

**Normative behavior in regional affairs:  
A conceptual study on the ‘ASEAN Way’**

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Scholars who study regional affairs have mostly focused on both materially- and ideationally-oriented analyses while concentrating primarily on their institutional dimensions. Existing literature on a wide range of examples from regional organizations and their institutional practices suggests that normative engagements have become increasingly important for regional affairs. Somehow, little attention has been paid to systematically analysing distinct and patterned normative practices that have been embedded in regional organizations. Therefore, it is important to explore such normative practices adopted by regional entities through a contextual and systematic academic inquiry. This involves investigating how regions regulate the behavior of their members by adopting normative frameworks and what patterns and distinct features are identifiable from such practices. In this context, the ‘ASEAN Way’ attributed to the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) offers useful insights to understand how regions have been distinctively shaped and regulated by normative frameworks. Specifically, the ‘ASEAN Way’ is a unique style of conducting regional affairs and it can be broadly understood as a code of conduct for states to interact with each other and make decisions based on consultations and consensus. In other words, the ‘ASEAN Way’ is a normative process of conducting interactions through which the existing political tension, mistrust, and historical confrontations among ASEAN members are strategically overlooked by informal and flexible institutional procedures. Therefore, this paper argues that the ‘ASEAN Way’ can be treated as a distinct model of conducting regional affairs and has important implications for other regional organizations to enhance their normative practices.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, ‘ASEAN Way’, normative framework, consensus building