

Looking to the Future: Examining the dynamics of ALBA

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ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America) is seen as an alternative integration model that has emerged from Latin America. To what extent is it possible to see ALBA as an alternative integration model?

In order to answer this question, let us simply recall the traditional economic integration theory that is based on comparative advantage theory and general/partial equilibrium theory. The main purpose of integration is to increase welfare via trade creation.¹ The purpose of integration is resource allocation on the basis of market efficiency and welfare optimization. Based on these, free mobility of four main factors (capital, labour, commodities/goods and services) should be obtained for complete economic integration. For the mobility of these factors, the most important aims are to eliminate discrimination within the integrated markets and the application of common policies and common measures to the third countries.

So under these conditions, markets and firms integrate in the first place. Liberalization within the integrated markets and protection against third parties lead to specialization on the basis of comparative advantages. Usually, as is observed from the traditional integration experiences, countries with bigger markets experience larger increases in welfare gains. Where a developed country integrates with a less developed country, it is observed that unequal development continues. Since integration of markets and firms leads to the concentration and centralization of capital, international specialization is not equally distributed.²

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¹ Starting from Viner (1950) the theory of traditional economic integration effects are analysed. Viner (1950) was the first to define trade creation and trade diversion effects of custom unions. Later, in the literature of traditional economic integration, static and dynamic effects were analyzed.

² Criticisms of traditional economic integration came mainly from Marxist economists who have studied the results of European Union integration. Maximova (1973), Van der Pijl (1978), Holland (1980), Elma Altvater (1979), Carchedi (2000), Werner Bonefeld (2003), Joachim Becker (2003) and Gowan Peter (2005) used Marxist analysis in order to analyse EU integration.

ALBA differs from the traditional integration experiences. The only common element is the concept of “integration”; otherwise, the purpose and targets differ.

ALBA was launched as an alternative to the US Government’s ‘Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), on the principles of integration to reinforce sovereignty and just social relations, as opposed to liberalization and denationalization.³ ALBA is simply a reaction to neoliberal policies, in search of alternatives.⁴ The path of the socialist Cuba and the Bolivarian revolution of Venezuela are the main driving forces in the emergence of the ALBA project. Further, the bilateral agreements between Cuba and Venezuela are the main pillars of the ALBA integration process.

The members of ALBA see the process as an alternative model of integration arising from the realities of Latin America that also takes into account the determinants of historical development. Based on the ideas of José Martí and Simon Bolívar, ALBA historically considers the idea of unity of the continent against colonization and imperialism. The idea of “Our America” that belongs to José Martí and the anti-colonial ideas of Simon Bolívar are the roots of the ideological challenge of ALBA. In the Joint Declaration of ALBA (2005), it is mentioned that⁵

“we fully agree that the ALBA will not become a reality with mercantilist ideas or the selfish interests of business profitability or national benefit to the detriment of other peoples. Only a broad Latin Americanist vision, which acknowledges the impossibility of our countries’ developing and being truly independent in an isolated manner, will be capable of achieving what Bolívar called “...to see the formation in the Americas of the greatest nation in the world, not so much for its size and riches as for its freedom and glory,” and that Martí conceived of as “Our America,” to differentiate it from the other America, the expansionist one with imperialist appetites.”

For many years liberalization policies have led to increase in inequalities among the poor, workers and the indigenous people of Latin America. The bilateral trade agreements and privatization policies increase people’s opposition against FTAs⁶. An alternative summit was organized by Latin American countries in the Mar de Plata Summit (2005) of FTAA; the attempt was a clear sign that Latin America would search for alternative policies and would not accept the path of FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas). This also caused the failure of the FTAA process.

³ Alejandro Bendaña, “From Development Assistance to Development Solidarity: the Role of Venezuela and ALBA,” available at http://www.networkideas.org/alt/feb2008/Venezuela_ALBA.pdf, 02.02.2009.

⁴ For more details on this point of view, see, Osvaldo Martínez, *Neo Liberalismo ALCA y Libre Comercio*, Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Cuba, 2005 and Osvaldo Martínez (ed.) (2008) *La Integración en América Latina: De La Retórica A La Realidad*, Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Cuba, 2008.

⁵ Final Declaration from the First Cuba-Venezuela Meeting for the Application of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), available at <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1097>, 01.05.2009.

⁶ For example, the bilateral agreements signed between the countries of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru have been met with negative reactions and protests from the people.

The opposition to neoliberal policies is also observed in the election outcomes. Latin American people fed up with neoliberal policies voted for the leftist parties.

While these factors provided the necessary condition for the emergence of ALBA as an alternative integration model; more importantly, the political will of Cuba and Venezuela have led to the development of the ALBA integration process.

Principles of ALBA

In the strategic plan for the application of ALBA (2005), in accordance with Article 3, it is said that the

“two countries will produce a strategic plan to guarantee the most beneficial productive complementation on the bases of rationality, exploiting existing advantages on one side or the other, saving resources, extending useful employment, access to markets or any other consideration sustained in genuine solidarity that will promote the strengths of the two countries.”⁷

Four years after this starting point, in the last summit of ALBA (VII extraordinary Summit, April 2009) it is stated that⁸

“Latin American and Caribbean countries have begun to construct our own institutional arrangements, which reflect the continent’s new reality. These arrangements are rooted in our common history, dating back to our Revolution for Independence. We have in our hands a tool that can strengthen the processes of social, economic and cultural transformation that will bring about full sovereignty for our nations. The ALBA, Petrocaribe or UNASUR are just a few of the recently created mechanisms of unifying solidarity that have been born out the existing transformations. These initiatives have been created with the objective of amplifying the effort made by our peoples to achieve liberation”.

After the bilateral agreement signed by Cuba and Bolivarian Venezuela in 2004, the first joint declaration of ALBA Summit was made in 2005. Later, Bolivia (2006), Nicaragua (2007) Honduras (2008) and the Dominican Republic (2008) joined ALBA as members. ALBA has signed an agreement with Haiti (2007) and energy agreements with the Caribbean countries (Petrocaribe 2005). Ecuador and Haiti attend ALBA meetings as observers.

