

Reviews

Dos modelos de integración energética América del Norte/América del Sur

(Two Models of Energy Integration
North America/South America)

Rosío Vargas and José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, eds.

CISAN-UNAM

Mexico City, 2007, 177 pp.



This volume presents pertinent, quality work and should be widely distributed, starting with its dissemination among UNAM students themselves.

This timely selection of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary essays centers mainly on the economy and international relations, but also includes energy engineering and environmental approaches. Its originality lies in its aim of presenting the reader with the best possible analysis of the notion generally accepted by scholars of the issue and the interested reading public about the two different models for energy integration that exist in the Americas.

The book's first virtue—and undoubtedly the attentive reader will discover this—is that the serious treatment given to its timely topic, mentioned in the work's title (*Two Models...*) brings to the fore three other issues. Even though they are fundamental, these three issues seem to be forgotten because of the recent, very important political changes and conflicts since 1999 throughout the hemisphere. If these three issues are glossed over, the central aim of the analyses presented in this book would lose a great deal of their meaning.

The first issue is the growing, irreversible importance energy has and will have for the survival

and development of modern societies, including practically all of the ones in this hemisphere. The second is the worrisome question about the need for and the future of hemispheric energy integration as the best possible long-term horizon for the inhabitants of what, in honor of diversity, we call “the Americas” (plural). The third is the recovery of a Latin American vision derived from shared socio-economic conditions such as persistent poverty, inequality, backwardness and dependence, as well as common historic backgrounds and cultural patterns that identify the countries located from south of the Rio Grande to the Patagonia. That is, the recovery of the identity of the region known as “Latin America”.

The efforts in CISAN's book advance precisely by posing the relevant aspects of the moment in which a profound, very long-term problem is situated in today and which, though long-term, requires urgent solution. There is no other way of dealing with the problem: only recognizing, characterizing and

seriously analyzing the current situation —regardless of our wish to reject or accept it— facing the nations of the Americas, as a situation in which the differences among the geo-economic regions stand out in stark relief. A brief perusal of the articles in any major newspaper dealing with big energy multinationals' investment plans or South American governments' initiatives is sufficient to begin to glimpse the importance of the book's subtitle (*North America/South America*) and to understand that this demands we not lose sight of the essential issues in the midst of signs of crisis, change or new elements.

Thus, the reader will find valuable information and rigorous reasoning that will help him/her to profoundly explain the discussion that gives rise to the situation: Does the palpable existence of *two* models of energy integration in the Americas imply the definite cancellation of the possibility of *one* single kind of energy integration for the hemisphere, or, on the contrary, would the latter continue to be a possible and desirable route for all the nations of the Americas?

If the response is that a single model of integration is possible, it would still be necessary to determine how to achieve it: despite the existence of the two different models or thanks to them? Could the two energy integration models co-exist and develop in a complementary way? Or are they now and will they remain in conflict, clashing and barring each other's way in the fight to be dominant along the road to the inevitable—even if in the very long term— energy integration of the continental Americas and the Caribbean.

Of course, this way of understanding the importance of the existence of different energy integration projects also takes into account the historic division of the hemisphere into “the Americas,” that is, North America, South America and the Caribbean. Even with the still recent failure of the energy integrationist position promoted strongly by the U.S. government, particularly after 9/11, as part of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and as a continuance of its market reforms since the end of the 1980s, we are still left with the question: Is the desire for reaching a hemisphere-wide energy integration of the Americas, regardless of the form it would take,

a necessity for the economic and social advancement of their inhabitants?

In the political sphere, the sphere of power, the answer to this question reveals the continuing need to advance along the road to integration: the failure of FTAA integration did not lead at all to abandoning the formulation and implementation of energy measures in the hemisphere, but rather gave rise to at least two large models, the ones presented in this book.

On the other hand, what is the specific weight that other dimensions of social life, different from the political factors, have in explaining the continued proposals of energy integration, specifically those headed up by the United States in the north and by Venezuela from the south? That is to say, are the economic, environmental, military and other kinds of difficulties what forces the different social actors, particularly decision-makers, to persevere in their efforts to achieve a broad energy integration? Is it possible, for example, that the Latin Americanist, Bolivarian political proposal known as ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean), promoted by the Venezuelan government, can achieve the consensus needed for hemisphere-wide energy integration without renouncing interest in Latin American development?

If these questions and many others as yet unformulated make it worthwhile reading the entire book, anyone who does so will also find that the editors of *Two Models of Energy Integration* have made sure to include quality articles and a diversity of points of view, approaches and nationalities. At the same time they lead the reader to recognize the need to formulate viable ways out for palpable difficulties like those posed for our hemisphere by the worldwide energy crisis and transition.

In this sense, it is altogether respectable that the authors of the different essays present us with approaches that do not seek to inhibit the necessary debate about crucial issues, or attempt to have the last word in the matter. For example, some emphasize the important function of markets in the modern economy in general and in the energy market in particular, while others underline the question of energy security and sovereignty.

The book presents the voices of Canadian, Mexican and Brazilian experts. They differ among themselves undoubtedly, but none of them professes to put an end to the debate, no matter how much he or she disagrees with the other's conclusions. Despite the difficulties for reaching consensuses, what we have here is a clear effort to fully argue and understand the different possible interpretations of the facts that the definition and analysis logically give rise to. We may mention here—and venture a suggestion for any future works Dr.

Vargas may prepare—that we miss the participation of U.S. and Bolivian authors.

To sum up, we can conclude that this is a contribution presented by the UNAM from Mexico and North America, obligatory for anyone interested in broadening his or her knowledge and enriching the debate about central, profound issues for the entire hemisphere. ■■■

Juan José Dávalos López
Professor of the
UNAM School of Economics

