

South American regionalism: explaining the foundation of UNASUR

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Luisa Linke-Behrens

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SOUTH AMERICAN REGIONALISM: EXPLAINING THE FOUNDATION OF UNASUR

Luisa Linke-Behrens

Abstract

As the first exclusively South American cooperation scheme and the new centerpiece of post-hegemonic regionalism in the region, the foundation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has recently attracted scholarly attention. While this event has been studied by means of descriptive narratives and frequently from the angle of post-hegemonic approaches, this paper draws on neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, the regional powers approach, and the security community approach to explain why UNASUR was founded. It thereby offers a systematic and theoretically informed account of the foundation of UNASUR as a particular phenomenon and, by extension, of the status quo of regionalism in South America. Specifically, I examine context conditions, such as the power shift in favor of Brazil, the anti-neoliberal social paradigm, and the decline of hemispheric cooperation; the interests of Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina, and the region-wide shared interest in stable peace and energy integration; and finally, the main actors initiating and driving the establishment of UNASUR, namely the Brazilian and Venezuelan government. I conclude that the security community approach is best able to explain the founding of UNASUR.

The Author



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1. Introduction

Yet another regional organization was added to the so-called Latin American spaghetti bowl when the constitutive treaty of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was signed on May 23, 2008, in Brasilia. In consecutive waves (Dabène 2012), about twenty regional organizations and free trade areas have been created since the 1950s that cover either both Americas, Latin America, South America or only a few of its states. Today, all Latin American states are members of at least three regional organizations (Bianculli 2016). However, as the first exclusively South American cooperation scheme and the new centerpiece of post-hegemonic regionalism in the region (Briceño-Ruiz/Ribeiro Hoffmann 2015), UNASUR certainly stands out. It has created and institutionalized a new narrative on regionalism that prioritizes social policy, infrastructure, and energy security over trade and thereby expresses a shift away from the neoliberal “open” regionalism of the 1990s (Briceño-Ruiz/Ribeiro Hoffmann 2015). Thus, especially its ambitious social agenda attracts growing attention from scholars (Buss/Ferreira 2011; Diamint 2013; Riggiozi/Grugel 2015; Riggiozi 2014). Moreover, through the foundation of the Security and Defense Council, UNASUR has created a means for autonomous regional security governance which stands in direct competition with the Organization of American States (OAS) (Comini 2010; Herz/Ribeiro Hoffmann 2010; Weiffen 2012; Weiffen et al. 2013). Many therefore agree that UNASUR “has the potential to change the regional and international scenario considerably” (Gardini 2012: 85), and it has even been suggested that its foundation symbolizes a new type of regional governance (Riggiozi 2011).

Scholars have been quick to ask why UNASUR was founded at all, why such an umbrella organization would focus on South America and move beyond trade, and who might have driven the foundation process. So far, the latter has been studied in the Spanish and Portuguese languages and, to a lesser extent, in English by means of descriptive narratives but also frequently from the angle of post-hegemonic approaches. In contrast, to explain why UNASUR was founded, this paper draws on classical theories of regional integration and cooperation. By applying neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, the regional powers approach, and the security community approach, this paper offers a systematic and theoretically informed account of the foundation of UNASUR as a particular phenomenon and, by extension, of the status quo of regionalism in South America. Though it does not engage in methodological theory testing, a second aim of this paper is to determine whether any of the above-mentioned theories – often criticized for their Eurocentrism and inability to “travel” – is able to explain such a non-European case of regionalism.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The second section organizes the literature along several strands of argumentation and demonstrates the current research gap. Regional integration theories are selected and their main arguments presented in section three, which serves as the basis for the analysis in section four. Here, I examine the context conditions of the organization’s foundation, the interests involved in this process, as well as the main actors who initiated and drove it. Concluding remarks are offered in the final section.

2. Explaining Latin American Regionalism and UNASUR

Systematic investigation of Latin American regionalism by means of integration theories has been quite scarce, at least compared to the vast amount of literature on European and Asian regionalism. While in the 1960s, it was debated whether neofunctionalism offered convincing explanations for the foundation of the Latin American Free Trade Association (Haas 1961, 1967; Haas/Schmitter 1964), it was concluded that it did not (Schmitter 1969). In parallel, while indigenous theories such as the structuralist school, proposed by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA 1950), and dependency theory (Cardoso/Faletto 1979) were politically influential, they were theoretically less convincing. Later, Hurrell (1998) discussed whether or not Brazil and Argentina, and by extension South America, could be called a security community.