The main developments in ALBA are as follows; with the acceptance of TCP (The Peoples Trade Agreement, 2006) in the third Summit of ALBA, the dimension of ALBA has

⁷ Final declaration from the First Cuba-Venezuela Meeting for the application of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), available at <http://www.bolivariancentre.com/leftframe/cubavenezuela.htm>, 2 April 2009.

⁸ Fifth Extraordinary Summit of the ALBA Final Declaration, Cumana, available at <http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=1982>, 29 April 2009.

expanded to trade related agreements. In the fourth Summit (2007), the protocol of Grand nations (proyecto grannacionales) was announced and in the fifth summit of ALBA (2007), the structure of ALBA was defined. Three major commissions—economic, social and energy—have been established; the ALBA Bank has also been established. In the sixth Summit of ALBA, a cultural agreement was signed and a political declaration about social movements and a support to Bolivian peoples' struggle were also declared.

In an extraordinary summit convened to draw up a special plan for food security and declare support to Bolivia's government, the ALBA bank and social programmes were put in place. It should be emphasized that ALBA as an integration process not only deals with economy related issues but also has taken upon itself the responsibility to defend the rights of the Latin American peoples in every field of life.

According to ALBA agreements, cooperation in 19 areas is foreseen. These areas are: 1. Oil and energy 2. Communication and Transportation 3. Military 4. External Debt 5. Economy and Finance 6. Basic and light industry 7. Natural resources 8. Land; food sovereignty and land reform 9. Education 10. University 11. Scientific and technological development 12. Media 13. Health 14. Gender 15. Immigration and identity 16. Settlement 17. Participant democracy and leadership 18. Indigenous movement 19. Labour movement. In the protocol of grandnations cooperation these areas have been defined.

In the sixth Summit (2008), for finance, the ALBA Bank (BALBA) was established; also as part of the challenge to cultural imperialism, Telesur TV have been broadcasting since 2006. In the Cumana Summit (April 2009) the use of ALBA SUCRE, a common currency for ALBA members, has been announced.

In a unipolar world with increasing monopoly power of MNCs, ALBA is a way to create a culture based on cooperation and solidarity.⁹ As a part of its challenge to liberalization ALBA aims to show that it is possible to obtain socio-economic without defending liberalization.

According to Hugo Chavez, ALBA is a tool to fight against poverty. In the last summit of ALBA,¹⁰ it is clearly mentioned that it is necessary to develop an alternative to the capitalist system. A system based on:

- solidarity and complementarity, not competition;
- a system in harmony with our mother earth and not plundering of human resources;
- a system of cultural diversity and not cultural destruction and imposition of cultural values and lifestyles alien to the realities of our countries;

⁹ Judith Valencia, "El ALBA algo diferente, novedoso", available at <http://peoplesdialogue.org/es/node/151>, 7 March 2007.

¹⁰ Fifth Extraordinary Summit of the ALBA Final Declaration, Cumana, available at <http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=1982>, 29 April 2009.

- a system of peace based on social justice and not on imperialist policies and wars;
- in summary, a system that recovers the human condition of our societies and peoples and does not reduce them to mere consumers or merchandise.

*** *Social justice and equity***

The ALBA integration model is based on equity and justice. ALBA is an agreement that serves the interest of people that are exploited and socially excluded within the system—the poor, indigenous people and workers who should be protected. The main objective of ALBA is to maintain socio-economic development and, at the same time, focus on social justice and decrease in poverty and increase in life standards.¹¹

*** *Competition and complementarity***

According to Article 2¹² of the ALBA agreement, “The countries shall elaborate a strategic plan in order to guarantee complementary products that can be mutually beneficial based on the rational exploitation of the countries’ existing assets, the preservation of resources, the expansion of employment, market access and other aspects inspired in the true solidarity fostered by our peoples”.

Based on this article the countries will use their own resources on behalf of other countries. The advantageous positions of countries will be used to eliminate inequalities of the others. Advantageous positions on behalf of others rather than creating specialization is among the principles of ALBA. ALBA countries should share this position on an equitable and complementary basis rather than based on comparative advantages. For example, the diversification of resources or creation of conditions that provides competitive positions for the less developed countries should be considered.

*** *Endogenous development in ALBA***

Endogenous development is seen as a necessity to eliminate poverty and overcome social exclusion. Due to these the quality of employment should be guaranteed. Contrary to the FTAA, ALBA opposes the diversification of production. An economic growth that leads to an increase in the standard of living and welfare of society should be obtained. In addition, this, economic growth should be in harmony with the economic sectors. It is argued that the increase in investments and exports of cheap labour-intensive industries could not create a multiplier effect for economic growth. In this case it is not possible to create a mutually beneficial growth in economic sectors. Trade and investment should provide economic development rather than specialization.

¹¹ Bancoex, “What is the ALBA?” available at http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/pdf/alba_mice_en.pdf, 9 March 2009.

¹² Agreement for the Application of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples Of Our America and the Peoples’ Trade Agreements, <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/english/news/bolivia3.html>, 06.06.2008.

ALBA defends self-sufficiency; so, liberalization that destroys this principle is rejected. Instead of liberalising the markets and minimizing the role of state policies, the interest of society should be taken into account. Self sufficiency in agriculture and food policies should be regarded as especially important. The less developed countries could not protect their agriculture sectors due to the high import tariffs of developed countries. So the agricultural policies should be redefined in the light of ALBA's principles.

For sustainable development, the regulatory role of the state should be maintained.

The finance of endogenous development funds should be used on the basis of complementarity and equity. For sustainable development, common projects should aim to create a greater scale in production and self sufficiency in the long term.

**** Trade for Peoples Agreement***

ALBA has expanded its scope by the agreement of TCP (Trade for Peoples Agreement). TCP is seen as an alternative to the proposed trade agreements of the North. Complementarity, cooperation, and mutual collaboration that respect the welfare nations are the principles of a trade agreement. Non-reciprocity, Compensated trade (through direct product exchanges)¹³, Reciprocal Credit Arrangements, and Trade agreements negotiated on a case-by-case basis, allowing for flexibility of commitment according to country circumstances are also valid for other ALBA members in trade relations. Depending on the nations' interests, it aims to provide trade integration for the benefit of society rather than markets or firms. Foreign investments should also be reorganized so as to protect productive development at the national level.

