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Whither the push and pull for integration: Taking stock
of Latin America's declaratory regionalism

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Abstract

Repeated setbacks to a regional project in Latin America have given rise to a narrative portraying the region's integration endeavor as a succession of failed attempts. Analysts concordantly highlight that Latin America's institutional development and actual policy output do not live up to the integrationist discourse sustained in the region, and point to a series of obstacles standing in the way of deep integration. Such a perspective misses out, however, on an intriguing persistence of Latin American regionalism both in discourse as well as in repeated attempts to induce new impetus into the regional project.

In an attempt to map out the basis for a more rigorous, theoretically guided approach to the subject, this paper brings the debates on the different push and pull factors of Latin America's regionalist project together. Based on the premise that forces pushing towards integration are present within the region, it is argued that the dominant hypotheses in the study of regional integration do not address Latin America's declaratory regionalism in a conclusive manner. The key to the broader picture of the region's integration gap lies with a lack of determination to let the word follow the deed, and needs to apprehend of the political function declaratory regionalism has come to fulfill in the Latin American international system.

Keywords

Latin America; integration; regionalism; theory of integration.

1. Trapped in crisis, lagging behind, or working differently? What is at stake with Latin America's regionalism¹

The end of bipolarity, the breakdown of authoritarianism and the economic depression of the 1980s gave rise to a new paradigm that came to dominate Latin America's foreign policy strategies during the 1990s 'new regionalism' (Söderbaum and Shaw, 2003). Old integration and cooperation schemes were revived and new ones created, and the unanimously adopted neoliberal agenda set the track for integrating the region's national economies as a stepping stone into the global market. The initial enthusiasm received a setback, however, as the process stagnated and the welfare-enhancing promise failed to materialize. Indicating a shift in development models in several Latin American countries, the 2000s saw the creation of novel multilateral frameworks. The new institutions, however, did not significantly alter the level of integration.

The list of complaints regarding the record of what has been conceptualized as yet another wave of regionalism in Latin America is long. Inter alia, the regional project is said to suffer from a lack of a viable road-map, imprecise rules, partial implementation, and unsanctioned breaches of commitments (Mace et al., 2007; Malamud and Gardini, 2012; Rojas Aravena, 2010). Adherence to a traditional concept of sovereignty and strong nationalisms allegedly stand in the way of successful integration (Sanahuja, 2007; Serbin, 2010), and prospects are likely to remain gloomy. Differences in economic strategies and performance are said to be growing with the likely result of continued institutional fragmentation and the survival of a symbolic regionalism at best (Bouzas et al., 2007: 68; Valladão, 2007). Multilateral dynamism notwithstanding, pessimistic accounts of recent developments have gone as far as to state that regional integration is not only experiencing a standstill but has actually taken a reverse road (Malamud, 2012).

Over the past six decades, setbacks to Latin America's regionalist agenda have indeed been so consistent that, according to one expert, "one of the mysteries any inquiry about integration in Latin America should try to unveil" is the resilience of the very idea to join together (Dabène, 2009: 5). While the relevant scholarship readily points to the obstacles to integrating the region, the question of what stands in its way has not been dealt with in a systematic manner. Studies of individual organizations or trading schemes provide detailed analyses of specific shortcomings and problems imbued in institutional design, but seldom address the bigger picture. On the other hand, Mace and Migneault's (2011) list of obstacles to build an effective framework for hemispheric relations is exemplary of omitting to link their analysis to broader theoretical questions. The authors identify five problems ranging from insufficient funding to the absence of political will and deficient participation of civil society actors to explain frustrated integration efforts, but fail to discuss the respective relevance of the individual factors and the way they relate to each other. This gap in the literature is in part due to a lack of conceptual specification and, as a result, the conflation of the driving forces of integration with regionalism's outcomes. The same phenomena are thus evoked both as a cause and a consequence of failed integration strategies, such as the fragmented and overlapping nature of the regional governance system or the prevalence of the intergovernmental principle.

With the goal of providing the ground for a theoretically guided approach to the study of regional integration in Latin America, this paper assesses the relevance of the main hypotheses derived from the dominant theories of integration. To this end, it brings together the prevalent arguments addressing the gap between Latin America's proclaimed and actual integration. It is argued that these point to the

¹ I am indebted to Andrea Bianculli, Carlos Closa, Adrienne Héritier, Katharina Meißner and an anonymous reviewer for insightful and critical comments on earlier drafts of this paper. All remaining errors are mine.

international political function that Latin America's declaratory regionalism² has come to fulfill. Rather than proposing an alternative explanation of the region's integration endeavors, the argument put forward seeks to discern a recurrent pattern of Latin American internationalism and should therefore be read in conjunction with accounts elucidating the political economy of individual arrangements.

The paper proceeds as follows. The remainder of the first section defines the relevant conceptual toolbox and summarizes the main readings of Latin America's history of integration. Having specified in what the integration gap effectively consists, the second part discusses the scholarship on Latin American regionalism relating to three sets of hypotheses derived from the dominant integration theories. The first builds on economic analyses highlighting the demand-side of integration. Next, the focus is shifted to the supply-side of integration. Here, the role of leadership within the hemispheric and the Latin American context respectively is discussed with reference to the United States, Brazil, and different sub-regional coalitions. The third part unites comparativist scholarship that locates the explanatory factors for Latin America's integration gap at the level of the state and assesses the impact of state capacity and regime type on regional integration. The third section of the essay weaves the individual conclusions into a coherent picture. Building on constructivist scholarship on the region's internationalism, it is argued that Latin America's declaratory regionalism is the product of a lack of political will to follow through with the proclaimed agenda of integration as the rhetorical commitment has come to fulfill a political role. The paper concludes with a note on future research and the policy agenda of Latin America's regionalism.

1.1 Setting the benchmark: conceptual clarifications

Any qualified assessment of regionalism needs not only to be precise in its conceptual use but also to explicate how the benchmark is set to judge its achievements. The definition of regions and the processes creating and sustaining them are subject to an extensive literature, from which a common set of key terminology has started to emerge.³ Implicitly relying on definitions prevailing in different sub-disciplines, however, analysts are still often unclear about the use of specific concepts and tend to subsume a wide range of multilateral initiatives under the label of integration. Referring back to a study mentioned above, Mace and Migneault (2011) stand as an example of another group of analysts that adopts a broad definition that is, in fact, too broad to analytically distinguish process variables from outcomes when they put regional integration on par with regionalism. To illustrate, integration is here referred to as a dynamic process involving different actors, processes at distinct levels and in different policy areas that result in interaction, the strengthening of a common identity and institutionalization (ibid.: 159).

On the other hand, too narrow a focus on economic integration, understood as the deliberate removal of barriers to mutual exchange of goods, service, capital, and people, appears to be overly restrictive (Hurrell, 1995: 43). The establishment of the ASEAN free trade area, for instance, had as its key objective the attraction of foreign capital for production and capital investment rather than trade and exchange (Nesadurai, 2003: 20, 184). Moreover, a regional strategy for economic insertion into the global market is also necessarily a political decision, yielding implications for national autonomy and control (Mansfield and Milner, 1999; Mansfield and Solingen, 2010) and should thus not be ignored.