More recently, Latin American regionalism has attracted growing attention, especially since the 'left turn' in Latin American politics which has been accompanied by politico-economic transformations. Simultaneously, the vision of an autonomous Latin or South American regionalism vis-à-vis the Pan-Americanism led by the United States seems to have pervaded (cf. Bianculli 2016; Hurrell 1995b). This has led scholars to label Latin American regionalism as "post-hegemonic" (Riggiozi/Tussie 2012), "post-liberal" (Sanahuja 2012), "post-commercial" (Tussie/Trucco 2010), and even "anarchical" (Hirst 2009). UNASUR is considered an essential part of this development (Briceño-Ruiz/Ribeiro Hoffmann 2015), and thus a debate has emerged on the reasons for its foundation. In this debate five argumentative patterns stand out: First, UNASUR's role in resolving South American conflicts, especially between Colombia on the one side and Venezuela and Ecuador on the other, and during the intrastate conflict in Bolivia, is often mentioned as the main reason for its foundation (Caballero Santo 2012; Cepik 2008; Comini 2010; Guedes de Oliveira 2007; Nolte/Wehner 2013). Second, the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) were at an insurmountable impasse by 2000 and ultimately failed in 2005 because South American states were unwilling to accept the FTAA's neoliberal orientation and its lack of a social dimension. Especially Bolivia and Venezuela refused to develop closer cooperation with the United States, and tried to strengthen the social dimension in regionalism. Thus, UNASUR offered a viable alternative as a multidimensional forum to develop policies in diverse issue areas (Briceño-Ruiz 2007; Kellogg 2007; Mychalejko 2009). Third, South American states have been eager to integrate their energy markets. This includes billion dollar projects to construct pipelines across the continent, which foster intra-continental trade in energy resources and allow eastern South American states to access the Pacific markets, as well as large-scale infrastructure projects that make the Amazonas Basin more accessible and connect the Andean and Amazon states (Burges 2005; see also Palestini Céspedes/Agostinis 2015). Fourth, it is often argued that Brazil's foreign policy after the Cold War aimed at building a more united South America and at establishing itself as an internationally recognized regional leader (Brands 2010; Couto 2007; García 2008; Gratius/Saraiva 2013; Palestini Céspedes/Agostinis 2015; Poggio Teixeira 2011; Rivarola Puntigliano 2011). Fifth, by the end of the 1990s, the Andean Community and Mercosur stagnated in their integration efforts and experienced their rivalry as unproductive. Bringing together both sub-regions is now an essential part of UNASUR (Curran/Zignago 2012; Molina 2007). Most of the above analyses are interested in a specific sector and therefore do not systematically investigate the foundation of UNASUR. By consequence, the explanations offered seem rather eclectic and can even appear tautological, while a large part of the literature remains piecemeal.

Other authors draw on theories of regional integration but in a quite selective manner. Botelho (2008) detects three reasons for UNASUR's foundation: first, the convergence of Brazilian, Argentinian, and Venezuelan foreign policy at the beginning of the 2000s; second, the amelioration of the Brazilian-Argentinian relationship during the same time; and third, the coming into power of Chávez in Venezuela who directed his foreign policy towards South America rather than the Caribbean and North America, and who had the political will and financial means to support the process. Although Botelho's study is framed by liberal intergovernmentalism, the basic propositions of the theory are not applied to the case in a systematic manner; nor is the viability of other integration theories tested or ruled out. Pires Martins, Arjonilla de Mattos, Ribeiro Mesquita, and Cesar (2009) conduct a neofunctional analysis of UNASUR's foundation but, similarly to Botelho, barely specify the categories of their analysis and do not justify the use of neofunctionalism. To address these gaps, this paper draws upon different integration theories and offers a more systematic account of UNASUR's foundation.

3. Theories of Regional Integration and Cooperation

Although theories of regional integration and cooperation developed in the context of European Union studies and International Relations have been frequently criticized for their inability to "travel" to non-European or non-Western regions, viable alternative theories remain scarce. In the 1990s, the New Regionalism Approach was a prominent attempt to explain the wave of non-European regionalism after the end of the Cold War (Hettne/Söderbaum 2000; Söderbaum/Shaw 2003), but its added value was later questioned, even by one of the theory's proponents (Hettne 2003; see also Börzel 2013; Warleigh-Lack 2004, 2006; Warleigh-Lack/Rosamond 2011). Concepts of post-hegemonic regionalism may be useful to capture the status quo of Latin American regionalism, but they prove inadequate when attempting to explain developments and develop causal narratives. Bianculli (2016) argues that theories of European integration are unsuited to explain the consecutive waves of Latin American regionalism because the European integration experience is a progressive process. While I do agree with Bianculli that those theoretical arguments concerned with the enlargement of competences of regional organizations are certainly inadequate for Latin America, I suggest that these theories still offer narratives on the foundation of regional organizations which seem quite suitable.

The two most common integration theories are arguably neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. Since both emerged in the context of European Union studies and center around the economic reasons for regional integration, I add both a power-based and a constructivist cooperation approach from the discipline of International Relations. Many power-based approaches draw on the concept of hegemony (Destradi 2010) which might seem awkward at first given the strong terminological reference to the hegemonic stability theory. Thus, theories which employ the terminology around hegemony, even if they expressly seek to delineate themselves from the hegemonic stability theory (Burges 2008; Pedersen 2002), are excluded. Regional power is a less connoted concept in this context, even though it has rarely been considered in relation to regional integration. The most comprehensive actor-based approach to regional power was developed by Nolte (structuralist examples are Buzan/Waever 2003; Lemke 2002; 2006, 2010, 2011). Both its focus on actorness and its explicit link to regional integration are two good reasons to make

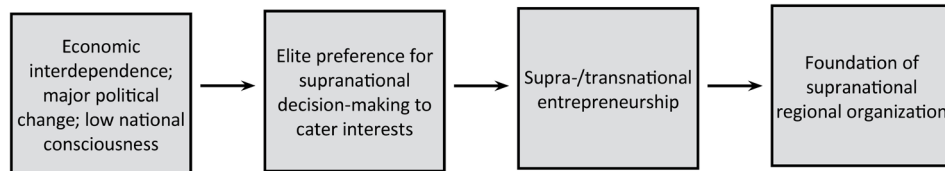
use of this approach here. In the constructivist camp, only one substantive theory on regional integration has been developed (Börzel 2013) and that is the security community approach (Adler/Barnett 1998; based on Deutsch et al. 1957). Note that questions on collective identity and whether, by this standard, UNASUR can be considered a security community or not are not discussed here. In sum, the following analysis is framed by neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, the regional powers approach, and the security community approach. Since the selected theories have emerged in different contexts and focus on different aspects of regionalism, they are not comparable per se. However, it is possible to categorize their arguments as follows: Based on (1) *a specific international context* that is given, actors develop specific (2) *interests* to define their role within said context, and subsequently, (3) these *actors* take specific actions that aim to create some form of regionalism.

