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Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis

PÍA RIGGIROZZI

Latin American regional governance today represents a conglomerate of commercial, political and trans-societal welfarist integration projects. In this overlapping and sometimes conflicting scenario what Latin Americanness should mean, and how integration projects should respond to current challenges of global political economy are being redefined. The focus of the paper is twofold: to better understand current regional transformations and to discuss what new developments mean for how we theorise non-European regionalism. Looking at the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas and the Union of South American Nations we ask: How are we to understand regional agreements that are grounded in different systems of rules, alternative ideas and motivations that contest ‘open regionalism’? We argue that Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) represent different pathways to regional building, creating foundations for post-hegemonic and post-trade regional governance. We thus challenge New Regionalist approaches that assume regionalism as taking place within and modelled by neoliberal economics, establishing the debate around ‘old’ vs. ‘new’ regionalism. As these categories are limited in grasping the full meaning and implications of post-hegemonic regional orders, we discuss UNASUR and ALBA as ‘arenas for action’ to understand divergent practices, outcomes and types of regionness emerging in alternative regional spaces in South America.

Keywords: regionness, New Regionalist approach, post-hegemonic regional governance, welfarist regionalism, ALBA, UNASUR

Introduction

The reconfiguration of Latin American regional governance is one of the major features that has characterised the hemispheric political economy over the last decade. Regional governance is currently transiting a ‘garden of forking paths’, in the telling words of the Argentine writer Jorge Luis
Borges, where different regional policies, regional identities and regional forms of cooperation and competition are transforming the cartography of politics.\textsuperscript{1} Latin America today offers alternative pathways to region building whose rationales are not restricted to reasons of trade or rhetorical opposition to US hegemony. Although it is undisputable that regionalism is driven in part by economic calculations, Latin American regional governance represents a conglomerate of projects in which issues of commerce, political integration and trans-societal welfare are reclaiming – perhaps even re-inventing – some of the principles of collectivism and socialism that have previously characterised the political tradition of the region. In this overlapping and sometimes conflicting scenario, the terms of regional integration are being redefined as regional projects offer substantially divergent visions of what \textit{Latin Americanness} should mean and how integration projects should respond to current challenges of global political economy.

This paper is concerned with the question of how transformative new regionalist projects are in shaping new spaces for thinking and negotiating alternative models for political and social cooperation. Looking at the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) we ask: how are we to understand regional agreements that are grounded in different systems of rules, that contest ‘open regionalism’ and that are part of a complex set of alternative ideas and motivations affecting polities and policies across the region? In a context marked by the declining ability of the USA to shape regional orders, institutions and discourses, can we genuinely discern emerging forms of regional governance that amount to more than rhetorical rebellion against the Washington Consensus? In addressing these questions, we argue that UNASUR and ALBA should not simply be seen as \textit{ad hoc} subregional responses to the meltdown of neoliberal governance, but as political spaces where the coordinates of the Washington Consensus are being revised while new ‘regional’ understandings about issues of inclusion, democracy and economic management are being framed. Regionalism in Latin America has thus become a place where new trans-national and trans-social relations are constructing new understandings of regional community in a post-hegemonic regional order (Acharya 2009).

Focusing on the question of regional governance in UNASUR and ALBA enables us to test the theoretical power of New Regionalist approaches that have usefully embraced issues beyond mainstream EU studies yet have assumed regionalism to be taking place \textit{within} and \textit{modelled by} neoliberal economics, responding to the pressures and constraints of a globalised economy (see Hettne 1999; also Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Payne 2000). This debate dominated until very recently academic theorising and policy discussions. But as new coordinates of trade and power, particularly since the early 2000s, are affecting hemispheric relations and the terms of regionalism, critical interrogations challenging both notions of defensive regionalism and US/neoliberal-led regional governance have become important now. The difficulties in the course of transformations mean that it is very easy to dismiss the possibilities of a coherent post-neoliberal future. However, notwithstanding the obstacles in the way, the fact is that the debate over how to best serve participatory, redistributive and demands for
greater autonomy is redefining the regional agenda in Latin America. Our task in this paper is to explore in more detail what this means in terms of new configurations of regional projects. In so doing, we go beyond binary categorisations of ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism departing from the usual approach to regional integration to focus on the creation of new spaces for (regional) consensus building, resource sharing, autonomous development and power decentralisation.

What we propose here is, therefore, to explore further how these regional spaces unfold in the cases of UNASUR and ALBA, what these regionalist projects stand for and how they manifest in terms of alternative governance. We appeal to the mostly under-explored concept of ‘regionness’ developed mainly by Hettne (1993, 2005) and Hettne and Söderbaum (2000: 462) to provide a more perspicuous analysis of the politics of regionalism and region building in current Latin America. Regionness has been productively applied to explain social cohesion and the position of the European Union (EU) as an international actor (Hettne 2008), but has been largely overlooked in the study of Latin American regionalism, where the focus was primarily on US power shaping inter-American relations and trade-led regional governance. Yet Hettne and others offered a notion of regionness as a progression from geographical units to state-like qualities, equating regionness to a unitary sense of ‘actorness’ (region-as-actor). According to Hettne and Söderbaum (2000: 461; also Hettne 1993), ‘regionness defines the position of a particular region in terms of regional cohesion’. Instead, we propose to dissect the notion of regionness by looking at the actors, practices and processes of social and political interaction that define the region not as a unitary actor but as ‘spaces or arenas for action’ (Schmitt-Egner 2002: 180–1). By unpacking this distinction between ‘region-as-actor’ and ‘region-as-arenas for action’, this paper attempts to contribute to the debate about regionness, adding new insights for the analysis of types of regionness emerging in alternative regional spaces in South America and out of the practices and policy action in those arenas.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part reflects on the usages of New Regionalism and of regionness explaining the current context of transformation in Latin American regional politics. The second part analyses the complex cartography of regionalism(s) in Latin America, reviewing the trajectory of regional politics vis-à-vis American leadership and the emergence of alternative, post-hegemonic regional projects with a new emphasis on social and political aspects of integration. The third part concentrates on how Venezuela-led ALBA and Brazil-led UNASUR reconfigure and contest the legacy of ‘open regionalism’ of the 1990s, while proposing the construction of new regional polities: one that embraces a trans-national welfarist model of (micro)-regionalism with an emphasis on socio-economic development; the other seeking geo-political and socio-economic autonomy with an emphasis on institutional building and inter-regional outreach. The fourth part builds on the concept of regionness to explain transformative elements of ALBA and UNASUR. The paper closes with a discussion on the implications of these visions for the way we theorise regional governance beyond neoliberalism, beyond the 1990s and beyond Europe.
New regionalism, regionness and regional governance

