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Liquid Regionalism: a typology for regionalism in the Americas

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Abstract

The American continent has seen the emergence of regional processes in the last 30 years, characterized by the emergence of new blocs, but also quite different projects. Faced with the new global and regional dynamics observed in the decade of 2010, this article argues that regionalism in the Americas has experienced a new wave in recent years, which we characterize as Liquid Regionalism, given the fluidity, informality and limited institutional design of the regional projects. Furthermore, the article introduces a new typology to characterize regional projects in the Americas, dividing them into platforms for consultation, cooperation and regional integration.

Keywords: Comparative Regionalism; Regionalism; Regional Integration; Regional Cooperation; Latin America; South America.

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Introduction

This article discusses the current stage of contemporary regionalism in the Americas. Given that that regionalism is going through a new wave with intrinsic characteristics different from those of previous periods, the current situation is characterized by retraction, conservatism and a reduced commitment to regional initiatives. In addition, the basic structures that make up regional integration projects have deteriorated in the face of fading post-liberal regionalism at the beginning of the century.

The purpose of this analysis is to establish new elements to reflect on the American regional projects, from the elaboration of a typology proposal that categorizes regionalist projects in the Americas within three types: consultation, cooperation, and regional integration. Methodologically, we have conducted a qualitative analysis grounded in an inductive mapping and categorization of regionalist initiatives on the continent, drawing on the literature

on Comparative and Latin American Regionalism. The goal is to contribute to the construction of a classification that allows for the observation of behavioral trends in these processes, based on structural and not just conjectural aspects. It is believed that structural issues make it possible to identify the capacity of regional initiatives to respond to cyclical pressures.

The following section presents a review of the factors that stimulated the development of waves of regionalism in the American continent, highlighting how the current situation can be characterized as a new wave of regionalism which, inspired by the notion of Liquid Modernity by Bauman (2000), we call Liquid Regionalism. In the second part of the article, we introduce a typology presenting the structural aspects that characterize American regionalism and affect the behavior of the blocs at different times. Next, this typology is applied to regional experiences in the Americas, verifying its validity as an explanatory instrument for the current regionalist context. The conclusion then summarizes the main reflections of this article and suggests a new agenda for discussion in the light of the proposed typology and characterization of current regionalism.

The waves of regionalism in the Americas and Liquid Regionalism

In the Americas, the first regionalist initiatives came about in the context of old regionalism (1945-1980), strongly inspired by the functionalist model of regional integration. These initiatives emerged from attempts to institutionalize and promote trade between countries and industrial development in the region, capitalizing on comparative advantages and gains in scale, through a process of internal trade liberalization with strong external protections in place (Hurrell 1995; Braga 2002). However, these projects were weakened and diluted during a democratic crisis caused by coups that gave rise to authoritarian governments in the 1960s, adding to the economic adversities that plagued the countries of the region (Tavares 1978).

The regional initiatives identified in this first wave were the Organization of Central American States (ODECA) of 1951, the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), which unsuccessfully pursued Latin American trade integration in 1960, the Andean Pact of 1969, and the Commonwealth and Common Market of the Caribbean (CARICOM) of 1973. Encompassing the whole Western Hemisphere, the Organization of American States (OAS) has since 1951 played an important role in promoting a dialogue between the countries of the Americas, without economic intentions or integrationist prerogatives. Despite the continuing economic and political difficulties in the countries of the region, the creation of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) in 1980 can be considered a new regionalist effort, and a prelude to the resurgence of regionalism that would follow in the years to come (Braga 2002).

The start of a new world order, with the end of the Cold War and the growing pressures for multilateralism resulting from globalization and regionalization, established fertile ground for the formation of new international organizations. In Latin America, the return of democratic

governments in the 1980s and the end of the developmental project based on the principle of import substitution generated a favorable environment for new regional initiatives (Almeida 2003).

New regionalism, also known as open regionalism, was characteristic the international system in the late-twentieth century, and became manifest in the formation of new economic blocs around the world. In the context of open regionalism, states began to strengthen commercial ties and increase the conditions of competitiveness through a search for greater economic efficiency and trade liberalization. Furthermore, states adopted this strategy to achieve a better insertion in the international economic and political framework, whilst attending to new domestic and external demands (Baptista 1998).

The resurgence of regionalism was associated with the political and economic changes that led states, as well as other international actors, to value and explore opportunities arising from geographical proximity as a strategy for insertion in the international context of the late-twentieth century (Hurrell 1995). Moreover, the new regionalist wave that took place in Latin America appeared to break with the neo-functional integration rhetoric, since it safeguarded the sovereignty of Latin American states. The new blocs formed in this period resulted from the opening and deregulation of economies, adherence to the neoliberal system and adaptation to the globalization process (Bernal-Meza 2002).

