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Abstract

New forms of regionalism are now a central element in global governance. It is sometimes suggested that new regionalism represents an opportunity for transnational civil society activism. I explore this argument through a comparison of processes of collective action in two emerging frames of regionalism governance in the Americas, the FTAA/Summit of the Americas and Mercosur. I show that, while civil society activism has regionalized to some extent in relation to both hemispheric regionalism and sub-regionalism, this process is far more marked in the former. I suggest, further, that the influence of civil society actors in regionalist governance in the Americas is extremely limited. This is due to persistent institutional barriers to inclusion, the practical obstacles for many groups of scaling up to the regional/transnational level and the particular difficulties associated with accessing trade-based negotiations.

Keywords: Regionalism; governance; transnational; civil society; Latin America; Mercosur; FTAA/Summits of the Americas.

New forms of region-building are now an inescapable feature of the global political economy. Once viewed primarily as a regulatory frame through which state actors pushed the progressive liberalization of trade and investment (Gamble and Payne 1996; Grugel and Hout 1999), regionalism is increasingly, and more fruitfully, conceptualized as a broader project of governance which aims to refashion the norms and the networks that underpin policy-making and the ways in which authority and legitimacy are exercised in bounded but post-sovereign spaces (Payne 2000; Phillips 2004). It is sometimes assumed...
that region-building of this sort creates opportunities for transnational collective action and social activism via either inclusion of society-based organizations in policy-making or grassroots mobilization coordinated across regional states (Marchand et al. 1999; Mittleman 2000; Piper and Uhlin 2003). However, the empirical foundations of such arguments are still thin and it is not clear how far collective action at the regionalist level has, in practice, entered the repertoire of civil society groups (Grugel 2004). This article is an attempt to ground debate rather more than has hitherto been the case through a focused comparison of collective action within two distinct models of regionalist governance in the Americas. ¹

Since the 1990s, Latin American states have embarked upon a range of region-building initiatives which establish institutions and rules for policy discussion and political and economic regulation at the level of both the hemisphere and the sub-regions of the Americas (the Southern Cone, North America, the Andes, etc.). The best known of such projects are the US-led North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), which was followed by proposals for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the creation of Summits of the Americas, designed to serve as the political frame for hemispheric integration, and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), a sub-regional project to link the countries of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay in the Southern Cone. If NAFTA, the FTAA and the Summits are perceived as attempts to legitimize and embed US hegemony across the Americas, Mercosur is usually regarded as an alternative project of integration, based on inter-governmentalism, common cultural values (‘latin-ness’) and a view that South America – which Mercosur aspires to represent – is best served by a degree of distance and autonomy from the US.

My central concern is to identify how far these two distinct models of regionalist governance serve as organizing frames for civil society activism. I show that both hemispheric regionalism (the Summit of the Americas process) and sub-regionalism (Mercosur) have stimulated new forms of collective action and provide opportunities for activism by civil society groups committed to challenging or influencing the trade agenda or concerned with the welfare consequences of trade liberalization. However, collective action is considerably more extensive and civil society movements more visible at the hemispheric level than within Mercosur. In the Southern Cone, despite national traditions of collective action, sub-regional mobilization is thinner and weaker. Why should this be so? To some extent, it reflects the very different institutional arrangements of sub- and hemispheric regionalism. While consultations with civil society actors are part of the formal structures of hemispheric governance, such consultations are entirely dependent upon the initiative of member states in Mercosur, and civil society inputs depend largely upon the willingness of member states to carry them forward. Not surprisingly, then, sub-regional integration has not become a target for large-scale social mobilization or protest. This stands in sharp contrast to hemispheric region-building, which is viewed by many social movements as a reassertion of US power over Latin
America. As a result, hemispheric regionalism has become the site of sometimes dramatic protest by anti-liberalization and pro-social justice groups. There are, in sum, significant differences in how civil society movements respond to and are caught up in projects of regionalist governance in the Americas.

Nevertheless, in one key respect, the relationship between civil society and emerging structures of regionalist governance is remarkably similar: independent of the institutional arrangements for region-building or the scale of activism it has engendered, civil society organizations have enjoyed little success in term of influencing the policy agenda of region-building. I attribute this to the persistence of institutional barriers to civil society inclusion, the difficulties facing civil society movements in demanding inclusion in apparently trade-based debates and the fact that civil society groups, to the extent to which they are invited to participate, are invited to already established agendas of discussion. I examine what the case studies suggest about the relationship between regionalist governance and transnational collective action in the final section of the article.

Civil society and contentious politics in Latin America

Exploring the dynamic between projects of regionalism and collective action in Latin America requires, as a first step, some understanding of the nature of civil society and contemporary social activism and its relationship with regional states. A useful starting point is to note the extensive weaknesses of democracy, alongside the ingrained tradition of limited and elitist government, which have, *grosso modo*, shaped regional patterns of social activism. Despite a shift away from authoritarianism in the 1980s and the sustained discursive commitment on the part of governments to democracy-building, the quality of democracy across Latin America is poor. Problems include weak, under-funded and ineffective institutions, low levels of public faith in governments, political elites and the state, social and political exclusion, inadequate rights protection and creaky and partial welfare systems which rarely reach the poorest and the socially and economically marginal; many countries also suffer from endemic violence and state corruption. Externally funded democracy-building programmes have tended to focus on strengthening the formal institutions of government and have, at least until relatively recently, ignored the importance of creating effective cultures of civil and social rights. This can be attributed to some extent to the difficulties of constructing social and political citizenship in economically hard times (Graham and Pettinato 2003). Certainly, budgetary constraints on governments since the 1980s have made meaningful social reform very difficult (Barrientos 2004; Hall 2005). In some countries of the region, democratization was also encased within terms of transition which created ‘reserved domains’ of authoritarianism, as in Chile and Nicaragua for example, making social reforms difficult to enact and
thereby de-linking the concept of democracy from that of social and economic inclusion (Linz and Stepan 1996).