It is clear that this way of organizing the theoretical arguments is highly stylized and reduces their complexity. Note that, in view of the paper's purpose, arguments on how competences are extended once a regional organization has been created are excluded. This is especially important in neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. Moreover, it is difficult to do justice to the extensive debates that have developed around each of these theories. The paper therefore draws on the arguments of one or two key proponents and thus presents *a* version of the above theories rather than the conglomerate of various scholarly positions.

3.1 Neofunctionalism

Writing in the aftermath of World War II, Ernst Haas postulated that these traumatic events and their disastrous effects have been the main driving forces for European states to integrate (see Figure 1). Thus, according to him, a radical change in the political landscape combined with weak national consciousness, economic interdependence, and the "immanent myth" of cultural unity were the founding conditions for regional integration (Haas 1961: 367; 1967, 2006 [1958]). Elites, conceptualized as "the leaders of all relevant political groups who habitually participate in the making of public decisions," including government policy-makers, lobbyists, and high members of political parties, are the winners of integration and hence the motor that drives the integration process (Haas 2006 [1958]: 115). Based on the permissive consensus of the people, "interest groups and political parties at the national level endorse supranational action in preference to action by their national governments [...], organise beyond the national level in order to function more effectively as decision-makers vis-à-vis the separate national governments [...], [and] coalesce on the basis of a common ideology, surpassing those at national level" (Haas 2006 [1958]: 109-110). National and transnational elites ally with actors across borders that share their interests and push for integration at the supranational level, because their interests are better served by supranational rather than national policy-making. Acting as policy entrepreneurs, they thus create a demand for integration, which governments then supply. The newly created institutions are supranational entities which allow for effective bureaucratic and functionalist solutions of economic problems. At a later stage, these solutions will shift people's expectations, and increasingly direct political activity towards the new center, as a process of spill-over is set in motion (Haas 1967).

Figure 1: The Argument of Neofunctionalism

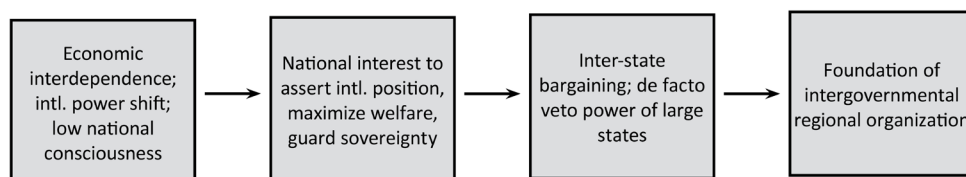


Source: Author.

3.2 Intergovernmentalism

In Stanley Hoffmann's view, the creation of the European Communities was made possible by the simultaneous "temporary demise of nationalism," the loss of wealth and political power in the international arena, the entanglement between two hegemons, and increased economic interdependence (Hoffmann 1966: 139). Put more abstractly, interdependence as well as the necessity to establish and assert one's position in international relations after a major power shift were the basic conditions for regional integration to begin with (see Figure 2). Nation states seek to create institutions to reduce anarchy and facilitate cooperation because they are the key to solving collective action problems and helping states to pursue their interests. However, driven by economic interests as well as geopolitical and ideological motivations, states only agree to cede sovereignty through intergovernmental decision-making and in exchange for benefits. Yet, "in areas of key importance to the national interest, nations prefer the certainty, or the self-controlled uncertainty, of national self-reliance, to the uncontrolled uncertainty of the untested blender [of supranational decision-making]" (Hoffmann 1966: 144). Intergovernmentalism thus places its emphasis on nation states, whereas supranational and societal actors are mostly regarded as irrelevant. Therefore, the development of regionalism remains dependent on the willingness of nation states. It is understood as an inter-state bargaining process that reflects the power asymmetries between states, according to which smaller states can be "bought" and larger states have de facto veto power.

Figure 2: The Argument of Intergovernmentalism

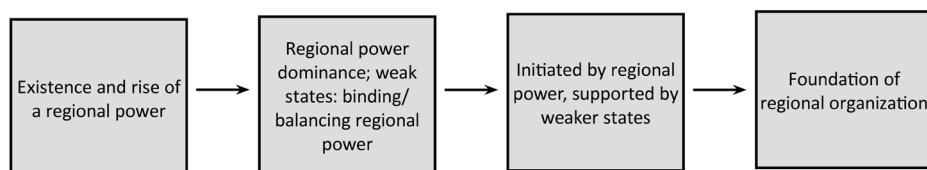


Source: Author.

3.3 Regional Powers

Detlef Nolte (2010) defines regional powers similarly to other conceptualizations: They are geographically part of the respective region, have the largest share of power in that region, exercise some degree of influence in the region, and are capable of making other states and actors, both in- and outside of the region, accept their leadership (for other definitions, see Destradi 2010). In Nolte's definition, there is no mention of specific context conditions except for the rise and existence of a regional power. Nolte emphasizes a power-based logic in the development of regionalism: By institutionalizing a sphere of influence and aggregating power, regional organizations become a reliable and cost-efficient tool of domination, exclusion, and inclusion. Regional institutionalization is therefore best understood through the regional power's interests, especially if it is an emerging power seeking to increase its international influence. Weaker states, on the other hand, join or create regional organizations to bind and balance a regional power; regional organizations allow weaker states to constrain the regional power through rules and procedures, to calculate or even influence its behavior, to advocate their own interests within the power hierarchy, and to build coalitions. While one might expect the regional power to be the initiator of the process, the final outcome can differ from the initial strategy because practical implementation still depends on the reaction of the weaker states (see also Hurrell 2005; Nolte 2010, 2011).

