A Critical Analysis of Regionalism as a Development Strategy in southern Africa: beyond Institutional Explanations of Failure of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)

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Introduction
Beyond the level of a general phenomenon in the global political economy, regionalism has been expressly promoted as a development strategy in southern Africa since the formation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in 1980. Against the backdrop of movements for majority rule, actions by the apartheid regime in South Africa to preserve its dominance in the region and a prevalent discourse of dependency among poor countries, the SADCC’s stated aim was to reduce dependency on the South African economy, and the industrialised economies at large, through concerted action. With the anticipated transition to majority rule in South Africa, a shift in the world order associated with the changes in Eastern Europe and the dominance of market-led development strategies, the SADCC initiated a reorientation of its institution and its development strategy in 1992 as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in an attempt to integrate the region more openly with the world economy and include South Africa upon the end of apartheid. However, after over a quarter century since

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its inception, poverty, inequality and marginalisation in the world economy continue to characterise the SADC region. This, therefore, raises the question as to why regionalism has failed to have a discernible impact on development in southern Africa.

Several arguments have sought to address this question by implicitly or explicitly centring on the ‘weakness’ of the institution and its development strategy. Implicitly, these arguments have taken the form of the inability of the SADC to formulate an effective development strategy, relying on market integration and privatisation to carry out its stated development objectives.¹ More explicit arguments, which this paper will focus on below, have centred on the power and capacity of the SADC to successfully deepen integration and implement any type of development strategy in order to improve economic conditions in the region. However, each of these arguments is based on a related assumption that may be challenged when regionalism in southern Africa is examined in a ‘critical’ light. With regard to the SADC’s weakness to pursue alternatives to a neo-liberal strategy, the assumption is that the transition from the SADCC in the 1980s to the SADC in the 1990s represented a marked change in development strategy, where a focus on production for more self-sufficiency was abandoned in favour of a market-led strategy, which was ‘embraced’ through the power of structure, agency and discourse. With regard to the SADC’s inability to deepen integration in the region, the assumption is that has ever been imbued with the legitimacy and authority to carry forward its development objectives across its member states, whereby a degree of their state sovereignty should have necessarily been yielded in its formation.

What these assumptions overlook, however, is the extent to which the SADC embodies a set of overlapping contradictions regarding its strategy and authority that have been present and in a process of historical change and continuity since its inception in 1980. By focussing, implicitly or explicitly, on the SADC institution and its power to transform the region, such analyses have obscured these underlying processes that not only contribute to the nature of regionalism in southern Africa but also to its deficiencies as a development strategy. If, instead, the SADC case is

¹ See, for instance, Pallotti (2004: 549).
examined in the light of a critical approach to theory along the lines of Cox’s (1981) method of historical structures, whereby the interrelationships between ideas, institutions and material capabilities are examined dialectically, the power of the SADC, to rephrase Cox’s argument (1981: 139), ceases to be the sole explanatory variable in the development of southern Africa and instead becomes part of what requires explanation. In this way, the static nature of the assumptions discussed above gives way to a more process-oriented understanding of regionalism and development in this case, where there have existed tensions between strives for self-sufficiency and a desire to integrate with a global political economy, the inclusion and exclusion of South Africa, and between regionalism and nationalism since the formation of the organisation in 1980.

This paper will argue that institutional explanations have fallen short of accounting for the failure of regionalism as a development strategy in southern Africa by not having considered these three interrelated factors, which underlie this process. Within a framework of Coxian critical theory, this paper will explore these contradictions that point toward a more satisfactory explanation of the SADC’s shortcomings in the region, with the purpose of setting an agenda for research into this case. After brief discussions of the paper’s theoretical perspective and history of the SADC, it will first examine the main thrust of the institutional argument – that the strength of regional institutions is the most important factor shaping development in southern Africa. Next, it will present the argument that the power of the SADC is reliant upon three factors that have emerged dialectically since the inception of the institution: the tension between a self-sufficient strategy for development and closer integration with the world economy, the concept of sovereignty and its implications for regional and national forms of development, and the role of South Africa. By way of conclusion, these findings will be summarised and an agenda for research into the failure of regionalism as a strategy for development will be laid out.

**Critical theory as framework for the study of regionalism and development**

Cox’s original contribution to the study of international political economy (IPE) sought to challenge what was seen as an ahistorical mode of enquiry found in the orthodox theories of international relations (IR)/IPE – mainly neo-realism and neo-liberal institutionalism – with a perspective that sought to delve into the origins of
power structures in world orders. The purpose of this, he argued, was to be able to ‘[stand] apart from the prevailing order’ to understand the processes of change that brought it about and that shape possible future world orders (Cox 1981: 130). In this way, Cox distinguished between ‘problem-solving’ and ‘critical’ theory. Problem-solving theory, as he characterised the body of theory within the orthodoxy, holds a current set of social and power relations, and the institutions that embody them, as given to be able to maintain stability of the order in the face of challenges that confront any particular aspect of it. Critical theory, by contrast, aims to examine and evaluate the very parameters (the social relations, power relations and institutions), which problem-solving theory holds as constant, through an historical method of enquiry to reveal a possible set of alternatives for a world order open to normative choices (Cox 1981: 130). This method involves the use of framework that takes the form of an ‘historical structure’, which changes over time at different interrelated levels of analysis and consists of a ‘particular pattern combination of thought patterns, material conditions and human institutions which has a certain coherence among its elements’ (Cox 1981: 135).