But economic and political constraints inherited from the 1980s and 1990s do not, on their own, account for Latin America’s poor record with regard to democracy and citizenship. Just as fundamentally, the limitations of democracy now reflect a long-standing and deep-seated hostility towards ‘ordinary’ people’ on the part of governing elites and an ambiguity as to whether, in fact, the poor are worthy of civic inclusion (Jelin 1996). As Cruz (2003: 96) argues, the concept of citizenship was actually ‘evicted from the realm of the national imagination’ during democratization. As a result, non-elites still find themselves outside ‘the daily business of politics’ (Cruz 2003: 96). Indeed, what citizenship means, in reality, in Latin America is unclear since states rarely act to make rights real for the poor and other vulnerable social groups.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these traditions of elite-led government, a vibrant culture of society-based movements and popular organization emerged remarkably early in Latin America (Forment 2003). Once democratization was under way in the 1980s, and with the threat of open repression and the real and potential violence which characterized authoritarian rule diminished, rights-based social movements erupted in fields as diverse as education, ethnicity, housing, land, the environment, gender, trade, labour rights and production. Most post-democratization social movements have, as they pressed their claims, found themselves once again in opposition to the state. This has been intensified by the ways in which neoliberal restructuring has impinged on state organization and state capacity, making it difficult for states to respond to pressures for social reform (Oxhorn and Ducatzeiler 1998). Policed tightly across Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal reform has resulted in (sometimes) leaner but less effective states, shambolic and discredited public sectors and the privatization of public goods, all of which have led to rising levels of unemployment, poverty and social marginalization (ECLAC 2002; IDB 2002).

Nevertheless, despite the vibrancy of social movement traditions and periodically intense periods of mobilization, social protest has often proved difficult to sustain, even when grievances are strongly-felt. Eckstein (2004) suggests that this reflects a rational response on the part of activists to the difficulties of sustaining activities over time: individuals bear a high cost for engagement and, since returns are often meagre or nonexistent, activists may decide to exit rather than to continue to seek a voice. Professionalized or middle-class movements and NGOs have perhaps experienced fewer difficulties because they enjoy greater formal and informal resources (Taylor 2004). But they too they have had little impact on government policy, especially in the economic and social domains. The exclusion of critical civil society organizations from politics has impacted on how democratization is understood by non-elites: activists, and indeed ordinary people in general, no longer always hold liberal democracy in high regard. Lagos (2004), for example, reports that...
up to half of the population of Latin America is ambivalent in its support for democracy.

In this context, Pearce’s (2004) notion that a core distinction within Latin America’s civil society movements refers to perceptions of the liberal state is pertinent. For Pearce (2004), whether activists accept the liberal democratic state as legitimate and see it as the legal source of rights, despite its manifold failures or whether, instead, they have opted out of or lost faith in liberal politics is crucial for explaining trajectories of mobilization. This distinction has been expressed elsewhere in the literature on protest and contention variously as an ideological dichotomy (‘moderates’ versus ‘radicals’) or a difference in strategies of activism (‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’) or in projects of citizenship (‘invented’ or ‘invited’ citizenship) (Cornwall 2002; Smith and Korzeniewicz 2003; Miraftab 2003). Overall, insider/moderate groups privilege collaboration with state actors as a way to encourage policy change while radicals/outsiders focus on contestation and opposition. Insiders/moderates seek to enter negotiations and make use of existing policy-making spaces; outsiders/radicals choose instead to organize mass opposition. Insider/moderates depend on the deployment and collaboration of professional and middle-class organizers who can speak a similar language to that of policy-making elites; outsiders/radicals prefer popular protest based on identity and difference. For Miraftab (2003), following on from Cornwall (2002), insiders/moderates accept and legitimate a weak version of citizenship, confined to ‘invited’ spaces; oppositional-radical groups seek instead strong citizenship through invention, participation or insurgence (Holston 1998; Gaventa 2002; Kabeer 2002). These distinctions certainly emphasize the extent to which civil society is a contested and conflictual, rather than a homogeneous, space. But they have a practical utility too and provide an ordering device through which to understand civil society responses to the formal institutions of governance.

Whether moderate or radical, insider or outsider, most Latin American civil society movements have some awareness of the difference that activism beyond the state can sometimes make. Friedman et al. (2001) show how Latin American movements participate actively in global activist networks and play a role in the construction of global norms. Transnationalization began as early as the 1970s in Latin America, when civil society movements seized on mobilization beyond the state as a way to protect activists on the ground, to some extent at least, against authoritarian states and to protest against abuses of human rights. Successful transnational campaigns around principles of rights and citizenship were supported by the emergence of liberal global norms in the 1980s and 1990s (Khagram et al. 2002). By appealing to these norms, some policy changes were achieved, in the field of human rights most notably (Brysk 1994).

