognition of professional qualifications to establish the ASEAN Economic Community, it also specified action plans to complete mutual recognition arrangements under negotiation, implement the MRAs, and identify and develop MRAs for other professional services. Of particular interest is its action to enhance cooperation among ASEAN University Network members to increase intra-ASEAN student and staff mobility, and develop core competencies and qualifications for job/occupational and trainers' skills (ASEAN, 2009b).

These action plans form ASEAN's directives related to mobility and mutual recognition. It should be noted that mobility and mutual recognition in ASEAN policy documents were initially linked to movement of skilled labor and professionals within the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services and within the context of ASEAN liberalisation of trade in services. In fact, mutual recognition arrangements have been considered an important initiative for ASEAN integration on trade in services based on its ability to facilitate the flow of foreign professionals and workers taking into account relevant domestic regulations and market demand (ASEAN, 2015b).

With the exception of the MRA on Tourism Professionals which is implemented by the ASEAN Tourism Professionals Monitoring Committee, these MRAs are implemented by the Business Services and Healthcare Services Sectoral working groups under the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Services. Common competency standards and an ASEAN-wide registration system for mobile ASEAN professionals covered by the various ASEAN MRAs, have been (or being) developed to support their implementation.

In terms of implementation, the MRAs for engineering and architectural services are showing signs of early success. According to the ASEAN Integration Report 2015, there are 1,252 engineers and 284 architects recorded in the ASEAN Chartered Professional Engineers and ASEAN Architects registers respectively (ASEAN, 2015c).

### *Higher Education Mobility and Mutual Recognition*

In spite of these developments, discussions on student and academic mobility, and mutual recognition of higher education qualifications came at a later stage. ASEAN discussions on mobility and mutual recognition were initially focused on professional and skilled labor mobility as seen in the Hanoi Plan and Vientiane Plans of Action leading to the development and adoption of the first MRA in 2005, while it was only in the Hua Hin Declaration in 2009 where international student and staff mobility was explicitly mentioned.

The ongoing regionalisation of ASEAN higher education and its various initiatives may have played a role in their inclusion in recent ASEAN policy documents. Regionalisation of higher education initiatives were developed and implemented by AUN and SEAMEO-RIHED in the late-2000s. SEAMEO RIHED's *Raising Awareness: Exploring the Ideas of Creating a Higher Education Common Space in Southeast Asia* project, which started in 2007, and the various AUN and SEAMEO RIHED's subsequent regionalisation of higher education initiatives raised awareness on the necessity of international student mobility and regionalisation of higher education to support ASEAN Community building.

ASEAN's earlier and ongoing focus on liberalisation of trade in services, and its late realisation of the importance of intra-ASEAN student mobility in the ASEAN Community building process may have contributed to why intra-ASEAN student mobility has been lagging behind the growth of ASEAN outbound student mobility. However, the First ASEAN Mobility Forum, which focused on intra-ASEAN mobility and outlined a strategy to map and quantify intra-ASEAN student mobility, shows ASEAN's increasing focus on intra-ASEAN student mobility, and by extension mutual recognition of higher education qualifications in the recent years.

### *Regional Frameworks*

In spite of the late discussions on ASEAN student mobility in ASEAN policy documents, the AUN, SEAMEO-RIHED and ASEAN, and sometimes in collaboration with other non-ASEAN partners, have developed and adopted a number of regional frameworks, mechanisms and/or transparency instruments related to mobility and mutual recognition. These frameworks including the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE), and the Academic Credit Transfer Framework in Asia (ACTFA) can be considered as integral part of the ASEAN higher education area (Chao, 2015; 2016). They were developed to promote and support the regionalisation of ASEAN higher education, facilitate ASEAN student mobility and the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications (Chao, 2016). This sub-section presents these regional frameworks and discuss their relevance to mobility, mutual recognition and the ASEAN Community building project.