Thus, an historical structure consists of a configuration of three types of forces that act upon each other: material capabilities, ideas and institutions. Material capabilities, as Cox put it, are ‘productive and destructive potentials’, which are broadly the productive capabilities of organisation and technology as well as the stock of natural resources, equipment and wealth within any particular frame of reference (Cox 1981: 136). Ideas may also be distinguished along two lines, along which one exhibits more static and the other more dynamic characteristics: ‘intersubjective meanings’ and ‘collective images of social order held by different groups of people’. The first category of ideas involves accepted notions of sets of social relations that perpetuate through time and set expectations of behaviour among groups of people. As Cox points out, these may involve the notion that states have a particular authority over territories and that they engage with each other in certain prescribed ways; they may also involve the shared notion of money representing certain forms of value that may be exchanged in a certain manner. The second category of ideas are more contentious and relate to ideas held by groups of people about the nature of justice and equality, for instance, and the legitimacy accorded to the prevailing power structure. These types of ideas are not constant across groups or time but rival and conflict with one
another, offering images of alternative orders, the material and institutional basis of which are brought into question (Cox 1981: 136). Lastly, an historical structure consists of institutions, which reflect a particular order and act to stabilise and perpetuate it. As such, comprised of a set of material capabilities and ideas, institutions act as a counterpart to a hegemonic strategy, in the Gramscian sense, by coalescing diverging sets of interests under the guise of a shared or universal set of principles. Whilst related to hegemony or a hegemonic project, institutions, as Cox warns (1981: 137), are not to be taken as identical to hegemony. To do so would be to overlook the material and ideological aspects of hegemony that may change apart from the institution, rendering the institution to be an inaccurate expression of it.

These three dimensions of an historical structure are not fixed but impact on one another through time and across different levels of analysis. Cox calls attention to three levels in particular: social forces, forms of states and world orders. Social forces are those which arise from the organisation of the production process; forms of states signify particular instances of the broader concept of a ‘state/society complex’, denoting the complex interwoven nature of the ‘state’ and ‘civil society’; and the level of a world order represents the amalgam of forces that ‘successively define the problematic of war and peace for the ensemble of states’ (Cox 1981: 138). As with material capabilities, ideas and institutions, these levels of analysis are not conceptually isolated but interrelated, each influencing the other. For instance, a significant change in the way production is organised alters the social relations embedded within the state-society complex, having ramifications on the world order that now encompasses this new form of state. As such, historical structures not only exist across levels of analysis but also through time. For this, Cox brings in Marxian historical materialism and a dialectical mode of enquiry as a fundamental component of critical theory. As Harvey explains, ‘[d]ialectical thinking emphasizes the understanding of processes, flows, fluxes, and relations over the analysis of elements, things, structures, and organised systems’, yet ‘elements’ or ‘things’, as he refers to them, ‘are constituted out of flows, processes, and relations operating within bounded fields which constitute structured systems or wholes’ (Harvey 1996: 49 – 50). In other words, it is not sufficient to analyse structures consisting material capabilities, ideas and institutions at any particular point in time but must be considered through processes and relations that occur over time that give rise to them within a particular
realm of human activity (or what Cox calls a ‘limited totality’). Furthermore, when examined dialectically, such structures and their elements are inherently contradictory; that is, they embody a set of processes and flows that simultaneously act to reinforce and undermine them (Harvey 1996: 52).

Therefore, in the case of examining regionalism and development in southern Africa, it is insufficient in the light of Cox’s arguments to solely focus on the SADC as an institution and evaluate its development strategy and its effects at present without critical engagement with the processes and forces that given rise to it and continue to shape it. This requires that all three elements of an historical structure be considered over some range of activity (or ‘limited totality’) and during some period of time. To restrict analysis to the institutional element presents the risk that changes in the relationship of material capabilities and ideas in the region that cause them to become ‘out of sync’ with the institution and to go unnoticed (Cox 1981: 137). Thus, if the SADC’s current strategy, which predominantly calls for market-led approaches to development, is analysed without attention to these other elements and the processes by which they were arrived at, it may lead to a conclusion that the SADC is an expression of the hegemony of neo-liberalism, which may obscure processes that undermine market-oriented strategies if material capabilities and ideas in the region are not also taken into account.