It should be remembered, nevertheless, that, for groups in Latin America as elsewhere, scaling up from the national to the transnational in practice is neither simple nor easy. In the first place, transnational collective action is not
always strategically appropriate. Second, collective action is considerably more effective when it draws on prevailing global assumptions about the appropriate behaviour of states and notions of what is right and wrong (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Moreover, third, it is easier to build transnational networks which target authoritarian states than to put pressure on formally democratic ones, even if abuse of rights is well documented. Fourth, transnational collective action requires considerable and sustained confidence, know-how, energy and financial resources. For many civil society organizations in Latin America, especially small-scale or grassroots movements, such resources are in short supply. And there are no guarantees of success; like all forms of activism, the momentum for transnational campaigning is difficult to sustain over time, with the result that activism ebbs and flows, picking up in moments when opportunities open up and scaling back at other times. Then there are the risks attached to activism beyond the state to be taken into account. By focusing attention and committing resources to activities outside the local community, embeddness in national politics can easily be lost and opportunities to deepen horizontal connections with other local groups missed. Effective transnational action frequently depends on cooperation with ‘friendly’ states, meaning that there is always the risk of cooptation (Smith and Korzeniewicz forthcoming) – and Latin American social movements, unsurprisingly, are perhaps particularly sensitive to cooptation in this sense. In sum, the transnationalization of protest, and the emergence of transnational or region-wide collective action, requires explanation; it is not an inevitable corollary of globalization.

**Regionalism and activism in the Americas**

Collective action at the regional level, in Latin America and elsewhere, is inevitably shaped by pre-existing patterns of activism, such as those discussed above. But its emergence will also depend on how far the new institutions of regionalist governance foster and create opportunities for activism – and how civil society movements interpret and understand those processes. Do the new structures of regionalist governance represent opportunities for engagement and claims making? And, if so, for whom?

According to Varynen (2003), new regionalism, that is the creation of authoritative governance structures above the nation-state, arose out of the phase of global capitalism that began with the end of the Cold War and which has rendered trade liberalization difficult to resist. Within the Americas, new regionalism also reflected the needs of the US state to reconstruct the web of formal relations binding it into the hemisphere (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995). The Enterprise for the Americas, launched in 1990, was designed to create regional order through hub-and-spoke integration based on the principle of trade and investment liberalization. A Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was initially intended to be in place by 2005. Despite the fanfare and excitement which accompanied the launching of the integration agenda,
however, progress towards economic integration has been considerably slower than was initially anticipated. It has been hindered by conflicting state interests, especially between the US and the larger Latin American countries of Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina, debates within the US state itself as other foreign policy priorities have taken precedence over hemispheric relations, the difficulties of advancing a regional agenda of economic liberalization that goes further than the present multilateral arrangements and a gradual loss of faith in the liberal economic project, in much of Latin America at least.

As the momentum towards hemispheric free trade slowed, attention shifted to sub-regional integration (Phillips 2003). Mercosur, in particular, has become a focus for South American integration. Born from the democratic and security dilemmas facing Argentina and Brazil after the transition to democracy, Mercosur was formed in 1991, with Uruguay and Paraguay as additional founder members. The promise of establishing a Common Market was then grafted onto the initial agenda of peace and democracy. Integration has, however, been adversely affected by sub-regional economic instability, the Brazilian devaluation of 1997 and the spectacular collapse of the Argentine economy in 2001. Mercosur has, in effect, been kept alive in recent years by political – indeed presidential – diplomacy and shared political objectives rather than an economic agenda of integration (Gomez Mera 2005; Malamud forthcoming).

Region-building in the Americas is driven, in short, as much by political as economic factors although issues of trade and investment appear to dominate the policy agenda. Liberal notions of politics – the idea that politics is a domain distinct from that of the market, the importance of constitutionalism, the separation of powers, the centrality of citizenship and individual rights, etc. – discursively underpin the regional agenda, in addition to a commitment to market-led economic reform. As such, hemispheric region-building quite evidently transforms the political, as well as the economic, agenda across the Americas. Civil society groups within Latin America have, consequently, had to consider not only the economic impact of hemispheric regionalism but also what it means for the pursuit of rights and the capabilities of local states to implement and uphold citizenship. As a result, coterminous with the emergence of the integration agenda, region-wide activist networks began to develop, supported in some cases with funding from large US- and Canadian-based NGOs, such as the North–South Institute and the Fundacion Canadiense para las Americas (FOCAL). These have emerged primarily to try to ensure that democracy, the environment, gender and ethnicity, issue areas where there are long-standing traditions or civil society organizations in Latin America and where grievances can be framed within the context of liberal rights, form part of the hemispheric agenda (Shamsie 2000; Smith and Korzeniewicz 2003; Botto and Tussie 2003). But there is hardly any research at all as to whether this pattern of engagement is reproduced within sub-regionalism, at least until very recently (Jacobs and Maldonado 2005; Grugel 2005). As a result, it is unclear whether sub-regionalism has led to the
emergence of trans-regional civil society networks in ways similar to hemispheric regionalism. Whether civil society organizations have become entangled in sub-regional policy networks remains equally unexplored.

