Regional Integration Theories: The Suitability of a Constructivist Approach (at least, in the case of South America)


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Abstract

This paper attempts to point out the shortcomings of mainstream regional integration theory: neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism. The 1999-2001 Mercosur crisis is chosen as a tour de force for regionalist theories. The “redefinition” of South American integration process during the following years shows the necessity to introduce complementary approaches focused on ideational factors –ideas, norms, values-, rather than material ones. That conclusion will provide a more complex and rigorous theoretical framework for analysing regional integration processes in the present time, and the South American case in particular.

Key-words: Regional integration, International Relations theory, Mercosur, Constructivism, Ideational factors.

1. Introduction

This paper tackles regional integration phenomenon from an International Relations (IR) theoretical perspective, seeking to shed light on explanations on integration process in the Southern Cone of Latin America. Classical theories on regionalism since the 40’s and 50’s, as well as critical approaches –new regionalism approaches- in the 80’s and 90s, have focused on material aspects following the mainstream of IR discipline. That is, regional integration processes have been explained due to geostrategic rationality –realism-, economic interdependence –neoliberalism-, reaction against marginalization in international globalization –neostructuralism-, or spill-over from one technical field to another –neofunctionalism-, among others.
Concerning the particular scenario of South American regional integration, the Mercosur crisis in 1999-2001 pushed the process to one of these two choices: either a weak process in stand-by and under lethargy or a redefinition of the process based on non traditional factors, i.e. factors connected to socio-cultural construction rather than just economic and geostrategic interests.

In order to show this point, this paper is organized as follows: in the first section, I propose a historical-political summary of the causes and consequences of the end-of-the-century Mercosur crisis, which became the inflexion point for a “different” Mercosur. Secondly, I will offer a detailed repertoire of IR theoretical approaches on regional integration, stating the mainstream’s shortcomings in explaining this new South American context. Finally, these arguments will lead us to support the suitability of a constructivist approach, which include ideational elements –ideas, values, norms- which play an important role in the 2003-2006 period in South America.

II. The Mercosur crisis, 1999-2001

Notwithstanding the fact that regional integration processes in South America accumulate several unsuccessful attempts throughout its history, the last serious attempt, dating from the period after military dictatorships in the 80’s, seems to have been a very fruitful one. During the 80’s the main regional objective was to eliminate the risk of interstate war and to generate confidence via nuclear cooperation, while the particular objectives of such countries were the strengthening of recovering democracies and the fight against economic crisis. Both aspects were raised bilaterally by presidents Sarney and Alfonsín and, in 1991, this cooperation was institutionalized by the creation of Mercosur. The signing of the Asunción Treaty, which launched Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay on this trip, accentuated the economic nuance of the process: the implementation of a custom union as the first step towards a South American common market. However, socio-cultural elements as well as political-institutional ones remained present with more or less importance. One example could be the compromise to sign the Tlatelolco Treaty against nuclear weapons in Latin America and the
definitive process to solve territorial disputes between Southern Cone countries, mainly Chile and Argentina. This period of increasing regional economic interdependence, growing international insertion in a globalized world and incipient institutionalization of Mercosur mechanisms—notably, by the Ouro Preto Protocol of 1994—was mainly explained by the Academy as a huge success. This success seemed obvious because the economic sectors already integrated could act as a driving force for further integration and could also produce the idea of regional integration as economic development.

Nevertheless, the end of this decade of strong neoliberalism, of political bandwagon and of shortening the state in the South American region led to an important crisis in all fields of everyday life: economic stagnation, loss of legitimacy of elected offices, popular uprisings... Thus, what started as a devaluation of Brazilian real in 1999, turned into the Argentinean “corralito”, where even the Argentinean Ministry of Economy, Domingo Cavallo, asked for the transformation of Mercosur into a mere free trade area. Likewise, the disenchantment with its ruling class spread in Argentinean society, where there were five presidents in a week. Due to all these facts, the Academy believed that regional integration process in South America was on the verge of dying, becoming the umpteenth failed attempt of regional integration throughout the Latin American history.

However, after the Mercosur crisis, a new phase was opened with the election of presidents convinced of the benefits of regional integration based on socio-cultural ties: Eduardo Duhalde in Argentina and Lula da Silva in Brazil, and afterwards, Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay and Nicanor Duarte Frutos in Paraguay. With a badly damaged economic productivity, with a decreasing trade exchange among neighbours, with consolidated democracies and the military already out of the equation, with a strengthened regional cooperation in security and defense; the understanding between Buenos Aires and Brasilia—the driving force for further integration—, was focused on socio-cultural aspects. This point was confirmed in arrangements such as the Buenos Aires Consensus in 2003, the Brasilia Declaration of 2003— that implies the willing of Argentina and Brazil to share their opinions face to international financial institutions—and the Copacabana Declaration of 2004—concerning social issues—, among others.
Furthermore, the fields covered by Mercosur process were enlarged, including the rising “Mercosur social” and “Mercosur educacional”, which fosters the academic community mobility and the links among regional epistemic communities. Lately, it is important to point out the emergence of a new position, the president of the Permanent Representatives Committee, held by Eduardo Duhalde in order to institutionalize the Mercosur activity and to play a more important role in the international scenario. Moreover, the evolution of the Comisión Parlamentaria Conjunta into a real Parliament of the Mercosur sought to place it closer to society and bind citizens to this project. Finally, the Mercosur Structural Convergence Fund (FOCEM, in Spanish) was created to address resources to the least developed subregions in the member states and associated states, with the aim of reducing the huge asymmetries inside the Mercosur region as well as fostering regional solidarity and the emergence of new loyalties towards regional institutions.