New Regionalism as an approach has captured the intellectual imagination of scholars concerned with regionalism beyond neo-functionalist understandings of integration based on EU studies (Warleigh-Lack 2010). The evolution of the theoretical debate about regionalism since the 1980s has been driven by a proliferation of regional cooperation agreements that, unlike the previous experiences of (old) regionalism associated with post-war economic protectionism, were part of a broader process of neoliberal globalisation. While the ‘old regionalism’ of the 1950–1970s was a manifestation of regionalised forms of regulated markets and high tariffs, ‘new’ regional formations were tied to the transnationalisation of trade and production, and the progressive liberalisation of markets in developing countries (Bøås et al. 1999; Hettne 1999: 7). In this context, many scholars understood these projects as ‘open regionalism’, conceived as and modelled by the need of countries to engage efficiently in global market activity (Gamble and Payne 1996: 251–2). As a governance project, new regionalism unfolded as a state strategy to lock-in market reforms of the Washington Consensus, driving processes that Phillips (2003b: 329) identified as ‘meso-globalisation’, or neoliberal strategies at a regional scale. Regionalism from this perspective was conceived as a building block to global liberalisation through the interplay between state-led macro-processes of regulation and micro, and often informal, processes of regionalisation led by non-state actors (Hurrell 1995, 2005; Bøås et al. 1999, 2005; Mittelman 2000: 113; Breslin and Hook 2002: 8).

This persuasive perspective broadened our understanding of formal and informal dynamics of regionalism as manifestations of global orders, adding new dynamism to Eurocentric and EU-specific studies of regional integration (Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010). However, New Regionalists have tended to overstate the role of informal, non-state agencies, embracing new forms of regionalisation, which in Latin America have been weak and often coordinated under state initiatives (Philips and Prieto Corredor 2011). If anything, the role of non-state actors in the shaping of regionalism in Latin America was mainly seen in economic and business actors seeking to minimise the risks associated with global competition and insertion in the global economy (Phillips 2003a; Grugel 2004: 605; Phillips and Prieto Corredor 2011: 129). In this context, New Regionalist approaches brushed aside an enquiry about the extent to which the regional space can create opportunities for dissent and strategies that may challenge the regional-global liberalisation relationship. This becomes a pressing dilemma in a period of rapid transformation of regional policies where political and economic circumstances that gave substance to new regionalism in the 1980s and 1990s – as a project and an approach – do not hold so firmly any longer. As a number of social and political inter-linkages are reflecting a new sense of purpose in Latin America, perhaps the most significant question about current regionalism is how are we to understand regional agreements that are grounded in different systems of rules that reconfigure open regionalism and that are part of a complex set of alternative ideas and motivations affecting polities and policies across the region.

While we agree with Phillips and Prieto Corredor (2011) that we are witnessing a move from neoliberal politics to a more diverse regional political economies, we
disagree that regionalism is giving ground. Even accepting that projects of the neoliberal era, such as MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay plus Venezuela, Chile and Bolivia as associates) or the Andean Community (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru), have failed to create sustainable levels of intra-trade and political commitment, a new focus needs to be placed on alternative processes, models and tools of regionalism that are grounding new regional consensus about policies and cooperation beyond what used to be the hub of ‘open’ regionalism, namely markets, trade and investment. In Latin America, real regional spaces for alternative policy-making have taken shape since the early 2000s as part of a new political climate of social mobilisation and political motivations embraced across the region by new Left of Centre governments, in a move that is often characterised as post-neoliberalism (MacDonald and Ruckert 2009; Panizza 2009).

How far can we genuinely discern new regional governance in a post trade regime? What sort of alternative social and political dynamics, institutions and scope can be identified in new regional projects such as UNASUR and ALBA? How do these regionalisms represent themselves as a cohesive group? These are the pressing questions as we move from neoliberal-led open regionalism to distinctive forms of regional consensus building, regional solidarity and integration, and identity formation. At the same time, these questions challenge the explanatory power of New Regionalist approaches which have often overemphasised globalisation as a structure of constraints and regionalism as a defensive mechanism of adjustment.

The key to understanding the politics and transformative capacity of current regionalisms in Latin America is to look at inter-governmental and inter-societal practices leading to what we can see as alternative visions of what the region and collective action is for. These practices are expressions of a redefinition of regional consensus over social and economic resource sharing, regulations, planning and financial cooperation. At the same time, these practices laid new foundations for political and social cohesiveness that can be also interpreted as community building or regionness. The ideas of region as defined by its level of regionness has been portrayed by Hettne and Söderbaum (2000: 461; also Hettne 1993, 2008), who defined regionness in terms of organised social, political and economic trans-border relations (material foundations of regionalism), supported by a manifested sense of belonging, common goals and values (symbolic foundations), and institutions and regulations that enhance the region’s ability to interact autonomously in the international arena (external recognition as an actor). From this perspective, the levels of a region’s regionness will increase in the progression from mere regional space to deeper institutionalised polity with a permanent structure of decision-making and stronger acting capability as a global actor: region as actor (see Table 1).

This categorisation was often used to explain how EU integration unfolded as a cohesive global actor (Söderbaum and Van Langenhove 2006), while, earlier versions of new regionalism located Latin America as part of a North-Americanised system that posited regionalism through locking in linkages to the North American economy (Grugel 1996; Phillips 2003b). This has been the case despite prolific work exploring dynamics of cooperation in different areas of regional policy
(see Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; Gomez-Mera 2009; Tussie and Trucco 2010) or analysis on transnational networks of resistance at the hemispheric level (Saguier 2007; Icaza et al. 2009; Von Bülow 2009). Ultimately, new regionalism in Latin America was assumed to take place within a fundamental and ongoing neoliberal consensus that was defined ‘globally’ and locked-in ‘regionally’. In this context, issues of identity, purposes and regional consensus building around social policy and development lagged behind in the academic debate.