Civil society and hemispheric integration

The FTAA/Summit of the Americas project of hemispheric integration was the first serious project of integration fully to cross the North-South divide (Grugel and Hout 1999). Integration had as its goal nothing less than the reconfiguration of the political and economic rules that govern the region. Since hemispheric integration is organized around US state interests and perspectives, these rules are imbued with US liberal preferences. In the first place, there is a clear separation of the economic sphere of decision-making from the political. Regulation of this sort relies on the creation of political as well as economic order and, for reasons both of delivery and legitimacy, frequently implicates civil society actors in policy. As such, North American strategies for ‘managing’ the previously ‘disorderly’ South include strengthening concepts and practices of liberal citizenship. We can, for example, identify the articulation of a model of liberal citizenship for the Americas through the Organization of American States (Cooper and Therien 2004; see also Cooper 2005).

As is well-known, two distinct tracks for the negotiations were established in the early 1990s. The FTAA and economic integration were kept separate from discussion of the political frame for regional integration, which was assigned to the Summit of the Americas. Unlike the FTAA agenda, where deadlines were firmly established (even though they have been broken) and targets set (though not met), the Summits created a loose frame for discussion, without any clear road map or indeed agreed endpoint. The US government was the principal force behind the decision to push the Summit process towards embracing representation from selected civil society actors, as well as the thirty-four states involved in the integration process (Rosenberg 1998). The Miami Summit of 1994 thus marked the beginning of the formal inclusion of some civil society voices in the integration process. Since then, Summits have been organized annually in different member states of the Americas, preceded by rounds of ministerial meetings to prepare and push forward the agenda of integration. The issues for discussion have focused principally on questions of democracy, broadly understood to include education, judicial reform and education, regional security and environmentally sustainable development (Botto and Tussie 2003). While in practice debates about trade and investment have crept in because of their inescapable overlap – at least as far as civil society actors are concerned – by and large the US managed to keep the formal discussion of the economic agenda out of the Summit process and confined to the centralized inter-state negotiations for the FTAA where civil society movements were excluded.
From the beginning, integration thus became a principal focus of attention for a range of civil society groups in Latin America with broad concerns in democracy, development, rights and the environment. Indeed, civil society groups with interests in local micro-politics or committed to a narrow technical agenda were almost the only ones that saw themselves as unaffected by the integration agenda. A division soon opened up over how to interpret the invitation to participate in the Summits. Essentially, the debate focused on whether to enter a process in which they were clearly not decision-makers, the ultimate aim of which seemed to be to establish and support US hegemony in the Americas: could any meaningful policies that would benefit ordinary people in Latin America possibly result from a process of integration that was shaped around the security and developmental needs of the US? Pages (2000) and Smith and Korzeniewicz (2003) describe these sometimes tortuous debates. ‘Insider’ groups included the large non-governmental organizations based in the US and Canada, such as the North-South Centre of the University of Miami and the Inter-American Dialogue, US- and Canadian-based NGOs such as FOCAL and the Esquel Foundation, which partly depends on US state funding. Many such groups already formed part of the network of contacts between North and South American policy-makers and, almost inevitably, these pushed hard for civil society collaboration. But also in favour of participation were a range of Latin American movements, some of which were already part of the fabric of existing cross-hemispheric non-governmental networks in the issue areas of institutional reform, democratisation and sustainability and environmental governance. These networks took a pragmatic approach to the Summits (Botto and Tussie 2003). The *Red Interamericana para la Democracia* (RID), for example, which brings together over 100 large civil society organizations from North and South America committed to promoting regional democracy argued that there were advantages in participation from the start. *Corporacion Participa*, a large Chilean pro-democracy NGO, also sought inclusion in the Summit agenda and formed part of the officially sanctioned Civil Society Task Force, created in 1993, just prior to the Miami Summit. Others followed suit (Smith and Korzeniewicz 2003).

In addition to civil society representation at the Summit meetings, it was agreed that two other forms of consultation would be arranged. By far the more important of the two was a process of non-binding consultation within the participating states. This, it was suggested, would provide an opportunity for those civil society groups unable to access the Summit process directly to express views. Consultations were therefore organized within the thirty-four states of the Americas. These were usually the formal responsibility of the foreign affairs department of each government, which then tended to charge a large national NGO with the task. Funds were then channelled to the NGO from national governments, US bodies and inter-regional institutions such as the OAS and the Inter-American Development Bank. In addition, an internet system (the ‘mailbox’) for civil society consultations was also set up,
supposedly making it possible for civil society movements to express their views without incurring the costs of attending meetings at the Summits or even within the individual member states.

The scale of civil society participation in the national consultations varied. These consultations were almost completely formalistic exercises in Argentina and Brazil, with low levels of participation and no real discussion, for example. But, in contrast, in Chile, the process was far more dynamic. Here, the Corporacion Participa, the NGO in charge, was able to bring in not only moderate local groups but also more critical voices such as the Alianza por un Comercio Justo, a network of civil society groups hostile to the free trade agenda (Tussie and Botto 2003). How far groups engaged with the consultation process seems to have depended on: whether states encouraged participation; if they were perceived as relatively free spaces for debate and discussion; the strength of civil society movements and the resources at their disposal to attend; and the extent to which civil society groups already engaged with the trade agenda. In Chile, where the history of state-sponsored trade liberalization stretches back into the 1970s, civil society groups were largely already engaged with trade debates. But, even where consultations were relatively lively and genuine debate took place, as in Chile, other problems emerged. How far the groups that engaged with the integration agenda could be said to ‘represent’ civil society in any meaningful way was unclear, and the consultation inevitably opened up latent ideological conflicts between the various movements. Moreover, within the consultation process itself, most activists saw the political and economic agenda as linked. But Latin American governments strove hard to keep the agendas of political and economic integration separate. Already committed to liberalizing trade and investment, whether through the FTAA or not, Latin American governments were not, on the whole, willing to allow the consultative process to become an opportunity to voice widespread criticism of existing policy (Botto 2003). Civil society groups were, in effect, invited to discuss an already established agenda, not to contribute to setting the agenda for debate. The internet consultations, meanwhile, were overwhelmingly acknowledged to be a failure. Few groups participated beyond those already involved in the process, mainly because these consultations were seen by civil society groups as a way of burying dissent. Submissions were not discussed at any level and no feedback was offered (Alemany 2002).