III. Classical theories and new approaches

The academic approach to regional integration has come, mainly, from liberalism and its concern with cooperation and its connexion with economic explanations. The first enunciation was the functionalism of David Mitrany that, even before the Second World War, maintained that the material needs for living provided by technical experts of international agencies (low politics) could facilitate cooperation among statesmen to solve security and power conflicts (high politics). His liberal point of view meant that the increase of technological progress would make the state’s capacity to control all the security tasks inefficient and, therefore, the international cooperation was becoming essential.

This first attempt to explain regional integration was completed by the neofunctionalism of Ernst Haas. He tried to strengthen the functionalism argument and to challenge the two dominant mainstreams of the International Relations discipline. It

1 “Neofunctionalism was developed explicitly to challenge the two theories of IR dominant in the 1950s, classical realism and idealism”, HAAS, Ernst. The Uniting of Europe, 2004, p. XIV.
is important to note that this approach arose at the dawn of the European construction, and as a driving force and theoretical basis for the processes that were taking place in the 50’s. An important peculiarity of neofunctionalism is the complete break with the realist static picture\(^2\), that is, Haas underlines the sense of movement generated by increasing interdependence in several areas. As Haas defends, loyalties start to change and the idea of a region with more powerful institutions—or even supranational ones—then becomes real\(^3\). This process, which is due to an ideational ontology—that will be a strong influence for the constructivists, as we will see—implies that the positive outcomes obtained by the spill over effect will drive a change in the evaluation and motivation of statesmen to also integrate issues in other areas.

Another important aspect of Haas contribution over the functionalism of Mitrany concerns the plurality of actors. They are not only statesmen who support the integration process, but, according to Haas, also all the society elites. Thus, the characteristic rationality associated with statesmen becomes blurred among a plurality of actors who search for the same objective—inegration—, but through different strategies.

This approach, notably focused on the study of European integration process, has been refuted for its lack of explanations for the French position under the De Gaulle regime and its euro-sclerosis in the 60’s. Against these critics, Haas defends that his argument is a form of approach, and not a theory in that it can neither understand the reality in a holistic way nor predict future events. At the same time, after the strengthened European integration process in the 80’s, neofunctionalism has re-emerged bringing Haas the opportunity to sharpen his line of reasoning. Haas has pointed out that the spill over effect is not automatic in some types of economic law but relies on the

\(^2\) As we could appreciate later, one of the most powerful criticism against realism is about the lack of dynamism, that is, the incapacity to explain changes of interests or motivations to act because of it is believed that these interests are permanent and prefixed.

\(^3\) “Haas built the idea of spill over not on economic determinism, but on changes in the attitudes and behaviour of governments, parties, and, especially, labour and business interest groups. His key conclusion was that “group pressure will spill over into the federal sphere and thereby add to the integrative impulse””. HAAS, Ernst. The Uniting of Europe. 2004, p. X.
ability to readdress and change loyalties and attitudes among the states of the same region, and finally to promote regional integration among them.

Neofunctionalism has also been criticized for its European specificity. At the end, neofunctionalism could be understood more as a European historically descriptive approach than as a regional integration theory with a world dimension. Even Haas –and Schmitter- have limited the possibility to apply these preconceptions in other regions with other particularities. Thus, it seems that the spill over effect does not work successfully in integration processes where the institutional level has been weak, as is the case in Mercosur. Indeed, the Mercosur process is not currently directed to have supranational institutions and is notably intergovernmental –in the sense that almost all decisions are taken directly by the presidents and/or ministries of foreign affairs or economy, but not by regional institutions-. Following this line, we could observe that the Mercosur process would suffer too many problems to channel the spill over effect and the functional spread among varied sectors. This fact implies an important hole and a lack of explanation in this approach, even if the ideational prism and the idea of a plurality of actors acting as a driving force could be extrapolated out of the European case to the South American reality. In conclusion, it seems that the neofunctionalism of Haas is not able to explain by itself some events that have taken place in Mercosur, i.e. the acceleration of the signing of the Asunción Treaty in 1991 because of the presidential impulse of Menem and Collor, or the unilateral Brazilian devaluation in 1999 that generated a trade conflict intra-Mercosur. However, the neofunctionalism theory can be very useful in understanding the rapprochement between Sarney and Alfonsín in the 80’s and subsequently, the nuclear disarmament and finally the elimination of the risk of war in South America.