Regional projects derived from open regionalism consist of innovative initiatives, or attempts to rescue institutional structures from the previous period. Furthermore, they may vary between hemispheric proposals, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), launched by the United States in 1994, and subregional proposals like the 1991 Southern Common Market (Mercosur), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994, and the Andean Community (CAN) of 1996, which replaced the Andean Pact.

The second wave of regionalism lasted until the first decade of 2000, when it was increasingly questioned in the wake of political changes resulting from the disenchantment of Latin American society with the governments that had followed the neoliberal logic in the previous years. Criticisms of the economic policies adopted by the countries of the region were aggravated by a succession of economic crises at the turn of the century, such as the devaluation of the Brazilian currency in 1999 and the Argentine financial crisis in 2001 (Bernal-Meza 2002). Moreover, the weak performance of Latin American economies and an increase in domestic inequality culminated in widespread popular resistance to national strategies linked to neoliberalism, demanding a greater role of the state in the economy.

This social dismay and dissatisfaction with the neoliberal model created a fertile environment for the rise of leftist governments, which scored a sequence of electoral victories (Stefanoni 2012). In addition, the renewed participation of civil society, non-governmental organizations and social movements that emerged in the late 1990s generated new spaces for action and demand in the 2000s. Such actors spurred changes at the domestic level, whilst also generating a new understanding of the architecture and purpose of regional integration processes. As a regional and heterogeneous response to the crisis of trade liberalization, new regionalist projects emerged,

such as the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) in 2008, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America - People's Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) of 2006 and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), of 2010. All of them symbols of the so-called "post-hegemonic" regionalism (Riggiozzi and Tussie 2012) or "post-liberal regionalism" (Veiga and Ríos 2007).

Based on a developmentalist agenda, resistant to trade liberalization, the new paradigm generated coalitions between governments with ideological affinity. In addition, the new regional order expanded the thematic integration agenda by incorporating non-commercial social and economic issues. A range of themes based on several diversified criteria was listed, including development, social equity, overcoming poverty and inequality, and maintaining regional stability and security (Veiga and Ríos 2007; Sanahuja 2014).

Despite these changes, characteristics of the previous waves remained a part of regional initiatives throughout the post-liberal phase. The maintenance of the state as both the propellant and decision maker of integration did not allow for the creation of institutional structures with a certain autonomy and supranational scope. To the contrary, the return of the strong state in the face of private actors prevented a plurality of actors from pursuing integration. Consequently, by being subject to national sovereignty, the institutions of integration remained intergovernmental, which impeded the evolution of regional deliberative bodies. Furthermore, when countries do not adopt regionalist commitments as a long-term state policy, regional policy is left to the executive branch, making it hostage to short-term interests and sensitive to governmental changes.

In this sense, post-liberal regionalism did not question the limits imposed on the evolution of the regional processes of previous waves. The lack of efforts to institutionalize and strengthen the structure of regional projects – which have been used as instruments for the achievement of national policy goals – predestined the blocs to face difficulties in the face of government changes in the region. The latter has occurred, resulting in a new regionalist wave of conservative character, which led to either the abandonment or reformulation of previous regional initiatives.

Since the 2010s, Latin American regionalism has faced a wave of retraction. With the conservative turn in world politics, starting in the Northern Hemisphere but affecting all regions of the globe, the emergence of illiberal governments began to challenge basic principles of democracy, multilateralism and regionalism. This new wave has been characterized by the creation of regional initiatives with a limited institutional design, configuring ideological alliances that have not sought to deepen the regional agenda. Notably, the Pacific Alliance (2012) rescued the precepts of open regionalism for trade liberalization, but did not show great ambitions in its agreements. Changes imposed by the Donald Trump government in the United States transformed NAFTA into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in 2018. At first, there was a threat on the part of Trump to dismantle the historic trade liberalization agreement between the three countries. Terminating the rules of competition and protection, the agreement has undergone changes within an illiberal logic. Additionally, both the Lima Group (2017) and the Forum

for the Progress and Development of South America - Prosur (2019) proved to be initiatives of ideological consultation and opposition to processes created in the previous wave, highly volatile and poor in performance.

Therefore, the projects of contemporary regionalism express a transition to a new phase in the region as a result of the fading of post-liberal regionalism. The initiatives established in this period consist of consultation projects with a low degree of complexity in terms of institutional design, a certain volatility and volubility stemming from different illiberal governments of the last decade. These developments have brought about a new dimension to the study of regionalism in the Americas.

In recognition of this new wave with intrinsically different characteristics, and mapping the new initiatives, we call the current moment one of Liquid Regionalism. Inspired by Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) reflection on liquid modernity, we have identified a new period characterized by a greater fluidity in regional arrangements.