In contrast to the insider groups, ‘outsiders’ rejected the Summit/FTAA agenda and its political/economic dichotomy outright. They sought instead to use the integration process as a site around which to demonstrate their rejection of the liberal political economy that had come to dominate policy-making in Latin America and to mobilize for radical change. A network of more than fifty social movements hostile to the agenda of liberal trade-based integration from across the Americas formed the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA) in 1997 with the aim of using the Summit process as an opportunity to reject the primacy of trade/investment liberalization and to push instead for a
political economy based on rights and community. The HSA successfully channeled the anti-free trade sentiments of labour, not only of organized social movements within Latin America, and some of the members are large and well-organized national movements with considerable experience of mobilization. The Red Mexicana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC), for example, emerged out of the Mexican protests against NAFTA and coordinated labour and grassroots protests not only against integration within the Americas but also against the terms of engagement with the European Union (Icaza 2004). The Chilean Alianza por un Comercio Justo y Responsable also brought together national groups with considerable experience in mobilizing against Chile’s long-standing strategy of economic liberalization (Rojas and Pey 2003). As large national networks, these groups were able to scale up to the regional level while maintaining their national base. The HSA thus constituted a genuinely new level of civil society engagement. Members maintained their national linkages but used the Summits to develop a new kind of trans-continental protest movement. In the end, the HSA was able to organize a series of parallel Summits across the hemisphere with civil society, not governmental, participation and representation. Funding was even provided from some official state bodies, such as the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and some of the large US and Canadian NGOs.

Increasingly recognized as representative of an important part of Latin American civil societies, the parallel Summits became more and more significant as a site for protest. Eventually, violence broke out in 2002 in Quito, at the so-called ‘Democracy Summit’. Here, the divisions between the official Summit and the parallel meetings were starkly revealed. Politicians found themselves facing a huge demonstration of ordinary people who had come to protest around the slogan ‘No to the FTAA, another world is possible’. As Drainville (2002) graphically put it, while the ‘hemispheric growth machine gathered to settle social relations in conformity with neoliberal values and perspectives…a community of resistance [was instead] charging the world economy with politics’ and expressing a deeply felt rejection of liberal integration. The demonstration succeeded in disrupting the official negotiations and, as a result, a small delegation of the HSA was allowed to address the official representatives.

The parallel Summits have thus been remarkably successful – if judged by their power to bring considerable numbers of protestors from Latin America together and to give voice to their protests at the very centre of the integration machinery. Certainly, they illustrate the scale of oppositional mobilization against the liberal trade/investment agenda and the role of the Americas as a site within the global social justice movement. For Smith and Korzeniewicz (forthcoming), they draw on widespread popular fears about globalization in Latin America. But, in policy terms, their success is more doubtful. Despite the protests, the HSA has been unable to challenge, deflect or reform the direction of integration. Even the victory at Quito was pyrrhic. No substantive changes took place either to the form or the content of the official integration agenda.
Although protests continue, there is still a marked disparity between the HSA’s power to convoke mass opposition to the liberal agenda of integration and its ability to impact on policy-making. I return to this issue later.

Civil society and Mercosur

Mercosur is a very different model of integration from that of the FTAA/Summit process. While both endorse the agenda of liberalization, Mercosur is also rooted in the principle that states should play a role in managing integration. This reflects the fact that, for Brazil especially, retaining indeed building state capacity is seen as a legitimate goal of government. Mercosur’s integration process, moreover, involves the creation of institutions with a physical inter-governmental existence rather than relying simply on agreed rules and norms. And, most centrally, from the start, there was a view within Mercosur that it should have what came to be termed a ‘social dimension’; that is, some level of coordinated social policy should form a central plank of the integration process (Jelin 1999; Ermida 2000). As such, there were expectations that Mercosur would be open to civil society influence.

Nevertheless, what a ‘social agenda’ for Mercosur means, concretely and with regard to policy-making, is far from clear (Di Pietro 2003). It is true that there has been some talk by political elites of Mercosur providing a frame for an alternative development project that combines export growth and international trade, alongside social reform and a commitment to greater equality, in support of what has sometimes been referred to as the Consensus of Buenos Aires (Sigal 2003; Mercopress 2005). But all of this is very vague and there has been little, if any, detailed discussion of how exactly a new regional model based on rights, welfare and inclusion might take shape. The most that has been achieved so far – some fourteen years after its creation – is the decision of January 2005 to create a Structural Fund, in imitation of the EU, for internal regions of the member states where levels of poverty are particularly acute. But there are no details as yet as to how it will work and the funds, which come principally from the Brazilian government, are considerably more limited than their European equivalent and far too small to meet even a fraction of social needs. As might perhaps be expected, no date for when the first tranche of funding will be available has been set (Clarin 10 January 2005).