Developed and adopted by ASEAN in 2014, the AQRF is a common reference framework that enables comparisons of education qualifications across participating ASEAN Member States. Considered to be a unique ASEAN cross-sectoral and cross-pillar initiative, the AQRF was developed to support ASEAN Community building. Specifically, it supports achieving the free flow of skilled labor (through harmonisation and standardisation) within the region, and the establishment of an ASEAN skills recognition framework. Its objectives also include supporting recognition of qualifications and worker mobility, promoting and encouraging education and learner mobility, and encouraging the development of qualifications frameworks and national approaches to validating non-formal and in-formal learning in participating ASEAN Member States (ASEAN, n.d.).

Within the ASEAN Community building project, the importance of quality higher education and the need to award credit for studies within the Asian region has been recognised. In fact, these were behind the development of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE) and the Academic Credit Transfer Framework in Asia, by the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network and SEAMEO-RIHED respectively. Even though both frameworks aim at supporting regional harmonisation in higher education, the former is focused on facilitating regional recognition of qualifications and the alignment and harmonisation of national quality assurance systems, while the latter is aimed at addressing the challenge of having multiple credit transfer systems in the Asian region (Chao, 2016).

Along with UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Recognition Convention and its diploma supplement, the three ASEAN regional frameworks facilitate harmonisation, transparency and accountability in ASEAN higher education (Chao, 2015; 2016). They also promote and support ASEAN student and labor mobility through a mutually agreed quality assurance and credit transfer frameworks, and a qualifications reference framework that enables referencing of ASEAN Member States national qualifications frameworks and their respective qualifications.

In spite of all these initiatives, regionalisation of higher education in the ASEAN region is still in its early stages of implementation. Mechanisms and frameworks for regional quality assurance, credit transfers, student mobility, and even mutual recognition conventions and agreements have been developed and/or established. Actual implementation, however, is still in its initial stages. In fact, some ASEAN Member States have not developed their national qualifications frameworks, and as such will not yet be referencing to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework.

Furthermore, the various ASEAN-based/linked student mobility programs (e.g. AIMS, AUN-student mobility scheme/scholarships) are for short term mobility, usually for one semester or one year. The limited duration, scope (disciplines), and number of participating universities in the above-mentioned mobility schemes significantly reduces their potential for increasing intra-ASEAN student mobility. It also does not establish an environment conducive to mutual recognition of higher education and professional mobility as its focus has been recognition and awarding credits acquired during the exchange within its member universities.

### *ASEAN Awareness*

Regional community building is not simply a declaration that 10 ASEAN Member States came together to form the ASEAN Community. Although ASEAN's region building initiatives have initially focused (almost) exclusively on economic integration, it has evolved into a more complex community building project encompassing political-security, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. As such, ASEAN's region building project has evolved from old regionalism, one based on inter-governmental collaboration on a geographical restricted basis (Ravenhill, 2001; 2009) to new regionalism, defined as "an outcome of the integration processes usually involving the coalition of social forces: markets, private trade, investment flows, policies, and decisions of organizations and state-led initiatives" (Robertson 2008, p.720).

According to Hettne (2005), regional integration is a complex endeavor which should be disaggregated in terms of economic, social and political integration processes, and seen in relation to the transfer of sovereignty from the nation states to the region, namely ASEAN. This is reflected in ASEAN's three pillars: ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community; and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, and the ASEAN Charter, which was drafted and adopted in 2007.

Given the above-mentioned evolution of the ASEAN Community building project, the importance of ASEAN identity building, and promoting awareness of the concept of ASEANness has been increasing. Discussions of ASEANness in official ASEAN documents started with the 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord II within the context of "cultivating people's awareness of ASEAN" and "to enhance the mutual ASEAN spirit", and have been carried onward in all policy documents related to the ASEAN Community building project.

In fact, as part of the education provisions in the Hua Hin Declaration and in support of the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the promotion and awareness of the ASEAN identity starts at the early stage of education inculcated into the curriculum in schools, especially in primary schools and guided by the ASEAN Curriculum Sourcebook, a resource designed for educators and curriculum developers implemented by the ASEAN Secretariat, and the development of ASEAN studies courses and programs for undergraduates and postgraduates respectively (ASEAN, 2009b; 2013).