The security communities approach or transactionalism of Karl Deutsch could be framed as a position close to neofunctionalism but focused specifically on order and security. Furthermore, the transactionalism implies a challenge to statocentric theories as realism, insofaras it brings the possibility of the existence of driving forces
other than the ones coming from the government itself\textsuperscript{4}. Transactionalism is characterized by the conception of the integration as a process throughout which the evaluations and societal behaviours based in political decisions get modified. Thus, as Deutsch claimed, “[e]arly in the course of the integrative process, a psychological “no-war” community often also develops. War among the prospective partners comes to be considered as illegitimate; serious preparations for it no longer command popular support; and even if some of the prospective partner countries find themselves on opposite sides in some larger international conflict, they conduct themselves so as to keep actual mutual hostilities and damage to a minimum”\textsuperscript{5}. The security community approach is then a challenge to realism; in spite of explaining peace just as a consequence of power balance or latent war, he suggested also psychological elements and ideas concerning identity\textsuperscript{6} as possible causes and explanations for cooperation and, at the end of the day, the formation of a security community. In other words “in short, Deutsch claimed that those state that dwell in a security community had created not simply a stable order but, in fact, a stable peace”\textsuperscript{7}.

While talking about security communities, Deutsch distinguishes between two models. On the one hand, there are the \textit{amalgamated communities}, where different states join together around one regional centre. In these cases, a supranational entity will arise. On the other hand, and more interesting for regional integration literature, we find the \textit{pluralistic communities}, where sovereign and independent units agree to put together some kind of decision making process and, notably, renounce the use of force to solve their disputes. Apart from this distinction, the main point in Deutsch’s argumentation is the ideational nuance that he introduces: the interaction among the

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Integration}, then, is a relationship among units in which they are mutually interdependent and jointly produce system properties which they would separately lack […] \textit{Political integration} is the integration of political actor or political units, such as individuals, groups, municipalities, regions, or countries, in regard to their political behavior”, DEUTSCH, Karl. \textit{The Analysis of international relations}, 1968, p.159.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{6} Deutsch pointed out as one of the four main tasks of integration “(4) gaining a new self-image and role identity”. \textit{Ibidem}, p. 192.

\textsuperscript{7} ADLER, Emanuel and BARNETT, Michael. \textit{Security Communities}, 1998, p.3.
diverse members of the community produces an increasing transnational solidarity and subsequently, is understood as a sense of community, a “we-feeling”, a concept that constructivists will reclaim, as we will see later.

This idea of “we-feeling” is very present in South America after the identity construction between Argentinean and Brazilian people in the 80’s. The end of both dictatorships generated the self-perception as democratic societies, as democracy and human rights developers. This almost perfect understanding between both positions could be compared to Deutsch’s “psychology community of non belligerence”, that subsequently could be the origin of a South American security community. Thereby, Deutsch’s contribution is useful to analyse the security concept from an ideational point of view –and not just material-, that give us the key to understand the period from the recovery of democracy in the 80’s to the elimination of the risk of war in the 90’s.

The interdependency theory of Nye and Keohane takes Haas’ contributions related to institutions and, at the same time, searches to defy the realist theory predominant in the 70’s. In its earliest formulation of 1977, the “complex interdependence theory” aspires to refute realism with the presentation of two ideal types: realism and complex interdependence, that can be seen as a continuum where reality can be placed. Thereby Keohane and Nye explain the international relations in the 70’s as characterized by an increasing interconnection between domestic and international affairs, what has been called “intermestic”. From this point of view, the realist definition of states as billiard balls motivated by rational choice and national interest is not useful any more. Following this idea, they start to talk about transgovernmental networking and interstate relations outside of the formal channels. It is also important to contextualize this theory within that time and be aware of implications of the 1973 economic crisis, which showed the interconnection among the

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10 Ibidem, p. 302.
whole national economies and the interdependence of all states on resources, notably, oil.

A little bit surprisingly, in *Power and Interdependence Revisited*, written ten years later by the same authors, Keohane and Nye reduced their degree of confrontation or challenge against the realism and they assumed some realist postulates and tried to make a kind of collaboration to realism in order to create a broader realism or at least, to complement it. This position is adopted specially by Keohane—as he proved in other publications as *Neorealism and its critics*, while Nye focused his further research on soft power. One possible explanation for this reformulation of their perspective could be the appearance of Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* in 1979 and its suggestive reinforcement of realist postulates in the so-called structural realism or neorealism. In addition, the aggravation of international context and the second phase of the Cold War seemed to give force to realist interpretation in spite of complex interdependence theory formulations. In conclusion, Keohane and Nye are resituated in an intermediate place between realism and liberalism; or in their own words “our analysis linked realist and neorealist analysis to concerns of liberals with interdependence. Rather than viewing realist theory as an alternative to liberal *interdependence theory*, we regarded the two as necessary complements to one another”.