Finally, with regard to conceptualisation of regionalism and development, the work of Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne (1996) on regionalism and world order, and Payne’s recent work on the regional politics of development (2004) fit neatly within the Coxian framework. This approach, termed the ‘World Order Approach’ (WOA) by some (Söderbaum 2005: 232), conceptualises regionalism as a ‘state-led or states-led project designed to reorganise a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines’ (Payne and Gamble 1996: 2). For Gamble and Payne, as for others who have adopted this approach, regionalism is a process that occurs within the world order, and thus occurs within the context of globalisation in the current era. In the current world order, the phenomenon of ‘new regionalism’, which signifies a post-Cold War era form of regionalism that seeks to integrate with the global economy as opposed to the preceding form of ‘old regionalism’ that sought to distance itself, is arguably an attempt by states ‘to accelerate, to modify, or occasionally reverse the
direction of social change’ that the process of globalisation contributes to (Gamble and Payne 1996: 250). This notion of the impact of globalisation, and indeed of regionalism, on society and on the people lives draws the concept of development directly into the study of IPE. Based once again on a Coxian critical perspective, Payne defines ‘development’ in the contemporary era as:

the collective building by the constituent social and political actors of a country…of a viable, functioning political economy, grounded in at least a measure of congruence between its core domestic characteristics and attributes and its location within a globalising world order and capable on that basis of advancing the well-being of those living within its confines (Payne 2004: 23).

Payne then argues that based on this perspective, analysis should focus on those strategies that states have adopted in order to bring about a process of development, including their material, ideational and institutional character, of which regionalism is very much a part (2004: 25 – 26). Indeed, he argues, analysis must consider the case where a regional organisation explicitly becomes involved in this process (Payne 2004: 26). This is certainly the case with regard to the SADC in the southern African region, as the next section outlining its history will discuss. The purpose then, along these theoretical lines and to return to the question that motivates this paper, is to analyse why the SADC has failed to be an effective strategy for the advancement of the well-being of those living within the confines of the region.

A brief history of the SADC: from the late 1970s to the present
In the midst of a world-wide economic recession and regional conflicts for independence and majority black-rule in the late 1970s, regionalism in southern Africa came to be specifically adopted as a development strategy with the intention of improving the lives of people living in its newly independent states, through the reduction of dependence on South Africa and the advanced industrial economies at large. Thus, as a strategy to improve the economies of the so-called Frontline States, and to do so on their ‘own terms’ without the involvement of the Republic of South Africa, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), the institutional precursor to the SADC, is a case that illustrates the inseparability of economic and political processes. These processes would continue to shape regional development strategies in southern Africa into the 1980s, the so-called ‘lost decade’
for sub-Saharan African development; into the 1990s, amid the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the apartheid regime in South Africa; and into the present decade, against a backdrop of an increasingly globalised political economy.

The formation of the SADCC in an era of apartheid

In general, the 1970s witnessed a state of economic and political crisis for the southern African region. Sharply declining rates of growth, increasing population, worsening terms of trade, mounting debt and current account deficits on the balance of payments characterised the economies of the region during this period. These economic conditions occurred against the backdrop of calls for a New International Economic Order among the so-called developing countries, and conflict among the states in the region, particularly the liberation movements and civil wars in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Angola and Mozambique, and the destabilisation efforts of South Africa. With respect to the latter, these conflicts had a strong regional dimension, impacting the political economies of their neighbouring states. The war in Rhodesia, for instance, was especially costly for Zambia and involved the political interventions of Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Botswana. With regard to the political tensions with South Africa, as the only minority-led government in the region by 1980 – along with Namibia, its illegal, ‘de facto colony’ (Sidaway and Simon 1993: 7) – it engaged in policies designed to maintain economic and military dominance in the region. These took the form of an initiative, for instance, to create its own regional grouping, and the form of destabilisation, which involved military actions into its neighbouring states. These economic and political circumstances exerted pressure on the majority-led Frontline States to formulate a regional development strategy in order to improve the economies of these countries and alter the structure of dependence on South Africa.

With increasing South African military involvement and its adoption of a policy of ‘destabilization’ in 1979, the newly independent states of southern Africa formed the SADCC and adopted its regional strategy for development upon the independence of Zimbabwe. The creation of the organisation and formulation of its strategy was primarily a reaction to South Africa’s efforts to craft a political economy of the region in its own interests, expressed through the proposal for a Constellation of Southern African States (CONSAS), but then also reflected a more general intention to shape
the region along the lines of the idea of independence inherent in the liberation movements. As President Kaunda expressed in his welcome address to the first SADCC summit held in Lusaka, Zambia:

Some people have tended to think that we are forming this economic grouping purely to face South Africa. In our view, this regional grouping is being established despite and not merely because of South Africa and her concept of a regional constellation of states. We in this region must reflect the new image of free Africa. Our effort is the logic consequence of the victory of the people in Southern Africa in the war of liberation...Our task is to link up our economies in order to strengthen ourselves (SADCC 1980a: 15).