But the emergence of new regional projects such as UNASUR and ALBA grounded on motivations, ideals and practices defiant of the neoliberal orthodoxy presents a conjectural dilemma. UNASUR and ALBA are redefining new boundaries (geographical and ideological) while fostering new consensuses that are defined regionally, not globally, and supported by the creation of new institutions, funding mechanisms, regional policies and collective practices in social fields such as education, health, employment, energy, infrastructure and security. Although embryonic, these consensuses are setting regional boundaries beyond the historical hub of new/open regionalism, namely the expansion of trade and markets. Consequently, new regionalist projects represent a challenge to dichotomised explanations of ‘old’/’close’ vs. ‘new’/open’ regionalism; neither of which adequately grasp the implications of the socio-political, ideational and institutional transformations, and borrowing Arditi’s words (2008: 57), the ‘will to renew (regional) politics’. To make sense of these emerging forms of regionalisms we draw upon Hettne and Hettne and Söderbaum’s degrees of regionness to understand motivations and policies embraced in new projects. But we attribute no tautological significance to the notion of regionness and thus rather than equating regionness to actorness to understand the position of a region in the international political economy, we depict types of practices and networks defining spaces for action and a sense of regionness. As expressed by Schmitt-Egner (2002: 181), we need to disentangle the ‘differences between regions as actors and regions as arenas’ to understand divergent outcomes in terms of region building or regionness. Building on this difference, we understand UNASUR and ALBA as regional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of regionness</th>
<th>Nature and dynamics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional space</td>
<td>A geographically contiguous area with no organised society existing at this stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional complex</td>
<td>Embryonic interdependence driven by trans-local relations to achieve mutual gains in issues like trade or security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional society</td>
<td>Intensified regional complex advanced by trans-local relationships in different areas of politics between states and non-state actors supported by infrastructure developments, and incipient institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional community</td>
<td>A regional society in which cohesion is supported by convergence of values, norms and behaviour. Polity is deeper and a sense of inclusion and belonging underpins identity formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalised regional actor</td>
<td>A coherent form of governance that institutionalises norms and practices in support of a regional community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
spaces for action driven by new consensuses over practices and cooperation in politico-institutional socio-economic and cultural arenas. Dynamics in these arenas are driven by different actors, projects of integration, linkages mechanisms, institutional structures and distributive consequences, which is in contrast with the notion of regionalism as a coherent model, and regionness as a cohesive (acting) subject or actorness (see also Schmitt-Egner 2002:192–5).

What sort of regionalism? The struggle for identity and autonomy in Latin America

Regionalism is a dynamic and an important force in the Americas, a site from which to understand the complex interplays of domestic and external influences. Most of our understanding about regionalism in the Americas has developed from the view that Latin America engaged defensively in regional cooperation schemes to either counteract or better cope with the pressures of external forces. Until very recently, the debate about regionalism among the majority of scholars and policymakers was dominated by issues of trade liberalisation, US hegemony and US-led hemispheric governance building (Jayasuriya 2009). Issues of identity, social cohesion and social networking within the regional space remained largely under-explored. However, changes in the political economy of the region since the early 2000s call for a refocus towards political and social drivers of regionalism, rather than trade liberalisation, reflecting new pressures for more inclusive systems of governance. It would be wrong to assume that the transition from trade-led to political and social integration constitutes a rupture with Latin America’s recent past. Transformation in this scenario is, however, about possibilities for new agency and autonomous choice in a context where a hegemonic single mode of political economy for the region is over. In many ways, it can be argued that, following the words of Whitehead (2009: 46), far from a coherent new grand ‘meta-narrative’ of unambiguous transformation and rupture, Latin American regionalism depends on multiple but partial attempts of change that combine motivations and policy initiatives of the past with new policy responses to the current challenges of political economy.

In retrospective, there are two (competing) sets of ideas, values and motivations that historically embraced the struggles for independence – both at the birth of Latin American nation-states as independent political entities in the nineteenth century and more currently in the search for new socio-political and economic organisation. On the one hand, the idea of a united region has been embraced as a ‘US vision’ born in the Monroe Doctrine and embodied in the Pan-American ideal that advocates Americas free from the influence of countries outside the Western hemisphere – yet guarded by the USA. On the other hand, the ‘Latin American vision’ embraced by Simón Bolívar’s quest for a unified body of former Spanish colonies linked a vision of integration to culture, language and history. These two visions later evolved into modern manifestations of contrasting and competing models of economic and political governance, which dominated the twentieth century.

In practice, a perceived sense of common legacy together with a realpolitik calculus of cooperation against imperialist external rule, political and economic have
been the drivers of different regional arrangements and integration projects. As bluntly put by Myrdal (1968: 39) ‘there are no mystical qualities in geographical proximity that make neighbouring nations a unit in any real sense culturally, politically or economically’. This call for unity has been mainly conceived as an instrument to balance external influences – in a broader sense, that is US hegemony; EU economic competitiveness; international capital and globalisation demands. In other words, rather than a teleological destiny, regionalism in Latin America has been tended to be driven by defensive reasons, setting Latin American countries as takers rather than makers of global rules (Keohane 2001).