Knowing the argumentative fortress of neorealism but conscious of its lack of explanation, they reformulated a synthesis or adaptation to neorealism, that put the emphasis on exchanges. These exchanges would generate a mutual dependency until weaving an interdependent network in which national and regional aspects were blurred. In any case, the thin line between the *nationalness* and the *regionalness*, kept on getting thinner because of the growing international institutions and their importance until they began talking in an “intermestic” way, i.e. the mixture and interconnection of both fields: domestic and


12 “We viewed our structural models as attempts to improve the ability of Realist or neo-Realist analysis to account for international regime change: we saw ourselves as adapting Realism, and attempting to go beyond it, rather than rejecting it”. KEOHANE, Robert. “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond”, *Neorealism and its critics*, 1986, p. 160.
Besides, Nye and Keohane’s limitations -announced ten years after their *opus magnum*—also concerned the complex interdependence consequences. The optimism showed in 1977 about the unleashing of cooperation processes among states becomes restricted. Cooperation is no longer understood as an inherent consequence of interdependence. Material capacities and power are once again placed at the heart of international relations among states; or in Keohane and Nye’s words: “In analyzing the politics of interdependence, we emphasized that interdependence would not necessarily lead to cooperation, nor did we assume that its consequences would automatically be benign in other respects. The key point was not that interdependence made power obsolete –far from it- but that patterns of interdependence and patterns of potential power resources in a given issue-area are closely related.”

On the other hand, the other component of the discipline mainstream, neorealism, has not been too interested in regional integration. “Waltz updates realist analysis by paying attention to the *systemic* level of analysis [...] For Waltz the international system is characterized by anarchy rather than hierarchy. It is composed of units that are formally and functionally equal (states) and the key variable is the distribution of capacities across units (a system level attribute)”

Its statocentric and rationalist approach, dominated by the idea of security as the main aim -defined in terms of power and material capacities-, has made the attempt to explain regionalism conditional. Thereby, regional integration is understood as a means to satisfy particular national interests in the international field. Statesmen’s rationality facilitates the achievement of certain agreements and/or cooperative systems in order to favour their national interests. Thus, the interests externally given and reinforced by material capacities make the sense of belonging in the community or other ideational factors that we mentioned before futile. Once we have posed the neorealist departing point, we can

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state that, according to this theory, regional integration could be explained as some kind of specific alliance among sovereign and independent states, notably related to security affairs that do not imply any renunciation of decision-making power. As Hurrell declares, “[f]or the neo-realist, the politics of regionalism and the emergence of regionalist alignments have much in common with the politics of alliance formation”\textsuperscript{15}.

Following this line, we could point out international organizations that neorealism could interpret as cases of regionalism like NATO; however, we will not include such security international organizations in our study because they are outside the scope of this paper.

Another approximation from the neorealism to regionalism and international regimes is the \textbf{hegemonic stability theory}, which links the realist idea of power and security with the cooperative elements –typical of international regimes– motivated by the hegemon\textsuperscript{16}. At first sight, this theory could resemble the \textit{amalgamated communities} of Deutsch in the sense of adhesion around a hegemon, but it is completely different in its justifications. In fact, the hegemonic stability theory denies the possibility of either creating or maintaining a cooperative regime without the existence of a hegemonic leader that provides fortress and efficacy. This theory has suggested two different theoretical developments depending on a benevolent hegemon or a coercive one. In fact, with reference to our case study, Mercosur, even if Brazil, as a global player, behaves in a diplomatic and soft power way in the regional field, it seems unrealistic to perceive Brazil as a hegemon which can guarantee the Southern Cone stability. This occurs because Brazil is not willing to assume the cost of regional leadership because a hegemonic attitude would provoke a hostile reaction from its regional neighbours.

According to this trend, there is a central author in regional integration: Walter Mattli. Besides a rigorous review of regional integration debate, he proposes his own


\textsuperscript{16} “The theory of hegemonic stability, which links strong international regimes to the existence of a dominant state in the respective issue-area, seeks to explain when and why international regimes emerge and are effective in the sense that states follow cooperative policies which, in the absence of regime, they would most likely not pursue”, HASENCLEVER, Andreas, MAYER, Peter and RITTBERGER, Volker, \textit{Theories of International Regimes}, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 86.
theory to explain why some integration processes have success or not. Thus, success would have three pillars. First of all, “the potential for economic gains from market exchange within a region must be significant”\(^\text{17}\) in order to assure the demand of norms, regulations and regional policies. Secondly, “there must also be a fulfillment of supply conditions. These are the conditions under which political leaders are willing and able to accommodate demands for regional institutions at each step of the integration process”\(^\text{18}\). And, thirdly, the existence of one state that assume the leadership or benevolent hegemon, that is, takes coordination responsibilities as well as costs of the process. In our South American case, the two first conditions are relatively constant in recent years, but it is still at stake if Brazil wants to play the role that Mattli’s third condition states. In any case, Mattli supports the idea that “new regionalism in Latin America can be understood as an effort to reverse a decade of the economic decline and to fend off the negative externalities of blocs formation elsewhere”\(^\text{19}\) which imply trade deviations that could affect South American exports.