In ALBA all regulations are against exploitation and neoliberal policies. Nationalization against privatization and protectionism, if needed, against the openness ideas of the markets are both defended. For the purpose of industrialization, domestic markets for the sensitive sectors should be protected. Countries should be free in the determination of their own agriculture and food policies. The main sectors of the economy should be determined by the state instead of market mechanisms. Public goods and basic sectors should belong to the state. Public property rights instead of private property in these sectors are necessary for the complementarity principle.

The Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and national treatment policies are out of the agenda of ALBA. These policies are thought to promote the MNCs and foreign firms and limit the role of the small scale industries and cooperatives in the economy. In the case of strategic binational or trinational companies, the parties shall do everything possible—the nature and

¹³ For example, the Dominican Republic is allowed to pay for 40 per cent of its Petrocaribe oil imports with exports of bananas.

cost of the investment permitting—to ensure that the host country holds at least 51% of the shares. ALBA members will exchange scientific and technical know-how with the aim of aiding the economic and social development of member countries.

Energy integration

For ALBA, energy is the one issue that covers integration agreements for the whole region. Venezuela is the fifth richest country in oil reserves and third main exporter whereas Bolivia has one of the highest reserves in natural gas. These parameters increase the importance of energy integration not only for ALBA members but also for the whole world. The Trade and Development Report of UNCTAD (2007)¹⁴ was one of the first reports that “recognize” the importance of ALBA on the basis of regional energy integration agreements. According to the Caracas Agreement (2005), Cuba and Venezuela have decided to improve collaboration in this field. In April 2007, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela, Haiti and Nicaragua have signed an energy agreement. The agreement is based on cooperation in oil and natural gas research, building refineries and ensuring protection. Also, it is stated that Cuba will share its energy saving experience with other ALBA countries.

What does Cuba mean for ALBA?

As mentioned above, the bilateral agreements between Cuba and Bolivarian Venezuela are the driving forces of ALBA. As a socialist state, Cuba is a member of an integration process that claims to be an alternative integration model.

Considering its ideological roots, ALBA is said to be a challenge to neoliberal policies. Cuba's inclusion in this process as a socialist state strengthens the ideological roots of this idea by its political and socio-economic development experiences. For 50 years Cuba has posed a strong ideological challenge to US imperialism. For example, the blockade¹⁵ conditions, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Block, led Cuba to redefine collectivism and self-sufficiency together with independence. In the 1990s Cuba announced that ideological challenge will continue on the basis of “battles of ideas” in order to fight against imperialism and build a better society. In addition to this, Cuban revolutionary forces aim to reorganize activities and adopt social relations in order to meet the needs of the society (guarantee the basic needs) and to build a strong political institution on the basis of

¹⁴ UNCTAD, “Trade and Development Report”, 2007, available at http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdr2007_en.pdf, p. 174.

¹⁵ The direct economic damage suffered by the Cuban people from the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba, since its inception up to the end of 2007, is conservatively estimated at over 93 billion dollars. The significance of the scale of damage is apparent from the fact that this sum equates to 1.6 times Cuba's GDP or around 12 times the country's foreign debt at the end of 2006, or some 23.5 times the total invested by Cuba during that year. See, <http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu/informe2008/InformeIngles/7.html>, 5 March 2009.

increasing social participation and democracy. Thus, for 50 years under conditions of US blockade, Cuban revolutionary forces have struggled to build a socialist state based on independence, patriotism, justice and equity, giving due attention to José Martí's thoughts and Marxism.

In Cuba, the human being is the subject and object of development. Economic independence is considered necessary for the foundation of political sovereignty, continuity in social policy and of the preservation of human historical and spiritual heritage of the nation.

Cuba is a country that tries to find solutions to its problems independent of capitalist institutions. It is well known that economic, financial and political dependence on capitalist institutions contradicts with the ideas of independence and patriotism. In the 1960s, although Latin American countries were suggested policies by the IMF, World Bank and ECLAC, Cuba preferred to follow a different path. By the end of the 1960s, it is seen that despite the blockade and some problems of industrialization Cuba achieved success in its socio-economic indicators. As Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman¹⁶ emphasized, Cuba has shown that it is possible to follow a path independent of these institutions.

Another main characteristic of the Cuban revolution is the principle of solidarity and universality. As a part of Cuban foreign policy, the principles of Cuban revolution are to be spread for the benefits of humanity. It is possible to call this process "export of humanity".

After the revolution, the socio-economic development path of Cuba is considered as one of the main achievements of the revolutionary politics. In these indicators, Cuba shows improvement not only compared to Latin American countries but also to OECD countries. The human development index parameters clearly show this.

Table 1: Cuba's human development index and other countries (2007/2008)

HDI value	Life expectancy (years)	Adult literacy rate (% 15 years and above)	Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%)	GDP per capita (PPP US\$)
1. Iceland (0.968)	1. Japan (82.3)	1. Georgia (100.0)	1. Australia (113.0)	1. Luxembourg (60,228)
49. Bahamas (0.845)	30. Denmark (77.9)	2. Cuba (99.8)	33. Belarus (88.7)	92. Fiji (6,049)
50. Seychelles (0.843)	31. United States (77.9)	3. Estonia (99.8)	34. Germany (88.0)	93. Peru (6,039)
51. Cuba (0.838)	32. Cuba (77.7)	4. Latvia (99.7)	35. Cuba (87.6)	94. Cuba (6,000)

16 Huberman, Leo and Paul M. Sweezy (1969) "Socialism in Cuba", *Monthly Review Press*, New York.

52. Mexico (0.829)	33. Portugal (77.7)	5. Slovenia (99.7)	36. Brazil (87.5)	95. Cape Verde (5,803)
53. Bulgaria (0.824)	34. Slovenia (77.4)	6. Lithuania (99.6)	37. Singapore (87.3)	96. Lebanon (5,584)
177. Sierra Leone (0.336)	177. Zambia (40.5)	139. Burkina Faso (23.6)	172. Niger (22.7)	174. Malawi (667)

Reference: 2007/2008 Human Development Report Cuba,
http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_CUB.html, 5 April 2009.