This formal, state-led process is generally described as 'regionalism' and comes along with or is preceded by unintended and uncoordinated phenomena emanating from social and/or economic

² The term was used by Donald Weatherbee (2005: 15) to describe what he argued to be a similar gap in respect of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

³ A critical discussion thereof is provided in Closa (2013). On regionalism, see Fawcett and Hurrell (1995) and Hettne (2005), as well as Mansfield and Solingen (2010) for a review.

interdependence, what is commonly referred to as 'regionalization' (Hurrell, 1995: 39-40). Trans-border dynamics are thought to raise regional awareness and give rise to trans-nationalized identities, which is yet another factor scholars have sought to conceptualize in defining the boundaries of a region (Acharya, 2008). These processes, however, merely describe an increase in flows and ignore the dimension of sovereignty, rendering the conceptual notion unsuitable to distinguish integration from other multilateral forms of cooperation. Haas' (1970: 6) definition of integration as:

a process of how and why nation states voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbors so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts among themselves

is thus still a valid basis to guide the study of regional integration. Later on, Schmitter (2004) expanded the definition to include the establishment of formal structures that institutionalize the transfer of competence. It is important to note that the 'thickness' of such stable institutions to which members are bindingly committed is not only dependent on institutional design, but on both the formal and informal structures contributing to a specific cooperative goal. Institutions are hence thought to yield a more general impact within the context of international cooperation. Consequently, the assessment of regional integration ought to determine the extent to which sovereignty is transferred to regional institutions promoting a common public good as opposed to purely national interests.

1.2 Accounting for the integration gap

Latin American regionalism in an historical perspective

The intellectual history of Latin American integration is as old as the regional states themselves. As Mace (1988: 404) puts it, even before the wars of decolonization had ended, "proposals for political unity began to be heard throughout the newly independent territories". Historically, the region's common project never converged on a single initiative. A series of international conferences held in the late nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century are widely cited as the first ambitious, but eventually unsuccessful attempts to institutionalize regional solidarity. Under the lead of the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA, to be extended to the Caribbean in 1984 [ECLAC]), Latin American states concluded the first economic integration agreements in the 1960s. A Latin American Free Trade Area between South America and Mexico (LAFTA), signed in 1960, was to be established through subsequent product-by-product negotiations. In the same year, the Central American countries launched their more ambitious Common Market, which was followed by the Andean Group in 1969, in an attempt to redress the failures and obstacles of LAFTA (Peña, 1973: 48-50).

Due to a lack of coordinated long-term policies and disrupted by political crises and economic shocks, the initial prospect of success was soon to vanish (Wionczek, 1970). A number of limited institutional modifications fell short of rectifying an unimpressive share of intra-group trade and unmet objectives in the areas of commercial, financial and industrial cooperation (Rosenthal, 1991: 63-66). Under the weight of Latin America's economic collapse in the region's 'lost decade' of the 1980s the economic model of protectionist import-substitution was replaced by radical liberalization policies. The new regionalism of the 1990s was reinforced by the Central American crises and the backlash against the US' support for Britain in the war over the Falkland Island/Malvinas, which was perceived to be the abrogation of the hemispheric defensive alliance. Along with the proliferation of preferential trade agreements, deeper forms of economic integration were envisaged in the newly created Common Market of the South (Mercosur: 1991) and the re-negotiated and revived schemes in Central America (SICA: 1991), the Caribbean (ACS: 1994), and amongst the Andean states (CAN: 1996). The new development strategy emphasized that 'open' regionalism was complementary with the WTO's economic globalization, but the achievements of the trade-driven integration agenda

remained behind the expectations it had raised. By the end of the decade, the setbacks to the neoliberal model were palpable.

From the mid-2000s on, the notion of a new integrationist paradigm with a stronger underlying political rationale gained prominence, its prime examples being the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) (Motta Veiga and Ríos, 2007; Sanahuja, 2009; see also Riggirozzi and Tussie, 2012b). At the same time, scholars have emphasized an increasing ideological fragmentation within the region as well as shifts in its institutional landscape that do not neatly correspond to coherent national policy agendas (Gardini and Lambert, 2011; Rojas Aravena, 2010). Latin American regionalism is hence best described as a conglomerate of “coexisting and competing projects with fuzzy boundaries” (Tussie, 2009: 170), in which varying degrees of competence in different policy areas add to its complex nature. Thus ALADI continues to function as a supporting umbrella group for trade integration. Mercosur, once hailed as the most successful economic scheme in the region, has yet to recover the trade levels of its hey-days in the 1990s and faces the danger of fading into irrelevance as the Pacific Alliance’s economies grow increasingly more competitive. Though Mercosur does not have a formal role in the area of security, it has been at the forefront in defending democratic principles, which are likewise found in the legal frameworks of the CAN and SICA. All of the major trading schemes have broadened their agendas to provide for cooperation in related policy areas and have further sought to step up the provisions for disputes settlement. UNASUR, on the other hand, is not a framework for economic integration but a forum for political cooperation without a clear strategic vision and few institutionalized provisions to date. Its newly created Defense Council (SADC) foresees cooperation on a broad range of issues in the area of defense and security. ALBA was launched as an alternative to the neoliberal integration model, emphasizing joint actions in the area of social development. In 2005, it concluded the Petrocaribe Cooperation Agreement to provide energy security through the subsidized and preferential trade of Venezuelan oil. It created its own bank and launched projects in twelve areas ranging from finance over telecommunications and health to trade and infrastructure. An organizational map of Latin America’s regionalism, however, “significantly overstate[s] the degree and density of institutionalized governance” (Hurrell, 2004: v), especially when taking into consideration that not all of the existing schemes are tailored towards integration.

Defining declaratory regionalism

Two forms of dissonance can be identified in the record of the individual institutions as well as regarding the overall governance structure of the region. The first is a gap between stated objectives and actual policy outcomes. On a more specific, second level, agreed-upon measures failed to materialize. The notion of declaratory regionalism hence describes the proclamation of ambitious policy goals with reference to the structural framework of regional integration as such, i.e. institutional innovations or measures to facilitate regionalizing processes, or in regard of particular outcomes which were sought through a regional strategy. The declared objectives were then either not pursued in the first place or failed to bring about the desired outcome.

Of the analyses focusing on economic regionalism, Mercosur has attracted the most scholarly attention. While the organization is credited for its contribution to lowering tariffs, this excluded for the most part trade in services, and a widely referred to in-depth study concludes that its effects remained largely confined to intra-regional trade flows (Bouzas et al., 2002; see also Schelhase, 2011). Mercosur’s impact on production structures has remained extremely limited (Botto, 2013), and more than two decades after its founding Mercosur is still a far cry from being a common market and is not fully operative even as a customs union. The Community of Andean Nations, in a similar vein, has not yet established a real free trade area and it is only since 2004 that a trade agreement links the Andean block with Mercosur. Still, scale gains from intraregional trade flows are not being exhausted by Latin American markets (CEPAL, various years), and performance in other areas such as the regulation of national economies has been even less prominent (Durán Lima and Maldonado, 2005; Phillips, 2004).

The major reasons for these failures are said to lie with the lack of oversight and sanctioning mechanisms to tackle persisting problems such as trade disputes, lax implementation, and the absence of macroeconomic coordination (Rosales et al., 2008: 133).⁴ These institutional shortcomings are a direct proxy of the refusal to transfer sovereignty to a supranational body. This not only renders the efficacy of the organizations dependent on intergovernmental compromises but accounts in large part for their failure to implement what is pledged by the national governments (Malamud and Schmitter, 2011; Phillips, 2004).