In relation to regional integration, the realist emphasis on power also concerns economic strength in terms of competitiveness in international trade and investment flows, so “Neo-realism focuses attention both on power-political pressures and on the dynamics of mercantilist economic competition”\(^\text{20}\). Since the main aim for constituting a region would be a stronger geostrategic position in both military and economic fields, the role of international trade will be also a priority\(^\text{21}\). In the crossroad among neorealism, liberalism and regional integration theory, we can situate what has been called liberal intergovernmentalism. Its principal author, Moravcsik, joins together his regionalism studies with his realist and liberal postulates, and settles that regional


\(^{18}\) Ibidem, p. 42.

\(^{19}\) Ibidem, p. 155.


\(^{21}\) “Neorealists predict that Europe will unify to emulate its continental sized economic rivals to become more competitive and to better project its interests”, COLLARD-WEXLER, Simon. “Integration under Anarchy: Neorealism and the European Union”, *European Journal of International Relations* 2006; 12: 424.
integration has three bases: First, the assumption that states act rationally, so when a state starts an integration process it is aware of doing so to achieve its goals. Second, national preferences are built and decided in relation to domestic politics and they are indirectly conditioned by economic interdependence. And third, governments are the principal actors, remarking that governmental decisions depend mainly on the material capacities of each state. From here on, Moravcsik reformulates the neorealist characteristics *(vid supra)* trying to explain the integration phenomenon from the role of the state and national interest point of view and rejecting any possibility of supranationality or even cooperation politics if they are not subordinated to intergovernmental necessities.

In order to close the neorealism bloc, the Latin American academy brings us a theoretical approach, the peripheral realism that reminds us how Mercosur consolidation has been impregnated with an economic and pragmatic logic. Carlos Escudé has developed this approach bringing the realist postulates to the South American peripheral situation, where national interest and material needs are neither related to increasing world power nor to international balance of power. In fact, he maintains through his peripheral realism that international relations should be conditioned by the material needs of its people, defined as national interest, and therefore they should forget other ethical considerations. In conclusion, on the one hand we can see some kind of neorealism focused on security and state survival and, on the other hand, talking about a peripheral state such as Argentina, Escudé embraces a strategic attitude of bandwagoning and a regional alliance that implies an important saving of risks and costs in the international scene, and without giving up neither

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23 “As he puts it “intergovernmental demand for policy ideas, not the supranational supply of these ideas, is the fundamental exogenous factor driving integration. To a very large extent, the demand for co-operative policies creates its own supply” (Moravcsik, 1995) quoted at NUGENT, Neill. *The Government and Politics of the European Union*, Ed. Palgrave, 1999 [1989], p.511.

sovereignty nor independence. “Thus the foreign policy adopted focuses on preserving the status quo to the detriment of all other more ambitious options, in a combination of behaviours that leads to a defensive, marginal, passive role in world affairs”.

Against the mainstream of the discipline –neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism-, new critical approaches arose in the 80’s and 90’s. One of these new voices, focused mainly on regionalism, is the new regionalism approach of Hettne, which links globalization and regionalism. At the same time, Hettne provides his theoretical framework with a normative and plurithematic aspect, very far from the economic regional integration theory. On this basis, Hettne points out the difference between both concepts: “According to the regionalist approach, integration should above all serve the purpose of creating viable regions; whereas economic integration theory as such, at least in principle, is neutral with respect to the specific value of the region or whatever the particular unit to be integrated. [...] Regionalization is not only economic, but also political, social and cultural”. Therefore, introducing “the political ambition of creating territorial identity and regional coherence” as a main character of regional integration, the new regionalism approach challenges the neoutilitarian theories. In fact, these postulates are very close to constructivist ones (vid. infra), because Hettne and Soderbaum understand that “political communities are not exogenously given, but constructed by historically contingent interactions”.

Hettne’s point of view is very useful in two ways. First of all, since he links new regionalism and globalization, he establishes a comparison between old and new


27 Ibidem, p.286.


regionalism, enhancing that the main difference is neither temporal nor quantitative, but qualitative. In order to prove this, he contrasts the old regionalism –that appeared in a bipolar world, “from above”, focused on economic protection and specific aims between neighbour countries- with the new regionalism. The latter is characterized by its emergence in a multipolar world and its interconnection with globalization, where the emergent regions seek to cooperate in order to integrate themselves into the world economy. At the same time, new regionalism becomes a multidimensional process with multiple aims and it is framed in a structural global transformation where several non state actors operate at different levels of the global system 30.

According to one of Hettne’s last articles 31, “since the new regionalism now has two decades behind it, this may be the time to bury the distinction and recognise the study of regionalism as a search for a moving target, even if this leaves us with a complicated ontological problem” 32. At the end of the day, he tries to blur the difference between old and new regionalism in order to create a more comprehensive and dynamic approach. In the same way, Hettne and Soderbaum defend the suitability of a bridge between “European Union integration studies” and “International Relations regionalism studies”.

Secondly, Hettne searches to create a way to measure regionness. He recognizes five levels, not necessarily consecutive but important for knowing the situation in a regional social process building. Thus “the level of regionness defines the position of a particular region or regional system in terms of regional coherence and identity, which can be seen as a long-term endogenous historical process changing over time from coercion, the building of empires and nations, to more voluntary cooperation” 33. On this

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32 *Ib idem*, p. 20.