Figure 3: The Argument of the Regional Powers Approach



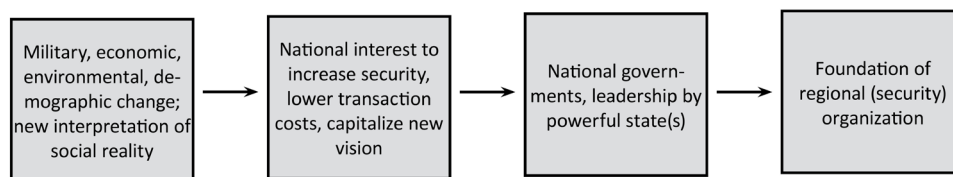
Source: Author.

3.4 Security Community

To begin with, there must be a perceivable change in the international context for states to seek closer cooperation, ranging from a mutual security threat or a shift in military power to environmental, demographic, and economic changes or events that change interpretations of social reality (see Figure 4). Consequently, states develop common interests in order to increase their security, lower transaction costs, encourage further exchange to benefit from gains from trade, and to “capitalize on a particular vision of a better material progress (economic, environmental, health, human rights etc.)” (Adler/Barnett 1998: 50). Consequently, national governments seek closer ties to each other through institutions or organizations, which allow them to institutionalize reciprocity, to identify common interests, to produce rules and procedures and thus accountability, to act as arenas of social learning, and to facilitate trust through constructing a common future. Security institutions play a particularly prominent role in this approach since they are considered to “reflect a belief that security is interdependent and should be overseen by a collective

body” (Adler/Barnett 1998: 52). This view is supported by decreases in military spending, deployment, and planning. Here, the authors are explicit about power: The approach “is not antagonistic to the language of power; indeed, it is dependent on it” (Adler/Barnett 1998: 52). Powerful states or coalitions of a few provide leadership and thereby stabilize and facilitate the process, not necessarily through coercion, but also by providing a sense of purpose and a future vision, for example through reproducing an inter-subjective idea which becomes the common goal. As a last step, mutual trust and a collective identity emerge, ultimately leading to a dependable expectation of peaceful change; as mentioned before, this is excluded from the analysis.

Figure 4: The Argument of the Security Community Approach



Source: Author.

To summarize, the above theories list economic interdependence, weak national consciousness, a loss of relative power in international relations, the existence or rise of a regional power, change in the international political landscape, and a new social paradigm as context conditions. They focus on different actors – elites and states – that drive the creation of regional organizations and subsequently the development of different interests that are then at stake: elite preferences and national interests in power, security, and welfare.

4. The Foundation of UNASUR

This section turns to the analysis by way of reorganizing the existing literature into context conditions, interests, and actors. Section 4.1 highlights factors determining South America’s international and intra-continental relations at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Section 4.2 and 4.3 are devoted to exploring who had a major interest in UNASUR’s foundation, and who took the initiative and drove the process. Finally, section 4.4 evaluates the significance and explanatory power of the respective integration theories.

4.1 Context Conditions

A New Social Paradigm. In the early 2000s, a new political climate developed across South America, articulated as mass mobilization and the election of left-wing governments with clear anti-US and post-neoliberal discourses and policy programs. Although far from being a homogenous movement (Cameron 2009), this so-called “pink tide” advocated a clear break from the Washington Consensus, the rejection of US influence in Latin America, and a mindset of social and economic resource sharing (Castaneda 2006; Levitsky/Robert 2011). Moderately left governments were elected, such as Lula and Rousseff in Brazil (2003-11, since 2011), Lagos and Bachelet in Chile (2000-06, 2010-14), and Nestor and Kristina Kirchner in Argentina (2003-07, since 2007), as well as more radically socialist governments headed by Chávez in Venezuela (1999-2013) and Morales in Bolivia (since 2006). In all other current member states of UNASUR, too, left-wing governments had come into power by the end of the 2000s (Lievesley/Ludlam 2009; Riggiozzi 2011; Tsolakis 2012). Interpretations as to the implications for the region and regionalism vary. On the one side, it has been argued that the election of these governments was a sign of strengthened nationalism in South America as reflected by nationalist economic and social policies. Examples of such policies are the nationalization of energy companies in Venezuela and Bolivia as well as the re-introduction of protectionist policies during and after the economic crisis in Argentina, and minor, but ongoing border disputes between Peru and Chile and between Uruguay and Argentina (Christensen 2007). On the other hand, Riggiozzi (2011: 425) advocates a more cosmopolitan stance:

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.

Similarly, Brinceño-Ruiz and Ribeiro Hoffmann (2015) argue that the foundation of ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) symbolizes a new model of regionalism which favors social development over trade. In any case, this new social paradigm has served as background for several political developments conducive to the foundation of UNASUR.

Stagnation of Open Regional Integration. Both Mercosur and the Andean Community relied on a very neo-liberal mindset based on the Washington Consensus and the “open regionalism” doctrine of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Dabène 2012). However, their achievements caused general disappointment, and around the turn of the millennium, “integration was paralyzed, and the trade flows remained at a level comparable to that of 1991” (Dabène 2009: 167). When Mercosur celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2001, its members were struggling with economic and financial crises, especially Argentina. Governments had to introduce severe austerity policies to receive payments from the International Monetary Fund while turning their backs on Mercosur. Contrary to general expectations, intra-Mercosur trade decreased drastically and economic convergence remained very low (Christensen 2007). This contributed strongly to the delegitimization of the Washington Consensus, ultimately leading to a halt in the neoliberal wave of integration and the election of many left-leaning governments, as outlined above (Bianculli 2016; Dabène 2012). At the same time, the Andean Community was deeply divided

between opponents (Columbia, Peru) and supporters (Ecuador, Bolivia) of Venezuela's president Chávez and his energy policy (Dabène 2009).

