



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

ISSN(O): 2320-5407 | ISSN(P): 3107-4928

International Journal of Advanced Research

Publisher's Name: Jana Publication and Research LLP

www.journalijar.com

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57587

Title: Embedded Cooperation and the Durability of Regional Cooperation in South Asia

Recommendation:

Accept as it is

Accept after minor revision.....

Accept after major revision

Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality	✓			
Clarity		✓		
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: JPR-130

Detailed Reviewer's Report

Overall Evaluation

The manuscript titled “*Embedded Cooperation and the Durability of Regional Cooperation in South Asia*” presents an insightful and theoretically grounded discussion on the persistence of cross-border electricity cooperation within the Bangladesh–Bhutan–India–Nepal (BBIN) framework. The paper addresses an important issue in regional cooperation studies by questioning the traditional assumption that durable cooperation depends mainly on strong institutional authority. Instead, the study argues that cooperation can become stable through infrastructural integration, contractual arrangements, interdependence, and administrative routines. The topic is highly relevant and timely, particularly in the context of growing regional energy integration and increasing debates surrounding infrastructure diplomacy, regional governance, and energy security in South Asia. The paper demonstrates strong conceptual clarity and presents a coherent theoretical argument supported by empirical illustrations from the electricity sector. The manuscript is academically rich and shows a good understanding of regional cooperation literature. The author successfully combines institutional theory, embeddedness theory, and regional political economy perspectives to build a convincing analytical framework. The writing style is formal and scholarly, and the discussion progresses logically from theory to empirical analysis and conclusion. However, despite its strong conceptual contribution, the paper can be improved further through clearer methodological explanation, stronger empirical substantiation, additional comparative insights, and refinement in structure and language presentation. Some sections are repetitive, and a few

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arguments would benefit from deeper analytical engagement rather than descriptive narration. Overall, the paper has strong publication potential after moderate revision.

Strengths of the Paper

1. Strong and Relevant Research Topic - The paper addresses a highly significant issue in international relations and regional studies. Cross-border electricity cooperation in South Asia is an underexplored but increasingly important field, especially given the region's energy demands and political complexities. The study contributes meaningfully to debates on regionalism and institutional durability.

2. Clear Theoretical Contribution - One of the major strengths of the paper is its conceptual contribution. The author challenges conventional institutional explanations and introduces the idea of "embedded durability" as an alternative explanation for sustained cooperation. This argument is intellectually valuable and adds originality to the literature.

3. Well-Structured Argument Development - The manuscript develops its argument in a systematic manner. The transition from theoretical discussion to empirical analysis is smooth and coherent. Each section logically builds upon the previous one, helping readers understand the evolution of the central argument.

4. Strong Use of Literature - The paper demonstrates extensive engagement with existing scholarship. Important scholars such as Keohane, Nye, Granovetter, Koremenos, and Williamson are appropriately integrated into the discussion. The literature review effectively situates the study within broader debates on institutionalism, interdependence, and regional governance.

5. Good Empirical Illustrations - The discussion on the BBIN electricity system provides useful empirical grounding for the theoretical claims. Examples such as the Baharampur–Bheramara interconnection, Dhalkebar–Muzaffarpur transmission line, and Bhutan hydropower projects strengthen the paper's credibility and practical relevance.

6. Interdisciplinary Perspective - The paper successfully combines perspectives from political science, international relations, economics, and infrastructure studies. This interdisciplinary approach increases the paper's analytical depth and broadens its academic relevance.

7. Strong Academic Writing Style - The manuscript maintains a scholarly tone throughout. The arguments are presented with intellectual maturity, and the paper reflects a high level of academic engagement.

Areas for Improvement

1. Need for Clearer Methodological Explanation - Although the paper provides strong theoretical and empirical discussion, it lacks a dedicated methodology section. The author should clearly explain:

- Research design

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- Data sources
- Case selection rationale
- Analytical approach
- Timeframe justification

Including a methodology section would improve the paper's academic rigor and transparency.

2. More Empirical Evidence Required - The paper relies heavily on conceptual interpretation and secondary references. While the examples are useful, additional empirical evidence would strengthen the argument further. The author may consider including: Trade statistics over time, Policy data, Official agreements, Comparative infrastructure data, Interviews or policy documents if available. More detailed empirical substantiation would make the argument more convincing.

3. Repetition in Some Sections - Several ideas are repeated multiple times, particularly regarding: institutional weakness, infrastructural embedding, and durability through interdependence. Reducing repetition and tightening the discussion would improve readability and conciseness.

4. Comparative Perspective Could Be Expanded - The paper focuses mainly on the BBIN framework. Including brief comparisons with other regional energy cooperation models such as: ASEAN, the European Union, or African regional power pools would enhance the broader theoretical significance of the study.

5. Limited Discussion of Counterarguments - The paper strongly supports the embedded cooperation argument but gives less attention to possible limitations or alternative interpretations. For example: geopolitical risks, India's strategic dominance, climate vulnerabilities, domestic political instability, or infrastructure dependency risks could be discussed more critically.

6. Minor Language and Formatting Issues - A few grammatical inconsistencies, citation spacing issues, and formatting repetitions are visible in the manuscript. Careful proofreading is recommended before publication. Examples include: spacing errors in citations, duplicated transitional sentences, and occasional typographical inconsistencies.

7. Conclusion Can Be More Forward-Looking - The conclusion summarizes the argument effectively but could provide stronger policy implications and future research directions. The author may discuss: implications for regional energy governance, renewable energy integration, future BBIN cooperation, and lessons for other developing regions.