Adherence to a traditional notion of state sovereignty is also key to understand the region's 'light institutionalism' (Carranza, 2003: 94) when it comes to the political-security realm. Here, evidence shows fairly consistently that both UNASUR and Mercosur have fulfilled important functions as informal security actors (Flemes and Radseck, 2012; Oelsner, 2011; Sanahuja, 2010). Moreover, the long-standing norms proscribing intervention into domestic affairs and stressing territorial sovereignty have come under attack and have been curtailed in favor of defending human rights and democracy (Hawkins and Shaw, 2007; Sikkink, 1997). Nevertheless, security cooperation bears a strong mark of traditional sovereignty concerns. Given the lack of actual empowerment of regional institutions, Latin American states have retained their right to reject interference and instead rely on a range of specific mechanisms designed to respond to the primarily transnational threats facing the region. These conditions do not forestall the successful management of specific issues at hand. Yet, they do not create an environment facilitating integration through the empowerment of actors promoting the delegation of competence and the pooling of sovereignty.⁵

Persistently moderate levels of integration notwithstanding, Latin American leaders have hardly missed any opportunities to express their country's desire to strengthen relations with their neighbors. Rhetorical commitment to integrating the region is expressed in countless policy declarations, press statements, speeches and political roadmaps. As Malamud points out: "after any international dispute a bunch of statesmen rush to declare that 'the conflict is over, now it is time for integration'" (2013: 4). Rhetorical commitment, so far, has been accompanied by regional dynamism in a multitude of areas of functional cooperation covered by UNASUR and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Any tangible advances on part of these, however, have remained few and far between.

1.3 A different type of regionalism?

The indicators presented by critics of Latin American integration provide solid evidence that a real gap exists. These critics caution against the objection that the world's regions have built distinct types of regionalism with features different, but not necessarily inferior, to those developed in Europe (Breslin and Higgott, 2003). Taking this line of argument further, it has been argued that integration may effectively proceed and manifest itself in workings that are not comprehensible through Western-biased conceptual lenses (Acharya, 2012: 8). This position holds against the prevalent focus on EU-type institutionalized integration processes and criticism of Latin America's reliance on intergovernmental mechanisms. The lack of supranationalism, so the argument goes, renders the process of integration too vulnerable to national policy agendas to succeed in bringing about any tangible outcomes.

⁴ Detailed studies of the respective schemes are provided in Lombaerde et al. (2008).

⁵ Cooley and Spruyt (2009) develop a similar argument based on their theory of incomplete contracting to explain the existence of powerful institutions in the EU as compared to NAFTA, where a high degree of precision and detailed, complete contracts rendered the creation of supranational institutions obsolete. Their argument leads to opposite policy prescriptions as those put forward by Malamud and Schmitter (2007: 32-34) who, according to a neofunctionalist logic, advocate downscaling the region's integration agenda to concentrate on few core areas with low visibility.

A number of studies on Latin American integration frameworks has shown that an equation between low levels of institutionalization and the failure of successful integrative policies is overly simplistic. Mercosur's record demonstrates how the organization has proceeded through intergovernmental mechanisms in the absence of any strong, formal institutions. Latin America's characteristic reliance on the presidentialism of direct negotiations between state leaders not only allowed for sufficient flexibility to avoid any paralyzation of the process in the face of deadlock, but also worked to defuse crises on several occasions (Domínguez, 1998; Malamud, 2003). The members of both Mercosur and the Andean Community have started to make use of institutional mechanisms to settle disputes only from the late 1990s on, resolving contentious cases instead through diplomatic channels (Delich, 2006). Another study concludes that the lack of formal monitoring mechanisms in the Caribbean Community notwithstanding, a compliance system embedded in CARICOM's structures and practices facilitated capacity building to resolve problems and may serve as a fundament to consolidate the integration process (Girvan, 2008).

Irrespective of the importance of such achievements, the tendency to implicitly conceive of regional integration as inherently positive and hence desirable is erroneous and leads to a conflation between integration, on the one hand, and what liberal theories tell us about its outcomes, on the other. The notion of a nascent security community in the Southern Cone, where the use of force has increasingly become a non-option in the panoply of available policy alternatives, is now virtually commonplace in the literature (Flemes, 2005; Kacowicz, 1998; Oelsner, 2005). Scholars have also highlighted that trajectories that are distinct to the European experience have led to the emergence of security communities elsewhere.⁶ Amongst these, integration is merely one of a myriad of possible pathways towards amicable relations between states that maintain trustful relations amongst each other, with other mechanisms not necessarily demanding the cession of sovereignty. The transfer of competence, however, is indispensable to the establishment of institutionalized dispute resolution and macro-economic coordination capable of moving up Balassa's (1967) ladder of economic integration - provided that one accepts, as the bulk of work on regionalism effectively does, that trade continues to lie at the heart of any integration process.

Regardless of how central supranational institutions are viewed in the context of integration, few would deny that institutions matter. Yet, reference to Latin America's light version of institutionalism does not conclusively address the paradox of the region's integration gap since it merely shifts the problem to another level. Here, the question becomes why pressures to the contrary notwithstanding Latin American states did not build strong institutions capable of bringing about the desired results. A growing line of research into the political economy of institutional design offers explanations as to when a particular form of governance comes to be seen as the most beneficial.⁷ These contributions yield little insight into regional structures, however. Concerned with single cases or large N respectively, they rarely distinguish between regional and global international organizations.

In light of the above discussed, Latin America's integration gap can thus not simply be talked away by reference to theoretical paradigms that are ill-suited to grasp a different reality of integration. When the provision of a promised common public good fails to be brought about, it is only consequential to establish a benchmark for assessing the outcome of integration policies with institutions that transcend the intergovernmental confines of the nation state.

⁶ This is explicitly addressed by Barnett and Adler (1998) in the concluding chapter to their edited volume which offers an enhanced framework building on Karl Deutsch's classic concept of security communities. On South America, see Hurrell's (1998) contribution.

⁷ One of the most comprehensive studies in this regard is Koremenos et al. (2001).

2. Explaining the integration gap

Despite the persistent calls for deeper integration and notwithstanding the numerous initiatives undertaken throughout Latin America's post-colonial history, why have tangible outcomes remained weak? One way of answering this question is to dismiss outright the rhetorical commitment to regional integration as cheap talk with no real political will and not backed by demand. Following this line of reasoning, asking why an integration gap exists comes down to posing the wrong question in the first place. The processes that led to successful integration in Europe should simply not be found at work where integration does not occur. The following discussion departs from the premise that such a view represents a rather simplistic move in which theories of integration are simply turned upside down to explain an apparent non-event and cannot explain the survival of ill-equipped regional institutions in the face of apparent pressures to adapt. Hence, this approach falls short of explaining why we keep witnessing new initiatives to promote international cooperation with the stated goal of integration.

The following sections assess the explanatory power of different hypotheses derived from the study of regional integration. First, analyses focusing on the demand-side of integration will be discussed. Their strategic-economically focused perspective misses out, it is argued, on the persistence of the idea to integrate. The second set of arguments deals with the question of how the availability of a regional 'paymaster' (Mattli, 1999: 14) and leading core coalitions of states have affected integration in Latin America. The third section brings arguments related to state characteristics together and scrutinizes the viability of regime type, state strength and material capacity as explanatory factors for the region's integration gap.

2.1 Resilience despite lacking fundamentals: economic regionalism and beyond

A glance at Latin America's trade relations raises the question why governments would pursue a regional strategy in the first place. In the past decade, free trade negotiations have mostly been held at the Doha conferences and the G20, and the region's hub-and-spoke system suggests that national economies can gain more from trade with extra-mural partners (Comtrade, 2013: table D). This lends support to the claim that the region lacks the economic underpinnings for integration to be regarded as an attractive option to deal with economic interdependence and market opening.

