

**Indicadores sociales, políticos
y económicos TLCAN-UE.**

Un enfoque comparado

(NAFTA and EU Social, Political and Economic
Indicators. A Comparative Approach)

Alejandro Chanona Burguete

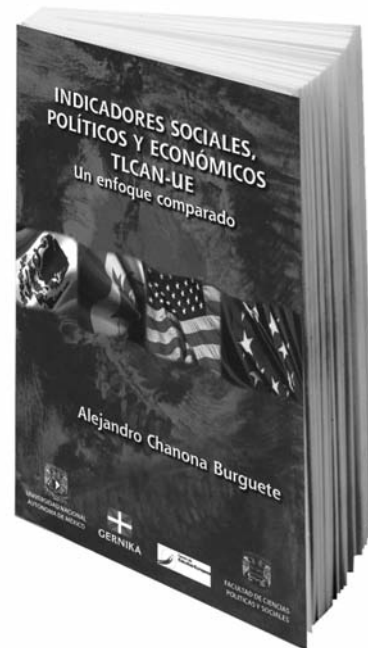
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It is almost impossible for researchers in international relations to find empirical data on social, political and economic issues in different countries in a single source, despite the availability of a wide array of reliable sources for each of these fields. They can be found on the websites of different international organizations like the World Bank (WB), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). However, very few single sources—if any—provide rigorous comparative data on all these issues, and comparative data on countries or regions is even more difficult to find. For the researcher, this can represent a serious problem in terms of time and methodology.

In this context, *Indicadores sociales, políticos y económicos TLCAN-UE. Un enfoque comparado*, by European studies expert Alejandro Chanona Burguete, is an invaluable tool for scholars and students researching relations between North America and Europe, and especially between Mexico and its NAFTA partners and European countries. In a single volume, this book, the result of an UNAM collective and inter-institutional research project, presents a wide range of statistical data in these fields



for both North America and the European Union. In addition, its rigorous review and systematization of the data provides the reader with a comparative analysis of the regions and the countries within these regions.

The data is grouped in 14 broad sections organized as chapters: geography, demographics, macroeconomics, economic globalization, the labor market, education and competitiveness, health, living standards, human development, governance, military security, information and communications, the environment and energy. These sections cover a total of 75 different indicators taken from the WB, the IMF, the OECD, the United Nations (UN), the International Labor Organization, the UNDP, Mexico's Economy Ministry, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the Bonn International Center for Conversion, among other prestigious sources. Each chapter opens with a normative definition of the subject to help the reader avoid methodological confusions. Where necessary, given the variety of methodologies and understandings of the concepts in different countries, the author also provides a description of the methodologies used to measure a given indicator, such as poverty, understood very differently in Europe and North America.

The author warns, however, that, in presenting this data, the book does not attempt to resolve the problem of a lack of reliable statistics for comparative analysis between countries and regions. Rather, it aims at providing a statistical portfolio for researchers and students conducting research in comparative international relations, economics and politics. Neither does the book undertake policy assessment or establish links between the different indicators; instead, it identifies the areas in which countries have good and bad records, pointing to paths for further research. In the author's own words, the book is an important source of reference material for research and teaching. However, although it establishes no relationships between indicators, the reader can draw his/her own conclusions about some of the comparisons, which in turn could also suggest directions for further research.

Due to space limitations, I will present only some of these figures and research directions, more specifically figures for the economic and social fields. First, the book provides the reader with a geographical and demographic overview of the two regions, contrasting the trends in population growth and change, including migration. In this area, Europe has a higher rate of immigration than North America (2.6 vs. 1.6), but this is because Mexico's numbers are negative (-4.6, which means that more people are leaving the country than entering), and this brings the overall regional figure down. Surprisingly, the U.S. immigration rate is lower (3.3) than that of Canada (5.9), but both are higher than the average European rate (2.6). It comes as a surprise, too, to see that in Europe, Luxemburg rather than France (0.66), Spain (0.89) or the UK (1.97), has the highest immigration rate (8.9).

In the field of economics, the book presents comparative figures in three areas representing three different levels: the global (economic globalization), the macro (macroeconomics) and the micro (labor markets). In economic globalization, the book presents trade figures, especially Mexico's trade with the U.S., Canada and Europe, which are common knowledge (Mexico's exports depend on the U.S., and its imports outpace its exports to both regions). At the macro level, however, the book reveals that Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP) is similar to that of Spain and Canada: between 1993 and 2003, Mexico grew 52 percent, whereas Spain grew 69 percent and Canada 70 percent. Its per capita GDP, however, is the lowest in both regions: Europe's average is US\$23,183, while in North America it is US\$21,440. In contrast, in Mexico it barely reaches US\$9,168.

In the labor market, Mexico continues to occupy last place in the rankings: even though Mexico, together with Austria, Ireland and Luxemburg, has the lowest unemployment rate (less than 5 percent, contrasting with Germany, Spain and France's 10 percent), the figures do not take into account underemployment, which is at 20 percent. Mexico's unemployment among young people confirms the country's lack of opportunities: it is the highest in both regions (47.2 percent). The average in the

U.S. and Canada is 30 percent, whereas in Europe, it is 23.9 percent.

Mexico's low levels of social well-being can also be traced in the social data, clearly indicating its deficiencies in relation to its trade partners. Mexico is always last in the rankings for education and competitiveness, health, living standards and human development, and tends to drag down figures for the North American region as a whole. In education, for instance, Mexico has the lowest levels of enrollment in both regions, together with Austria, Germany, Greece and Italy, although it does not do well in schooling levels compared to the majority of these countries.

Nevertheless, Mexico's health budget is the lowest in both regions, representing just 2.7 percent of GDP; the lowest ranking in Europe is Greece with 5 percent, far behind Germany's 8.6 percent. It therefore comes as no surprise that Mexico, together with the U.S., is the country where people

invest the most money in private health services. Mexico's living standards compare unfavorably to its North American neighbors and trade partners: in the U.S. and Canada people have a life expectancy of over 80, whereas in Mexico it is 75. Mexico is among the countries in both regions where people live the shortest lives, forming a group with Portugal, Ireland, Denmark and the U.S.

These are only some of the figures Alejandro Chanona's book offers to suggest interesting and new directions for research, along with fascinating material in the fields of politics and the environment. It promises to become an essential source of reference material for both students and scholars in the social sciences. **NM**

Ariadna Estévez López
Researcher at CISAN