Estrangement from the United States and Decline of Hemispheric Cooperation. The negotiations for the FTAA, initiated by US President Bush senior, were led with very little enthusiasm and ultimately failed in 2005 for several reasons. Most importantly, the election of left-wing governments throughout Latin America severely dampened the support for the FTAA. Opposed especially by Venezuela, it was “widely viewed as a form of trade colonization by the US of South America” (Baumann 2008: 4; see also Kellogg 2007). At the same time, as the declining hegemon of the Western hemisphere, the United States had little capacity left for its traditional “backyard” Latin America due to the War on Terror and its military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. When the FTAA's failure became foreseeable, the United States fostered its competitive liberalization strategy in relation to the non-OECD world, which “opened a race for access to [the US] market, thereby enticing countries to open their economies to US companies” (Tussie 2009: 179). As a result, the United States, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic signed the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) in 2004 (Dabène 2009). Subsequently, Singapore, Australia, Morocco, Bahrain, South Korea, all DR-CAFTA members, Panama, Chile, Peru, and Colombia signed trade concession treaties with the United States. Arguably, this strategy aimed at constraining Brazilian leadership in the Caribbean and at preventing the creation of a link between Mercosur and the Andean Community (Riggirozzi/Tussie 2012; Tussie 2009).

At the same time, the importance of hemispheric security radically declined (Weiffen 2012; Weiffen et al. 2013). During the Special Security Conference in Mexico in 2003, the differences between the OAS member states became all too visible, especially their different understandings of security and their policy emphases (Herz 2010). In 2005, attempts by the US government to establish democracy monitoring mechanisms within the OAS, which aimed to legitimize Chávez, were blocked by a South American coalition (Chador/McCarthy-Jones 2014). Likewise, the American fight on ‘narcoterrorism’ and the US attempts to divide South American governments into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were vehemently opposed by most South American countries (Chador/McCarthy-Jones 2014). Increasingly, South American states sought to frame problems as regional rather than hemispheric and to find solutions to problems at the regional level (Weiffen et al. 2013). These developments are clearly opposed to a vision of a pan-Americanism led by the United States and instead favor an autonomous South American regionalism (cf. Bianculli 2016; Hurrell 1995a).

Regional Leadership. Although the Brazilian foreign policy agenda is discussed in section 4.2 in more detail, let it suffice to say at this point that Brazil developed a firm “belief that it should assume its ‘natural’ role as a ‘big country’ in world affairs” (Soares De Lima/Hirst 2006: 21). Along with the other BRICS countries, Brazil's international behavior has clearly demonstrated its intention to play a more active role in global affairs and assume greater responsibilities with regard to South-South diplomacy, as well as at the regional and the global level. Brazil's foreign policy has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years and the country has been labeled a regional great power (Hurrell 1992), a regional hegemon (Kellogg 2007), a consensual hegemon (Burgess 2008), a cooperative hegemon (Pedersen 2002; Poggio Teixeira 2011), and a cooperative regional leading power (Gratius 2004). By the standard of Nolte's definition, Brazil is indeed a regional power. The Argentinian economic crisis of 2001 weakened Brazil's most important continental rival in terms of international and regional influence, and simultaneously, the retreat of the United States

from the region allowed Brazil to assert itself in its own sphere of influence (Gratius/Saraiva 2013). By consequence, the other South American states now faced an even more powerful international and regional player right on their doorstep. Meanwhile, Venezuela under Chávez became Brazil's most powerful competitor at the regional level (Burges 2007; Chador/McCarthy-Jones 2014).

Pacific Trade. The four commodities mainly exported from Latin America are copper, oil, soy, and coffee, accounting for about 66 percent of total raw material exports. Latin America is one of the world's top producers of these commodities, with around 47 percent of the world's soy bean crop, 40 percent of copper and 9 percent of mineral oil. Meanwhile, by 2003 China's tremendous economic growth and demand for raw materials had made it the world's largest importer of cotton, copper, and soybeans, and the fourth largest importer of mineral oil. Its demand for copper and soy beans was rising at a rate of 50 percent per year at the time, while its demand for mineral oil had increased by 19 percent (Blázquez-Lidoy et al. 2006). This development translated into the increased importance of accessing the Pacific. Although associated with the danger of high dependency and with being trapped in raw material production, an OECD study called China's eastward turn "good news for Latin America. In economic terms, this event could be considered as a positive demand shock" (Blázquez-Lidoy et al. 2006: 26; Gallagher/Porzecanski 2010).

Low Economic Interdependence. For economic interdependence between regions to develop, two conditions must be met: First, a variety of commodities and services must be traded and second, members of one region must export products of interest to the other; that is, products that they do not produce themselves. Yet in South America exports are highly concentrated in a few sectors, with only ten products accounting for more than half of all exports. Andean Community economies are even more specialized than Mercosur economies, with ten products accounting for about two thirds of exports (Burges 2005). Clearly, extra-regional trade has mattered most for South American states over the last decades, whereas intra-regional trade has been constantly at fairly low levels, with 20,1 percent in 1995 and 24,4 percent in 2001 (Martín 2007; UN 1996, 2002). Due to the relative homogeneity of regional exports, there is relatively little demand for the region's products in the region itself, with one important exception: Venezuelan gas and oil are in great demand in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. Likewise, business in South America is more strongly integrated with business outside of the continent than with regional business. Overall, despite the existence of Mercosur and the Andean Community, South America is relatively weakly integrated in terms of economic interdependence when compared to Europe and North America (Burges 2005; Curran/Zignago 2012).