Formal integration preceded informal commercial and societal linkages across Latin America.⁸ Amongst the major trading schemes, the Andean Community was motivated by the desire to foster intra-regional trade as a means to reduce dependence on extra-regional markets, while Mercosur formed part of a multidimensional process to create interlinkages in both the economic and the security realms (see Avery and Cochrane, 1973 and Hirst, 1998, respectively). According to authors privileging the demand-side of integration, Latin American internationalism has failed to set off a self-enforcing dynamic conducive to deeper integration (Mattli, 1999). Burges (2005) holds that significant spill-over effects did not occur even in those areas where interaction expanded most. Evidence that Mercosur created some benefits for private market actors notwithstanding, the significance of their support to deeper integration appears to reach its limits at the moment of substantive political bargains: Mercosur's institutional reforms did not respond to economic interdependence or societal demands, but were instead politically motivated and pushed through on the initiative of the executives (Cason, 2000; Phillips, 2001). Remaining duties and administrative trade barriers are said to be symptomatic of the non-complementarity of the regional economies (Durán Lima and Maldonado, 2005; Sanahuja, 2010), and deprive the region of yet another possible incentive for integration.

The relative importance of non-state level interaction versus the top-down regularization of coordination thus comes down to the question of ontological priority, although it is generally

⁸ The distinction between formal and informal integration goes back to Wallace (1990). The terms correspond to Higgott's (1997) concepts of *de jure* and *de facto* integration, although more recent contributions refer to regionalism as opposed to regionalization to distinguish between state-led and societal or market-driven processes (see 1.1).

acknowledged that successful integration relies on both processes complementing each other. The perspective from the demand-side of integration offers an explanation why, in light of the failure to create significant economic benefits from market exchange, Latin American regionalism has not witnessed an emergence of strong forces from below. However, an argument relying exclusively on an economic logic loses sight of the political impetus supporting region-building (Tussie, 2009). Many have proclaimed the demise of Mercosur as its internal trade levels have yet to recover to match those of the organization's high time in the 1990s, and following Brazil's decision to give precedence to widening over deepening by launching UNASUR (Domínguez, 2010: 33-34). The grouping has however from its very outset been seen as a strategic alliance by its founders in Brasilia and Buenos Aires to overcome the difficulties of an historic rivalry, and its political process has arguably been the most salient outcome of the scheme. Likewise, Venezuela's accession to Mercosur following its drop-out from the Andean Community and the Group of Three can be clearly only understood by comprehending its underlying political motivations, although the economic consequences across the two blocks remain to be seen.

Beyond Latin America, looking back to the origins of the European Union, it is clear that structural conditions - though necessary in order for trans-nationalization processes to strengthen - are not sufficient in themselves to bring about deeper integration. Demand for a political union amongst Europe's post-war societies was the product of a deliberate process in which the pooling of coal and steel production, following the vision of Robert Schuman, was to "immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe".⁹ Likewise, Jean Monnet, who greatly relied on the logic of functional spill-over in a gradual process towards an integrated polity, stressed the importance of continued constitutional development to nurture the "force of necessity" (1978: 94) that was to sustain the creation of a political Europe.

When examining this process, any argument relying exclusively on economic regionalism is also neglectful of the stage in the political process at which Latin America's integration gap occurs. The purely economic perspective disregards varying degrees of commitment on the part of political leaders and, as a consequence, turns a blind eye to whether it is a lack of willingness or rather a lack of capacity that accounts for the failure to create the conditions for successful market integration. For the most part, analysts locate the problem at the stage of implementation to such an extent that it has been argued that laxity in implementing international agreements has come to be a founding rule of Latin American regionalism:

Governments find it useful to sign agreements that they expect never to ratify because, on balance, these help them to manage relations with other states in the Americas, contributing to their reputation as inter-American or subregional team players. There is, therefore, an inter-American interstate 'society' with a life of its own (Domínguez, 2007: 97).

Regardless of whether one subscribes to this explanation, what is important here is that efforts to promote the idea of an integrated region incur liability as well as costs on the part of the state leaders. While declarationism may partly be accounted for by the strong protagonism of Latin American executives, the persistence of the regionalist idea can also be found in its practical dimension. Latin American states have not only maintained common institutions in the face of declining economic and political incentives. They have also created new schemes without adding to regionalism's substance, thus rendering novel arrangements equally ill-suited to bring about tangible results. As neofunctionalism has it, there has been considerable spill-around (Schmitter, 1970), but little spill-over both in general terms as well as regards the issue-agendas of individual organizations (Dabène, 2009: ch.5).

The reasons for the stickiness of Latin American regionalism is dealt with in more detail below (see section 3); suffice it to note that forces pushing for integration have been present in the region.

⁹ Declaration [on French proposal to place coal and steel under "higher authority"] by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman. Paris, 9 May 1950. [EU Speech].

Overlooked by a purely economic perspective on integration, this underscores the existence of a puzzling inconsistency brought about by a constellation of factors that renders the benefit of declaring regionalism higher than the cost of eventually defecting.

2.2 Regional leadership: who pays the cost?

The notion of 'external federalizers' or 'catalytic agents' has been prominent to the study of political unions.¹⁰ Alongside this tradition, work documenting the importance of US support to the European integration project and the impact of Franco-German protagonism in furthering the European agenda abound. Comparative work has scrutinized the role of hegemon in the context of integration and has showed that the role of a powerful state vis-à-vis a regional grouping yields a decisive impact on the form cooperation takes (Katzenstein, 2005; Mattli, 1999; see also Grugel, 2004).

Latin Americanists have mainly approached the region's international politics through the lens of its peripheral condition within the US' sphere of influence and, consequently, tend to interpret Latin American foreign policies as a consistent quest for greater autonomy.¹¹ To the best of the author's knowledge, however, no study has systematically enquired into the US' attitude towards different integration schemes over time. Neither has the question of how the different levels through which the US has exerted political influence -the regional, the hemispheric, and the global levels- complemented or contradicted one other been dealt with in its own right. The complex overlap of inter- Americanism, Latin American unionism and sub-regional groupings does not hence allow us to deduce a straightforward hypothesis on regionalism within the US' Latin-America foreign policy strategy. Undoubtedly, the United States has not actively pursued a comprehensive regionalist agenda towards the region in particular since its declining paramountcy became notable from the 1980s on. The mere absence of an "undisputed leader among the group of countries seeking closer ties" (Mattli, 1999: 14), however, does not provide a satisfying answer to the puzzle of Latin America's declaratory regionalism. In theoretical terms, it is far from clear why leadership needs to stem from a single source. This is particularly so as the region's layered institutionalization of multilateralism renders scope for integration-willing coalitions to push their agendas through.

The following section assesses two largely complementary hypotheses in respect of the US' influence on regional integration. The first holds that the United States were a factor inhibiting Latin American regional integration processes. The second shifts the focus to Latin America and deals with Brazilian leadership and the more recent debate on the region's leftist coalition as a possible motor of integration.

The United States

To varying degrees as regards time and geography, the US has been paramount to Latin American politics. Latin American states have traditionally held an ambiguous attitude towards their Northern neighbor, which, on balance, favored cooperation over open opposition in their search for independence (Tulchin, 1971). This relation has been mediated by co-existing ideas of a hemispheric and exclusively Latin American conception of the region. On the part of the US, no single one strategy has underpinned its positioning within the continent. The regional option has been advocated by different domestic groups and for different motives over several points in time, but institution-building was neither an automatic response to exert hegemony nor to foster cooperation (Mace and Thérien, 2007). Interference with sub-regional integration efforts, on the other hand, was generally limited to ensuring that national economic strategies remained in line with the US' preference.