Given the socio-economic parameters of Cuba before the revolution, it took just 5 years for results to start showing in these parameters. For example the ratio of illiterate people was only 3.9% in 1961 compared to 34% before the revolution.¹⁷ This improvement is sometimes referred to as a miracle of the revolution, but it was simply the result of planned policies led by organized forces of the Cuban revolution.

Cuba has the highest literacy rate in Latin America; in addition, it has the highest quality in health indicators. Today, Cuba is a unique example in Latin America that has obtained socio-economic development with lower inequalities and poverty rates. In 1959, the poorest people in Cuba (40% of the population) received only 6.5% of income whereas in 1986 they received 26%. In 1953 the most affluent segment (10% of the population) received 38% of the income while in 1986 their share decreased to 20%.¹⁸

In the beginning of the 2000s when the poverty rates in many Latin American countries were increasing, the socio-economic parameters of Cuba distinguished themselves among others. According to World Bank figures (2007), 22.2 per cent of the Latin American population live below the 2 dollars a day poverty line.

In Fidel Castro's speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the attack on Moncada, related facts about Cuba's socio-economic parameters have been summarized. Fidel has compared the years 2000 and 1953 by means of socio-economic conditions, while also making a reference to his own speech "History will Absolve me" of 16 October 1953.¹⁹ In 50

¹⁷ According to Diana, "The Cuban transition to socialism was one of the most rapid and thorough anywhere in the world: the first and second Agrarian Reform Laws, the nationalization of virtually all large industries and services, the extraordinary literacy campaign and the establishment of free public education at all levels, free universal health care, and the organization of a popular militia and disciplined mass organizations from neighborhood level upwards, all in the space of four years or so." See, Diana, Raby "Why Cuba Still Matters", available at <http://monthlyreview.org/090105raby.php>, 3 May 2009.

¹⁸ Garcia, Delia Luis Lopez (1999) "Economic Crisis, Adjustments and Democracy in Cuba" in José Bell Larra (ed) *Cuba in the 1990s*, Editorial José Martí, Cuba, 1999, p. 26.

¹⁹ Fidel Castro, "Cuba, a Small Country, Besieged and Blockaded, Still Survives and Grows" Moncada, 50 Years Later, available at <http://www.counterpunch.org/castro07282003.html>, 2 April 2007.

In 1953, the number of people with junior or senior high school education was 139,984, or 3.2% of the population aged 10 and over. In 2002, the number had risen to 5,733,243, which is 41 times greater, equivalent to 58.9% of the population in the same age group. The number of university graduates grew from 53,490 in

years of the Revolution more than 30,000 Cuban educators have dedicated their services to Cuba, which currently has 3.5 million matriculates and 350,000 teachers and professors. In higher education, the country has produced one million professionals. Cuba has 65 central universities with more than 3,000 municipal university satellites.²⁰

According to the WHO, Cuba has 5.91 physicians per 1000 people, twice as many per capita as the US. In fact, Cuba also has more doctors per capita than any other country in the world. There are some 90,000 Cuban students currently studying to work in health care. Cuba is training—free of charge—76,000 foreign students in medicine. ELAM (Latin American Medicine School) was founded in 1998, just as Cuba began to send doctors to the Caribbean and Central America for imparting education of medicine to the young people of poor families throughout the Americas, including the US. There are also hundreds of African, Arab, Asian and European students. Cuba's 21 medical faculties all participate in training. In July 2005, the first 1,610 Latin American students graduated. Each year some 2,000 young people enroll in the school, where they receive free training, food, accommodation and equipment in return for a commitment to go back home and treat their compatriots. Altogether 21,000 students from 20 countries have completed their education in medicine from the Latin American medicine school. In the years 2005 and 2006, three thousand people have graduated from these schools.²¹

Cuba has managed to train more than 78,000 doctors and reach out in solidarity to 100 countries throughout the world.²² Cuba's medical brigades have sent 36,500 doctors (2008) to work in 81 developing countries in the third world to provide services to populations who

1953 to 712,672 in 2002. The 1953 census was taken in the middle of the sugar harvest, that is, the time of the highest demand for labor was 8.4% of the economically active population. The 2002 census, taken in September, revealed that the unemployment rate in Cuba today is a mere 3.1%. And this was the case in spite of the fact that the active labor force in 1953 was only 2,059,659 people, whereas in 2002 it had reached 4,427,028. The number of persons per home was reduced from 4.46 in 1953 to 3.16 in 2002; 75.4% of these homes were built after the triumph of the Revolution. Of the total number of homes in the country, the percentage of huts fell from 33.3% in 1953 to 5.7% in 2002, while the percentage of homes with electrical power service rose from 55.6% in 1953 to 95.5% in 2002. The maximum of 20 students per teacher in primary schools already attained, and the ratio of one teacher per 15 students in junior high school—grades seven, eight and nine—that will be achieved this coming school year, are things that could not even be dreamed of in the world's wealthiest, most developed countries. The number of doctors is 67,079, of which 45,599 are specialists and 8,858 are in training. The number of nurses is 81,459, while that of healthcare technicians is 66,339, for a total of 214,877 doctors, nurses and technicians in the healthcare sector. Life expectancy is 76.15 years; infant mortality is 6.5 for 1000 live births during the first year of life, lower than any other Third World country and even some of the developed nations. There are 35,902 physical education, sports and recreation instructors, a much more than the total number of teachers and professors in all areas of education before the Revolution.

²⁰ Correa, Yenia Silva, "3.6 million Latin Americans have become literate using the Cuban method", available at <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2008/diciembre/juev11/Education.html>, 10 January 2009.

²¹ Ospina, Hernando Calvo, "Havana's medics work around the world, Cuba exports health," available at <http://mondediplo.com/2006/08/11/cuba>, 12 February 2009.

²² "More than 78,000 doctors trained", available at <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2008/diciembre/vier12/medicos.html>, 10 January 2009.

otherwise would have no access to medical care.²³ Between 1963 and 2005 more than 100,000 doctors and health workers intervened in 97 countries, mostly in Africa and Latin America. During 2005 the programme helped the most deprived areas of six countries in Latin America and 20 in Africa. “Operación Milagro (Operation Miracle)”, a project developed by Cuba has allowed more than a million patients from Latin America and the Caribbean requiring eye surgery to be operated on in Cuba or in centres run by Cubans in their own countries.