While Bauman refers to a broad social phenomenon aimed at explaining new forms of social interaction, our analysis deals with the mechanisms of interaction between states within regional contexts. The basic idea in both cases is that there is a rupture in the sedimented order - labeled as solid by Bauman - that underlies the construction of beliefs and loyalties, which in turn structure behaviors. In fact, the liquid order represents the opposition to the sedimented order, based on a logic of flexibilization, deregulation and liberalization.

We are currently experiencing a challenge to the idea of what regional integration would mean, or rather, the coexistence of different perceptions on integration, which do not help to identify and understand this phenomenon. In this sense, the elasticity of the concept incorporates a variety of types that confuse rather than clarify. For this reason, the initial premise of this article is to differentiate these types, clearly identifying what we in fact conceive as regional integration, and contrasting to consultation and cooperation arrangements.

This issue of conceptual imprecision is connected to the notion of liquidity defended in our argument. "Solids" refers to a well-established, durable, stable and clearly delimited order, which guides the behavior of actors from the construction of beliefs and loyalties, ensuring the permanence of order itself (through the logic of reproduction of values), and the ability to adjust to changes without causing drastic disruptions. Liquid regionalism is the lack of this enduring order. It refers to a context in which the meaning and purpose of regionalism is not clearly established, unlike the first two waves of regionalism, in which the prevailing model was well-defined (Closed and then Open regionalism, respectively).

The expectation of a prevailing and stable regionalist model began to be diluted in the first decade of the 21st century, in the moment literature has called post-hegemonic regionalism, which can be understood as an intermediate phase in which solid regional structures begin to melt. The multiplicity of coexisting and alternatives regional arrangements, in the case of Latin America, was seen by political actors as positive because it allowed the establishment of new models, freeing countries from the imposition of pre-defined standards that originated in the Global North.

At the same time, greater freedom of choice about the type of integration to be promoted and the diversity of integrationist alternatives available, generated an increase in the instability of these processes and a decrease in their internal cohesion.

By not establishing a pre-determined and solid model of integration, all options became equally valid and accessible. Without a clear reference of what kind of regional arrangements should be pursued, states start to question or relativize their membership, considering the unclear benefits derived from associated integration costs. Actors' disinterest intensifies when there are other regional initiatives that can be mobilized and offer other gains, or at least lower costs.

Therefore, Liquid Regionalism is characterized by the low commitment of actors (especially governments and state actors), which has reinforced the idea that regional norms and structures are volatile and changeable, designed not to crystallize or perpetuate themselves. This is the main feature of the liquid logic, as the concept refers to unstable relationships. From the physical properties of liquids - marked by the inability to maintain their shape, their permanent change, and plasticity (Bauman 2010) -, integration processes lose their ability to provide predictability and confidence to the participants, who start to interact in a context in which limits and standards are constantly altered or, at the very least, stressed.

Liquid Regionalism leads to a dangerous cyclical dynamic: developing lighter, more flexible and dynamic processes encourages less regional commitments, which in turn increases insecurity within integration processes. This instability increases actors' distrust and the perception regarding excessive integration costs (as gains become increasingly remote and less visible). Consequently, this trend favors a growing disinterest and low commitment on the part of political actors, who tend to seek other alternatives to make their interests viable. This will lead actors to defend greater flexibility - understood as a reduction in integrationist ties -, reinforcing the entire cycle.

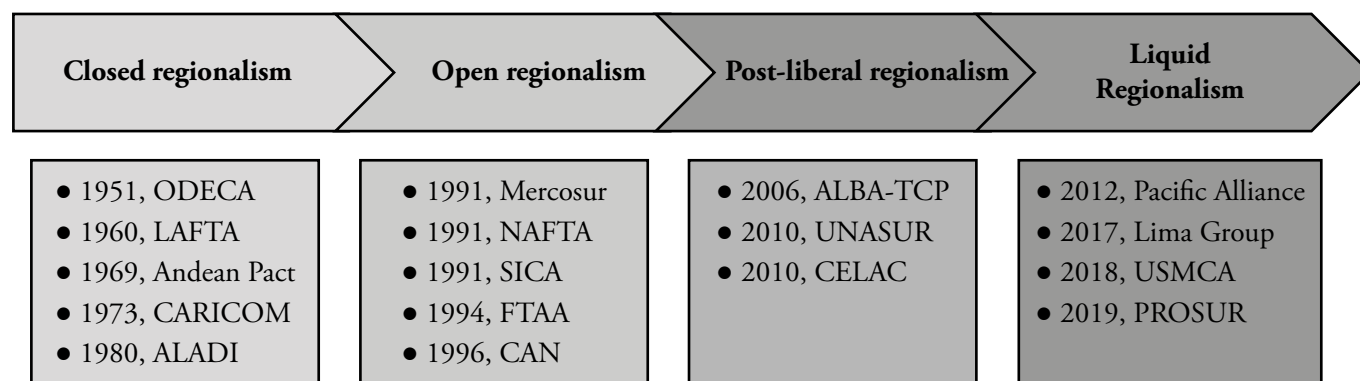
The current trend has been to prioritize the creation of flexible and informal institutional structures, free of any concerns as to setting up bureaucratic structures in charge of consolidating behaviors and safeguarding memories from which the actors can guide their actions in the short-, medium- and long-term. At the same time, there is an appreciation of the individualization of the member states expressed in an emphasis on national autonomy, which makes the regional initiatives of this period more mechanisms for consultation than integration.