At this point, the following interim conclusions can be drawn. Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism do not seem suitable to capture the context of UNASUR's foundation: Economic interdependence, which is assumed to be the most important condition, is too low to be of explanatory value for this case, thereby ruling out the applicability of these theories. Likewise, it is not clear whether national consciousness in South America is in fact all that weak, which would be considered another important context condition, especially in neofunctionalism. And, contrary to what intergovernmentalism suggests, South America has not lost any power in global comparison. However, the context condition suggested by the regional powers approach is confirmed: Brazil can indeed be considered a regional power. At the same time, both the declining relative influence of the United States over Latin America and the perception of the DR-CAFTA's establishment as an intrusion into the Brazilian sphere of influence, have further supported Brazil's assertive

foreign policy and its rise. The context conditions mentioned by the security community approach are also given: Although there was not one water-shed event that changed the international landscape, a significant number of developments took place around the turn of the millennium, which amounted to a significant change. The unipolar world of the 1990s was developing towards multipolarity, with rising powers such as China and Brazil claiming international relevance. Meanwhile, trade was shifting towards the Pacific, the United States was losing its hegemonic status, and hemispheric cooperation was in decline. The new social paradigm of anti-Americanism and post-neoliberalism had come close to a new interpretation of social reality. And, although the stagnation of other regional projects in South America was not a pertinent change, it did make the foundation of a new regional organization more plausible. Considering that the context conditions assumed by neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism are not given, the following sections now focus on the propositions of the remaining theories, the regional powers approach and the security community approach.

4.2 *Interests*

In this section, I look at the interests in the region that were conducive to UNASUR's foundation. These include first of all the interests of the most powerful states of the region: Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina. Finally, I discuss the vision of South America as a zone of peace and the widespread interest in regional energy integration.

Brazil. Under the Cardoso and Lula governments (1999-2003; 2003-2011), Brazil actively pursued a foreign policy strategy guided by the principles of integration autonomy, universalism, and grandeur (Borges 2009; Gratius 2004; Soares De Lima/Hirst 2006; Wehner 2011). It aimed at becoming a power at the international and regional level and at fostering the transformation of international rules, norms, and institutions in favor of Brazil and the Global South. This included the formulation of active positions in international and hemispheric trade negotiations, deepened relations with the BRICS, South-South coalition-building, promoting Brazilian candidates to become the head of the Inter-Development Bank and the World Trade Organization, suggesting the notion of 'responsibility while protecting,' and pushing its aspiration to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Equally prominent examples are its command of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti after 2004, the diplomatic efforts during the Honduras crisis 2009, and its contribution to the Rio Group (Brands 2010; Gratius/Saraiva 2013; Stuenkel/Tourinho 2014).

Regional policy was considered an efficient way to realize Brazil's global ambitions and policy goals, and by the turn of the millennium, South America had become a geopolitical priority: "The greatest priority of our foreign policy during my Government will be the building of a politically-stable, prosperous and united South America, founded upon ideals of democracy and social justice" (da Silva cited in N/A 2003: 187), Lula stated in his inaugural speech. Since 2000, Mercosur had served increasingly as a platform to consolidate Brazilian power interests in South America and thus lost its status as a focus of Brazilian foreign policy. Instead, Lula's administration "prioritised the construction of a structured South American framework under Brazilian leadership" as a way to establish itself as South America's leading power and thereby gain political weight at the international level (Christensen 2007; Gratius/Saraiva 2013: 2-4). A related ambition

was to offset the other potential leaders of the region – Venezuela and Mexico – and to soft-balance the United States. However, since Brazil was not powerful enough to impose its positions on its neighbors, it made use of economic and soft power resources, including regional organizations and region-building (Nolte 2011). While Brazil's relations in the Latin American context were institutionalized through the Rio Group and the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA), there was no equivalent organization in South America. This sub-regional level had the advantage that it excluded Mexico and kept a certain geographical distance to the United States, and thus seemed particularly conducive to Brazil's strategy once Argentina had been weakened economically and politically. In sum, by the beginning of the 2000s, Brazil had established itself a regional power in South America and had an interest in institutionalizing its status to further strengthen its influence.

Venezuela. Chávez was amongst the first to call for increased political rather than economic integration in a bid for autonomy from the United States and to push for “a more original and endogenously inspired post-liberal regional order” (Chador/McCarthy-Jones 2014: 211). Chávez broke with Venezuela's traditional pattern of being engaged in cooperative schemes with the Caribbean and the United States, and shifted its geopolitical focus to South America; regional integration along Bolivarian ideals became the centerpiece of his foreign policy (Chador/McCarthy-Jones 2014; Bianculli 2016). He proposed a “South American NATO” in 2003, and initiated the foundation of ALBA in 2004. Even though the latter stood in competition with Brazilian ideas of a regional structure at first, it did not prevent Chávez from supporting Brazil's South American regional initiatives. After all, Venezuela and Brazil were united in pursuing a South American vocation excluding Mexico and the United States. In other words, both Brazil and Venezuela were eager to initiate new regional projects that would allow for regional cooperation and the realization of their foreign policy strategies in a more encompassing way than existing institutions did (Weiffen et al. 2013). In 2005, they started a strategic alliance and signed 15 cooperation agreements in various policy areas. Economically, Venezuela profited greatly from Brazil's economic growth and its increased demand for energy resources (Flemes/Wehner 2012), and in the UN General Assembly, Venezuela and Brazil voted identically in more than 80 percent of cases, indicating a high degree of accord in foreign policy (Botelho 2008). Even though some authors portray Venezuela as a direct competitor of Brazil for regional leadership (Burgess 2007; Weiffen et al. 2013) and others as a secondary power on equal ranks with Argentina (Flemes/Wehner 2012), it seems that Venezuela pursued a strategy of binding Brazil through pro-integrative policies but at the same time advocating for its distinct post-liberal ideas, thus seeking to institutionalize and spread them across the region. All of these purposes were to be accomplished through the creation of a regional organization.