Since the Great Depression and up until current developments, the USA and the Latin American visions reflected a debate of national and regional development defined in terms of statism vs. liberalism. The ways in which this dichotomy was resolved had been inherently related to how Latin American nations managed autonomy vis-à-vis regional power. This defined at the same time three moments or waves of regionalism in Latin America. This first wave of regionalism can be seen as a response to the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, and the access of former colonies to the EEC by means of preferential agreements. The statement by the President of Uruguay in the early 1960s illustrates the notion of defensive regionalism as he established that ‘the formation of the European Common Market is a state of near-war against Latin American exports. To an integration scheme we must respond with another integration’ (quoted in Mattli 1999: 140). The general idea of this orientation was that economic integration would improve the bargaining position and facilitate industrialisation through import substitution on a regional scale. This was at the core of ‘old’ regionalism in Latin America. Trade was the motor of integration, with low or even no socio-political content. The first relevant trade project of this kind took shape in 1960 with the creation of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA, or ALALC in Spanish). LAFTA was created, under the inspiration of the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC), by Mexico and six South American countries with the objective of eliminating all barriers to intraregional trade. At its centre was the notion of bounded sovereign states, largely able to control the nature of regional commitments and to protect their domestic producers from external competition via subsidies and tariffs (Chibber 2004; Lewis 2005). In this context, economic nationalism framed a new way of thinking and speaking about politics, economics and culture; while regionalism became a generalised reaction to the liberal rule. In Central America, a similar initiative gave birth to the Central American Common Market, joined by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, which set a more ambitious objective of creating a free trade area and to implement a common external tariff. In 1969 a split from LAFTA led Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru to establish an even more institutionally ambitious common market project, the Andean Community, with an executive body with ‘supranational’ powers and mechanisms to promote an equitable distribution of benefits. To complete the regional architecture, the Caribbean Free Trade Agreement (CARIFTA) was signed in 1967, to be superseded six years later by the Caribbean Community (Bouzas and Knnack 2009). But by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, this sense of common (economic) destiny was severely
challenged by stagnation, general difficulties linked to import substitution and political instability which in turn led to a loss of faith in state-led growth across Latin America (Haggard and Kaufman 1992). Nationalistic development projects increasingly became unsustainable, while the severity of many years of political repression and military dictatorships that followed affected the spirit and the progress of close regionalism and any attempt to advance towards other areas of political union (Mattli 1999: 145; Mace and Belanger 1999: 9). This decline in many ways meant not only a failure to tie the region closely in terms of its cohesion but critically a mitigation of its identity and autonomy. In turn, indebted economies were left with little choice other than to align closer with the USA, a gatekeeper to external finance, and standard-bearer of ‘open markets’ and ‘open regionalism’, defining the contours of region building in the 1990s.

The agenda of ‘new’ regionalism, as it was termed in policy and academic circles, was dominated by questions of trade and investment, yet rather than tariff protection it was underpinned, politically and ideationally by the perception of an ‘unavoidable reality’ of the marked-led globalisation (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Gamble and Payne 1996; Varynen 2003; Sørensen 2004). In this context, linking up with the US economy was seen as a way, paradoxically, for an indebted state to re-assert some control over the direction of their economies and an accommodation with the global market (Grugel 1996; Grugel and Hout 1999; Phillips 2003b; Drake 2006). The USA provided debt relief through the Brady Plan while it involved Latin American governments in a discussion of new rules for ‘open’ regional integration. The establishment of the MERCOSUR in 1991 grouping together Brazil, the largest economy in Latin America, with Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed with Canada and Mexico in 1994, for instance, were premised on the notion of ‘open regionalism’. Both MERCOSUR and NAFTA were articulated as strategic responses to the imperatives generated by the globalisation processes aimed at enhancing markets, trade and investment (Phillips 2003b: 329). For the USA, meanwhile, this context opened a new opportunity towards a more ambitious ‘Enterprise for the Americas’, introduced in 1990 by President G.W. Bush senior and designed to lead to a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) with a deadline for its signature in 2005. The FTAA was launched by President Bill Clinton at the Summit of the Americas in Miami in 1994, on the footsteps of NAFTA, resembling the old vision of Pan-Americanism under a neoliberalism disguise. The FTAA sought to integrate the Americas through the liberalisation of economic policies opening up a vast market from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego and, politically, through common liberal democratic values.

However, the establishment of the NAFTA and the FTAA as paragon of American-led regionalism was a double-edged sword. Although, as Tussie (2009: 178) argues, it ‘triggered panic reactions in a spate of excluded countries’ the idea of neoliberal-led regionalism was highly contested from the outset by social actors within one major partner, Mexico and externally by the global financial crisis in 1994–1995 and its ‘Tequila’ effect. The adverse effects of economic integration on social cohesion and development contributed to deep disenchantment with neoliberal policies as they failed to deliver on their promises beyond controlling inflation. Latin American countries were increasingly hit by unsustainable
levels of poverty and inequality. Poverty rates barely dropped throughout the high period of neoliberalism (from 48.3 per cent in 1990 to 44 per cent in 2002), as welfare was systematically squeezed and inclusion reduced to those who could pay for healthcare, good schooling and social security (ECLAC 2010). Soon, even subregional expressions like MERCOSUR gradually turned into a platform for resistance to further neoliberalism, reinforced in turn by the incorporation of Venezuela to the founding group (Malamud 2005: 423). Institutionally, the ‘re-politicisation’ of MERCOSUR was seen in references to new initiatives for labour rights, participation of civil society, the establishment of a regional parliament, the introduction of the Initiative for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA) in 2000 and the establishment of a Fund for Structural Convergence in 2005, marking a new direction beyond trade-led goals – and the road to what later crystallised as UNASUR. These goals became even more pressing as the social costs of neoliberalism became clear by the turn of the new century. A slow down in growth following currency difficulties, rising indebtedness (especially pronounced in Argentina) and a growing awareness of a failing model, changed attitudes towards pro-market reforms and elite politics. In this context, the agenda of integration ushered in by the FTAA negotiation encountered the difficulties of losing support and legitimacy, while the USA turned to a number of bilateral trade deals (Phillips 2005; Shadlen 2005; Gallagher 2008).

A new spectrum of national responses has seen the election of a series of Leftist governments in much of Latin America, most profoundly in Argentina and Venezuela, followed by Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay and Paraguay. At odds with neoliberal policies, these governments embarked on a search for an alternative to the orthodoxy of neoliberal political economies (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2009; Panizza 2009). The change in the political orientation in many countries in the region since the early 2000s was not simply rhetorical. In general, new Latin American governments adopted more radical models of political inclusion and citizenship and a new attitude to state building and representation in a multi-scalar way. In this context, reclaiming the region became not only a way of resisting US power but a genuine reflection of what Latin America should mean in the face of the crisis of neoliberalism. This became evident at the Fourth Summit of the Americas, which took place in Buenos Aires in November 2005. The Summit declaration grounded two opposing views: one favouring the proposed FTAA – mainly supported by the USA, Mexico and Canada, and countries especially dependent on preferential US trade agreements – and another dissenting group – including MERCOSUR countries, Venezuela and Bolivia – which declared themselves against a hemispheric trade agreement and refused to commit to future FTAA talks. It soon became clear that the window of opportunity that opened for Washington to remake the hemisphere in its own image had found clear limits.