In this sense, an important characteristic of Latin American regionalism is its strong dependence on the political will of heads of state (Malamud 2008). Consequently, its susceptibility to constant change when subjected to new pressures resulting from political shifts brings it closer to the characteristics of fluids or liquids (Bauman 2000). Instability has become a hallmark of this new wave of regionalism, as, like Bauman's (2000; 2010) notion of a liquid world, it neither immobilizes like solids, nor does it retain its shape; being volatile and subject to constant change.

In view of the four waves of regionalism explored in this section, figure 1 demonstrates a chronology of regionalist projects in the Americas. After recognizing the changes and characteristics of each wave, the article will subsequently introduce a typology proposal that will contribute to the

characterization of existing regional projects in the American continent to help understand how the changes caused by regionalist waves over time have implied structural changes in regionalism in the region.

Figure 1. Waves of regionalism and regional projects



Source: authors' elaboration

Trends in regionalism in the Americas: introducing a typology

Regional processes in the Americas have been interpreted over time through parameters referenced to the European model, using a framework of analysis based on the characteristics present in this case, as well as the theoretical approaches elaborated from this particular experience (Malamud and Schmitter 2010; Malamud 2010). The objective in this article is not just to establish a new concept (Liquid Regionalism), but also to adjust the analysis criteria to the current reality in the Americas, thus presenting a conceptual categorization that assists in creating a better understanding of regional processes on the American continent.

In general, the criticisms regarding the use of Eurocentric approaches exalt the contextual differences that have stimulated different regionalisms and that would explain the disparities, as well as their particular institutional evolution (Acharya 2012). For instance, European integration has had a supranational element since the beginning, which proved a decisive characteristic for later developments (Briceño-Ruiz 2018a). While we recognize the importance of these differences, they do not invalidate the arguments in these approaches, as long as conceptual adjustments are made. Therefore, it is important to establish how concepts can be used and adjusted for different realities.

In this sense, the central problem lies in the widespread use of the concept of “integration” without a clear definition of its meaning, and its indistinct use to deal with processes that are quite different from each other. As we pointed out in the previous section, there are several types of regionalism (among which is regional integration), each with their own characteristics that may even be present in the same phenomenon, acting in a complementary way.

Traditionally, two approaches are used to define integration: one economic, the other political. In the first case, we find Balassa's typology (1982) that defines it both as a process and as a situation: "As a process it implies measures aimed at the abolition of discrimination between the economic units of different states; as the situation may correspond to the absence of various forms of discrimination between national economies" (Balassa 1982, 12). The author states that economic integration can take different degrees of depth, from which it is possible to distinguish five successive stages: the free trade zone, customs union, common market, the economic union and, lastly, total economic integration.

In the political perspective, the main reference in the definition of integration is that of Haas: "Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states" (2004, 16). As a result of this conceptualization, an assumption was made as to the existence of supranational institutional structures that would become this new center of power.

From these two definitions of regional integration, theoretical reflections started to adopt an evolutionary assumption, i.e., as the integration process advances or deepens on the economic level, it is necessary to expand and supranationalize the political sphere. In this sense, it was established as a goal that regional arrangements should follow the model of supranationalization seen on the European continent in order to be considered successful.

An attempt to move past this perception was introduced on the research agenda of Comparative Regionalism, which in principle aimed to overcome Eurocentrism and the view that European integration is the only example of success. In addition, Comparative Regionalism focuses more on the issue of regional cooperation than integration (Acharya 2012), since integration presupposes the loss of sovereignty to some extent, whereas regionalism does not. In this sense, thinking about integration necessarily leads to the discussion of the European case.

As pointed out by Acharya (2016), while the EU aimed to develop a supranational model of integration, non-European regions share one point in common: their quest for autonomy of sovereign states. This convergence could be a starting point for the development of more comparative analyses between regions, capable of identifying additional similarities, despite their contextual differences. However, Closa (2015) has pointed to the difficulty in Comparative Regionalism to really establish new categories of analysis. Most studies include very little comparison, and tend to focus on case studies (regions) and the formulation of reflections that eventually seek to build a methodological identity based on the negation of traditional integrationist theories. Börzel and Risse (2016) to some extent responded to Closa's provocation, presenting both a broad debate on regionalism in many regions and a defense of Comparative Regionalism as a promising research agenda. However, the authors themselves recognized the difficulty of extrapolating the analysis for distinct regions. Comparisons end up focusing on punctual and specific aspects, making it difficult to build more general explanations about the processes. This problem also exists in the Eurocentric approaches that provide relevant

explanations for European integration, but are not necessarily useful in the assessment of other regions.