Therefore, the political motive at the heart of the SADCC’s development strategy was shaped by the liberation movements in the region against colonial rule and against minority rule in Rhodesia, South Africa and Namibia. Indeed, Kaunda began his address not by drawing attention to the economic challenges faced by the Frontline States, but by discussing the liberation efforts of Zimbabwe, the experiences of Swaziland and Lesotho, and the prospect of independence in Namibia. Similarly, in the Summit’s Opening Statement by President Seretse Khama of Botswana, the economic intent of the SADCC was not presented until the independence of Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, and the hopes for an independent Namibia had been covered. Thus, economic development was couched in terms of ‘liberation’ and seen as an extension of the independence movement in region:

We believe that the time has now come to demonstrate our solidarity in the struggle for economic liberation. I have no doubt that we are equally capable of working together for the Economic and social advancement of our peoples in the same way as we have done in the struggle for political freedom (SADCC 1980a: 18).

One, of course, could point out that the independence efforts in the region, which Khama referred to, were somewhat factious and by no means concerted. One could also dispute the degree to which this outlook was reflected in actual regional development policy and action. Nonetheless, by linking economic development with an overarching project for independence, the SADCC’s development strategy was aligned with an image formed in contradistinction to that put forth by South Africa in its efforts to promote a constellation of states in the region, and inherited an African nationalist slant in terms of its ideology and the primacy of self-rule.
The strategy formulated by the SADCC member states was moulded by the interaction of national, regional and international politics. From an international point of view, the SADCC initiative was embedded within a wider discourse of dependency and calls by the poor countries of the world to establish a New International Economic Order. This motivates, for instance, President Machel of Mozambique to state at the second SADCC Conference, held in the Mozambican capital of Maputo in 1981, that ‘[t]his Conference must make a positive contribution to the more general effort to create a just and equitable New International Economic Order’ (SADCC 1981: 29). However, when narrowing the focus to the southern African region, this notion of dependency within a world order is applied to the relationship between the SADCC states and South Africa. As Khama stated in his address at the first SADCC Summit:

We all know that our economies are to a very large extent albeit to varying degrees, dependent on the [economy] of South Africa. We may be proud of our Political Independence; but before we achieve some degree of Economic Independence our task is not complete. The desirability and indeed the inevitability of interdependence as a world economic order is fully recognised and accepted. Unfortunately this is not the situation with regard to our relationship with South Africa. What we therefore seek is the ability to exercise some degree of choice which insures us against domination by one powerful partner (SADCC 1980a: 19).

The ‘degree of choice’ the countries of the region sought, in Khama’s statement above, points to the SADCC’s strategy for development: the ‘choice of transportation routes, choice of market, choice of sources of energy and choice of investment partners’ he listed in his address were clearly a reflection of the priority placed on diverting trade away from South Africa through infrastructure, production and investment (SADCC 1980a: 19). Coordination of national development projects centring on transportation and communications linking the landlocked countries in the region with ports in Mozambique (particularly the port in Beira), Tanzania and Angola were given the highest initial priority. This was considered key, as the region depended heavily on transportation links through South Africa to access its ports, and could thus develop a new economic backbone through new infrastructure (SADCC 1980b: 5). However, as Wagao (1987: 176) observed, the emphasis on new transportation and communication systems that linked the SADCC economies with
the rest of the world, rather than with each other, reinforced neo-colonial patterns of trade and production.

Food security and agriculture, energy, industry and trade were also priorities for the SADCC. Food and agriculture become a high priority for the SADCC following regional droughts in the early 1980s. In this case, transportation and infrastructure were considered a ‘means to an end’ through which an adequate supply of food could be secured for the region (SADCC 1981: 33). With regard to energy, oil and coal extraction were recognised as key commodities that the region could expand production of for export (thereby increasing revenue from abroad); whereas the production and distribution of electricity was considered a strategic priority for the region to develop in order to reduce dependence on South Africa (SADCC 1981: 161–162). The strategy for industry also focussed on the exploitation of mineral resources for export but also involved the investment into different areas of production. These policies together with those of trade help shed more light on the ideological orientation of the SADCC’s development strategy. During the 1980s, southern African states adopted varying degrees of private and state-led models of development. Therefore, in terms of regionally developing production, the SADCC appeared to take into account both of these approaches by encouraging what it called the ‘enterprise sector’, consisting of both private and parastatal businesses. It, however, leaned towards the privatisation model by advocating the need for private foreign investment (Hanlon 1989: 9). Trade also demonstrated the more open, liberal side of the SADCC strategy by criticising protectionism and promoting integration with the global economy. At the 1983 SADCC Conference held in Maseru, Lesotho, Botswana’s Minister of Finance and Development Planning stated that the SADCC was alarmed at the ‘rise of protectionism’ and subsidisation of exports (particularly in the agricultural sector), which were considered to hamper the development strategy. ‘We, the SADCC Members,’ he explained, ‘do not believe that retreat into protectionism or isolationism is the way forward. Industrial economies have historically benefited from international exchange and the development of our economies requires increased, not reduced, access to global markets’ (SADCC 1983: 41).
Therefore, unlike the wave of ‘closed’ regionalist projects that emerged among the so-called developing countries during the 1960s and 1970s, the SADCC adopted a relatively open regional development strategy that aimed at diverting economic attention away from South Africa but deepening existing and exploring new economic relationships with the industrialised countries. The SADCC’s remit at this stage was also relatively narrow, homing in on development projects that mainly touched on infrastructural and agricultural projects, many of which had already been earmarked for funding by international donors at the organisation’s inception (Hill 1983: 225).