¹⁰ For a discussion of their relevance to the classic theories of regional integration see Nye (1965) and Haas (1970).

¹¹ Amongst these, Escudé (1995) and Russell and Tokatlián (2003) are some of the few notable examples that seek conceptual development based on the Latin American experience.

Pan-Americanism The inter-American system was developed into the most strongly institutionalized framework as compared to Latin America or any of the sub-regional groupings.¹² Following in the footsteps of the Pan American Union, in the aftermath of the Second World War the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (known as the Rio Treaty: 1947) and the Organization of American States (OAS: 1948) provided the institutional foundations for hemispheric cooperation in military and political affairs, respectively. The Inter-American Development Bank, established in 1957, became the primary instrument to administer funds allocated to promoting economic growth through regional integration. Commercial regionalism has been highest in the Americas when compared to Asia and the EU (Gratius, 2012: 19). This is notable given that Latin America by itself has historically had a negligible share of intra-mural trade in its overall trade volume.

Institution-building, however, was neither a priority nor a necessity for the US. According to Bloomfield and Lowenthal (1990: 872), during much of the Cold War the United States was sufficiently strong to feel “invulnerable” to Latin America. Where security was nevertheless felt to be at stake, the US “apparently concluded early on that multilateralism was a hindrance rather than a help” (ibid.). Starting with the bypassing of the OAS in the Dominican intervention in 1965, a series of unilateral actions mainly in Central America weakened Washington’s influence in the region. Latin America’s search for greater autonomy was further reinforced when the White House sided with Great Britain in the 1982 war against Argentina. Fidel Castro’s reference to the OAS as the US’ ‘Ministry of Colonies’ reflected the suspicions against too much influence then growing amongst Latin American governments, until in the mid-1980s several countries gathered to launch their own initiatives to meet the challenges of the Central American conflicts and indebtedness.

While many had predicted the OAS’s definite dissolution with the end of the Cold War, the organization found a new role in promoting and protecting democracy (Shaw, 2004). Its revival was greatly aided by the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), initiated with George H.W. Bush’s Enterprise of the Americas Initiative in 1990. Initially, the US had opted to re-launch the inter-American summits of heads of states as a forum to open deliberations on the FTAA (Feinberg, 1997: 100-101), but at the third Summit in Quebec (2001) the OAS was designated as the Secretariat and given a formal role in the implementation process. The FTAA’s proposal did not envisage any institutions in charge of policy coordination or to ensure equitable growth, and, although the summitry process came to embrace a wider set of issues, it retained its entirely inter-governmental nature.

In line with a classical realist point of view, Mace and Loiseau (2005) have argued that the Summits of the Americas constitute a cooperative form of hegemony through which the US has sought to re-engage its own region (see also Grugel, 1996). The conclusion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA: 1992), the first US-promoted sub-regional integration framework that brings the United States together with Canada and one Latin American country, is another example of how the United States institutionalized the prevailing post-Cold War order.¹³ NAFTA has since represented the only significant case of institution-building. Overall, the United States has preferred governance through legislation instead of institutions (Phillips, 2005), and multilateralism has not been pursued as a goal in itself. After 2001, and when it became clear that a continental FTA would at best become an ‘FTAA lite’, the Bush administration spurred on mini and bi-lateral trade negotiations. This multi-strategy policy of competitive liberalization discredited the US as an external disaggregator (Phillips, 2005; Riggiozzi and Tussie, 2012a), and though the actual effect of the North-South bilateral agreements remains to be specified a certain degree of trade diversion is to be expected. US policy in this instance should nevertheless not be seen as deliberately countering the establishment of a more comprehensive international regime in the region. Within Latin America, different economic agendas

¹² On the Inter-American institutions see Puig (1983) and Mace and Migneault (2011).

¹³ On hegemony and institution building, see Gilpin (1981) and Keohane (1984).

and trade preferences already existed (Stephenson, 2008), and most countries have anyway pursued a hub-and-spoke approach with extra-mural trading partners beyond America.

Underlying the emphasis on economics, Washington's reaching out to foster closer ties with Latin America carried a strong security rationale. Ideologically, the promotion of the economic liberal model was closely tied to the idea that new regionalism would produce stable governments able to contain problems such as drugs, immigration, and the environment; all perceived to affect the United States' national security. Although these concerns predated the end of the Cold War, this new strategic context allowed the US to press on with them in a more assertive way. Complex interdependence, nevertheless, did not provide an impetus for the pooling of sovereignty in the hemisphere. Instead, trade agreements offered an alternative way for Washington to set the terms for political and security provisions through legal frameworks, most significantly in the case of NAFTA (Hurrell, 1994; Payne, 1996). Towards the end of the 20th century, dependence on the US and multilateral donors to fend off Latin America's devastating debt levels meant that the set prescriptions were, together with the neoliberal economic model, largely embraced.

This changed in the new millennium, when the rise of Latin Americanism relegated Pan-Americanism again to the backstage. The death of the FTAA project in 2005 meant a further loss of influence to the United States, which under the Obama administrations has limited its economic policy largely to the administration of existing agreements. As a report issued by ECLAC (CEPAL, 2011: 18) concluded, a priority agenda indicating a strategic vision of the region has been elusive. In conclusion, the obvious power-asymmetry within the American continent meant that the US was not dependent on building strong institutions to further its national interest. Moreover, and under the impact of its increasingly contested role in Latin American affairs, the inter-American system has merely been one amongst the many global strategic concerns of the United States. For the less powerful Latin American countries, in turn, hemispheric integration was beneficial as long as it provided a means by which to constrain the White House's influence. It can therefore be seen that the institutionalization of Pan-Americanism, albeit resting on solid ground, was not aimed at deep integration as such. Given this distinct nature of the inter-American system, to conclude that hemispheric regionalism diverted the capacities of Latin American states away from furthering their own integration schemes is thus misguided.

Latin Americanism and the United States The preceding section holds that potential tensions between continental and more exclusive forms of regionalism cannot account for Latin America's integration gap. Instead, they are illustrative of a feature common to regionalism in the global South that responds, to a large extent, to problems of dependence and marginalization. Paradoxically, it is this very dependence that assured the US its place in Latin American regionalism.

An observer of Latin America's first wave of integration noted that the US' "coolness" towards the early economic schemes instilled an "identitive appeal as a distinctly Latin American concept" (Denham, 1968: 200, 201). ECLAC, the intellectual author of regional economic development policies intended to shield Latin America's industrialization against the US market, provided such a "space for indirect opposition" (Grugel 1996: 135). Theory suggests that the US would counter the formation of a strong regionalist bloc seeking to balance its weight. However, and contingent on the power differential between the hegemon and secondary states, it may adopt a well-meaning stance towards institutions promoting an agenda in line with its own national interest (Breslin and Higgott, 2003). In keeping with this prediction, the US initially offered some support to the pro-market CACM but not to LAFTA (Schmitter, 1972). By the mid-1960s and under the influence of the Kennedy-initiated Alliance for Progress, the US' position had shifted towards fluctuating between a "handsoff" policy and one of "neutral benevolence" (Wionczek, 1970: 62). Compliance with the GATT and later the WTO rules has constantly been pushed for through the US-dominated World Bank and the IMF, but clear evidence of the United States openly opposing any of Latin America's stated intents to deepen regional integration has not been presented.