The present analysis does not intend to overcome this problem, but to establish categories that allow us to differentiate cases that, even though they look similar and are generally treated as equivalent, represent different phenomena with varying objectives that share some similar traits. This, in turn, leads to very different results.

Based on this discussion, the purpose of this section is to establish the conceptualization that will be used to address Latin American processes and to analyze the current context in which they find themselves. Firstly, the idea is established that the different categorizations are found in a continuum, are not watertight and follow an ideal type¹. This means that the definitions are based on characteristics and criteria used to distinguish the different types, but not that the cases must present all of them. In fact, the classification will be carried out based on the characteristics prevailing at the time of analysis, given that the processes are dynamic and undergo changes over time. Therefore, regarding them as part of a continuum means accepting that some cases are in intermediate situations, and may be closer to one type than others, or that processes can move in different directions within the continuum without an evolutionary assumption that determines a single course.

In this typology, we will elaborate on three basic categories: consultation, cooperation, and integration. At one end of the continuum we find consultative behavior. This presupposes a very low level of incentives for cooperation, allowing for more informal, loose, case-based and occasional action. In this case, state collaboration is linked to a certain willingness to establish a platform for dialogue with other actors, without assuming more rigid commitments (Sanahuja 2014; Nolte 2019).

The next step in this continuum is cooperation. It contains a situation very similar to the former, but where it is possible to identify greater pressure for deepening relations in some aspects of the agenda and, therefore, the willingness to establish real commitments in relation to certain issues. However, there is no willingness to increase interdependence among member states or to condition their autonomy.

Interdependence refers to greater commitment among those involved in order to respond to pressures of the context and the existence of reciprocal effects between countries or actors generated by international transactions (Keohane and Nye 1989). According to Moravcsik (1997), interdependence involves costs and benefits for societies, revealing the tensions between national objectives and transnational interests. It is a situation in which international cooperation begins to be internalized in domestic institutional structures, with a greater involvement of society and expansion of policy agenda to other domains.

¹ Same notion of Ideal Type or Pure Type used by Weber (1991), which establishes the characteristics intrinsic to the phenomenon being analyzed, without necessarily representing what we actually find in historical reality. It is a reference that allows us to classify, without the pretension that there is a full correspondence between the concept and reality.

Interdependence is a characteristic present at the other end of the continuum: regional integration. The main characteristic of this type is precisely the acceptance of shared autonomy. In other words, the process of interdependence becomes part of the dynamics of the functioning of the state and the decision-making sphere, and political action is no longer possible without considering the regional panorama (which involves the behavior and positioning of the other participating states).

Within the category of regional integration, there are different levels of interdependence, which can vary even in their nature: political, economic, etc. The goal here is not to deepen the analysis on the different levels of integration, but to establish a distinction between regional dynamics, which in the American case tend to be defined as integration, but in reality belong to another category. For a better understanding of the analysis proposal, table 1 presents the general characteristics of our typology.

Table 1. A typology of regionalism in the Americas

| Characteristic/Type | Consultation | Cooperation | Integration |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Actors | states | predominantly states | states, non-states and regional |
| Institutional design | restricted | restricted | complex |
| Incorporation of norms | voluntary | voluntary | compulsory |
| Interdependence | unnecessary | unnecessary | necessary |
| Logic | responsive | responsive/propositive | propositive |
| Leadership | unnecessary | unnecessary | necessary |

Source: authors' elaboration.

We have selected these characteristics as central to the classification of different types, because they express important aspects which highlight the differences between the types as well as indicate the transition from one stage to another. The first characteristic refers to the actors who participate in the process, which can vary from strictly states to the involvement of social actors. This does not mean that non-state actors cannot participate in consultative regionalism, but that they are not recognized as key agents within this process.

Likewise, institutional design is observed in all types, but there is an important conceptual difference. In the case of integration, a more complex and bureaucratic institutionalization can be observed, involving different actors. As such, it responds to a broader agenda that reflects the interests of this multiplicity of participants. On the other hand, in cooperation and consultation processes institutionalization can be more flexible and less bureaucratic. The degree of bureaucratization also depends on the moment when the regional process started, because the various waves of regionalism represent a conjuncture of characteristics that serve as important conditioning factors of this aspect.