In addition to these figures, the method of reading and writing “Yo sí puedo (Yes I can)” that won a prize from UNESCO is used as a method of teaching, reading and writing in Latin American and African countries. By the end of last year, this method has reached some 3.6 million Latin Americans making them literate. At present, another 385,000 people from 24 countries are learning by using this method “Yo sí puedo seguir (I Can Do More)” that is developed based on the principles of the literacy campaign undertaken on the island in 1961.²⁴

Another main achievement that makes Cuba different from other Latin American countries—is the improvements in the “institutionalising” of knowledge.²⁵ Cuba occupied third place in Latin America in the number of scientists in 1994 after Venezuela and Argentina.

The Cuban revolutionary leadership believes that social revolution is not attained without techno-scientific development. Knowledge is institutionalized in Cuba. After 1980 one of the main policies is to invest in science. Even in the worst conditions during the special period of Cuba the investment policy for this area has not changed; in fact, it has been continuously improved.

Cuba has 46 centres of higher education and 221 research centres. The country has 1.2 scientist and engineers per 1000 inhabitants and invests 25 US dollars per capita each year in research and development, the highest figure for Latin America. In 15 scientific poles, 23 thousand people work. Altogether 20 bio pharmaceutical drugs are registered and 200 biotechnological products have been developed.²⁶

The Cuban case has become important in the medical and pharmaceutical industries such as electronically integrated medical diagnostic instruments. Since 1980 the country has built a

²³ Cubasolidarity, “Celebrating 50 years of progress, Cuban solidarity campaign”, available at http://www.cuba-solidarity.org/cubasi_article.asp?ArticleID=88, 01 April 2008, 2 March 2009.

²⁴ Correa, Yenia Silva, “3.6 million Latin Americans have become literate using the Cuban method”, available at <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2008/diciembre/juev11/Education.html>, 10 January 2009.

²⁵ Jorge Nunez Jover, Knowledge (1999) “The University and Socialism”, in José Bell Larra (ed.) *Cuba in the 1990s*, Editorial José Martí, Cuba.

²⁶ Lara, Jose Bell, “Cuba in the 21st century”, in Jose Bell Lara (ed.) *Cuba in the 1990s*, Editorial José Martí, Cuba pp. 248-249.

chain of research and development production that lead to the registration of over 145 products with over half already listed in some 36 countries.²⁷ Cuba has developed a vaccine for meningitis B and exports the world's best hepatitis B vaccine. It also developed the first synthetic vaccine for pneumonia prevention. Cuba's flourishing biotechnology and pharmaceuticals industry also become one of the main sources of exported goods.

The feedbacks of ALBA

An examination of the ALBA agreements and the related principles shows that the experiences of Cuban socialism have been carried out. As has been mentioned before Cuba has strongly influenced the ideological background of ALBA integration. In addition to these, the principles of solidarity, collaboration, complementarity, the share of socio-economic development policy experiences such as teaching methods, energy saving methods and "export of humanity" are implemented.

Table 2: A comparasion of ALBA countries' socio-economic parameters

ALBA members	Area (km ²)	Population	HDI value	Expectancy of life at birth	Adult literacy rate (% 15 years and above)	Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio	GDP per capita (PPP US\$)
		2006	2006	2006	2006	2006	2006
Venezuela	916,445	27,000,000	61. (0.826)	62. (73.4)	52. (93.0)	55. (79.7)	62. (11,115)
Nicaragua	129,494	5,470,000	120. (0.699)	76. (72.3)	96. (80.1)	100. (72.1)	127. (2,441)
Bolivia	1,098,545	9,630,000	111. (.723)	124. (65.1)	69. (89.8)	41. (86.0)	113. (3,989)
Cuba	110,860	11,400,000	48. (0.855)	32. (77.9)	2. (99.8)	15. (94.8)	88. (6,876) (6,876)
Dominican Republic	754	70,000	91. (0.768)	85. (71.8)	71. (88.8)	90. (73.5)	95. (6,093)
Honduras	112,090	6,823,568	115. (0.700)	103. (69.4)	90. (80.0)	95. (71.2)	118. (3,430)

Reference: http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets, 4 April 2009.

Except for Cuba, in ALBA countries the poverty rate is high. As it is seen from table 2 the socio-economic parameters of Cuba differs from other members. According to UNICEF²⁸ figures, Bolivia is the poorest country in Latin America where 80% of the population are in the poverty line, and Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas. Honduras and Dominic Republic also have high poverty rates. A study of the poverty data of Venezuela in 1998 shows that 50.5% of the population were living in poverty.

In the last few years due to the change in the political climate, the fight against poverty has become a priority for these countries. Besides the finance problems the necessary infrastructure for socio-economic development is not available. It is possible to claim that

²⁷ Garcia, Delia Luis Lopez, "Economic Crisis, Adusments and Democracy in Cuba" in José Bell Larra (ed) *Cuba in the 1990s*, Editorial José Martí, Cuba, p. 37.

²⁸ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nicaragua.html>, http://www.unicef.org/bolivia/resources_2332.htm, 2 February 2009.

ALBA and, therefore, the Cuban experiment acts as an accelerator for the application of social programmes or for the nationalization of private sectors to obtain free public services and transfer of income to these areas. As a part of the ALBA principles, the fight against poverty and for obtaining socio-economic development is one of the main objectives.

As far as the feedbacks of ALBA for Cuba are concerned, the integration process reduced the vulnerabilities of the Cuban economy. The Helms-Burton (1992) and Toricelli (1994) Laws of the US against Cuba have increased the burden of the blockade that coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Block. The Cuban economy in the special period has lost 85% of financial credits, 75% of trade and 35% of GDP. This sudden loss of financial and economic market and, most important from the ideological point of view, the collapse of the Soviet Block led Cuba to put in place some measures.

In the fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (1992-1993), after discussions in the Cuban society, some measures were adopted. One of the main points that the congress underlined was that there would be no change in the socialist path of the Cuban revolution. The reforms included,²⁹

“...an adjustment process, measures to manage the crisis and the external opening. An emergency national program denominated Special Period was adopted whose main objective rested in the distribution of the scarce available resources, in such a way that the impact of the crisis was equally distributed among the population and whose main purpose went to promote an external opening that allowed to capture external resources in the smallest possible period.”