Whilst the general orientation of this strategy was influenced by discourses of dependency and the situation with South Africa at the time, the choice of projects and the general ideological stance of the strategy may have been influenced by the political heterogeneity of the member states. The differences in the political and economic systems in the region, ranging from the more to less radical forms of African socialism to those that espoused a greater degree of market orientation, would have made closer integration of their economies politically challenging. Therefore, as Tostensen (1982: 119) argues, heavily emphasising physical infrastructure gave the SADCC states something to which they could easily agree and quickly implement.

The shift to the SADC in the post-Cold War era

With the SADCC’s strategy hinging on the poor state of the region’s economies, on the existence and actions of the apartheid government of South Africa and on a global ideological setting that pitted Left against Right and North against South, continuous poverty and changes which occurred in the Republic of South Africa and the global political economy towards the late 1980s encouraged a realignment of the organisation’s development outlook and priorities. Firstly, by the early nineties many of the economies of southern Africa were still in a dire state. The failure of development policies, particularly of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that many of the SADCC countries adopted, allowed the poor economic performance of the previous decade to continue and challenged the SADCC to re-evaluate the policies that it had adopted. Next, by early part of the nineties there was a palpable sense that political events in South Africa were leading to a transition to majority rule. This called into question the raison d’être of an organisation that had positioned itself as a bulwark against the apartheid regime. Finally, structural pressure on the SADCC mounted as it witnessed the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the worldwide increase in
the number of formal regional organisations. No longer under socialist rule, Eastern Europe had the effect of diverting aid from Western donors away from Africa, leaving the SADCC, which depended on this aid to fund the great majority of its development projects, to face potential losses in revenue. Furthermore, the proliferation of economic blocs in the Americas and East Asia, together with the formalisation of the European Union, threatened the region, in the eyes of its leaders, to be further marginalised in the world economy. Combined, these sets of factors contributed to the organisation revamping itself into a ‘Southern African Development Community’ (SADC) in 1992, with a new remit that attempted to adapt to these changes.

Having been reliant upon donor funding for great majority of its development initiatives, the SADCC became concerned over signs of ‘aid fatigue’ among its international donors by 1989 (SADCC 1989: 30), which was exacerbated by the changes occurring in Eastern Europe by 1990. Despite verbal pledges to the continuity of assistance, but not its increase, to the region by officials in Brussels, Washington, New York, Ottawa and Stockholm, the SADCC expected the ‘opening up’ of Eastern Europe to exert pressure on the aid budgets of Western countries and thereby have a negative impact on the flows of contribution to the SADCC region and developing countries at large (SADCC 1990: 29 – 31). Furthermore, the socialist countries in the region in particular no longer foresaw the procurement of ‘solidarity assistance’ from these Eastern European states, which began to be seen as competitors for aid and investment. In light of this, ‘most member states’ had begun to discuss or implement economic and political reforms to adapt to these changes in the global environment (SADCC 1990: 4). However, the SADCC expressed a greater degree of concern over the competition it would face in the countries of Eastern Europe in the global market. As the Report of the Executive Secretary at the Council of Ministers meeting, held in Lusaka, Zambia in January of 1990 noted:

[M]ore importantly, the competition for investment and trade markets is going to intensify; and in this context, Eastern Europe enjoys the advantages of proximity, large markets with significant effective buying power, technical expertise and technological advancement. These advantages will be reinforced by feelings of kinship between Western Europeans and North Americans on the one hand, and Eastern Europeans on the other (SADCC 1990: 31).
The quote above appears to express two ideas: one of competition with a group of states that with economic advantages over the southern African countries, and one of competition with states that may enjoy close relationships with the industrialised countries of the world, on which the economies of southern Africa depend. In these two ways, this statement hints at a concern over marginalisation of southern Africa in the global political economy. This unease was furthered by another set of changes in the world, the move towards economic integration among the industrialised countries. In theme document commissioned by the SADCC for its Annual Conference in 1992 (SADCC 1992), a central theme became the observation that economic integration was ‘fast becoming a global trend’ (1992: 6). The study noted the creation of the European common market, which anticipated the ascendancy of the Nordic and Eastern European states; the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada and Mexico; the moves amongst Asian-Pacific countries, including Japan, to create a ‘co-prosperity zone’; the launching of the Mercosur in South America between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay; and finally, and an agreement to end all regional tariffs between Bolivia, Columbia, Peru and Venezuela (SADCC 1992: 6). These blocs, which now centred on three major hubs of economic activity among the industrialised countries in Europe, North America and East Asia, were viewed as powerful transformational entities that would harbour increasingly competitive firms and alter the alignment of economic and political power in the world. Thus, the case for regionalism was no longer about de-linking from South Africa or the world economy, but participating in the latter out of concern over losing out: ‘Southern Africa must, therefore, strengthen itself economically and politically if it is to become a serious player in international relations’. This called for ‘deeper cooperation and integration’ and ‘common economic, political and social values and systems’ in SADCC’s immediate future (SADCC 1991: 297; SADCC 1992: 7).