Today the regional picture presents a complexity that challenges both the notion of defensive regionalism and US-led regional governance. In a context where the very pillars of neoliberalism – as a political and economic paradigm – are critically questioned by academics, politicians, social actors, Latin America is reasserting new rules of regional engagement and cooperation based on the reconfiguration of alliances, institutions and political motivations. As a
result regional governance in the Americas is defined by overlapping and sometimes competing regionalist projects (see Table 2).

### Table 2. Overlapping regional governance in Latin America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logic of regional governance</th>
<th>Integration projects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A strong emphasis on commercial integration in support of broader multilateralism, with low socio-political content</td>
<td>• Pacific Rim with Mexico under NAFTA (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An emphasis on trade while seeking alternative and autonomous political projects and developmental goals deepening linkages with neighbouring countries</td>
<td>• Andean Community (1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New regional coordination to share, consolidate, sustain and protect natural resources and infrastructure development</td>
<td>• Central American Common Market (1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reaching out of the region</td>
<td>• Caribbean Community (CARICOM 1973)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A radical emphasis on political and social aspects of integration</td>
<td>• Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New economic and welfare commitments</td>
<td>• Andean Community (CAN 1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong emphasis on distributional policies reclaiming – and redefining – the principles of socialism in direct opposition to neoliberal globalisation</td>
<td>• Union of South American Nations (UNASUR 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Venezuela-led Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA 2004)</td>
</tr>
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What current projects of regionalism represent, in sum, is a challenge to the notion of defensive regionalism by bringing to new focus ideational and institutional underpinnings of new regional agreements that engender new regional practices and coordinated action to address inequalities across the region beyond the need to enhance markets, trade and investment. In the process, these developments are embracing alternative modes and scales of territorial regulation, policy-making and cooperation contesting ‘open regionalism’ of the 1990s. The remaining of the paper focuses on two of these regionalist developments, UNASUR and ALBA, and speculates on their departure from the region’s more usual approach to regional integration.

**UNASUR and ALBA: redefining consensus, rebuilding regions and regionalising politics**

Latin America is at a complex interface between sub-regions defining and projecting different worldviews and models of regional governance. This diversity is an evidence of the absence of a single consensus ruling inter-American relations for the whole hemisphere. Resilient trade agreements and new social and political
integration projects are embracing different trans-national and trans-societal commitments redefining not only the terms of regionalism in the Americas but what regionalism in itself means.

Crises are always an opportunity for ideological contestation and accommodation of political and economic projects. The re-accommodation of actors and alliances in the ‘historical backyard’ of the USA suggests a new opportunity to reassert alternative ideas. In contrast to the proverbial ‘There Is No Alternative’; now promising alternatives not only emerge as possible options but they chime with local demands for more responsive political economies. That the Latin American region realigned its strategy to refocus on a more nationalistic course for development and governance is already a significant change. Renewed motivations within political and social circles recaptured the region as a space for new policy formulation on social, political and development issues that exceed the traditional drivers of ‘open regionalism’ in the 1990s. From this perspective, UNASUR and ALBA represent new attempts to ‘re-territorialise’ new consensus, that are regional not global, around which regional interests and practices converge.

Although the idea of a unified counter-hegemony to supplant neoliberalism in Latin America is clearly an overstatement, UNASUR and ALBA have embraced since the early 2000s different projects at odds with the US-sponsored Washington Consensus. UNASUR crystallised as a model of governance in 2008, yet its origins must be traced back to the beginning of the decade when Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso called in the first Summit of South American Presidents, in 2000. The aim was an ambitious integration project beyond notions of market expansion with renewed commitments on democratic principles and a broader sense of development. This Summit created the foundations in which South American integration settled and contested US continental ambitions (Bricen˜o-Ruiz 2007). However, it was not until 2004 when the South American integration process entered a new phase and dynamism. The third Summit held in Cuzco, Peru, in December 2004, established the South American Union of Nations (SACN), which was later institutionalised as UNASUR. The Cuzco Declaration established three main goals: convergence between MERCOSUR, the Andean Community and Chile through trade agreements, but more fundamentally new commitments to advance physical infrastructure (roads, energy and communications) – a plan that originated in the first South American Summit with the establishment of IIRSA – and political cooperation. Divergence in leadership, motivations and political understanding of the purposes of regional building led Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to diverge from the South American regionalist strategy. The result was the establishment of Venezuelan-led ALBA in 2004, and the formation of Brazilian-led UNASUR in 2008 (Bricen˜o-Ruiz 2010).

UNASUR is fundamentally a regional construction that capitals on the pre-existing trade-led agreements of the ‘open regionalism’ of the 1990s, but was aimed to strengthen its institutional structure in issues beyond trade, while seeking at the same time an autonomous position vis-à-vis external influence such as the USA or the EU. Remarkably, trade is underplayed as a pillar of UNASUR, whereas the backbone of the new treaty is formulated in relation to democracy, inclusion, social development, physical integration, defence and identity. In terms of institution building, it gave new impetus to the Initiative for the
Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America, which already formulated an ambitious project in 2000 to boost infrastructural integration throughout the continent (Carciofi 2008). It has also created the South American Defence Council, which picked up steam first in face of the territorial conflicts between Ecuador and Colombia, and more recently involving Venezuela and Colombia. These are important initiatives that restrict US interference in the South balancing the authority of the existing US-led institutions such as the Organisation of American States. More recently, UNASUR established the South American Council for Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Innovation seeking to reinforce the objectives of quality, equity and international competitiveness through harmonisation of Higher Education programmes. Although an incipient, the Council aims to facilitate the mobility of students and professionals in the region and formulate flexibility proposals and degree accreditation. Likewise, a new UNASUR Health Council was established to consolidate a space of cooperation in health provision and training.

These institutional ambitions of UNASUR are laid out in the Constitutive Treaty of the UNASUR which also sets out analogous institutions to the EU, that is, an Executive Council of Delegates as well as a General Secretariat, a Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and a Council of Heads of State and Government. The Constitutive Treaty also provides for a Parliament that is yet to be established. While these dimensions vindicate the tenets of the New Regionalist literature, it is important not to understate this regional arrangement as it represents a new perspective in the regional and global politics without being ‘washed away by the powerful waves of globalisation’ (Cooper and Heine 2009: 21). In other words, while the extent to which UNASUR can reconfigure broader links in terms of political and social community are still embryonic, progress has been made in the creation of alternative and fruitful economic and infrastructure projects bridging CAN and MERCOSUR, and as a block with extra-regional emerging powers such as China, India, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the South African Customs Union and the EU (Tussie 2010: 12).