These difficulties are accentuated by the fact that Mercosur integrates countries with a history of rivalry and competition. Despite geographic proximity, levels of economic and political cooperation before the establishment of Mercosur were very low. The task now of agreeing on, financing and implementing an agenda of integration that goes beyond trade liberalization is hugely ambitious. It has also been badly knocked off course by persistent economic and political crisis in both Argentina and Brazil from the late 1990s. Governments have been forced to focus on how to manage their domestic
political economy and to cope with deepening problems of domestic social hardship, at the same time as working out strategies to manage the global and hemispheric agendas of trade/investment liberalization. As the goal of coordinated reform at the sub-regional level has inevitably become progressively less important, it has become harder to find grassroots movements in Mercosur countries that are not sceptical of the notion that regional integration can somehow serve as corrective for the costs of global liberalization.

In this context, the research findings of Jacobs and Maldonado (2005) are not surprising. They argue, based on evidence of human rights and environmental activism in Argentina, that Mercosur has excited only limited interest on the part of civil society groups. However, they attribute this not so much to any lack of clarity regarding what social reform might mean in the sub-regional context but, primarily, to the institutional logic of integration, coupled with the fact that many rights-based civil society groups have, since democratization, re-directed their energies towards national politics and the challenge of building democracy within states.

It is certainly hard to disagree with the view that the institutional matrix governing Mercosur makes civil society intervention difficult. Despite the commitment to region-wide institutions, decision-making actually remains firmly in the hands of national political leaders. The institutional structure of Mercosur, which was formalized in 1994 via the Protocols of Ouro Preto, is weak and, in any case, lacks any independent democratic legitimacy. Limited and non-binding social consultation is supposed to take place via a Parliamentary Commission, which is made up of delegates from national parliaments, and a specially constituted region-wide Consultative Forum (the Foro Consultativo Economico y Social – FCES), which is roughly the equivalent of the European Economic and Social Council. The FCES is made up of national sections comprising mainly representatives of the main business groups, trade union federations and some ‘third sector’ groups which are dominated, in Argentina at least, by consumer protection bodies. The FCES is beset by bureaucratic difficulties and ideological cleavages, at the national and regional levels, making it highly ineffective (Grandi and Bizzozero 1998). Institutionally too weak to exercise influence on governments, it struggles to find a place within the machinery of integration. In sum, difficulties of coordination within the FCES, conflicts between the member groups, a lack of any formal authority, problems of inter-regional collaboration between the different national sections and the exclusion of many civil society movements because they are thought to be too radical to contain have made it something of a ‘freezer’ of civil society initiatives (Schelhase 2004).

Institutional problems, however, are not the only ones. Just as fundamental is the fact that the hemispheric agenda trumped sub-regionalism, as far as civil society movements are concerned. To put it baldly, the FTAA/Summit agenda got there first. Once resources had been deployed and concentrated at the hemispheric level – where so much appears to be at stake – there was inevitably less energy and less interest left over for sub-regionalism.
Despite all of this, however, it is also possible that the degree of disengagement with Mercosur is over-exaggerated. It would certainly be wrong to suggest that as many civil society movements are engaged with Mercosur as with the FTAA. But, equally, to suggest that civil society groups are uninterested in the sub-regional agenda, *tout court*, is to over-simplify. The hemispheric project attracts almost all civil society networks to it in one way or another – grassroots movements as well as more moderate insider groups and networks. But taking this as the template of engagement may be misleading. Mercosur, given its institutional frame and its developmental difficulties, will inevitably engage civil society very differently. The assumption that patterns of engagement will in essence mimic those of the FTAA/Summit process may actually blind us to the particular ways in which some civil society groups do engage with Mercosur. Elsewhere (Grugel 2005), I have shown how groups made up of moderate professional, middle-class activists work at the national level within Mercosur countries to support the development of a ‘social agenda’, using the example of the *Instituto Mercosur Social* (IMS) in Argentina and Brazil. Groups such as the IMS make use of global liberal norms of citizenship and inclusion and draw inspiration from the EU which, they argue, provides a more useful model of integration for the Southern Cone than NAFTA and the FTAA. Since the EU constitutes something of a model of integration for political elites across Mercosur – whatever the real differences between them – they believe that this will serve as a way of getting their arguments heard in a wider political context.

For such groups, the appeal of Mercosur is chiefly political. It presents as an opportunity to push debates about state capacity, reform, welfare and the role of social policy specifically within the Southern Cone (Grugel 2005). Activists thus focus less on the detail of trade or economic integration than in the case of the FTAA/Summit agenda. Mercosur is seen as a way to signal South America’s resistance to US-led neoliberalism. Of course, groups that have become actively pro-Mercosur are still small in number. But their members are apparently positioned in relationships with local state actors through personal networks and through relationships of policy delivery. Activists come from the relatively restricted pool of professional elites and, as mainly social policy specialists, some come into contact with the state bureaucracy through established networks of social assistance and social policy (Gonzalez Bombal and Villar 2003). As a result, they are well-positioned to attempt the deployment of strategies of activism typical of insiders – closeness to officials, quiet diplomacy, elite contacts and coalition-building. Nevertheless, even this kind of moderate activism appears so far to have met with little success.