33 *Ib idem*, p. 28.
basis, there are five levels: (i) the *regional space*, or the geographic area; (ii) the *regional complex*, which implies an embryonic interdependence; (iii) the *regional society*, which could cover different aspects such as political, cultural, economic, or military; (iv) the *regional community*, origin of transnational civil society in the sense that stimulates the convergence of values and, at the same time, equivalent to pluralistic security community of Deutsch; and (v) the *regional institutionalized polity*, which would have the decision making capacity

Even if Hettne and Soderbaum approach resembles some kind of structuralist enunciations, it is worth investigating further this theory in order to underline the differences. Structuralism tries to explain the regional integration from a socio-economic focus, inherited from the historical materialism of Marx. The International Political Economy challenged the Cold War realist explanation and became more powerful with authors such as Wallerstein and centre-periphery theories and dependency theory by Raul Prebisch, president of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Structuralism has had an important impact among the South American scholars who have tried to explain the South American regional integration process. Following this line, authors as Helio Jaguaribe and Aldo Ferrer have reinforced the idea of regionalism as a defensive reaction against international marginalization generated by economic globalization. At the same time, they value socio-cultural aspects of interregional identity over economic ones. As Jaguaribe states, the “Mercosur is the main tool for its members to protect their international interests and, in the long term, to preserve their identity and their national autonomy” \(^\text{35}\). On this basis, we can appreciate how regional integration is defined in two ways: firstly in terms of defence or reaction, notably against globalization and against American ideological point of view; and

\(^{34}\) *Ibidem*, p. 28-29.

\(^{35}\) JAGUARIBE, Helio. “Mercosul e a Nova Ordem Mundial”, *Dossiê CEBRI*, volume 1, año 1, 2002, p. 6; my translation from Portuguese.
secondly as a wish to unify the whole Latin America under the same pattern in spite of the existence of different theoretical approaches.

Unlike Jaguaribe, Aldo Ferrer maintains a similar thesis, but his optimism is reflected in the distinction between Mercosur ideal and Mercosur posible. The former would be an exercise of comparison with the European Union to reinforce the Mercosur disappointment for not being able to create supranational institutions. The latter would be a comparison between the South American situation in the 80’s and its situation two decades later which affirms that from the first bilateral agreements between Sarney and Alfonsín the outcomes have been satisfactory and there are promising perspectives. There is no need to say that Ferrer’s choice for the Mercosur posible implies a normative position for the future and, at the same time, implies some criticisms of some past events. In these terms, one of the main South American structuralist criticism concerns the neoliberal economic plans of the 90’s, exemplified by the Washington Consensus. “Mercosur requires, as a necessary condition, the agreement between Argentina and Brazil, whose convergence –while Alfonsín and Sarney were in office- was the key point to the process building [...] This strategy was abandoned since the process was delegated to the market forces, to an accelerated chronogram of automatic custom duty deduction, under the presidencies of Menem and Collor.”

Radically against structuralism, but also focused on the economic aspect of regional integration, there is the liberal economic school. We make this digression on our regionalism academic review in order to avoid future misunderstandings. Nowadays it is common to encounter authors who see regional integration just as an economic process and who refer only to political aspects when they talk about cooperation. In this line, we can show how they use the classical position of Bela Balassa –quoted by Nye- who “defines economic integration as the abolition of discrimination between economic


37 FERRER, Aldo. “El éxito del Mercosur posible”, Revista de Economía Política, vol.27, no.1, Jan/Mar. 2007, p. 6-7; my translation from Spanish.
units belonging to different national states”\textsuperscript{38}. Balassa established a classification to measure the integration level from “no tariff or quotas” (free trade area), “common external tariff” (customs union), “free flow of factors” (common market), “harmonization of economic policies” (economic union), to “unification of policies and political institutions” (total economic integration). Thereby, the purely political aspect appears only at the last stage and conditioned by the economic success. These typical economic arguments, supported by numerous economists, ignore the importance of domestic political factors –such as elite decisions and social support to integration- and international ones –for example, regional political or geostrategic contexts. As it seems evident, economic science has a limited vision in explaining regional integration. If we argue that there is nothing political in economic decision –which is almost impossible-, the Economy could explain only the aspects concerning economic exchanges and this is not enough to understand regional integration.

Finally, \textbf{constructivism} is consolidated as the most powerful approach to challenge the academic rationalist mainstream. The principal constructivist contribution is its ideational ontology, inherited by sociologists as Durkheim and Weber. According to this ontology, construction of social interest and ideational factors such as ideas, norms, and values become very relevant at the expense of material capacities and externally given interests, which are characteristics of rationalist and neoutilitarist approaches.

From the beginning, we must note that constructivism can also be understood as a metatheoretic approach with three main elements \textsuperscript{39}. First of all, epistemologically, knowledge is socially constructed; secondly, ontologically, the world is socially constructed; and thirdly, the liaison process between the other two elements is a reflexive process, i.e. a process that makes us wonder how knowledge of social construction could affect the reality of social construction and vice versa.