Ideologically UNASUR is a more versatile and even contradictory project embracing different discourses from different members. There is no one political, ideological identity although there is a new ideological space in terms of fencing-off American pre-eminence. The fluidity of UNASUR in terms of polities and policies has also been transformed by the presence of Chávez. The expansion of MERCOSUR to include Venezuela as an associate has added a nationalistic and more confrontational tone as Venezuela became a key player engaging in region-wide initiatives and spreading its oil wealth throughout the continent. In recent years, Chávez has actively taken the lead, exceeding the USA in terms of under-writing debt and offering strategic injections of capital to its neighbours. In addition to providing 200,000 barrels of oil a day (worth perhaps US$1.6 billion a year), new policies of aid for the region have been announced, totalling some US$5.5 billion. One of the most significant moves was the acquisition of a leading micro-credit institution in Bolivia, PRODEM, which owns 92 branches across the country and has 250,000 clients. Venezuela also bought a large share of the new bonds issued by Argentina – US$2.4 billion of Argentina’s debt in 2005 – that has cushioned the impact of the economic downturn and at the
same time forged new alliances based on a very different perception of the world (The Economist 2007).

Chávez’s initiatives also seem to have launched a broader cross-regional interest in creating a common energy policy. Acknowledging the current global issues and demand for energy, various South American Presidents met in April 2007 at the first South American Energy Summit to design an energy integration strategy for the region. This event drew up plans for further discussions regarding energy cooperation and institutionalised energy meetings at the ministerial level through the formation of a Council within the framework of UNASUR. To meet their energy needs, the member countries at the Summit agreed to implement energy cooperation and integration in the region. For example, Venezuela and Brazil launched a joint petrochemical plant, which is a clear step towards energy cooperation and integration. Likewise, Venezuela’s national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) is leading energy integration projects with the Caribbean countries (PetroCaribe) and several bilateral agreements to supply subsidised oil to Bolivia, Peru and Uruguay, as well as joint ventures for exploration and extraction with Argentina and Uruguay (Quintanar 2010). In this context, Argentina was one of the first countries to support Venezuela’s application to the sub-regional bloc MERCOSUR, and a strategic partner in the start up project for the Banco del Sur. If it succeeds in terms of goals and achievements, such an institution could play a significant role in reforming the regional financial architecture so long dependent on the Washington-based institutions.

Venezuela is, in fact, an interesting player as it sits at the intersection of the more moderate model of regional governance represented by UNASUR and the radical ‘socialist model of regionalism’, epitomised by ALBA, which includes Venezuela, Honduras, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Dominica, Antigua y Barbuda and San Vicente. In contrast to UNASUR, ALBA represents a new radical, ideologically transformative project that extends Chávez’s 21st Century Socialism into a regional integration scheme pursuing, in direct opposition to neoliberalism. ALBA rejects the logic of the ‘new’ regionalism of the 1990s in which Latin American economies competed to lock-in deregulation and attract foreign investment. Since its conception in 2004, it proposed an alternative model of development and accumulation underpinned by new principles of solidarity and complementarities, which in some cases, like in Bolivia and Ecuador, were included in Constitutional reforms (Dabene 2010: 19).

ALBA represents a new continentalism manifested through intergovernmental agreements, rather than supranational institutions, supporting transnationalised welfarist projects based on intra-regional grassroots cooperation in areas of health, education and housing through state-led programmes (the so-called Grandnational projects). While state-owned oil and gas company, PDVSA, became central for the funding of regional social welfare programmes, a new model of production is also advanced based on a barter system rather than free trade (Altmann 2009). Interestingly, the contrasts with other regionalist projects such as NAFTA, MERCOSUR, and UNASUR are seen not only in ALBA’s social dimension but in its construction of a regional space whose members do not share any contiguous borders.

Many arguments have pointed at out that ALBA resembles a mere propagandistic project whose future and resilience are conditioned by the presence of Chávez
and more significantly the revenues from the oil market. True, there is a great deal of ideological discourse in the shaping of ALBA, but we emphatically argue that, unlike other regional projects in the Americas, the significance of ALBA and possibly its resilience is to be seen in the trans-national welfarist space where socio-economic projects and regional welfare networks of solidarity can have an impact, even beyond Chávez. In other words, in countries with high levels of poverty, very low levels of human development and deprived economic structures, the impact of ALBA-sponsored social programmes is to be measured in the long term. In other words, ALBA introduced new practices and policies that provide a chance for political invention beyond the mere anti-neoliberal rhetoric.

For instance, Tahsin (2009: 14–7) shows that in 2008, projects between Cuba and Venezuela in these areas reached 1355 million US dollars, including a flagship programme ‘Oil for Doctors’ by which Venezuela exports subsidised oil for the exchange of medics and training programmes in the country. Within this framework, programmes like Barrio Adentro provided free basic medical care in Venezuela, while Mission Miracle provides free care to individuals with eye-related conditions, while other programmes tackle the needs of individuals with disabilities across ALBA countries. The exchange of human resources is also oriented to training and education. Since 2004 5000 Cuban medical scholarships are given to Bolivia. Bolivia is reportedly benefiting from 600 Cuban medical specialists. Bolivian doctors are educated in Cuba which at the same time helps coordination of health centres in Bolivia by sending specialists and doctors. Literacy has also been a key component of socio-economic development in ALBA. Cuba provides Bolivia with the experience, didactic material and technical resources necessary to implement the literacy programmes, and has been assisting Bolivia in expanding its public schools and hospitals. In the Dominican Republic, over 100 students are reportedly attending Cuban medical schools, and approximately 75 Dominican students are in other Cuban schools. Some 2000 Venezuelan and Cuban scholarships are available to Dominican students in computer science, medicine, engineering, sports, physics, math and agriculture. Venezuela and Nicaragua have also implemented agreements of mutual assistance around social programmes for housing and education for 47,000 street children in the latter. Other programmes include food production and the organisation of the ALBA Athletic Games, a two yearly event established in 2005. ALBA is also moving into the consolidation of the Unified System for Regional Compensation (SUCRE), signed in October 2009. The SUCRE is a common monetary denomination for the payment of commercial transactions between ALBA countries (Trucco 2010). This is a financial instrument to help stimulate and deepen intra-regional trade and productive enterprises envisioned in the People’s Trade Agreement. The relevance of these programmes is to be seen in the way they advance a new political economy and the formation of a regional consciousness supportive of what Murh (2010: 50) identified as ‘transnational organised society’. Comparatively, while in UNASUR social development and policy are gaining prominence within the regional complex, the agenda with regard to policy-making still remains unclear.