However, the concepts of ASEANness and an ASEAN identity are intangible and constantly undergoing construction as a long-term, complex, and multi-stakeholder (including students and professionals) process. Mutual recognition of higher education and professional qualifications, and intra-ASEAN mobility not only raises awareness of ASEANness and the ASEAN identity, but actually contribute to the ongoing construction of the ASEAN identity.

Looking into the world's most successful student mobility program, the ERASMUS program, "mobility has been found to equip people in Europe with skills, European identity and citizenship values, also impacting on their social integration, inclusion and openness to other cultures" (European Commission 2015, p.13). This was also confirmed during the recent First ASEAN Mobility Forum,

“building cultural understanding and connections outside the home country” were considered the main benefits of student mobility (Chipperfield, 2017).

ASEAN mobility, be it student or professionals, results enhanced awareness of other ASEAN Member States political, socio-economic, and cultural contexts, and facilitates ASEAN identity formation. Intra-ASEAN student mobility is of particular importance as the current students will become the leaders, entrepreneurs and active citizens of ASEAN’s future. Professional mobility facilitates understanding and harmonisation of professional practices and standards, and the integration of professions within the ASEAN Community. Mutual recognition of higher education and professional qualifications, however, is a major requisite for mobility.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### *Conclusion*

Regionalisation is a complex and multi-faceted process leading to the creation of a region. This process goes beyond the simple cooperation model within geographic boundaries usually directed by Nation States in old regionalism, to a multi-actor, multi-level, and multi-dimensional process leading to the establishment of a region. Endogenous and exogenous factors and actors makes the regionalisation process both an internally and externally driven process often showing a continuity between old and new regionalisms.

In the ASEAN case, this continuity between old and new regionalisms is seen in its evolution from regional economic cooperation and its related initiatives to the more complex ASEAN Community building project. Building on prior and ongoing ASEAN regional economic integration initiatives (e.g. AFTA and AFAS), the ASEAN Community building project started on the basis of regional economic cooperation and evolved into a community building project involving political, economic and socio-cultural integration processes.

Mobility and mutual recognition have been discussed and documented in a number of ASEAN policy documents. Their purpose within the ASEAN Community building project has also evolved from a vision of utilising human and natural resources to contribute to ASEAN and ASEAN Member States development and shared prosperity to the need to enhance human resource development and the recognition of educational qualifications to realise a fully integrated economic community, and eventually to an integrated ASEAN Community.

In fact, the various plans of actions (e.g. Hanoi, Vientiane) and the Hua Hin Declaration incorporated mobility and mutual recognition, with the later adding timelines on completion of negotiated MRAs, the development of new MRAs for other professional services, enhancing cooperation among AUN members and developing core competencies and qualifications for job/occupational and trainers’ skills. These action plans also direct ASEAN’s initiatives related to mobility and mutual recognition, which evolved from its focus on the free movement of skilled labor and professionals within the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services and the ongoing liberalisation of trade in services into one supporting ASEAN Community building.

### *Current State of Mobility and Mutual Recognition*

ASEAN developments related to mobility and mutual recognition have been focused on building the foundations for a regional quality assurance system, which is comprised of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education, ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, Academic Credit Transfer Framework in Asia, and the various ASEAN-based or linked mobility schemes. Furthermore, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Recognition Convention, both the 1983 and the 2011 versions, form an overarching framework to guide the recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia and Pacific region, including the ASEAN Member States. However, these regional frameworks

are still under development or are in an early implementation stage, and only three ASEAN Member States ratified the 1983 Convention, and none has ratified the 2011 Convention to date.

The role of ASEAN student and academic mobility in promoting and raising awareness of ASEANess and the ASEAN Community has been incorporated in ASEAN's more recent policies since 2009. This recent development is framed within the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community integration process, and can be seen in both the ASEAN 5-year plan in education (2010-2015) and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. Mutual recognition of higher education and professional qualifications, and intra-ASEAN student and professional mobility not only raises the awareness of ASEANess and the ASEAN identity, but actually contribute to the ongoing construction of the ASEAN identity.