Argentina. Although traditionally Argentina had viewed Brazil as a competitive partner without accepting its supremacy, it had lost perceptibly in comparative power due to its economic crisis in 2001. The country became isolated internationally after it had broken off relations with the International Monetary Fund and sought distance from the United States. As compensation, its foreign policy priority in the crisis' aftermath became the establishment of closer and more institutionalized relations with its immediate neighbors. Argentina thus pursued a very pro-integrative and cooperative strategy under Nestor Kirchner, with an emphasis on Mercosur and the South American region, and bilaterally with Brazil and Venezuela. Seen as a historically unprecedented peak, Argentina concluded 10 agreements with Brazil in 2003 and 23 in 2005; their votes in the UN General Assembly coincided in over 80 percent of cases, indicating a very similar

foreign-political position. At the same time, Argentina and Venezuela created an alliance to balance out Brazil and to prevent the region from serving as a stepping stone for Brazil's international power ambitions (Botelho 2008; Flandes/Wehner 2012; Wehner 2011). In the mid-2000s, Argentina therefore constituted a weakened secondary power which aligned with Brazilian and Venezuelan aspirations of region-building.

A Zone of Peace. South American states share a common value of national sovereignty and the clear division between the domestic sphere – where there may be criminality and intrastate conflict – and the international sphere – where there is peace. Creating and maintaining peace and stability in South America has been an essential factor in the foreign policy of most South American states in the last few decades of the 20th century. National elites then argued that a peaceful and stable continent would attract larger amounts of foreign direct investment and official development aid than turbulent areas in Africa. Despite multiple border disputes and general readiness to use military force, the number of violent conflicts in the last century has been very low, and a strong diplomatic culture has prevented these conflicts from developing into inter-state wars with high costs. All states adhere to international treaties of arms control and non-proliferation and have established the principle of absence of weapons of mass destruction (Herz 2010, 2011; Hurrell 1998).

In sharp contrast to the geopolitical doctrines of the 1960s and 1970s, South American states began re-approaching each other in the 1990s. Strategies of dissuasion and deterrence were replaced by confidence-building measures. These included measures to foster military cooperation, to increase the transparency of defense policies, and to share information through, for example, regular informal exchanges and the publication of selected military records and official White Books. As a result, tensions waned, balance of power discourses disappeared from the political stage, and threat perceptions were reduced (Battaglino 2012; Hurrell 1998). The military presence of the United States in the Caribbean was increasingly criticized and a common understanding to protect the state and South America developed. Because interventions and coups d'états – sometimes supported by external actors – had been highly unsettling for the region and presented a far more pressing security problem than inter-state conflicts, the maintenance of state sovereignty remains of great importance to governments today. In summary, “the notions of sovereign equality, non-intervention and international legality” are key to the South American understanding of security (Herz 2010: 608).

Energy and Infrastructure Integration. Another factor central to South American security is a non-traditional aspect, namely energy. Although the continent is a net exporter of energy resources, states are unable to guarantee constant levels of energy supply as illustrated by the energy crises in Brazil in 2001 and Argentina in 2004, and ongoing electricity rationing in Argentina and Venezuela (Burgess 2005; De Oliveira 2010). Since the end of the 1990s, the viability of energy integration has been discussed with more vigor, and an influential study commissioned by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC; Ramos 2004) has demonstrated its enormous potential benefits (De Oliveira 2010). At the first South American Summit in 2000, the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) was founded by all South American states. This 40 billion dollar project aimed at connecting the continent in terms of transport, communication and energy infrastructure and was supported by three large regional development banks. It included the construction of large highways, deep water ports, and hydropower plants. In parallel, though not stated in the IIRSA framework, agreements on the construction

of a natural gas and oil pipeline network through the Amazon River Basin were signed in 2005 and 2006, connecting Venezuela with Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. As part of its oil diplomacy, Venezuela concluded energy agreements with the Caribbean states (Petrocaribe), the Andean states (Petroandino), and the Southern Cone states (Petrosur), providing these with Venezuelan oil at favorable conditions (Flemes/Wehner 2012; Moreira 2007). At the same time, a pipeline to Colombia would serve to access the Pacific more easily. If South American states were importing Venezuela's natural gas, they would import less of its natural oil, which could then be sold to China. Similarly, Brazil developed an interest in exporting oil to China via Colombian ports after its state-owned oil company, Petrobras, made exploratory drillings in 2006 and found promising reserves (Kellogg 2007). Hence, there was a marked interest in energy integration across South America and several initiatives were started; yet, none of the projects was embedded in a more institutionalized structure.

Going back to the integration theories, the interests conducive to UNASUR's creation correspond much better with the security community approach than the regional powers approach. While both approaches do capture Brazil's interest in institutionalizing its status as a regional power, the role of Venezuela as a secondary power – and at the same time competitor for the regional power status – does not neatly fit the narrative of the regional powers approach. By contrast, in the security community approach, a primary power may be supported by a second state, which therefore is not only interested in binding the primary power but pursues independent policy goals, as did Venezuela. Moreover, the willingness to institutionalize the norm of non-intervention and military confidence-building and to increase regional energy security, are additional aspects of security that are mentioned by the security community approach but disregarded by the regional powers approach.