The extent to which these initiatives can consolidate coherent and resilient projects is still to be seen. Nevertheless, they need to be taken as part of valid
transformative arrangements shaping new spaces for thinking and negotiating alternative models for political and social cooperation outside the confines of the neoliberal consensus that framed Latin American regionalism in the 1990s. Theoretically these developments call for new rigorous and critical analysis able to supersede categorisations of ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism to look at the transformative capacity of ALBA and UNASUR as new and distinct projects in constitution of a post-hegemonic and post-trade regional orders. The following section takes some steps towards this goal analysing emerging types of integration and manifestations of regionness.

Regionalism and regionness in Latin America: a new synthesis

The changing political economy of Latin America and the recent transformations of its regional governance landscape suggest a need to reflect upon the meaning of regionalism as a new place where regional politics are defined and played. Brazilian and Venezuelan interests have coincided in underwriting the influence and presence of the USA in American multilateralism. Brazil and Venezuela have helped to promote a proliferation of new and viable sub-regional multilateralisms that are independent from the USA and US institutions’ leadership. UNASUR and ALBA are expressive of alternative continental strategies for growth and social justice, representative of a more political and confident ‘South’ America, suspicious of US leadership yet still largely in tune with the need for open and competitive markets. Although contrasting in nature and scope, UNASUR and ALBA are immersed in alternative visions to the orthodoxy of neoliberal politics re-writing the rules of the game in areas where US leadership has always been undisputable, namely security, development and finance. Ultimately, what these regional projects show is not only that the dominance of the US has weakened but also that its backing is not needed, symbolising a paradigm shift where Washington Consensus policies do no longer command a chief consensus.

The challenge for New Regionalist approaches, as we previously claimed, is to reach a new understanding that supersedes binary notions of ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism that helped to explain the relationship between regionalism and the process of globalisation leveraged and supported by the political and economic authority of the USA. The move away from the neoliberal project as the hegemonic project at national and regional levels is sustained by new practices and motivations that exceed New Regionalist understandings of region building. UNASUR and ALBA are embracing new spaces for deliberation and policy implementation that, although not anti-globalisation, are at odds with neoliberalism. This does not mean that capitalism, liberalism and trade-related forms of integration ceased to exist or to move the regional agenda. What this means is that their centrality is being displaced so that new valid and genuine alternatives to open, neoliberal integration are significantly taking shape. The realisation of these regional alternatives, as imaginaries and arenas for new actions and practices, defines their regionness. In many ways, UNASUR and ALBA represent experiments that ‘take place at the edges of liberalism’, borrowing Arditi’s (2008) arguments,
adding social development, community action, new forms of politics and organisation and a more active agenda-setting onto existing regional practices.

Although the extent to which new regional initiatives can consolidate coherent and resilient projects is still to be seen, they need to be taken as part of valid transformative arrangements shaping new spaces for political and academic reflection. Contributing to this reflection we recall these regional journeys as new constructions of a distinctive sense of regionness by exploring the types of practices and political spaces created in UNASUR and ALBA (Table 3).

What this characterisation suggests is that in a context marked by the retreat of market-led regionalism, and orthodoxy of neoliberal politics in general, the terms of region building open a space for different manifestations away from open regionalism. As different regionalist projects crystallise, the term regionalism itself becomes elusive. The concept of regionness helps us to make sense of it, broadening our understanding of region as an entity that coalesces around collective practices, consensus and identity. In the understanding of UNASUR and ALBA, the region contour is shaped by ideas, projects, contending forces and practices that are reinventing and rebuilding spaces for new political options and practices that differ in each of these alternative regionalist projects. Regionness from this perspective signifies the articulation of new foundational ideas about what the region is for, about common goals and common space, and sense of belonging. These ideas resonate with different social groups, local and ethnic identities; along with economic programmes based on autonomous use of natural resources and alternative models of production and distribution.

The way these ideas manifest themselves in both UNASUR and ALBA are different, yet they both reflect new and diverse expressions of regional identity demanding a new political economic ethos. UNASUR is heading towards a coherent institutionalised polity, and potentially supranationality a la EU capitalising on the existing institutions from MERCOSUR and CAN, replicating a more traditional understanding of open regionalism and region-as-unit yet as an arena that challenges old consensus based on the wisdom of market-led regionalism and neoliberal orthodoxy.