The institutional characteristic is strongly related to the incorporation of norms, because when the commitments assumed at a regional level become mandatory, a need for more complex institutional design arises, in addition to more rigid decision-making mechanisms. This does not mean that in integration there is a full and automatic incorporation of regional decisions, but there is an assumption that the decisions made will be respected by all members. When this fails to occur, the stability of intra-bloc relationships is threatened, and internal crises may arise resulting from a growing perception of low commitment levels.

Likewise, interdependence works as an important element in the degree of commitment of the actors, because it represents growing internal links within the bloc. For example, the presence of a trade agenda in itself does not translate into greater interdependence, since it may be geared towards greater participation in the world market or the insertion of countries in international value chains, without increasing interaction between the partner countries. However, the presence of cross-border interests like the ones promoted by regional trade stimulates both the maintenance of commitments, as well as institutional consolidation and the participation of non-state actors, thus ensuring a greater dynamism in the process.

The different types of regionalism are instruments designed to increase the capacity of member states to respond to some type of demand of external or domestic origin. As Mattli (1999) pointed out, two conditions must be satisfied to consider a regional integration process as successful: significant economic gains (or the positive perception of potential gains) and fulfillment of supply conditions (where the role of leadership is central). In all cases we find a function responsive to these pressures, however, in the case of integration there is a tendency towards a more propositional or proactive logic. Integration presupposes the construction of a common agenda, with objectives shared by its members. There is a long-term strategic dimension that is not a necessary condition for other types.

This propositional dimension is linked to the diversity of actors participating in the integration process. Multiplicity stimulates both the expansion of the integration agenda and its institutional design. Integration becomes incorporated into the daily practice of the societies involved, enabling the presence of diverse interests that generate new demands, and stimulating new commitments that increase interdependence and the integration process's stability.

Nonetheless, the characteristic of a propositional logic presupposes the existence of leadership as well, which must not be conflated with regional hegemony. "In contrast to the 'one-sidedness' of hegemony, the prominent feature of leadership is the pursuit of common interests and goals" (Alvarez 2021, 58). In consultation and cooperation there may be a leadership figure, but this is not a necessary condition for the smooth functioning of the regional initiatives. Contrarily, in integration the absence of regional leadership (which may be exercised by a single country or a grouping of like-minded countries) becomes increasingly problematic as interdependence and the need to build new common goals increase (Mattli 1999). The leadership functions as a guide to establish the direction to be followed by the bloc, an element of guarantee to the commitments, and lastly as an important constraint for the breach of rules.

This typology is aimed to highlight the characteristics considered essential in the different regionalist processes. Naturally, the reality of present-day regionalism does not provide a completely seamless fit in the proposed categories, and a presence of variations and diverging behaviors may be expected. That being said, the proposed classification allows for differentiation between the processes present in the current context of Liquid Regionalism and assist in the assessment of current trends.

Regionalist typology and Liquid Regionalism

This section seeks not only to place the regional projects of the Americas in the fourth regionalist wave, Liquid Regionalism, in accordance with the typology presented in the previous section, but also to demonstrate that these initiatives are inserted over time within these heuristic types, undergoing processes of deepening, inertia or deterioration. Through the application of the typology to specific cases of regionalism, this paper aims to show that while there are regional projects that are more accommodated or consolidated, other initiatives have gone through moments of movement and displacement, whether these are radical (deconstruction or emergence of new projects) or incremental (reformulation), towards more or less regionalism. To illustrate this point, table 2 places several regional projects in the American continent in the categories proposed by the typology outlined in the previous section.

Table 2. Regionalism in the Americas in practice

| Consultation | Cooperation | Integration |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| CELAC, Lima Group, Prosur | OAS, ALBA, Unasur, Pacific Alliance | CARICOM, Mercosur, SICA, CAN, USMCA |

Source: authors' elaboration.

As examples of consultation processes, which normally have a central role of state actors (in particular the Executive branch), low institutional design and a consensus-based and restricted agenda, the cases of CELAC, Prosur, and the Lima Group were highlighted. CELAC was created at the height of the third regionalist wave (post-liberal/post-hegemonic), as a way to develop an exclusive forum for cooperation between Latin American and Caribbean States and for the development of an interregional dialogue with actors from outside the American continent, such as China and the European Union (Ayuso 2014; Sanahuja 2014; Bonilla and Herrera-Vinelli 2020). However, throughout the fourth regionalist wave, this regional organization lost momentum due to the impossibility of dialogue between the countries of the region as a result of the unfolding crisis in Venezuela. This led the bloc to a stage of lethargy that has prevented the regular organization of High Level Summits and a reformulation of the CELAC Action Plan (Nolte 2021).