The beginning of the 1990s also witnessed dramatic political events within southern Africa with respect to movements towards majority rule in Namibia and South Africa. These represented the last set of important factors influencing the SADCC’s change in development strategy. Upon independence in Namibia in March of 1990, it quickly acceded to the SADCC one month later, becoming the organisation’s tenth member state in April of 1990. The significance of Namibian independence and membership in the organisation was that it lent to the growing sense in the region that the
apartheid would soon give way to majority rule in South Africa. In 1990, President F. W. de Klerk’s took initial steps towards dismantling the apartheid regime by freeing Nelson Mandela, and other political prisoners, lifting the ban on the opposition African National Congress (ANC) and its rival Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) from operating within South Africa and repealing the various acts of legislation that worked to segregate the majority of the population (SADCC 1990: 16; SADCC 1991b: 14). Despite these moves, however, the SADCC remained cautiously optimistic about relations with South Africa prior to a majority led government. In 1992, the Joint Planning Committee, comprised of representatives of the SADCC member states and representatives of the PAC and the ANC, concluded that the member states should refrain from engaging in any long-term bilateral commitments with de Klerk’s government in order to ensure continued pressure on the regime (SADCC 1992: 452). However, as the end of apartheid rule became imminent, the question of what the SADCC now stood for and how it would engage with South Africa as a member of the organisation came to the forefront of discussion within the organisation.

With regard to the SADCC’s post-apartheid relevance, there were two issues at stake. First was the aim of its agenda, now that South Africa might cease to be a military threat to the states in the region. Throughout the 1980s, an anti-apartheid agenda guided some measure of development policy throughout the organisation. With a transition to majority rule, the object of defiance ceased to exist and the SADCC needed to define a new strategy centred on the development of its member states that included South Africa, rather than opposed it. The anti-apartheid stance also drew in support from the SADCC’s international cooperating partners. By 1991, it became increasingly apparent to the SADCC that a significant amount of the assistance they had received was due to international objection to South Africa’s policies and its acts of military aggression. Thus, the anticipated transition from minority to majority rule in South Africa, along with the transitions occurring in Eastern Europe, caused the SADCC to project that foreign assistance which had been used towards this end would no longer be allotted to southern Africa and would instead go where donors could accrue ‘greater political dividends’ (SADCC 1991: 294). Therefore, one important aspect its new strategy entailed the promotion of an agenda that would continue to attract international cooperation. In this respect, it was vital to guide the
strategy towards the conditions that donors had placed on assistance in the nineties: democracy, market liberalisation, privatisation, and issues such as gender and the rights of children (SADC 1993: 21). The second issue regarding a post-apartheid southern Africa was the role that South Africa would now be expected to play in the region’s development. With an economy almost three times the size of the SADCC region (in terms of combined GDP), the SADCC states were apprehensive that South Africa’s inclusion of South Africa in the SADCC would ‘continue to pose the classic “centre-periphery problems” of economic development’ (SADCC 1990: 378). Furthermore, the SADCC grew increasingly concerned over suggestions that South Africa would act as a ‘regional power to dominate, lead and give assistance to the rest of the region’, which would also play the role of a ‘regional donor’ to the development efforts of the other southern African states (SADCC 1991: 146; SADCC 1991b: 18). This concern would particularly come to light as the SADC attempted to pursue its new strategy.

In 1992, the SADCC adopted a new development strategy as part of its change to the Southern African Development Community. In the hopes of preventing further marginalisation of its economies, the multi-sectoral project coordination approach that it implemented in the 1980s was put on the backburner in favour of a strategy of ‘development integration’, with scepticism over South Africa’s inclusion. The theme document for the 1992 Annual Consultative Conference set out the argument for ‘integration’ along the lines of ‘new’ or ‘open’ forms of regionalism that characterised many of the regional blocs that the SADCC had witnessed the emergence of at this time. In this way, it put forth a very similar argument: integration would encourage economies of scale, facilitating economic restructuring at higher levels of efficiency; would attract new and greater levels of investment; create a competitive environment to stimulate innovation; encourage rationalisation of production and investments in infrastructure and services; assist in bolstering the bargaining position of the region in a competitive and ‘asymmetrical world’; promote a freer movement of labour to enhance productivity; and help to create a new order of security based on non-violent forms of conflict resolution (SADCC 1992: 21 – 22).

Whilst market-orientation superseded project coordination as the focus of the SADCC’s new development strategy, it did not replace it. Instead, food security and
agriculture, energy, transport and communications and mining projects were still high priorities items in the new agenda (SADC 1993: 10 – 11). This combination defined ‘development integration’, and as an approach to regional development it represented an alternative to either a strict free-market or a wholly project-oriented strategy.