In spite of the ongoing regionalisation of ASEAN higher education initiatives, intra-ASEAN student mobility has fallen behind the increase of ASEAN outbound student mobility. Malaysia, Thailand, and arguably Singapore (in spite of the unavailability of data) are the major hosts of ASEAN students. However, geographic proximity and cultural cohesiveness appears to be a major factor influencing where internationally mobile ASEAN students study within the ASEAN region. Aside from the need to increase intra-ASEAN student mobility, there is a need to have a more balanced intra-ASEAN mobility to support raising awareness and understanding of the diverse ASEAN contexts, and the ASEANess within the ASEAN Community.

Mutual Recognition within the ASEAN Community has been focused on signing and implementing mutual recognition arrangements/framework agreements for key priority economic sectors. As such, mutual recognition, until recently, has been conceptualised as part of the ASEAN Economic Community process, and seen within an economic rationale. Although the implementation of the above-mentioned ASEAN MRAs are in their early stage, there appears to be some promise with the initial successful implementation of the MRAs for Engineering and Architectural services.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community's engagement with promoting ASEAN identity, culture and heritage, and promoting the concept and awareness of the ASEAN identity is also a promising development. This may facilitate an increased focus on enhancing intra-ASEAN student mobility, extending the period of study from one semester or even one year to a full program, and increasing focus on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications beyond the targeted professions.

### *Recommendations*

Given the above-mentioned developments and the current state of ASEAN mobility and mutual recognition, it can be argued that mobility and mutual recognition, not limited to professional mobility, within the ASEAN region contributes to the ASEAN Community building project. They contribute mostly to the integration of the ASEAN Economic and Socio-Cultural Communities through facilitating the free mobility of professionals, skilled labor and services, and promoting awareness of ASEANess and the ASEAN identity within the ASEAN Community.

Mobility and mutual recognition in ASEAN, however, tend to be skewed towards an economic rationale, and limited to a number of professional sectors. The ASEAN Community embraces three pillars, namely: the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community; and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Mobility and mutual recognition should contribute to the integration processes of all three pillars of the ASEAN Community.

In spite of the recent development of various regional frameworks for the ASEAN Higher Education Area (e.g. AQR, AQAFHE, and ACTFA), the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education, and the Academic Credit Transfer Framework in Asia, regionalisation of higher education is still in its early stages, and the implementation of the various ASEAN regional frameworks for higher education are in its early stage or have yet to be implemented. Their institutionalisation as foundations of an ASEAN regional quality assurance system has not even started. Intra-ASEAN student mobility, at 6.92% of total ASEAN outbound student mobility, remains minimal and mostly hosted by a few ASEAN countries. As mutual recognition of higher education qualifications facilitates international (and intra-ASEAN) student mobility, ratifying and implementing the UNESCO Asia and

Pacific Recognition Convention by ASEAN Member States will promote and institutionalise mutual recognition in the ASEAN region and beyond.

The ASEAN Higher Education Area is an integral part of the ASEAN Community, and international and intra-ASEAN student and academic mobility, and the mutual recognition of higher education and professional qualifications contribute to the ASEAN Community building project. Furthermore, professional and student mobility within the ASEAN region facilitates and contributes to the ongoing construction of the ASEAN identity by enhancing cultural awareness, inculcating ASEAN identity and citizenship values, and impacting their social integration, inclusion, and openness to other cultures as seen in the case of Europe's ERASMUS program.

Supporting initiatives to further develop and establish the ASEAN Higher Education Area not only promotes mobility and mutual recognition of higher education qualifications, but also directly contributes to raising awareness of ASEANness, the ongoing construction of the ASEAN identity, and molding future ASEAN citizens, entrepreneurs and leaders of the ASEAN Community.

As such, recommendations to the ASEAN Secretariat, and ASEAN Member States would be to: 1.) expand ASEAN MRAs and develop the common competency standards for all disciplines/professions, and facilitate the MRAs implementation across the ASEAN region; 2.) support the development and implementation of the various regional frameworks to facilitate the development and institutionalisation of an ASEAN quality assurance system, and the establishment of an ASEAN Higher Education Area; 3.) promote intra-ASEAN student mobility, and encourage a more balanced mobility across the ASEAN Member States; and 4.) encourage the rapid ratification of the 2011 UNESCO Revised Asia and Pacific Recognition Conventions (Tokyo Convention).

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