On the other hand, and also as a regional reaction to the democratic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, two other regional consultation initiatives emerged during the fourth regionalist wave: the Lima Group and Prosur. The Lima Group was formed in 2017 as an informal and flexible articulation between 12 American countries with the primary objective of developing a common approach to Venezuela's political instability. A strong right wing ideological alignment between the countries of this group and alignment with the United States' stance towards the Maduro regime are fundamental marks of this platform (Barros and Gonçalves 2019; Legler 2020). Under Chilean auspice, Prosur was an attempt to set up a new consultation mechanism in South America, in view of the paralysis of Unasur after several countries in the region interrupted their participation in this regional organization. In the agreement signed in 2019, areas such as energy, health, defense and infrastructure were identified by the member states as priorities for regional dialogue. On a practical level, Prosur has fallen short of the expectations raised by the proposing state, and in the face of the need for South America to deal with contemporary challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Prosur's liquid characteristics, such as a short-term perspective and dependency on the alignment of right-wing leaderships, added to its excluding characters, posed significant challenges to the performance of this initiative in addressing concrete regional policies (Frenkel 2019).

Cooperation arrangements are more common in the American continent. Regional projects like the OAS, UNASUR, ALBA, and the Pacific Alliance, despite having different thematic inclinations and institutional designs, can be identified as regional cooperation initiatives. There is a predominance (albeit not exclusive) of state actors, a limited institutional design which is nonetheless more complex than the mechanisms for consultation – exemplified by the possibility of creating sectoral councils and a permanent secretariat – a low level of interdependence, and regional agendas limited to priority themes. Within this framework, the OAS and Unasur present a more complex institutional design, with the establishment of a physical headquarters and permanent secretariat, whereas ALBA and the Pacific Alliance, despite being based on ideologically distinct regionalist approaches, share an analogous common institutional framework marked by shallow institutional design (Bressan and Luciano 2018).

While most regional consultation projects emerged during the most recent regionalist wave, the same cannot be said for cooperation initiatives, which gained momentum during post-liberal regionalism. However, most regional cooperation projects now appear to be in a stagnant phase. With the death of Hugo Chávez, the economic crisis resulting from the fall in commodity prices and political instability in Venezuela, ALBA entered a process of stagnation, with the loss of financial contributions and the political protagonism of its paymaster, as Mattli (1999) put it. Despite the euphoria surrounding it in the early years of its creation, the Pacific Alliance too has failed to advance substantially to this day, having been impaired further since a leftist government took office in Mexico in 2018. In turn, the OAS has been losing prominence since the second regionalist wave, given the criticism of leftist governments regarding the influence of the USA on the agenda of this regional organization and the creation of CELAC, which excludes the USA

and Canada. Furthermore, Unasur is clearly experiencing a period of deconstruction, with the lack of an appointed Secretary General since 2017 and the joint departure of 6 countries from the bloc in 2018 (Briceño-Ruiz 2018b; “Brasil e outros cinco países suspendem participação na Unasul, diz fonte” 2018). The fluidity of regional leaderships in the region - such as Brazil in Unasur and Venezuela for the case of ALBA - which have been dependent on domestic political configurations, may explain both the emergence and decay of regional institutions (Alvarez 2020).

Finally, regional integration processes abound in Latin America. Projects that involve state, non-state and regional actors, with a more complex institutional design, broad thematic agendas (with the presence of political, economic and social themes), a better connection between regional norms, and a strong economic dimension through the development of free zones, trade, customs unions or common markets are characteristic of initiatives such as Mercosur, CAN, SICA, NAFTA/USMCA, and CARICOM. These initiatives are also among the oldest in the region, having been created between the 1960s and 1990s and reformulated in successive regionalist waves.

The fourth regionalist wave did not bring with it any strong incentives to deepen regional integration initiatives. To the contrary, projects like Mercosur have suffered severe upheavals due to government changes in the region, which have favored the flexibility of these blocs and the reduction of their social agenda. Instead, the focus was shifted towards trade liberalization and extra-regional negotiations. The most recent dispute between Uruguayan President Lacalle Pou and Argentine Alberto Fernández regarding the flexibility of Mercosur during the bloc’s 30-year Summit clearly illustrates a lack of alignment between member states and the current stagnation in integration initiatives with greater ambitions (Figueiredo 2021). However, a less fluid regional integration arrangement such as Mercosur has so far survived recent attacks from anti-regionalist governments, demonstrating its resilience and relative institutional depth (Mariano and Menezes 2021).