Thus, the mobilisation of investment capital, the creation of a single regional market and the encouragement of the free movement of labour were not sufficient to bring forth the sort of outcomes envisioned by the organisation. Moreover, given the economic disparities between the SADCC member states, these policies alone would not be politically or economically viable (SADC 1993: 43). For this reason, the SADCC emphasised the need for ‘conscious coordination and intervention by regional partners’ to compensate for the ‘particular needs of the least developed member countries’ in the effort to integrate the regional market (SADCC 1992: 29).

In 1996, the SADC formally embarked on the process of trade liberalisation with the creation of the SADC Trade Protocol, which called for the further liberalisation of goods and services within the SADC region and the creation of a Free Trade Area (FTA). With the Protocol stipulating that the FTA be created after eight years of its ratification (SADC 1996b), and the Protocol having entered into force in 2000, the FTA was agreed to be implemented by 2008. However, by 1996 it was also recognised by the region’s decision makers that the SADC apart from stating that it had moved towards a market-led strategy in its Declaration in 1992, had not formalised a strategy and was very much continuing down a regional path of development followed in the late 1980s with the same institutional structure (SADC 1996a: 253). Acting on the recommendations of study commissioned by the SADC, the organisation put in place a new structure in 2001, whereby it centralised development coordination within its Secretariat, then implemented its new strategy, the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) in 2003. As the RISDP discusses:
While SADC has recorded some remarkable achievements, difficulties and constraints have also been encountered. These include lack of institutional reforms for effective transformation from SADCC into SADC; lack of synergy between the objectives of the Treaty on the one hand and the existing SADC [Programme of Action] and institutional framework on the other, and finally lack of appropriate mechanisms capable of translating the high degree of political commitment into concrete programmes of community building and integration (SADC 2003: 4).

In line with its Programme of Action, the RISDP places trade and economic liberalisation at the heart of its strategy and the top of its priorities, with plans for the FTA in 2008 and for a customs union in 2010 as focal points. However, it maintains its project-oriented approach and its role as a coordinator across the member states in the majority of the remaining aspects of its strategy: HIV/AIDS; Gender Equality and Development; Infrastructure; Food Security; and Social Development (SADC 2003).

**Institutional arguments for the failure of the SADC**

What this brief history of regionalism as development strategy in southern Africa demonstrates is that the SADCC up until 1992 and the SADC thereafter, has emerged and changed with respect to a variety of material and ideational forces at multiple levels. The SADCC was formed in 1980 not due to any one particular circumstance but several: weak economies in the region; ideas of solidarity and independence; and the desire to define the region on its own terms, to identify a few. In 1992, the changes in material conditions through the potential losses in aid revenue and threat of marginalisation in the world economy, and changes of ideas with regard to both the events in Eastern Europe and in South Africa, prompted a redefinition of the institution as a result. By the mid 1990s, the SADC itself recognised that the material capabilities in the region had not been transformed (the majority of states were still primary export driven economies) and the ideas of market integration had not taken hold. The, institution, encompassing its structure, practices and policies, was out of alignment with the development strategy it began to promote in 1992. The organisation’s restructuring effort in 2001 and its adoption of the RISDP in 2003 was an attempt to rectify this by attempting to consolidate power and authority at the level of the Secretariat in order to implement a more coherent agenda.
The restructuring effort, though, also shifted the problematic of regionalism being an effective strategy for development in southern Africa to the effectiveness of the institution. The underlying assumption of this effort was that the institution stood apart from development processes in the region and that through restructuring it could more effectively deepen integration. Thus, attention has turned to the SADC and its capacity to bring about change in the region. As one recent report put it: ‘[w]hile SADC is regarded as one of the more promising African regional integration initiatives, a broad development agenda and weak institutional capacity present a number of challenges…These challenges are about how to make “integration” happen – and give its myriad of protocols more meaning’ (SADC Barometer: 2005).

Similarly, one high-ranking official of a SADC international cooperating partner (ICP) attributed the failure of regionalism to the capacity of the institution to carry forward its development strategy; all other issues related to its strategy and its mission in the region stemmed from this (Anonymous interview: 2006). In this way, the institution is seen to act as an instrument that has some degree of capacity ‘to make “integration” happen’; it becomes the object of enquiry with regard to the success or failure of regionalism as a development strategy. The source of such capacity, though, and the legitimacy of the institution are not brought to light.

An instance of this institutional focus in the literature is found in the literature in a study titled ‘Making SADC Work? Revisiting Institutional Reform’ (Tjønneland 2005). The study begins with an overview of the SADC’s achievements, failures and shortcomings from the 1980s into the 1990s. Among the achievements listed were its ability to attract investment for development projects, particularly in infrastructure, and to foster a degree of regional identity. Among the failures was its inability to push forward a development agenda in sectors other than infrastructure. In both regards, the strength of the institution is considered the key component. With regard to the relative inactivity of sectors other than infrastructure in the regional development process, the report cites that this ‘required a strong capacity to drive the process’ (Tjønneland 2005: 167). Regarding its achievements:
SADC’s achievements would not have been possible without SADC and its institutions. Further deepening of integration and co-operation in Southern Africa requires regional institutions, and without strong institutions, experiences and lessons from other regions suggest that this may be very difficult to achieve (Tjønneland 2005: 168).

