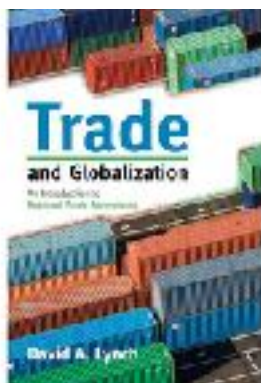


Trade and Globalization: An Introduction to Regional Trade Agreements

David A. Lynch

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David A. Lynch's *Trade and Globalization: An Introduction to Regional Trade Agreements* provides an expert introduction to one of the most prominent features of globalization – namely, the proliferation of so-called ‘regional trade agreements’ (RTAs), free-trade agreements between countries normally belonging to the same geographical area.

The book is divided into nine chapters. After outlining the scope of his research, and introducing his approach, Lynch dedicates one chapter to each relevant ‘region’: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, Russia and the former Soviet Republics, the Middle East and North Africa, and the Pacific Islands. Each chapter contains an analysis of the existing agreements, which, as the author points out, vary significantly in scope, membership and subject covered. Most interestingly, each chapter features a section devoted to the context of the RTAs in the region, which deals with the intra-regional political economy and provides the basic background information, indispensable to understanding the nature of the relations that underlie the institutional

RTAs frameworks. Another particular feature of the book is the intelligent use which Lynch makes of Venn diagrams showing membership in each region’s RTAs, which usefully represent the intricate, overlapping webs that RTAs often create – what Jagdish Bhagwati first called a ‘spaghetti bowl’.

In order to illustrate the most controversial aspects of regionalism, the author looks at it through the three main existing analytical approaches: traditional economic liberalism, according to which RTAs enhance cooperation and trade liberalization; economic nationalism, which sees RTAs as protectionist devices; and the so-called ‘anti-globalization movement’, also including economic structuralism or radicalism, which critically emphasizes the high social costs that often accompany the implementation of RTAs.

The result is a straightforward, comprehensive overview of a multifaceted subject. In particular, Lynch shows how each of the regions that he considers has its own peculiarities. Thus, for instance, while African RTAs have an extremely high level of cross-cutting membership, the membership maps in the Americas appear much more clear-cut, with NAFTA dominating the northern hemisphere and MERCOSUR being the most notable southern one. Also, while the European continent shows the highest level of economic and institutional integration, the Asian one is characterized by an extremely low level of institutionalization, since in much of Asia, actual globalization is ahead of RTA integration. Lynch also emphasizes how the issues that arise regarding RTAs depend on the analytical approach adopted, and that these different approaches reflect the significance of RTAs in international political economy.

Lynch concludes that RTAs are shaped and in turn shape globalization. In fact, they can be seen as ‘microcosms of globalization’. They are increasing in number and in diversity, particularly due to the stalemate in the WTO Doha negotiations, and their interpretation is as controversial as that of ‘globalization’ in general. Since their proliferation is a quite

recent phenomenon, it is probably too early to evaluate their actual impact in economic and political terms – and, in particular, whether in the long term they will actually enhance cooperation and trade liberalization, or rather turn out to be protectionist tools in the hands of states.

Lynch's *Trade and Globalization* thus succeeds in a difficult task. In no domain of international relations is there a more intricate, dynamic overlapping and interacting of economic and political factors, and the interplay of both, with its nuances, will always be crucial for truly understanding future trends in RTAs, just as it is for understanding globalization more generally.

Lynch succeeds in explaining this 'spaghetti bowl' in an admirably clear and effective way, presenting the most salient aspects of each region accurately and synthetically, and explaining the broader debates over economic regionalism in an accessible, balanced way. The book is therefore strongly recommended to anyone approaching the subject of trade regionalism for the first time, as well as to scholars in the field, who will find it a well-structured, insightful and, indeed, enjoyable read.