\textsuperscript{39} GUZZINI, Stefano. “A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations”, \textit{European Journal of International Relations}, 2000.
The constructivist approach has the privilege of being the main driving force behind the study of security communities. As Acharya proclaims, the “mainstream international relations theory would only return to the concept in the wake of the constructivist revolt against neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Subsequently, constructivism has been the main theoretical framework for the study of security communities” ⁴⁰. According to constructivism, the absence of war and the reliable atmosphere inside the security communities are not just due to power distribution in international relations or international economic contexts, but also –and mainly- due to interconnections between the national communities, including identity building, socialization and so on. “The habit of war avoidance found in security communities results from interactions, socialisation, norm setting and identity building, rather than from forces outside of these processes (such as the international distribution of power)” ⁴¹.

The relation between norms and constructivism is very interesting in the sense that norms are not just a way to regulate state behaviour, but a way to redefine national interests and to develop collective identities ⁴². In fact, the symptomatic element of this change from “regulate” to “redefine” is the creation of new habits, which implies more than just the legal obligation idea of fulfilment to avoid some kind of coercitive power. Following this argument, constructivism reclaims Deutsch’s contributions to allege that security communities need a certain degree of loyalty or shared identity. This notion of shared identity implies both the emergence of a “we-feeling” and the processes that foster this sentiment of community belonging. Once this sensation arises, the security community becomes a social habit and the renunciation of use of force ceases to be understood as a legal obligation with a punishment associated in case of non-


⁴¹ Ibidem, p.3.

⁴² “Norms not only “regulate” state behavior as in neo-liberal institutionalism, but also redefine state interests and constitute state identities, including the development of collective identities”, ibidem, p.4.
fulfilment. To sum up, we witness a social identity building and subsequently, a security community emergence, that aspire to solve the internal problems by non violent methods.

In relation to normative aspects of constructivism, it is interesting to point out the promotion of a cognitive regionalism. “Constructivist theories focus on regional awareness and regional identity, on the shared sense of belonging to a particular regional community, and on what has been called “cognitive regionalism”. They stress the extent to which regional cohesion depends on a sustained and durable sense of community based on mutual responsiveness, trust, and high levels of what might be called “cognitive interdependence”.

At the same time, “[t]he construction of identity is central to the kind of “we-feeling” that Deutsch identified as a key feature of security communities. The notion of identity runs deep into the heart of constructivist approaches because of its central claim that the development of a collective identity can ameliorate the security dilemma among states. The same idea has been developed in terms of epistemic communities trying to exemplify the dynamism of this process and, at the same time, the importance of these channels that give ideas the possibility to move and to reach different communities. “They argue that epistemic communities are crucial "channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from country to country" (P. Haas 1992b:27). Epistemic communities are defined as "network[s] of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that

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43 “Deutsch stressed that security communities require the emergence of “some degree of generalized common identity or loyalty”, including “the deliberate promotion of processes and sentiments of mutual identification, loyalties, and “we-feelings”. In security communities, war avoidance becomes a social habit, rather than a mere legal obligation backed by sanctions”, ibidem, p.25.


45 ACHARYA, Amitav. Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia. ASEAN and the problem of regional order, 2001, p.27.
domain or issue-area” (P. Haas 1992b: 3).  

Notwithstanding the different constructivist approaches, we have to recognize Alexander Wendt as one of its main authors. He maintains a statocentric perspective based in the idea of states as the most important actors—but not the only ones—in international relations. From the beginning he affirms that “[i]n contrast to the "economic" theorizing that dominates mainstream systemic international relations scholarship, this involves a "sociological social psychological" form of systemic theory in which identities and interests are the dependent variable”. In this way, he reinforces his interest in the identity concept in expense of economic reductionism used by the rationalist mainstream of the International Relations discipline.

Thus, Wendt defines constructivism as “a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective, rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are an important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics”. According to Wendt, the International Relations challenge is to demonstrate that realism and rationalism are wrong. Firstly, to refute realism, he gives priority to intersubjective elements over material ones, to social interactions over material capacities in terms of military power. Secondly, he accuses rationalism of not being able to explain the structural transformation within the international system due to its assumptions of identities and domain or issue-area” (P. Haas 1992b: 3).  

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interests externally given and fixed\textsuperscript{50}.

The link between Wendt’s constructivism and regional integration theory becomes real in his understanding of regionalism as a paradigmatic case of structural change in international relations not capable of being explained by material aspects, but by ideational ones. Indeed, he affirms that “[i]ntegration theorists appreciated this suggestion long ago, but their nascent sociology of international community has been lost in the economics of international cooperation developed by realists and rationalists”\textsuperscript{51}. For this reason it is important to emphasise that the constructivist approach to regional integration is more comprehensive than rationalist ones.