Following the demise of the Washington consensus, when Latin America's left-ruled governments eventually began to turn away from the market-centered development models, the US' influence in the region had already suffered a marked decline. The search for greater autonomy lies at the heart of what has been described as the new "post-hegemonic" (Riggiozzi and Tussie, 2012b) or "post-liberal" (Sanahuja, 2007) paradigm of Latin or - in a more exclusive fashion - South American integration. The region's ambition to improve its independent standing, however, did not automatically translate into open opposition, be it for ideological differences or for the international positioning vis-à-vis the United States. Likewise, the multiplication of organizations reframing the region by excluding the United States and the comparatively explicit opposing policy agendas did not trigger any strong reactions from Washington (Whitehead and Nolte, 2012).

It is clear from the above that the United States neither actively promoted nor deliberately countered regional integration in the Southern hemisphere. Its centrality as a regional and global power carried, however, contradictory implications for Latin American regionalism. In search of greater independence, the US served as a reference point to strengthen the concept of a distinct Latin American region. Yet the region's integration gap is not adequately understood as being the product of the tensions arising from integration as a balancing strategy. That is, it is not clear how integration, as opposed to other forms of security cooperation,¹⁴ would have increased Latin America's autonomy, and merely superficial commitments certainly contribute little, if anything, to this goal. On the other hand, the unifying effect of the US' paramouncy over Latin America is not straightforward. Its power-political position and market potential created strong incentives for Latin American states to turn individually towards the North in search of aid, trade and protection. Occasionally, this preference diminished the functional pressures that could have spurred a specific regional strategy, though whether the US' policy approach to the region had a patterned impact on the mode of Latin Americanism beyond direct and deliberate foreign policy remains an open question.¹⁵

Regional leadership

Due to its size and international positioning, Brazil has long been seen as the natural leader of the region. Lacking real weight as well as a strategic vision on its immediate regional surrounding until well into the 1990s, the country's rise has been accompanied by greater distancing from the United States and the envisioning of South America as a means to foster its position on the global scene (Fonseca Jr., 1998; Soares De Lima and Hirst, 2006; Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009). In line with expectations about the strategies of rising and middle powers, Brazil's means to strengthen its position have been those of exercising soft power through the creation of regional institutions (Hurrell, 2006). The country's role as a region-builder, however, has been ambiguous. Brazil's approach towards the region is well captured in the notion of a normative "Southfalian" system (Tokatlián, 2011: 156), in which clinging onto a traditional concept of national sovereignty stands in opposition to any deep commitments in the areas of economic and foreign policy. Indeed, Brazil has shown a striking consistency in seeking regional stability as a condition for national development and prosperity. Regardless of the respective governments' political couleur, these priorities have been pursued through permanent support to regional cooperation when conflict has loomed. The real contribution of Brazil's quiet diplomacy to regionalism is easily overstated, however, as it has rarely relied on inducing a logic of integration. Because existing institutions suffice to serve Brasilia's economic and power-consolidating interest, analysts by and large agree that the country has not and will not, in the short to medium term, take on the costs of integration (Burges, 2008; Gratius, 2007).

In the absence of a single actor able and willing to promote regional integration, scholars' attention has been directed to other 'cores of strength' around which integrative processes develop (Deutsch,

¹⁴ See Buzan, 2012 and Sperling, 2009.

¹⁵ Grugel (2004) is an example going into this direction.

1957: 37-39).¹⁶ During the Cold War, the establishment of the Contadora and Support Group, which set the precedent for the Rio Group (1986-2011), was a clear example of how, against the back-drop of functional pressure, Latin American states grouped together to counter US involvement and its dominant position within the OAS. Under the aegis of the Rio Group the forum to address the conflicts ravaging Central America was soon extended to deal with political and economic issues of common interest, but it continued to rely on the annual summits of the heads of state. As has been argued above, this example illustrates the limitations of a neo-realist path towards integration, one that treats the US as an indirect coalition-builder and suggests that without any further incentives states are unlikely to compromise on their sovereign prerogative.

By highlighting the weight that the integration projects of the 2000s laid on political and social components as compared to economic objectives (Sanahuja, 2009), the literature on post-hegemonic regionalism has reinforced the emphasis on alignment patterns. Against this view, Shifter (2012) holds that anti-Americanism does not adequately explain the formation of CELAC, the most encompassing Latin American organization counting 33 members. Rather than a “political move to supplant the OAS”, Shifter emphasizes the evolutionary dynamic of CELAC’s founding core, the Rio Group, and the desire of the participants to reconcile their regional agendas in a context of changing power structures within Latin America itself (ibid: 57-58). On this scale, the exclusion of Brazil from the Alliance of the Pacific, hailed by the director of the Inter-American Development Bank as the most ambitious integration project seen in decades (Moreno, 2013), points to a neo-realist logic predicting the formation of new alignments in response to Brazil’s ascendance. On the political level, however, evidence substantiating this claim is scant. Moreover, defense analysts highlight rather the opposite when showing that arms procurement in the region does not follow an interactive logic (Villa and Viggiano, 2012). According to Battaglini (2010), the perceived threat stemming from Brazil’s rise has effectively been low.

Closely linked to power considerations in coalition-building, though often treated separately, are the ideological dividing lines within the region (Bizzozero, 2011; Malamud and Gardini, 2012) as well as shifting ideologies over time (Dabène, 2012). Much attention has been focused on the divide between broadly neoliberal versus anti-capitalist socio-economic agendas within the region, but because substantive advances in integration have so far not been achieved by any of the different camps, analysts have warned against the growing complexity of arrangements impeding meaningful integration. Thus, although Venezuela stood side-by-side with Brazil in promoting institutions independent from the US, there has been little consensus on the form such organizations should take (Borges, 2007). Mercosur, once seen as a potential core around which deep integration in the Southern Cone and beyond could develop, has lost visibility partly in view of the consolidation of UNASUR and more recently the Alliance of the Pacific. While the patchwork nature of Latin American regionalism is indeed illustrative of the lack of a regional roadmap, Russell (2011) is correct when he cautions against a stylized view of conflicting development models that do not necessarily make up for general dividing lines within the region. Latin America’s left was successful in placing a stronger emphasis on the poor (ECLAC, 2012) and, strongly in accordance with the emergent global consensus, has granted a stronger role to the state vis-à-vis the market (Grugel and Riggirozzi, 2012: 11). At the same time, however, it has also embraced the rules of the global economy in the sense that it has relied on regional exports, particularly natural resources, which indicates that shifting integration paradigms in a temporal sequence are not as clear-cut as has commonly been displayed.¹⁷ Unlike CELAC, UNASUR and ALBA, which foster regional trade as a safeguard to globalization, the

¹⁶ While a potential regional leader in view of its size and economic weight, Mexico has not received much attention since its mainly economic orientation towards North America became firmly established with the enactment of NAFTA.

¹⁷ On the substantial novelties of the paradigm of the new regionalism, see Gómez-Mera (2008). A warranted critique of conceptual confusion and the strategic use of the terms ‘open’ and ‘alternative’ regionalism is provided by Gudynas (2005).

regional strategy of the Pacific bloc integrated by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru is clearly in line with the overarching goal of open regionalism to seek integration with the global economy.

Given the complex set of national foreign policy objectives, the various dividing lines within the region cannot be said to have prevented the emergence of a strong regional core. This view is supported by evidence put forward in favor of those theories of integration that omit approximate equality in power and wealth as well as political identification as a condition for integration. The emphasis on the political dimension in the concept of the new post-liberal paradigm should not prevent scholars from looking beyond its power-political implications, however. While trade liberalization ceased to be the overarching goal placed across most regional integration schemes, the economic dimension of the new agendas in the areas of energy, monetary and development cooperation is inevitably part of the equation. In the medium to long term, the most important effect of different development models may indeed lie with the decreasing incentives to integrate, based on the non-complementarity of national markets rather than with political considerations.