In the case of openness to foreign investments and investments in tourism, some additional measures have been taken in order not to lead to any change in the socialist character of the state, where a dual economic structure has been realized.

Another example is that in the worst period of the economy (1990-1993) effort was made to prevent reduction in the social expenditures; they thus stayed almost at the same level. There is no change in social security policies in the content of free public services either. Cubans have called this period a “share of constraint resources on equity.”

Cuban imports spending was mostly on food and oil and exports mostly came from sugar in the late 1980s. By the 2000s it is observed that this trade pattern has almost changed. Nickel, tobacco products, biotechnology and other services are the main exports while fuel, food, machinery and equipment, and chemicals are the main imports of the Cuban economy. In the

²⁹ Hernandez, Gladys (2005) “Cuba: Evolution of the national exports strategy”, Chief Deputy of International Finances Department, CIEM, Cuba.

period 1995-2000, the growth of the GDP was 4.8% while the growth in exports averaged 2.1%.³⁰

In 2006 the economy grew by 12.5%, the highest growth achieved in any years of the Revolution and the highest in Latin America. Also the unemployment level has decreased, making it the lowest unemployment level in Latin America. In 2006 it was 1.9%. In order to guarantee education and health free of charge for the entire population, 22.6% of the GDP was allocated for education and health.³¹

Cuba has welcomed ALBA under these conditions. Looking at the experiences of the ALBA integration it is seen that ALBA and Cuba have influences on each other. These effects are clearly seen in the following section which briefly examines socio-economic indicators, energy integration, food security, infrastructure and investment and trade relations in ALBA countries.

Socio-economic Indicators in ALBA

The case of Cuba-Venezuela relations is a good example of the socio-economic development under ALBA integration.

Since 1998, the fight against poverty is at the centre of Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. The social programmes applied for this purpose have followed Cuban experiences. Oil incomes are transferred to social programmes. Historically, Venezuela has the unique distinction of a Latin American country owning rich resources of oil being governed by a leftist government. A World Bank study estimated that in Venezuela oil is equal to 80% of total exports and 25% of GDP and 50% of financial revenues.³²

Before the Bolivarian revolution oil revenues were shared by the oil companies while more than half of the population lived under 2 dollars a day poverty line. After the Bolivarian revolution the PDVSA was reorganized. With nationalization in this sector, oil revenues were transferred to social programmes. Additionally, non-oil revenues were also increased.

The Venezuelan economy grew by 17.9 per cent in 2004 and by 9.3 per cent in 2005. Reduction in poverty was observed.³³ According to the latest statistics from the National

³⁰ Hernandez, Gladys (2005) "Cuba: Evolution of the national exports strategy", Chief Deputy of International Finances Department, CIEM, Cuba, p. 4.

³¹ Granma (2007) "Economic growth at 12.5%" available at <http://granmai.co.cu/ingles/2007/enero07/lun8/1asamblea.html>, 8 January, accessed on 4 April 2009.

³² World Bank, "Venezuela in brief", available at <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/external/lac/lac.nsf/Countries/Venezuela/9AEC6D72716FD7B985256D7A006B9B54?OpenDocument>, 3 August 2007.

³³ Weisbrot, Mark, Luis Sandoval and David Rosnick, "Poverty Rates In Venezuela: Getting the Numbers Right", available at <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/ceprpov.htm>, 5 April 2009.

Institute of Statistics (INE), poverty in Venezuela has dropped by 24.5 percentage points over the last decade, from 50.5% poverty in 1998 to 26% at the close of 2008.³⁴ Venezuela's social inequality index (Gini coefficient) reached 0.42; the average social inequality in Latin America is 0.52.³⁵

Finally, the government has steadily increased overall social spending from 8.2 per cent of GDP in 1998 to 11.2 per cent of GDP in 2005; this was expected to reach 12.5 per cent of GDP in 2006. On education, for example, real government spending per capita has increased by 80 per cent from 1998 to 2005, with public spending on education at more than 4 per cent of GDP annually during this period. Through the main literacy programme, known as "Misión Robinson", an estimated 1.4 million people (or more than 5 per cent of the total population) of different ages have learned how to write and read. These programmes have also benefited the poor, again in ways that are not reflected or feasibly incorporated into the measured poverty rate.³⁶ There have been other substantial gains in education, especially higher education, where gross enrolment rates more than doubled from 1999/2000 to 2007/2008. Again, infant mortality has fallen by more than one-third during 1998-2006. The number of primary care physicians in the public sector increased 12-fold during 1999-2007, providing health care to millions of Venezuelans who previously did not have access to it.

ALBA plays a critical role in this improvement in Venezuela. In the realization of the missions in Venezuela, the socio-economic development of Cuba is crucial. In the final declaration of ALBA in 2005 made by Cuba and Venezuela, 209 common economic projects with a total cost of 834 million US dollars were unveiled. These projects were in the areas of health, education, agriculture, sports and technology.³⁷ It was decided to support the missions that have been undertaken in Venezuela in order to fight poverty. In 2007, the number of common projects reached 353 with a total cost of 487 million US dollars; in 2008 the number of projects was 72 with a total cost of 1,355 million US dollars. For 2009, 311 projects in the areas of health, education, agriculture, sport and technology have been signed.³⁸

Some of the projects in Venezuela are as follows:

³⁴ Pearson, Tamara, "Poverty and Inequality Decline in Venezuela", available at <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/4064>, 5 April 2009.

³⁵ Pearson, Tamara, "Poverty and Inequality Decline in Venezuela", available at <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/4064>, 5 April 2009.

³⁶ Weisbrot, Mark, Luis Sandoval, and David Rosnick, "Poverty Rates In Venezuela: Getting the Numbers Right", available at <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/ceprpov.htm>, 5 April 2009.

³⁷ Final Declaration from the First Cuba-Venezuela Meeting for the Application of the ALBA (2005), available at <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/109>, 2 February 2008.

³⁸ <http://www.alternativabolivariana.org>, 3 February 2008.