Although integration in the USMCA framework is marked by a strong imbalance between the partners and does not have objectives beyond a free trade zone, the high degree of interdependence between its members is undeniable. Despite an emphasis on the trade agenda, this bloc ended up involving state and non-state actors (predominantly economic), and has presented a more complex institutional design and a broader regional agenda than the previous types. Although NAFTA underwent a reformulation cycle during the fourth regionalist wave, the results of the negotiation about its transformation into the USMCA did not radically alter the foregoing project. There was a focus on the development of incremental changes, such as the incorporation of new commercial agendas (e.g., Intellectual Property, Digital Trade, Financial Services and Environment), and on ensuring more predictability in the negotiations between member states (Sunset Clause). To a large extent, the USMCA is the product of an accommodation of its three member countries to the new global and regional context and the economic protectionism of Donald Trump

(Flores-Macías and Sánchez-Talanquer 2019; Mariano et al. 2019), which are distinctive aspects of Liquid Regionalism.

This liquid aspect of regionalism in the Americas facilitated the crisis of regional institutions on the continent, given that it has shaped a fluid institutional structure which was swiftly appropriated by the discourse and actions of emerging political agents who have recently confronted the international liberal order, and particularly the role of multilateral and regional institutions in addressing collective issues, such as the covid-19 epidemic. Indeed, “[...] even though regional institutions and platforms have multiplied across Latin America, mounting divisions have caused the region to backslide in terms of the depth of regional cooperation and the capacity to address common challenges” (Merke et al. 2021). The fact that the majority of regionalist initiatives on the continent have been framed based on consultation and cooperation, arrangements of low institutional depth (see Table 2), contributed to a drastic turn on regional affairs towards regional distrust and discredit of regional institutions by anti-globalist and nationalist leaderships.

In short, by applying the typology introduced here to most of the regional projects found in the Americas, this section sought to demonstrate the usefulness of the identified categories as a way of better explaining the differences and similarities between regional projects. Furthermore, by presenting a more specific look at the context of the fourth regionalist wave (Liquid Regionalism), it should also be emphasized that, although framed within the typology, regionalist initiatives are dynamic processes that can undergo radical and incremental changes over time, either towards deeper or looser ties. It is also important to note that the most striking features of the fourth regionalist wave are the emergence of new consultation arrangements (Prosur and the Lima Group) and the stagnation or even deconstruction of cooperation (Unasur) and regional integration mechanisms (Mercosur, CAN). This demonstrates that the most recent wave of regionalism is distinguished by a growth of leaner, more volatile, informal and restricted regional arrangements, and by resistance to initiatives of greater depth and scope, which is where the notion of Liquid Regionalism originates.

Conclusion

This article aims to contribute to contemporary debates about regionalism in the American continent, in view of the latest transformations in the international system and the rise of conservative governments in the region. First, not only were the main characteristics of the three waves of regionalism that have occurred in the Americas since the end of the Second World War discussed, but we have also identified a fourth regionalist wave taking shape after 2010. Inspired by Bauman’s reflection on Liquid Modernity, the term Liquid Regionalism was coined to denominate this development. Among its main characteristics are a reduced commitment

to regionalism, greater fluidity, volatility and low institutional depth when compared to the regionalisms of previous waves.

Second, based on the reflections from the theories of regional integration and comparative regionalism research agenda, we have proposed a typology to better understand the regional projects observed in the Americas during the four regionalist waves. In this sense, we have developed a continuum of three ideal types: consultation, cooperation and integration. The proposed typology seeks to facilitate the differentiation of regional projects in relation to fundamental aspects, such as the actors involved in regional processes, institutional depth, the level of incorporation of regional standards, the degree of interdependence, collective action logic and the existence of regional leadership.

Finally, we have analyzed the extent to which current regional projects fit the presented typology. While the projects of the three previous regionalist waves have been largely defined as arrangements of regional cooperation and integration, with the exception of CELAC, Liquid Regionalism is dominated by schemes of regional consultation and cooperation. These are models of greater fluidity and less commitment. Simultaneously, we have identified that several regional projects developed in prior phases have lost steam in the context of Liquid Regionalism, suffering stagnation, as in the cases of CAN and Mercosur, or disintegration, like Unasur more recently. As regionalism in the Americas changed over time, regional projects have become increasingly volatile and less institutionalized.

Understanding the characteristics and challenges of contemporary regionalism becomes increasingly fundamental, given that crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the need to build more effective regional responses for the provision of regional public goods and for the resolution of 'public evils' like the ones that can be seen today (Sanahuja 2020). In fact, this moment of Liquid Regionalism in the Americas has demonstrated, both in recently created regional organizations such as Prosur and in traditional regional projects like Mercosur, a low capacity to provide effective regional solutions to deal with the pandemic, intensifying the weak spots that have made the continent one of the most affected by the health crisis.

The fragility and fragmentation in the basic structures of American regionalism throughout its existence corroborate the current scenario of the global economic and political crises, with a strong impact on multilateral institutions. It is likely that the arrangements and initiatives that characterize Liquid Regionalism will have difficulties responding to and surviving the drastic changes arising from today's systemic crises, since they do not seem able to react adequately to the demanding dynamics of global governance, which require a higher level of coordination between members.

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