To conclude, Latin American regionalism certainly did not count on the strong support of a singular leader or a core coalition of states. Much less did the environmental conditions expose the region to a threat pervasive enough to set the conditions forging a confederation for security and defense. Framed in this way, these insights do not account for the integration gap, as we lack theoretical guidance on the question of the importance of a catalytic agent. Since its significance has been empirically established by analysts of political integration, there is no reason to reject a priori the possibility that different paymasters sustain a successful process of integration.

2.3 Domestic conditions: regime type and state capacity

The link between the types of states inhabiting a region, on the one hand, and their mode of coexistence, on the other, is still subject to debate. The empirically strong relation between economic liberalization and political opening, combined with their pacifying effect on foreign relations, nevertheless allows us to derive two possible explanations for why Latin American regionalism has not lived up to its pledge.

The first of these takes issue with the emphasis that neofunctionalism places on the role of transnational civil society actors in international integration. Such regionalizing forces, Schmitter (1995) contends, can only emerge in liberal democracies. While for most of the 20th century integration efforts were almost exclusively promoted by a small group of technocrats and economic elites, re-democratization in the 1980s and early 1990s also made integration processes increasingly dependent on public support (Seligson, 1999). With the exception of Cuba, all Latin American states are today governed by elected regimes and share a strong commitment to democracy. Nevertheless, deficiencies remain and the extent to which autocratic tendencies undermine democratic rule in some countries is an open question. Despite the creation of a modest number of participatory mechanisms since the 1990s, a lack of vibrant national civil society organizations has been identified as one of the main reasons why their active involvement in regional processes is still poor (Saguier, 2007; Serbin, 2011). As argued above (see section 2.1.), however, Latin American regionalism has, first and foremost, been a project that has been shared amongst the political and social elites who have provided the essential impulses for the existing schemes. The hypothesis that deficient democracies have failed to translate trans-nationalizing bottom-up dynamics into government policies is thus hardly applicable to Latin America.

A second hypothesis linking regime type and internationalism centers on institutional mechanisms, which are contingent upon state capacity. Accordingly, governments that are domestically held accountable and enjoy legitimacy at home find it easier to credibly commit themselves to cooperation and to eventually enforcing international agreements. Given the prevailing implementation gap across Latin America's regional agenda, it is striking that there appears to be no theoretically guided work questioning whether its roots lie with a classic commitment problem. The literature approximating the

subject matter most closely on the theoretical level comes from International Relations and scholarship inquiring into security in the Third World (Ayoob, 1995; Miller, 2005). These contributions treat integration as a regional peace strategy, but because their ultimate goal is to explain when conflict does or does not occur, the literature offers little guidance on the question when states are likely to relinquish sovereignty. Although the empowerment of international institutions is often implicitly related to the condition of strong states characterized by consolidated, participatory polities and high governance capacities, we lack a clear understanding of the workings underpinning this relation. The triangular relation between cooperation, democratic regimes and state strength is thus still to be disentangled, and Domínguez's (2007: 124) assessment that, from 1990, Latin American democratic regimes since 1990 were "more likely to succeed at continental international security cooperation" while, at the same time, democracy appeared to be "unrelated to the likelihood or efficacy of trade promotion or specific dispute settlement", is the furthest this line of research has been taken so far.

The material and practical capabilities for integration in developing regions have received considerably more attention and a relative lack thereof has frequently been evoked to explain why integration between Latin American states has failed to occur. Alongside criticisms of the lack of funds for regional arrangements, which is a problem that is common to international institutions, especially small states with limited market capacity and which have depended on tariff revenues have faced difficulties in liberalizing their economies (Baumann et al., 2002). However, shortcomings in regional infrastructure have arguably posed the greatest obstacle to intraregional trade (Grabendorff, 2002: 28), although, according to a study commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank, robust empirical evidence on the additional costs incurred by a lack of infrastructure still needs to be provided (Mesquita Moreira et al., 2013). Nevertheless, in large part due to the importance attributed to energy security, during the past decade the issue has been high on the agenda of Latin America's regional organizations. After a slow take-off in the early 2000s, several projects have been successfully concluded within the framework of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA), the most ambitious scheme to date.

Practical obstacles point to a number of challenges that Latin American integration faces, but these cannot account for the region's integration gap. A review of the mandates introduced at the eight Summits of the Americas celebrated from 1994 to 2012 illustrates that the discrepancies in the regional agenda go beyond merely practical problems. According to former US senior official for inter-American affairs, Richard Feinberg (2003; see also 2006), the list of initiatives adopted at the summits consistently exceeded the implementation capacities to an extent that could not possibly have escaped the attention of the participating countries. Though subsequently reduced, the mandates have not been met by concrete measures to step up capacities to put the proposals into effect and to guarantee a functioning system of follow-up measures. Similarly, at the height of Latin America's summitry diplomacy in 2007/2008, Rojas Aravena (2009: 24) took stock of:

160 points [that] were passed in MERCOSUR, and 140 agreements of MERCOSUR with its Associate States. In the Andean Summits, 18 points were agreed. In the case of SICA, 214 points were passed during this time, and CARICOM had 124. In the context of the ALBA Summits, 85 issues were agreed on, while Petrocaribe did son (sic) with 41. The issues agreed on at the Summits of the Puebla-Panama Plan/Mesoamerica Project were 140. The Rio Group agreed on 56 points during this time. UNASUR and the Energy Summit made commitments concerning 2 and 18 topics respectively. Finally, at the Ibero-American Summit and the V Latin America – European Union Meeting, the agreements reached were 24 and 57 respectively.

The real problem is thus not too little capacity, but too much declarationism. Otero Prada et al. (2009) support the claim that the key to failed integration lies in a lack of determination and show that underpinning a range of multilateral energy projects is a simple trade logic driven by corporate interests.¹⁸ Without any accompanying political strategy to build complementary energy markets, it

¹⁸ Note that this excludes IIRSA and some of the bilateral projects which envisage market convergence at least.

would hence be more appropriate to speak of the initiatives to be tailored towards energy interconnectivity rather than energy integration.

3. Latin American declaratory regionalism: A political international endeavor

Empirical reference to the discord between rhetorical commitment and substantial outcomes in Latin American regionalism abound. Few studies, however, have addressed the question in a systematic manner. The hypotheses discussed above complement each other in various ways, each highlighting different aspects of the complex process of region-building. Against a market-centered view that the non-occurrence of integration simply reflects a lack of demand it has been argued that the persistence of the integrationist idea and the survival of ill-suited integration schemes merit closer attention. The absence of strong economic actors and societal interest groups pushing for integration, together with inconclusive explanations linking polity characteristics to non-integration, pinpoint political willingness as a key factor to unpack Latin America's declaratory regionalism. The defensive nature of integration in the global South, where regionalism serves first and foremost as a strategy of empowerment vis-à-vis global pressures and/or stronger powers, has its obvious limits where the need to externalize ties beyond the immediate neighborhood inhibits a deeper integration within the region. Yet, these external conditions cast over the intra-regional dynamics that have exhibited a consistent re-creation of Latin America's regionalist idea.