Comparing activism across modes of regionalist governance

The FTAA, were it ever to become a reality, will lock Latin America, even more than is presently the case, into a developmental and political relationship
with the US and any remaining autonomy, in so far as economic policy is concerned, will be lost. Implementing the FTAA requires regional governments to acknowledge and accept extensive limitations on state action and policy choice. Put in this way, it is hard to reject the notion that hemispheric integration represents a form of political subordination to the North, whatever particular advantages state elites argue it may bring. As such, the political debate about integration within Latin America was always going to be intense and it should come as no surprise that the project of hemispheric integration led to the widespread organization of already existing civil society groups and the creation of new regionalist umbrella networks of civil society actors, with the aim of coordinating both resistance and collaboration. Region-wide networks such the RID and the HSA serve a number of purposes of course; and activism is not simply about making policy change. But, ultimately, most activists wish to make a policy difference. How far has this happened?

From quite early on, civil society groups were encouraged by the US to channel their energies into the political aspects of integration, narrowly understood. Latin American states also tried to push civil society groups in the same direction. ‘Insider’ groups such as those described by Smith and Korzeniewicz (2003) thus sought to use the ‘invited’ spaces of the Summit process to embed more deeply political norms of democracy and participation and, initially at least, largely left the economic agenda for others to debate. Yet it is striking that, while the Summits have endorsed principles of democracy, citizenship and consultation, the integration process itself has not become more democratic and no new region-wide initiatives in support of democratization have resulted. Insider groups gradually also tried to challenge the separation between the trade and the political agenda. As a result, a Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society in the FTAA was established in 1998. This was largely unsuccessful in the sense of channelling civil society concerns onto the official agenda (Pages 2000). Any achievements, such as engineering an apparent shift in the agenda for the Quebec Summit in 2001 towards one more concerned with questions of democracy and participation, have mainly been cosmetic and Quebec, as it turned out, was ‘principally about free trade after all’ (Smith and Korzeniewicz, forthcoming). For civil society groups to have influence over regionalist negotiations, they needed to be able to count on already-existing norms to support their incorporation and, moreover, be involved in the integration process from the beginning (Price 1998; Florini 1999). The difficulty facing insider groups was that they could not appeal to a pre-existing consensus in support of their conviction that civil society groups have a right to voice and influence in trade negotiations. Despite taking up the offer of assisting at the Summits, as a result, they have had to react to an agenda already established by states, where their role is unclear and which they have, as a result, proved unable to shape. Even moderate civil society movements have now grown more disenchanted with the Summit process. The momentum of participation has, inevitably, waned.
In sharp contradiction to the ways insider groups engaged with hemispheric integration, radical/outsiders tended to argue that from the beginning that it represented straightforwardly an attempt to impose US norms of liberal regulation and the domination of the market over political and civil spheres of life. As such, they have offered quite remarkable mass opposition to it. But region-wide mobilization has suffered from the traditional difficulties facing grassroots mobilization in Latin America. Activism is cyclical and difficult to sustain over time, and groups frequently end up locked in internal ideological dispute. Internal democracy within radical networks is also very hard to achieve – a serious problem for such networks since, without it, legitimacy and credibility are easily lost. The HSA, for example, faces considerable institutional constraints of coordination, fund-raising and representativeness, making it difficult to sustain pressure for change. As Legler (2000) notes, not only does the HSA have difficulty accessing the policy-making process in any meaningful way, but there are also real issues about internal democracy within it as those internal decision-makers are actually quite limited in number. In practice, Legler (2000) suggests, few groups contribute to debates within the HSA and ‘real participation [is] very limited’ indeed.

Mercosur presents an entirely different pattern of civic engagement. Although oppositional activism has increased recently, Mercosur shows very few signs of turning into a site of mass mobilization against the neoliberal agenda, although some small groups have sought to extend the momentum of the FTAA protests by focusing on negotiations with the EU after 2001, at a time when the hemispheric agenda was slowing down. Yet arguments about new regionalism and transnational collective action sometimes assume that civil society organizations will, almost inevitably, choose to scale their activities up beyond the state (Mittleman 2000). In fact, it seems that emergent forms of regionalism must first be perceived as meriting engagement. For many, perhaps even most, civil society movements in Mercosur countries, sub-regional integration has simply proved uninteresting, inaccessible or both. Mercosur has become a site of mobilization only for a small group of activists, concerned either with the detail of social policy or with the political goal of opposing, on principle, a US-led programme of integration. These activists see Mercosur as a way to limit US influence, demand some degree of policy autonomy for South America from the North and to push for more socially engaged integration. Welfare groups such as the IMS in particular have used the global norms of rights and citizenship and the example of the EU to push for policy reform and the creation of sub-regional norms of social inclusion. Di Pietro (2003), for example, argues that Mercosur cannot reject wholesale the agenda of liberalizing trade but that the creation of a ‘social agenda’, including the adoption of common anti-poverty strategies and policies that ameliorate embedded forms of social exclusion would provide some societal legitimacy for integration (see also Podesta 1998).