ALBA, on the other hand, represents a more radical departure from previous experiences of integration in Latin America embracing a regional community where social cohesion through welfarism rather than institution building are drivers of ALBA’s construction of region. Regional practices, from this perspective, are seen in unprecedented trans-societal cooperation in social projects in education, health and housing that not only have an impact on human development but also create new state-society contracts with regard to inclusion, welfare, security and dignity for long time excluded groups. In other words, beyond the regional space, ALBA’s transformative capacity must be seen in the construction of a trans-local social system or regional community through a series of welfarist programmes such as basic education, literacy, micro-finance and community development. Of course there is an ideological component that aims at expanding Venezuela’s socialist state to ALBA countries but trans-nationalised welfare programmes add an element of cohesion and cooperation that may support resilience beyond ideology in the new regional space. This is part of a new compromise that has far deeper implications than any analysis focusing simply on policy style can...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of region</th>
<th>ALBA</th>
<th>UNASUR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td>Region building as a result of a critique of unmediated marketisation reclaiming the region as a space for the provision of regional goods beyond trade and market competitiveness</td>
<td>Space for the construction of alternative: ‘Rebuilding’ the regional space capitalising on resilient arrangements of the ‘open’ regionalism of the 1990s (CAN and MERCOSUR) but redefining the regional consensus and programmes over regional resources, economic autonomy and security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional space</strong> (Region as constituted by practices, not merely as territorial contiguity)</td>
<td>Space for the construction of alterity: ‘Reinventing’ the regional space on the basis of regional provisions, exchange programmes and symbolic politics among countries with no common borders</td>
<td>Inter-governmental integration in energy, infrastructure, security health and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional complex</strong> (trans-border practices and cooperation)</td>
<td>Transnationalisation by state-supported production networks, trans-governmental agreements and trans-societal cooperation in welfare projects that re-signify the terms of belonging, identity and inclusion</td>
<td>Inter-governmental integration in energy, infrastructure, security health and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional society</strong> (as organised cooperation)</td>
<td>Grassroots missions to eradicate illiteracy and improve healthcare (Grandnational projects; Oil for Doctors project); People’s Trade Treaty; Energy Integration Agreements; ALBA Bank; SUCRE</td>
<td>New institutions deepening intergovernmental relations: Head of States Council; South American Defence Council; Health Council; Education Council; Infrastructure integration through IIRSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional community</strong> (symbolic foundations)</td>
<td>A new model of development and regional collective identity based on convergent principles of solidarism, socialism, complementarity and reciprocity</td>
<td>Institutional discourse reflecting new commitments towards social inclusion, development and autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutionalised polity</strong></td>
<td>No fixed structure of decision-making but transgovernmental agreements rather than supranational institutions resembling ‘region-as-action space’</td>
<td>Supranational institutions, formal inter-state security arrangements, South–South cooperation and more presence in the international arena resembling ‘region-as-actor-space’</td>
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offer. In practice, this represents a new milestone that can help to overcome traditional forms of state-bounded provisions of social rights. This is not a minor issue in societies with high levels of poverty, exclusion and inequality, and that struggle to mobilise funding for social cohesion programmes. In other words, the building of a regional community within ALBA is not simply rhetoric or symbolic politics. The constitutive content and new practices of regionalism here are inherently linked to a new social, political and economic construction that differentiates ALBA’s sense of regionness from others.

What the above suggests is that ALBA and UNASUR interact in different levels of regionness and visions of regionalism in a post-hegemonic and, in many cases, post-neoliberal scenario. Beyond populist rhetoric and symbolic politics, we need to address current regional transformations as part of deeply rooted dilemmas of development, growth and inclusion, and how to effectively tackle dependency and external vulnerability. ALBA and UNASUR are addressing these dilemmas by reclaiming the regional space for the construction of alternatives, crafting new consensuses over public policies and policy-making, and forms of economic activity that are re-shaping alternative pathways to region building beyond neoliberalism, beyond the 1990s, and beyond Europe.

**Final remarks**

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the standard prescriptions for development focused on shrinking the state or reducing the scope (and cost) of its activities. Arguments about conditions for economic development presume an inevitable neoliberal insertion into the world economy. This consensus underpinned Washington’s hegemony which went unchallenged in inter-American relations at this time in a way that was genuinely without precedent. The new millennium in Latin America, however, has witnessed a series of political transitions from the Right/Right of Centre to Left/Left of Centre rejecting the excesses of market governance. The loss of certainty in Latin America about the wisdom of orthodox, market-led strategies for development has led to the adoption of mixed and often pragmatic policies for more responsive political economies, broadening at the same time the arena of action beyond their own communities and nation states. This is visible in the creation of UNASUR and ALBA where new transgovernmental and trans-social cooperation in welfare projects, workers cooperatives and the creation of regionally anchored health, education and energy production systems are creating a new sense of belonging, identity and inclusion, what we called in this paper the region’s regionness.

What UNASUR and ALBA suggest is that to recognise the particularities of the societies and their regional arrangements, we need to be aware of not only the constraints they face but also the alternative spaces they open, for both (regional) consensus building and policy implementation. Despite different rhetoric and political styles, UNASUR and ALBA are manifestations of new regionalist projects that are built on the bases of new consensuses, and where cohesion and institution building defy the notions of defensive regionalism and US regional governance. Cooperation in these areas is reinforced by new practices, sources of funding, programmes, networks and institutions that are enlarging the possibilities of policies.
and politics. From this perspective we consider UNASUR and ALBA as hybrid models in the construction of post-hegemonic integration based on alternative modes of social and economic integration while strengthening a new sense of mission and identity. It is true many programmes are part and parcel of proactive actors, in particular Brazil and Venezuela, that seek to redefine their positions within the region and outside. However, in both cases specific practices are creating a coherent space and even a different narrative about regional interaction that may converge yet transcend a particular state’s interests. Furthermore, analysing current regionalisms in terms of regionness gives local actors independent agency and transnational and trans-social practices significance regardless of geographic boundaries and ideological rhetoric. Regionness as a concept recaptures the regional as a space for deliberation and collective action, focusing on actors and types of practices avoiding, at the same time, trivialised and a-critical views of current regionalist projects as mere ideological rhetoric and symbolic politics. In the case of ALBA, for instance, trans-national social welfarism has the transformative potential to integrate a regional society with low levels of institutionalisation but with high levels of socio-economic impact. In this case, welfare regionalism constitutes a central dimension to understand the type of regionness advanced by ALBA and the development of transnational political spaces with new levels of interdependence and trans-local relationship which to date is not only led by Venezuelan/Chávez political calculations and oil diplomacy but also by civic organisations of doctors, educators and builders that are recapturing collective action in the process of regionalisation. A similar conclusion can be reached in the case of UNASUR’s impetus to coordinate, sustain and protect regional natural resources to facilitate autonomous extractivist political economies beyond Brazilian regional and global ambitions.

Certainly, the resilience of UNASUR and ALBA as alternative regional constructions and models of governance is still to be seen. At the moment, Latin America is a continent of contradiction, where diversity in motives, ideologies and leadership aspirations is driving alternative (post-neoliberal) models of integration. Nevertheless, what the emergence of post-hegemonic regionalisms shows is that long-standing projects of integration and cooperation cohabit with alternative models of regional organisation that exceeds the ‘old’ and ‘new’ characterisations of neoliberal regionalism. Although there are important differences in terms of how projects such as UNASUR and ALBA are re-founding regional consensus and socio-economic practices that alter the relationship between national-states, integration and globalisation. In this context, we hope the paper adds a more nuanced discussion about the foundations of a region’s regionness and what new regionalism means in post-hegemonic scenarios.

Notes
1. El Jardín de Senderos que se Bifurcan (1941).


Notes on Contributor

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