In a rare example of scholarship seeking to come to grips with the integration gap, Montecinos (1996) employs a second-image perspective to explain the survival of the arrangements launched under the aegis of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) during the first wave of regionalism.¹⁹ Accordingly, these early schemes fulfilled a 'ceremonial function', consisting in the enactment of protocols, the creation of consultative commissions and technological task forces, periodical meetings and the publication of reports with the aim of legitimizing the economic agendas of the time (ibid: 120). The institutional shortcomings of the first arrangements are, inter alia, attributed to the inability of CEPAL's técnicos to assert the economic rationale over prevailing nationalisms.

This tension has been scrutinized by scholarship focusing on the longevity of the ideational creation of the region, its predominantly uniting historical memories as well as the relative homogeneity of the region when it comes to language, ethnicity and religion (Kacowicz, 2005; Paradiso and Luna Pont, 2003). Unlike the dominant understanding of Latin American regionalism as a reactive force, these contributions highlight the ideational foundations of the push-factors that are innate to the region. Rivarola Puntigliano and Briceño-Ruiz's (2013) recent edited volume addresses the resilience of Latin America's integrationist agenda right up front. Its contributions trace the national, subregional and regional ideational roots of integration to show how these persist well into contemporary regionalism. Dabène (2009) claims that Latin America's summit diplomacy of the past two decades fulfilled first and foremost a symbolic function directed towards itself as a regional international society and its domestic constituencies. In a similar vein, Malamud and Gardini (2012: 121) refer to the "burden" of an old regionalist idea, subsequently nurtured by the European Union model, that has "imbued into most regional leaders the idea that anything short of integration is a political failure or, worse, a betrayal of the liberators or the peoples".

A recent strand of scholarship on regulatory governance provides some evidence challenging the claim that the proclamation of the regionalist idea has been a forceful driver of Latin America's integration schemes. Likewise, it questions the assumption that political leaders perceived manifesting their views in favor of regionalism as beneficial vis-à-vis their domestic constituencies and the regional international community. Scholars advocating the study of regions through the lens of

¹⁹ For the classic take on the evolution of institutions, see Ruggie (1998). On the specific case of Mercosur's resilience, see Gómez Mera (2005).

regulatory governance focus on de-politicized spaces of multilateral policy-making to highlight changes in state organization that omit the usual distinction between the domestic and the international (Hameiri and Jayasuriya, 2011; Jayasuriya, 2003). On this view, integration proceeds through the emergence of specialized transnational policy networks and the participation of private actors in proceduralized multilateral governance mechanisms. A small number of contributions dealing with Latin America holds that integration indeed progressed in specific, functionally defined areas precisely because of its technocratic character. One example is Riggiozzi (2012) who argues that UNASUR's Health Council has become a "locus of integration", while Verger and Hermo (2010) illustrate how MERCOSUR-Educativo takes part in a global trend of internationalizing education.

Does this mean that integration has been most successful where it was promoted outside the political arena, and if so, why is this the case? The crucial question for regulatory regionalism remains whether converging levels of regulation and the harmonization of codes and standards eventually lead to integration. The theoretical framework of regulatory governance offers little guidance in this respect, and students of Latin American sectoral cooperation schemes remain cautious about its prospects. Phillips (2001: 580) merely suggests that regulatory activity within Mercosur may lead to a new form of governance "in the long term", and Verger and Hermo (2010) invoke a lack of resources to account for slow progress in internationalizing education. Margheritis (2013) points to the importance of Argentina's leadership in pushing for common migration policies within Mercosur, while Jayasuriya (2008) acknowledges that successful policy coordination through soft law and peer review eventually depends on the formal definition of rules. Not least, the approach privileges economic and social interdependence to create the functional pressures for multilateralism. Whether regulatory regionalism is the road ahead to walk the talk of integration thus comes down to the themes that are central to the theories of integration discussed above, namely demand, leadership, and domestic conditions.

Two insights of the governance approach add to the conclusion drawn from the preceding discussion. On the one hand, moving beyond the public political realm of declaratory regionalism, the formation of specialized bureaucracies and transnational political elites may account for the resilience of regionalism within specific issue areas and institutional frameworks. On the other hand, if a depoliticized process has been the more successful mechanism through which integration succeeded, the supply of declarationism did not necessarily correspond to functional demands. While this underscores that Latin America's governments did not generally perceive of regionalism as beneficial in terms of voter turnout or their international standing, it also lends support to an interpretation of declaratory regionalism as fulfilling a political function to foster stability within the region. Mutual reassurance of the commitment to integration has served to enlarge the shared time horizon which allowed states to cooperate both in pursuit of common objectives, including development and autonomy, and to ease tensions between them. It is widely recognized that, at least for most of the twentieth century, Latin America was relatively peaceful when considering the number of wars fought in the region, though it was certainly not devoid of militarized conflict.²⁰ One of the tools that was readily available to Latin America's elites to temper bilateral conflict was the identity function of regionalism, and its declaratory nature sufficed to serve its political purpose.

This is not deny the relevance of other factors in providing the impetus for regional integration. Regionalisms in other parts of the world are a clear indicator of the pressures that were created by economic globalization. Moreover, domestic factors and transnational coalitions crucially shape governments' decisions about regional integration. Nevertheless, adding the political function of declarationism to the picture alters the costs and benefits attributed to a regional strategy as opposed to other options. For the study of integration it is thus imperative to carefully examine whether the object of analysis actually exists in the first place, and when regionalism is simply an empty shell.

²⁰ For detailed accounts of this pattern and its explanations see Domínguez (2003); Kacowicz (1998); Mares (2001); and Martín (2006).

Future research and policy agenda

This paper set out to map the contributions speaking to Latin America's integration gap to lay the ground for a theoretically guided approach to the subject. Existing analyses tend to suffer from a lack of embeddedness in the scholarly debate, a systematic assessment of empirical evidence, and not least in part from conceptual clarity. Rather than asking why integration has failed to come about, it was argued, an inquiry should move the puzzle of Latin America's declaratory regionalism center-stage. An exclusive focus on market conditions is therefore misguided, and neither does the role of strong powers or domestic conditions provide a conclusive answer to the question at stake. To be sure, Latin America's foreign policy agendas are not exempt from the ordinary dilemmas of *realpolitik*. Nevertheless, the assessment of existing analyses suggests that the key to explain the broader pattern of the region's integration gap lies in the question of a lack of commitment. A conclusive understanding of the form that regionalism has taken over the past two decades, however, needs to understand the political function that declaratory regionalism has come to fulfill.

From the outset, Latin America's regionalist idea has been imbued by a defensive rationale vis-à-vis the interference of external powers. Yet, through repeated reference and practice, the constitutive idea of the region has acquired force in its own right. This explains why regionalism has occupied a prominent place in the agenda's of Latin American elites, and as such can provide an impetus for integration to come about. Whether the political and identity function of regionalism will continue to bear leverage is thus likely to impact upon the future of regionalism in the Americas. Irrespective of the question whether Latin Americans should follow the integration path as a viable road towards economic development and the construction of a peaceful regional order, the existing inconsistencies should not mislead us over the immediate, counterproductive effects of the elusive content of declaratory regionalism's elusive content. Given the lack of macro-economic coordination, intra-regional trade flows remain vulnerable to crises and tend to follow a pro-cyclical pattern. Under these conditions, the protectionist measures adopted during the economic downturn have led to bilateral tensions and a loss of investor credibility (Bouzas et al., 2002; Durán Lima and Maldonado, 2005; Sanahuja, 2009). As the region's states are diversifying their ties on a global scale, gaining a stronger position relative to the US, and as the Southern Cone is moving into the direction of building a stable security community that renders armed conflict an increasingly distant option, declarationism may indeed be losing some of its appeal.

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