Global Re-ordering: Evolution through European Networks (GR:EEN)

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The Project

GR:EEN, a large collaborative project co-ordinated the University of Warwick, addressed the changing distribution of power in world politics. The emergence of new powers has been altering the distribution of resources, goods and money around the globe. These new powers have also been seeking a greater say in the way that global issues are governed; some challenging the basic principles that have underpinned global governance since at least 1945. Alongside the "rise of the rest", there is evidence of an apparent decline of the West. In particular, financial crises have changed the way that others think about Europe – both in terms of the EU as a coherent global actor, and Europe as a source of ideas, norms and mechanisms that might lay the basis for effective global governance. GR:EEN’s objective was to consider how the EU might not only defend its own interests in the face of new challenges, but also proactively ensure that European values and objectives influence the way that the global order evolves.

GR:EEN did this by first looking inwards to consider how European preferences for forms of transnational governance have emerged, with a focus on how different governance structures have emerged in different policy areas. The project consortium explored this by thinking about how different networks of interest first develop specific identities and objectives and then how they inform policy debates.

The project then considered how these different networks and governance forms influence the EU in its role as a global actor – in particular, by thinking about ways that networks inform the way the EU functions in multilateral organisations.

In keeping with our emphasis on diverse outcomes, researchers identified how varied types of behaviour have emerged in different policy areas, and evaluated how successful they have been. We also looked at how the EU interacts with other global actors, and asked if these other actors conceive of the EU as a single coherent and influential global power in its own right, as opposed, for example, to being a grouping of individual European states.

A core dimension of the GR:EEN project was a recognition that the EU is not free to shape the world as it pleases. It was important to consider both the alternative interests and objectives of "traditional" powers like the US as well as those of new emerging powers. Researchers, therefore, sought a clear understanding of the different dynamics and potential power alliances that might shape the way the global order evolves in a post-unipolar era. In doing this, the consortium focussed on the way that the responses of "intermediate powers" to the preferences and initiatives of existing and emerging powers shape the evolving world order. And, once more, researchers started from the understanding that there will be no single pattern across all issue areas. So a key part of our agenda was to consider the nature of EU regional leadership in three key policy areas: on economics, we focussed on the regulation of labour, finance and trade; in security, on challenges to human rights, sources of radicalisation, and the relevance of the Arab Spring; and in energy and the environment, on geopolitical competition for different types of resources, and how energy strategies might be coordinated between individual European states.

Whilst bilateral relations clearly remained significant, GR:EEN paid specific attention to the role of regions,
and how regional leaderships in other parts of the world condition the way that those regions engage with emerging global governance forms.

Our goal, then, was to consider the relative nature of European power and EU regional leadership in each of these areas; which other actors are most important in any given policy arena; where (if at all) their interests and objectives align with European ones; what the main alternatives entail; and, finally, where they come from and who supports them.

Other Participants

- Universiteit van Amsterdam (Netherlands)
- Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)
- FRIDE (Spain)
- Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (Norway)
- Central European University (Hungary)
- United Nations University- Comparative Regional Integration Studies (Belgium)
- Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)
- Boston University (United States of America)
- Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (Italy)
- University of Cape Town (South Africa)
- Waseda University (Japan)
- University of Western Australia (Australia)
- Nanyang Technological University (Singapore)
- Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Argentina)
- Peking University (People’s Republic of China)

Professor Shaun Breslin’s Views on the Importance of EU Funding

“The GR:EEN project was only possible because the EU’s FP7 programme was far-sighted enough to encompass its intellectual reach, its global ambition, and the need to develop the researchers of the future.

At a time of huge geopolitical upheaval, the consortium was able to study in great depth the changing nature of the global order, the EU’s place in that evolving reality, and the EU’s capacity to influence it. GR:EEN was very much about Europe and the World and developed innovative ideas about what makes one country adhere to the leadership of another – ‘followership’ as opposed to ‘leadership’.

FP7 funding also enabled researchers from around the world, from developed and developing countries, to collaborate on a project of global interest. Out of the 16-strong consortium, 8 partners were from outside the EU and this breadth of expertise opened avenues for research which would otherwise not have been possible. On a more parochial level, Warwick has developed new, lasting relationships with Waseda University, in Japan, and FLACSO from Argentina.

And, for researchers, the Brussels ‘ecosystem’ is a magnet for a wide range of organisations and actors – it is a goldmine for researchers seeking access to representatives and delegations from around the world.

GR:EEN was also able to help develop early career researchers – to help train the next generation. Not only did they get access to the Brussels ‘ecosystem’ but we were able to take specific steps – such as our Next Generation Conference – to provide opportunities for young researchers to learn the skills that they will need in their professional lives.”