4.3 Actors

As a last step, this subsection examines who took the initiative and drove the foundation process of UNASUR. The prevailing picture is that UNASUR is “Brazil-sponsored” (Malamud 2013: 5; Burges 2008; Gratius/Saraiva 2013; Poggio Teixeira 2011; Wehner 2011), and indeed, UNASUR's creation was the result of a series of presidential summits initiated by Brazil. During the preparations for the Third Summit of the Americas for negotiating the FTAA, the Brazilian President Cardoso made the strategic move to invite the heads of states to the first South American Presidential Summit, which took place in September 2000 in Brasilia. The summit expressly addressed the idea of regional integration beyond trade liberalization, embracing issues such as democracy, peace, justice, and prosperity – in the opportune moment when all leaders of South America were united in criticizing the FTA for lacking a social dimension and failing to address grave problems in South America, such as infrastructure or energy security. Today, this very first South American summit is hence considered a landmark in the continents' history – it gave “symbolic gravitas to South America as a viable geopolitical entity” (Burges 2009: 59; Poggio Teixeira 2011). By the end of the summit, the Brasilia Declaration announced the decision to create a South American Union (Kellogg 2007: 196). Cardoso stated that the summit created a spirit of togetherness, and moved forward the idea of regional energy, transport, and infrastructure integration (Cardoso as cited in De Oliveira 2010: 5). The second summit was held in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in July 2002, where 162 major infrastructure projects were

adopted and the heads of state declared South America a Zone of Peace and Cooperation. At the third summit in December 2004, the Cuzco Declaration was adopted which announced the decision to form the South American Community of Nations (SACN), the predecessor of UNASUR. The decisive move was made – an exclusively South American regional organization was created. Meanwhile, Briceño-Ruiz and Ribeiro Hoffmann (2015) have argued that Venezuela was instrumental in the transformation of SACN into UNASUR because Chávez led an intra-SACN coalition that criticized the free-trade pillar of SACN. When Chávez suggested to rename SACN into UNASUR and to leave the free-trade agenda behind, Brazil aligned with this approach, and in May 2008, the constitutive treaty of UNASUR was signed.

At the same time, Brazil suggested the creation of a South American Defense Council (CDS) as the central sectoral council. It was formally installed in 2009 and is guided by the principles of non-intervention, sovereignty, and territoriality. Its primary purpose is to promote political dialogue and cooperation in defense matters, to prevent inter-state crises, and to contribute to crisis management. It has since been instrumental in a number of crises, for example when the United States was about to deploy military forces to Columbia or when Venezuela threatened to nationalize Columbian energy firms. Secondly, the CDS is the expression of self-organized defense with the aim of limiting external influences, developing endogenous capacities, closing technological gaps to the world's leading powers, promoting South America as a zone of peace, and creating an independent identity for the region in defense matters. Trust-building plays a pivotal role: The first Action Plan of 2009-2010 emphasized the necessity to guarantee transparency in military spending and to share defense information. Likewise, cooperation to reach a collective regional position in multilateral defense fora was concluded (Battaglino 2012).

Both the regional powers approach and the security community approach postulate that the most powerful state of the region initiates regional integration, which was the case here as the analysis has shown. However, it is the security community approach which can best account for Venezuela's role in the process. Moreover, the security community approach allows for the evaluation of the type of regional organization that was created: The CDS as a security organization has special importance in regional integration because its foundation necessitates higher levels of trust than other issue areas.

4.4 Evaluation and Outlook

In an attempt to address an existing literature gap, this paper has examined the creation of UNASUR in a systematic manner through the lens of regional integration theories. The analysis has used four theories to explain UNASUR's foundation and to examine pertinent context conditions, the interests involved, and the actors driving the process. Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism were deemed unable to capture the context, given that their most important assumptions, high economic interdependence and (temporary) low national consciousness, were not met. The rest of the analysis focused on the remaining two approaches. The rise of Brazil as a regional power established the assumed context condition of the regional powers approach, while the political changes in the 1990s and 2000s, the shift in power distribution, and the emergence of a new social paradigm, proved to be in line with the security community approach. Meanwhile, the interests of the actors involved were accounted for only by the security community

approach. While regional power Brazil sought to adjust to the new situation, to secure its current position, and to institutionalize the South American region, Venezuela did not only seek to soft-balance Brazil, but its activities towards post-liberal regionalism were directly conducive to UNASUR's foundation. This decisive role of the second most powerful state is not part of the regional powers approach, which understands the actions of primary and secondary powers mainly in the context of their roles within the power hierarchy. The security community approach is much more flexible with regard to power relations and actors; even though it postulates that one powerful state leads the cooperation process, a second or even a third state may support its activities. It can thereby account for the roles of both Brazil and Venezuela in the process of summitry leading to the foundation of UNASUR. Moreover, the regional powers approach fails to incorporate three other vital security interests of the South American states at the time: to institutionalize the principle of non-intervention to increase regional security, to offset the US influence in the region, and to establish energy security. All three are well explained by the security community approach. Beyond being able to explain the foundational process in detail, the security community approach has two further advantages: It is able to account for the nature of the regional organization that was created, which is not specified by the regional powers approach. Additionally, its third tier offers a theoretical perspective pointing towards the future development.

In conclusion, the two theories emerging from European Union studies seem too context-specific to account for this non-European example. Likewise, the narrow focus on Brazil of the regional powers approach does not allow us to capture the entire picture – this is a classical constructivist critique, pointing out that the focus on power neglects too many other aspects of social reality which do matter. The multidimensional narrative of the security community approach is far more comprehensive and thus able to explain the entire foundation process: Based on the power shift in favor of Brazil, the new anti-neoliberal social paradigm especially advocated by Venezuela, and international political changes, such as the estrangement from the United States and the decline of hemispheric cooperation, a demand for regionalism on the South American level emerges. Brazil seeks to adjust and to secure its new powerful position, while Venezuela aims at guaranteeing its own security vis-à-vis its powerful neighbor and at pushing its own regional agenda. Additionally, all South American states have an interest in promoting energy security and in institutionalizing the principle of national sovereignty and non-intervention. Subsequently, Brazil acts as the main entrepreneur initiating the first South American Summit in 2000 and suggesting the creation of UNASUR and the CDS in 2008, whereby Venezuela significantly influences the political direction of these initiatives. What remains open to debate at this point is the question whether UNASUR – or South America, for that matter – will proceed to develop into a fully-fledged security community. Only with the emergence of a collective identity and mutual trust does a security community come into existence; accordingly, collective identities in South America might prove a worthy subject of study in the near future.

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