

Global opportunities and institutional embeddedness

Higher Education Consortia in Europe and Southeast Asia

- Research Questions
- Theoretical Backgrounds
- Research Design
- Findings

1. how can the emergence of international consortia in higher education be explained in relation to ongoing processes of globalisation and regionalisation?
2. what types of international inter-organisational arrangements have emerged?
3. What features of international higher education consortia can explain the performance of these consortia?
4. What type of mechanisms are adopted by international higher education consortia in order to increase performance?

International Higher Education Consortia

- ❑ Limited and restricted membership
- ❑ Indefinite time-span
- ❑ Cooperation on multiple themes and disciplines
- ❑ Horizontal cooperation based on equal say
- ❑ Collaboration based on coordination

- ❑ Basic assumption: behavior will be determined by efficiency & effectiveness
- ❑ Theoretical starting point: Resource Based View of the Firm (RBV)
- ❑ Rationale for Cooperation
The resource-based view claims that the rationale for consortia is the value-creation potential of resources that are pooled together. Reciprocal strengths and complementary resources between partners are identified as a premise for successful consortia.
- ❑ Implication
Organisations will search for partners that will bring about synergy between their resources and those of their targeted partner.

- ❑ Basic assumption: behaviour is determined by conformity to institutional context
- ❑ Theoretical starting point: Embeddedness theories/Neo-institutional theories
 - the university as an institution embedded in powerful cognitive, normative and regulative structures: the social, political and cultural environment is brought back in
 - *paradox of embeddedness*: the same processes, by which embeddedness creates a requisite fit with the current environment, can paradoxically reduce an organisation's ability to adapt: traditional 'core competencies' have the potential to become 'core rigidities'
- ❑ Implications for cooperation

the differences in the institutional contexts in which organisations are embedded, can impact cooperation in a negative way.

Inter-organisational Diversity & Coping Mechanisms

4 Propositions:

Complementarity:

P1: The higher the level of complementarity between partners in a consortium, the higher the level of performance.

High diversity in resource base
(Differences to be exploited)

Opportunities for collaboration

Institutional coping mechanisms:

P4: In case of insufficient compatibility, consortia will employ institutional coping mechanisms in order to enhance performance

High diversity in institutional backgrounds
(Differences with a negative impact)

Compatibility:

P2: The higher the level of compatibility between partners in a consortium, the higher the level of performance

Strategic coping mechanisms:

P3: In case of insufficient complementarity, consortia will employ strategic coping mechanisms in order to enhance performance

- Performance
 - (Perceived) Goal importance * (Perceived) Goal attainment
- Complementarity
 - (Perceived) Importance * (Perceived) Availability of strategically important resources
- Compatibility
 - (Perceived) Impact * (Perceived) Presence of differences in institutional backgrounds
- Coping Mechanisms: explorative; not operationalised

- 4 Case studies:
 - ALMA Network
 - ASEAN University Network
 - Coimbra-Group
 - European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU)
- Questionnaires
 - Sent to to 4 consortia consisting of 68 universities from 35 countries
 - 39.2% response; good distribution over networks & countries
- Interviews with central actors in the four consortia (Directors, Chairmen, etc.)
- Document analysis of agreements, minutes, newsletters, etc. of the consortia

Findings: quantitative analysis (summary)

Table 1: Performance Indicators and Independent Variables (weighted Z scores; N=188)

Performance Indicators:	ALMA	AUN	Coimbra	ECIU
Consortium Performance	-0.49	0.42	0.42	-0.42
Independent variables:				
Complementarity	-0.23	0.42	-0.02	-0.17
Compatibility	-0.40	0.31	0.18	-0.09

Table 2: R² and Beta coefficients of regression equations (N=188)

	ALMA	AUN	Coimbra	ECIU
R ²	.398	.144	.301	.118
Beta (Complementarity)	-.279	.331	.322	.327
Beta (Compatibility)	.567	.063	-.089	.072

- ❑ Resource complementarity (partly) explains success of cooperation
- ❑ RBV sees resource exchange as rationale for cooperation; in addition to this other rationales can be observed:
 - Consortia as a vehicle to reduce transaction costs
 - Consortia as a collective representation of universities vis-à-vis international and regional authorities (EU, ASEAN)
 - Consortia as a response to regional research initiatives, where joint proposals are demanded

- ❑ This assumption does not need to be rejected but the impact on cooperation is less straightforward than expected:
 - A minimum level of compatibility is required
 - Different institutional forms influence cooperation in different ways
 - Non-academics seem to place more emphasis on the institutional differences (while academics seem to place more emphasis on complementarity factors)
 - A new joint institutional context is emerging on the regional level, especially in Europe

- ❑ An additional variable was detected on the basis of the case studies.
The management of relationships:

- Provision of sufficient and good communication
- Establishing a clear and transparent organisation of a relatively stable nature
- Promoting the commitment of member universities and their representatives

A good communication strategy, a clear and stable organisation and high commitment support processes of socialisation in sub units of the consortium which then will reflect on the consortium as a whole

Findings: Coping mechanisms

	Strategic coping mechanisms	Institutional Coping Mechanisms		
		Centralised institutional forms	Decentralised institutional forms	
low				low
↓	(i) Seeking <i>new resources</i> through new members	(i) Connecting to <i>existing relations</i>	(i) Connecting to <i>existing relations</i>	↓
↓	(ii) <i>Identification of additional complementary resources</i> within the existing consortium	(ii) Information on existing differences in institutional contexts of the members to create <i>awareness</i>	(ii) Information on existing differences in institutional contexts of the members to create <i>awareness</i>	↓
complexity	(iii) Improve utilisation of existing sources of complementarity through: a) <i>renegotiation or abolishment</i> of objectives b) <i>adapting</i> activities to existing university communities and to existing regional circumstances c) providing <i>incentives</i> for staff to become involved or to increase their involvement	(iii) <i>Familiarisation</i> with existing institutional contacts through meetings, seminars or courses (iv) Administrative structures for <i>tackling problems</i> due to differences (v) <i>Reducing differences</i> through mutual adjustment (vi) <i>Abolishing differences</i> through incorporation (only in the case of organisational differences)	(iii) <i>Familiarisation</i> with existing institutional contacts through meetings, seminars or courses	complexity
↓				↓
high				high

1. The consortium has to consist of members that possess resources which are strategically valuable for the other members.
2. Sources of complementarity must be accompanied by the appropriate strategic coping mechanisms, aimed at the acquisition, identification, dissemination and exploitation of complementary resources.
3. For less complex forms of cooperation, only a minimum level of institutional fit has to be present in the consortium. We have argued however that when cooperation becomes more complex, a higher level of institutional fit becomes necessary.
4. The fit between institutional contexts is not something that universities fully control. They can however employ institutional coping mechanisms in order to deal with the problems that arise through differences, in order to lessen or abolish them.
5. In the case of close cooperation management of the inter-personal relationships becomes more important. A good communication strategy and a clear and transparent organisation of a relatively stable nature support processes of socialisation in sub units of the consortium which then will reflect on the consortium as a whole.
6. A consortium, like any other organisation, needs to adapt to its internal and external environment. When activities are compatible with prevailing norms and beliefs in the universities and with the ongoing developments on the regional level, they are more likely to be successful. However, when this results in a risk avoiding strategy, it will not always correspond with the strategic global needs and opportunities that a consortium and its universities face in an increasing competitive environment. The seizing of those opportunities frequently requires taking risks not in line with the traditional views of the university, but that will more effectively exploit the complementarity in the consortium.