Activism of this sort implies necessarily a desire for involvement, however measured, with states. But, although activists have sought influence over state
政策，他们一直未能实现它。有些修辞的迹象表明Mercosur可能认识到至少最低限度的福利协调的重要性，但此类举措在该方向上的进展非常初步，且可能受到经济困难的阻碍。它们也很难直接归因于集体行动的压力。整体图景是极其有限的公民社会参与，而州甚至公司利益在Mercosur中占主导地位且未受到挑战（Guinazu 2003；Junquiera Botelho 2003）。

这导致了一个进一步的观察：尽管美洲地区和次区域的活动水平和参与程度存在显著差异，但国家模式的组织和国家-社会关系的持久性是显而易见的。尽管这在Mercosur内最为明显，但在关于美洲区域化的总体化中，大多数团体仍基于他们的国家背景，通过各自不同的经历来解读这一过程。区域主义治理的出现并不标志着国家模式社会组织的消亡。换句话说，这些发现与大多数关于跨国行动的现实研究一致，这些研究指出，证据不足以支持‘国家受到威胁的担忧’（Price 2004：591）。在这个背景下，关于在后主权条件下跨国社会全球空间的兴起的争论似乎言之过早（Kaldor 2003）。由此，我们或许也可以指出，美洲次区域或次区域社会网络的兴起并不意味着内部和之间公民社会群体冲突的结束。相反，Smith和Korzeniewicz（forthcoming）在对拉丁美洲的公民社会和跨国行动的综述中得出结论，社会群体之间的联系增多了分裂，而非协调。

总体而言，这些证据挑战了在全球化背景下，区域主义必然和不可避免地为成功的跨国集体行动提供了机会的假设。机构的性质，而不只是区域主义治理本身，部分决定着跨国争端发展的可能性。区域主义治理的新机制当然可以成为塔罗（2001）所说的‘争执的支点’，比如峰会。另一方面，当失败于在国家之上建立稳定和有效的机制，使得公民社会运动围绕它们组织起来变得困难。没了机构，当一体化通过个人化的外交渠道完成时，对政策制定圈层的访问是困难的，因为没有真正的进入点。同样，然而，机构化的内容是重要的。当公民社会运动被邀请参加以合法化既定议程为目的时，它们影响的机会就很渺茫。此外，成功的公民社会运动通常依赖广泛接受的关于权利、民主和包容的自由民主信念（Keck and Sikkink 1998；Khagram et al. 2002）。很难利用这些规范，
however, to demand inclusion and influence in debates that states claim are essentially about trade and economic policy-making (Ostry 2002).

Finally, it may be that optimistic arguments about regionalism as transformation underestimate the scale of the difficulties civil society groups face when they try to mobilize beyond the state. Personal contacts are fewer and less meaningful; cultural differences, including language, may apply; and physical distance is still a significant barrier to networking, especially for grassroots movements. Then there is the fact that the resources civil society movements have at their disposal are often precarious and rarely include budgets and training for operating transnationally. All of this inevitably puts them at a disadvantage compared to, say, corporate groups which are also try to influence agendas of global and regional integration. Also, while civil society movements usually have know-how, skills and experience in so far as mobilizing for rights is concerned, they are generally less knowledgeable and less experienced in debates on trade and investment. This lack of specialist knowledge makes it difficult for civil society activists to engage with trade professionals and state actors on anything like equal terms. To stand any chance of engaging effectively with regionalist debates, therefore, it seems that civil society organizations are now required to learn new vocabularies and new technical skills, in addition to those they already possess, and to begin the task of building an international consensus around their right to have a voice in economic decision-making.

Conclusion

The central argument of the paper can be re-stated succinctly. Civil society interest in, or influence over, regionalist governance should not be assumed a priori; transnational collective action is not an inevitable consequence of the creation of regionalist frames of political and economic organization. With respect to Latin America, new regionalism has become a space within which civil society actors connect, exchange information and debate and contest the norms that presently govern the Americas — but only to some extent. Patterns of engagement vary and the picture is complex and ambiguous. Moreover, regionalist governance in the Americas has not created genuine opportunities for civil society engagement or influence. Difficulties of coordination and agreement, the heterogeneity of civil society movements, the weakness of formal structures of representation, patterns of controlled insertion by governments and the absence of clear international norms supporting civil society inclusion in trade policy-making all act as obstacles to civil society influence. With regard to hemispheric regionalism especially, its rigid division into two separate negotiating strands, political and economic, effectively isolated civil society actors from the discussions on trade and made it difficult for them to be seen as central to the ‘real business’ of integration.

It is hard, in sum, to be optimistic about the chances for effective civil society agency at the regional level. As it stands, regionalist governance in the
Americas is undemocratic, elitist and closed. Consultation is limited and the views of social actors rarely count. All of this certainly matters to activists and those committed to building a more just world. Should it matter more widely, that is, at the centre of governance processes within regional states? I would argue that it should. Contemporary regionalism in the Americas springs from previous failures to establish legitimate, effective and inclusive forms of governance. The challenge now in Latin America is how to deliver development and order in an age where appeals to rights and citizenship cannot be brushed aside as easily as in the past. Without reform, it is likely that regionalist governance will at some point falter in the face of popular opposition, exacerbating the social, economic and political difficulties that beset the region. If only for this reason, state actors should urgently engage with what their citizens want from regionalism for, without it, political and economic instability will be difficult to avoid.

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Notes

1 I am using the terms ‘collective action’ and ‘civil society activism’ somewhat interchangeably. In Latin America, and indeed elsewhere, civil society has become an umbrella term to denote the wide range of ‘actors like social movements, interest groups, nongovernmental organizations and other noneconomic, nonstate actors who are quite diverse in their modes of organization and their goals’ (Friedman and Hochstetler 2002: 21–2). Civil society organizations thus include grassroots social movements, labour organizations and the more formally constituted non-governmental organizations (NGOs), usually composed of more middle-class activists.

2 Middle-class activists tend to have access to greater resources and a wider repertoire of action. They have, for example, sometimes successfully used legal means to further their claims, as in the case of human rights in the Southern Cone (Smulovitz 1997).

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