* 600 Integral Diagnostic Centers; 600 Rehabilitation and Physiotherapy Departments and 35 High Technology Centers offering, with the help of Cuban specialists, professional healthcare services free of charge to the Venezuelan population.

* ALBA agreements provide for 2000 Cuban scholarships to Venezuela per year.³⁹ Venezuela has 15,000 Cuban medical professionals working in its Barrio Adentro Mission.

* The training of 40,000 doctors and 5,000 health technology specialists in Venezuela within the Barrio Adentro II health care program for the poor.

* There are 30,000,000 Cuban doctors in Venezuela. More than half of the Venezuelan population is treated by Cuban doctors.

* The training in Cuba of 10,000 graduates from the Mission Ribas (preparation of high school students for university education) program in the areas of Medicine and Nursing, who will be deployed throughout the country's polyclinics and hospitals and will stay in the homes of Cuban families.

* Cuba contributes to the development of the Plans Barrio Adentro I and II, under which some 30,000 Cuban doctors and other healthcare workers are deployed throughout Venezuela.

* In 2005 alone, 100,000 Venezuelans with a variety of eye conditions were to receive surgical treatment in Cuba.

* Mission Robinson I, through which Venezuela will soon declare itself the second illiteracy-free territory in the American continent, have taught 2 million Venezuelans how to read and write.

* Under Mission Robinson II, some 1.262 million Venezuelans are continuing their studies to sixth-grade level.

* Mission Ribas, educating high school students to equip them for university education, is an opportunity for young Venezuelans offered by the Bolivarian Revolution. To that end, the fulfilment of the Scholarship Plan offered by Cuba is to be promoted.

* Mission Sucre for the universalization of higher education.

* Mission Vuelvan Caras to train specialized workers and provide them with new sources of employment.

³⁹ Girvan, Norman "ALBA & Petrocaribe An Alternative to Neo-Liberal Integration?" A Preliminary Evaluation from a CARCOM Perspective, available at www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/girvan-pres-alternativos.ppt, 7 April 2009.

* In addition, the two countries are working on the design of a continental project to eliminate illiteracy in Latin America.

* Medical treatment of Venezuelan patients in Cuba is to be maintained. By the end of 2004, the number of patients treated stood at 7,793, accompanied by 6,567 relatives or friends, who benefited from highly specialized services including cardiovascular surgery, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, and organ transplants. By 2005 the programme was supposed to have included a further 3,000 patients and their companions.

* 1,400 Cuban technical employees in the agricultural sector of Venezuela.

* 6,000 Cuban sportsmen work as volunteers in 335 municipalities in Venezuela.

* A total of 3,800 Venezuelan students in Cuba.

The same measures in socio-economic development are valid for other ALBA members. For example,

* 5000 Cuban medical scholarships are given to Bolivia. Bolivia is reportedly benefiting from 600 Cuban medical specialists.

* Bolivian doctors are educated in ELAM. Cuba helps coordination of health centres in Bolivia by sending specialists and doctors

* Cuba provides Bolivia with the experience, didactic material and technical resources necessary to implement the literacy programme in four languages—Spanish, Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní; the aim is to make it available to all sectors of the population in need.

* Cuba has also been assisting Bolivia in expanding its public schools and hospitals.

* In the Dominican Republic, over 100 students are reportedly attending Cuban medical and nursing schools, and approximately 75 Dominican students are in other Cuban schools. Some 2,000 Venezuelan and Cuban scholarships are available to qualified Dominican students in computer science, medicine, engineering, sports, physics, math, and agriculture.

* Venezuela and Nicaragua have also implemented agreements of mutual assistance around social programmes through ALBA. One of the biggest projects under this initiative involves Venezuela helping Nicaragua build eight centers that are aimed at providing housing and education to the country's 47,000 street children. In this area again Cuban teachers and doctors play a critical role.

Energy integration

The integration between PDVSA and CUPET is a specific example of energy integration. When oil prices are above 50 US dollars Venezuela guarantees that the oil that is sold to Cuba will not be below 27 US dollars.

- * A framework agreement, contracts for the buying and selling of crude oil and the warehousing of crude oil and its derivatives, and letters of intent for the restoration of the Cienfuegos Refinery and for technology transfers between PDVSA and CUPET have been signed.

- * PDVSA in Cuba whose social objective is the exploration and exploitation, refining, importation, exportation and commercialization of hydro-carbons and their derivatives, as well its transportation and storage.

- * A framework agreement between Cuba and Venezuela for cooperation in the electrical energy industry.

- * As a result of this agreement and energy saving policy, Cuba has increased its self sufficiency in energy use which has also affected its economic growth. Today nearly 90% of Cuba's energy is obtained from natural resources. Especially in this case, the energy agreements between Cuba and Venezuela have also coincided with economic improvements in Cuba.

- * Another significant impact of the energy integration is seen in the housing sector. For example the oil refinery of Camilo Cienfuegos, built in 1970, was later closed due to the blockade and collapse of the Soviet Block. As a result of the collaboration with Venezuela, oil is now exported from this refinery; the production of plastic, used in house construction, is also taking place. Hence an attempt is being made to solve the housing problem in this manner.

- * Cuba and Venezuela is helping Bolivia upgrade its gas sector so that it can become self-sufficient in its gas-derived energy needs.

- * Cuba's energy saving experience is taken as a sample by other ALBA member countries.

- * ALBA Caribe Fund created within the PC framework for ALBA countries—25 per cent of bill for imports of crude oil from Venezuela is credited to this Fund to fight poverty.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Girvan, Norman, "ALBA & Petrocaribe An Alternative to Neo-Liberal Integration?" A Preliminary Evaluation from a CARCOM Perspective, available at www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/girvan-pres-alternativos.ppt, 7 April 2009.

Investment and infrastructure

* Agreements, framework contracts and memoranda of understanding in tourism, information technology, communications; transportation, communication and information; education and sports; biodiversity, the environment, science and technology; and hydraulic resources and construction.

* Investments will be tax-exempt.

* A memorandum of understanding for the establishment of a strategic alliance for iron and steel development in Venezuela, and for the coordination of a bilateral enterprise oriented towards the recovery of raw materials.