In our particular case of Mercosur, we can find some case studies related to South American regionalism. According to Deutsch’s security communities’ theory and introducing a constructivist nuance, Andrew Hurrell and Louise Fawcett have tried to prove that traditional explanations are not useful anymore\textsuperscript{52}. On this basis, “[c]onstructivism, then, helps us understand both the ways in which more expansive notions of community may emerge, but also the ways in which historically embedded identities constitute important obstacles to cooperation”\textsuperscript{53}. In their historical review of South American over the last decades, they have focused on interests and changes in identity in order to look for new ways to approach regionalism, notably connected to a complex process of socialization\textsuperscript{54}. In any case, they propose constructivism as a complementary prism to explain the Mercosur case, but without denying the importance

\textsuperscript{50} “The essence of rationalism, in contrast, is that the identities and interests that constitute games are exogenous and constant. Rationalism has many uses and virtues, but its conceptual tool kit is not designed to explain identities and interests, the reproduction and/or transformation of which is a key determinant of structural change”, \textit{ibidem}, p.394.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibidem}, p.394.

\textsuperscript{52} “[T]he idea of a “satisfied Brazil” or a “revisionist Argentina” begs many questions about the character and historical construction of states that simply cannot be answered within the intellectually impoverished world of neorealism”, HURRELL, Andrew. “An emerging security community in South America”, in ADLER, Emanuel and BARNETT, Michael. \textit{Security Communities}, 1998, p.239.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ibidem}, p.257.

\textsuperscript{54} “Interests and identities are being reshaped through this period as interaction with the global political and economic system creates a complex process of socialization”, \textit{ibidem}, p.249.
of neorealism in the issues concerning power, pressures and hegemony. Finally, after considering different regionalist approaches, Hurrell and Fawcett conclude that “if still imperfect, security community can be identified within Mercosur, built around the changes that have taken place in the core relationship between Brazil and Argentina”.

The socio-cultural interaction between these countries could be exemplified by several events as the emergence of a South American news channel –TeleSur-, the strengthen of academic ties and students visitors programmes between South American universities or, among others, the creation of funds of structural convergence (FOCEM) for the poorest regions of Mercosur in order to stimulate solidarity and common identity building.

Amidst the few South American constructivist approaches, it is worth highlighting the one by Myriam Colacrai, for whom “the ideational strengthen of Mercosur is a necessary task for its emergence and consolidation [...] The institutions can help to foster the regional integration itself, limiting the possibilities that from other contexts take advantage from the current vulnerabilities of this process. If we recognize the constitutive value rather than the regulatory value of institutions, we would be in the path to concrete the virtuous cycle that we have defined as: ideas + institutions + deciding statesmen = politics, the whole in a continuous process of feedback”.

Likewise, Claudia Fabbri contributes with a constructivist approach for South American regional integration. Her proposal is summarized in this idea: “if ideational factors, as well as interaction, socialization and learning processes shape player’s interests, identities and behaviours in building and consolidating the integration, constructivism keeps its promise of having a special value for analysing the regional

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55 “Within its own limits, neo-realist theory still has a good deal to tell us both about the importance of “outside-in” pressures and about the importance of hegemony”, HURRELL, Andrew. “Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective”, in FAWCETT, Louise and HURRELL, Andrew. Regionalism in World Politics. Regional Organization and International Order, 1995, p.53.


integration process”. Fabbri exposes the importance of ideational factors in the beginning of Argentina and Brazil rapprochement in the eighties and how “this ideational change crystallizes in the first years of the nineties”⁵⁹. She also points out how new identities and interests in the process in the 90’s meant that “Mercosur represented a neoliberal project focused on increasing trade flows rather than economic development”⁶⁰. In any case, despite her emphasis on constructivist virtues for a better understanding of South American integration process, she does not accomplish the task of explaining how and in what direction changes in recent years have been produced.

IV. Conclusions

Having analyzed the decline and subsequently redefinition of Mercosur process, I support the argument that the driving forces of South American integration after 2001 have not been just traditional material factors –such as security, economic flows, geostrategic choices- but also, and especially, a way of understanding integration from ideational aspects; that is, integration as a project through which common history and shared values impulse and motivate the expectation of a future together. Thus, integration process itself has incorporated ideas, culture, identity, norms and values into the main actors. This statement means that ideas also produce integration, even if it is more “rethorical” than “real”, but integration in any case. And this gradual production of the condition of possibility to broader and deeper integration generates an increasing expectation –and even engagement- of societies involved.

Likewise, after having resumed the dominant theories focused on regionalism, it is proven that none of the theoretical frameworks by itself gives us keys for understanding the new scenario above-mentioned; that is, the period from 2003-2005 in the Southern Cone of South America. Conceptual tools mainly used are almost obsolete,


⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 22.
thus we lack complementary theoretical approaches. This situation requires the introduction of constructivist approaches in order to fill the gaps and shed light. These kinds of new complementary approaches are not going to be the solution to all our problems, are not going to answer all our questions, but they are going to be useful for raising new questions and dealing with classical ones in other ways. Thus, more works about South American regional integration under the socio-constructivist perspective would be desirable, avoiding the neo-utilitarist and rationalist shortcomings as well as demagogic speeches which recover Bolivarian ideas from the past in a biased way.

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