* Joint business directed at the improvement of the railway infrastructure of Cuba and Venezuela; fostering of integration in the area of maritime transportation.

* The creation of a joint strategic alliance with the goal of developing nickel and cobalt mining projects in the regions of Aragua, Carabobo and Cojedes.

* The repair and construction of sea vessels.

* The creation of a Cuban-Venezuelan mixed enterprise for the production of sports equipment as well as a mixed enterprise for fuel transportation.

* The Cuban government has also entered into a health care “joint-venture” with the Venezuelan government, called Mission Miracle. The aim of Mission Miracle is to eliminate blindness. Patients fly free of charge to Cuba where they receive a free eye operation. More than one million Latin American and Caribbean people have had their vision restored through this programme.

For Bolivia: during the investment recovery period, any state investment, investments made by Bolivian mixed companies or even those made with Bolivian private capital in Cuba will be tax-exempt. Cuba shall grant Bolivian airlines the same facilities provided to their Cuban counterparts, with regard to passenger transportation, freight to and from Cuba and the use of airport services or any other facilities, as well as the internal transportation of passengers and freight within Cuba.

Trade relations

According to the ALADI figures of 2001 and 2007, the export-import composition of Cuba with Venezuela and Bolivia has undergone a significant change. Cuba has changed its trade composition, in which an increase in trade-related products has taken place. Apart from oil,

manufacturing goods, chemicals, plastics, aluminium, vehicles are imported from Venezuela. Cuba's exports to these countries have increased especially in the areas of pharmacy products, manufacturing goods, tobacco and optical instruments.

In the third Meeting (2005) of the Administrative Commission of the Economic Complementation Agreement, Cuba and Venezuela decided to grant preferential tariffs to 104 new lines of Cuban exports and agreed on a timetable for progressive tax relief for these as well as existing preferences. In all cases, Venezuelan commitments as laid out in the Agreement between the Andean Community of Nations and MERCOSUR have been taken into account.⁴¹ Commerce between Venezuela and Cuba soared to 7 billion USD in 2007, according to the Cuban government (in 2006, trade was 1.7 billion USD).

Cuba is to initially acquire 412 million USD-worth Venezuelan items with productive purposes, as well as those manufactured for social use or for direct consumption by the population; this will have a positive effect on employment generation in Venezuela, leading to the creation of some 100,000 new jobs. These goods will be on offer in the Cuban market, with preferential treatment within the policy of economic and social development and elevating the living standard of the Cuban people.

Cuba agreed to grant duty-free access to Venezuelan imports and to remove non-tariff barriers; in return Venezuela has agreed to eliminate non-tariff barriers on Cuban imports.

For Bolivia the same conditions will be applied.

Food security

In Cuba, endogenous projects will be developed in the Higher Institute of Agricultural Science in Havana (ISCAH) for the training of young Cubans and thousands of experts and professionals from the Venezuelan agricultural sector, as well as those from the communities of Bolívar, Sandino and Martí, in the Sandino municipality of Pinar del Río province.

Under ALBA, there's a plan to establish a supranational company—like a transnational company, but in this case with the concept of a great nation—to produce food with the goal of guaranteeing food sovereignty. The new ALBA company will receive an initial investment of 49 million US dollars drawn from the 100 million US dollars food security fund that ALBA member nations created during the height of the world food crisis. As an investment plan, the ALBA nations signed agreements to form mixed enterprises that will promote

⁴¹ Final declaration From the First Cuba-Venezuela Meeting for the application of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), available at <http://www.bolivariancentre.com/leftframe/cubavenezuela.htm>, 3 March 2009.

technological cooperation and training, invest in rural infrastructure, and integrate regional food distribution.⁴²

Through ALBA, Venezuela and Cuba have also aided Bolivia. In 2006, the US stopped buying soy beans from Bolivia. To save Bolivia's soy bean industry, Cuba and Venezuela began importing soy beans from Bolivia under ALBA.

ALBA Bank (BALBA)

In Havana, a 100%-Venezuelan subsidiary of the Industrial Bank of Venezuela has been inaugurated; also, the opening in Caracas of a 100%-Cuban subsidiary of the Foreign Bank of Cuba has been approved. The two state institutions have decided to make a significant contribution to the sustained increase in economic relations and bilateral trade, which has already begun to materialize.

Later, ALBA Bank—in order to support sustainable social and economic development, in order to reduce poverty and strengthen integration—was set up with an authorized capital of 2 billion USD and subscribed capital of 1 USD billion.⁴³ The aim of the bank is to make loans available to member states to enable them to undertake infrastructural, health, education, and social and cultural development programmes. Loans from the Bank of ALBA do not have any conditions and the bank is run in a democratic manner.

Conclusion

Up till now, ALBA as an integration model has shown that political preferences determine the dimensions of the integration process on behalf of society. As a result of this, socio-economic programmes, under the security provided by the governments, have been realized on the basis of equity and complementarity. For many years Latin American people looking for alternative models of development finally have the opportunity of examining the ALBA experiences.

ALBA declares that the fight against neoliberalism is possible. At ALBA, the ideological challenge against the capitalist mode of the production is on the agenda more strongly than ever before. It is clear that the process of ALBA on this basis, not only for its members but also for the whole continent, will continue to determine the future of Latin America as one of the main actors.

⁴² “ALBA Trade Bloc Forms Joint Food Company at Summit in Venezuela”, available at <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/4165>, 3 February 2009.

⁴³ See, [ALBA & Petrocaribe An Alternative to Neo-Liberal Integration?](#), available at www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/.../girvan-pres-alternativos.ppt

ALBA, influenced by Cuban experiences, also played a role in reducing the vulnerabilities of the Cuban economy. ALBA's goals of self-sufficiency, providing basic needs, and increasing product diversification have made a critical contribution to the Cuban economy. ALBA has also contributed to reducing the burden of the blockade in many ways. Especially, the energy integration leads not only to economic growth but also development of other sub sectors. ALBA can be seen as an opportunity to develop the manufacturing sectors, increasing infrastructure and technology use on the basis of equity and complementarity.

Therefore, ALBA's experience in putting up an ideological challenge against neoliberalism combined with the factors mentioned above, might give some answers in the search for alternative economic development models.