The SADC restructuring effort and the adoption of the RISDP are thus considered efforts to shore up the institution in what was seen as a lack of progress towards the agenda laid down by the organisation in 1992. Given its new structure, its strategy and its set of development priorities, however, the report concludes that institutional weakness is the main concern in the realisation of such an image for development in the region:

SADC is a 25-year-old institution. It has progressed rapidly at the formal level of policies and agreements. However, its institutions are still weak and the organisation has not come far in the implementation of protocols and regional decisions. There is a major gap between what SADC wants to do, and actual developments and implementation on the ground (Tjønneland 2005: 181).

With its focus on the SADC institution as the main variable in the process of development in the region, this study makes only slight references throughout the paper to what factors contribute to its strength or weakness. The paper alludes to three main concerns in this regard. First, Tjønneland observes that the SADC Secretariat, the organisation’s central executive institution, is primarily an ‘administrative body with no formal political power’ (2005: 170). The reason behind this, he cites, is that the member states have been reluctant since 1980 to create an organisation with supra-national power. Indeed, the remit of the organisation, as stated in the SADC Common Agenda in the Treaty signed in 1992 does not go far beyond ‘developing’, ‘promoting’ and ‘harmonising’ policies in the region (SADC 2003: 5 – 7). The second point relates to the commitment of the member states to the SADC’s development agenda. Among the examples of this Tjønneland cites the difficulties the region has had with implementing the SADC Trade Protocol and pursuing financial liberalisation (2005: 175). These difficulties, though, he argues have less to do with reluctance on the part of the member states towards trade liberalisation and deeper market integration per se. Instead, he suggests that ‘[t]here may…be competing and different visions within SADC about the type of regional
integration they wish to see’ (2005: 175). Furthermore, the paper explains that there have been ‘visible and sharp divisions within and between SADC’s member states’, related to their particular development challenges and priorities (2005: 182). The last point regarding the strength or weakness of the SADC relates to the legitimacy and ‘relevance’ of the organisation to the member states, civil society and to donors. Here, Tjønneland argues that the relevance of the institution is external and ‘outside SADC’s own control’ and dependent on factors such as South Africa’s power in the region, the support of the African Union (AU) and the support of donors. With regard to the relevance and legitimacy in its member countries and civil society, the factors are internal and relate to the ability of the SADC to bring forth its reform and the formulation of its new policies and priorities to an early completion (which are, paradoxically, argued to rely on the strength of the institution), and its transparency and accessibility to society in the region (2005: 182).

Whilst cognisant of the history of the SADC, and of the interrelations between the institution, states, society, material capabilities and ideas (though not expressly in these terms), this institution perspective nonetheless places the power of the SADC as an institution to shape the development process in southern Africa at the centre of explanation. The argument makes reference to the divergent nature of the development priorities faced by its member states. The argument is also aware of the strong relationship between the authority of the SADC and which is accorded to it by its member states. Finally, the article is aware of the importance of legitimacy, and the influence of donors and intra-regional relations to the power of the institution. What the argument is aware of but obscures, in short, is the how the power and capacity of the institution are inextricably linked to other, underlying factors. These factors closely correspond to Cox’s framework of institutions, material capabilities and ideas across the levels of the state-society complex and the world order. Thus, to analyse the power and capacity of the institution is to analyse it with the context of a nexus of power between it, the material capabilities and ideas present within and across each of these levels. The factors that the article above places at the periphery lie at the centre of a more adequate explanation of the failure of regionalism as a development strategy in southern Africa. The question of the degree of SADC’s power and capacity then yields to more important questions that relate to why member states have been reluctant to create an institution with supra-national
authority, what diverging images of regionalism and development are held by actors in this process, and to the roles of South Africa and donors with respect to the economies and the power relations between the states in the region. The next section will briefly discuss these aspects before concluding with an agenda for research into the nature of regionalism and development in the SADC region of southern Africa.

Ideas of regionalism, state sovereignty and the role of South Africa

From analysis of historical documents and from data collected on recent fieldwork in southern Africa, three themes emerge as factors that have contributed to the failure of regionalism as a development strategy: shared images of regionalism as a development strategy, the role of sovereignty in the regional development process and the role of South Africa. These factors did not arise suddenly but have emerged dialectically since the process began in the late 1970s. The first theme involves ideas in the form of intersubjective meanings of the purpose of regionalism as a strategy for development. These ideas have entailed a tension between the region’s aims towards self-sufficiency and its leanings towards open integration with the global political economy to stave off further marginalisation. As the brief history of the SADC discussed above, the SADCC was created in the midst of discourses of dependency and the idea of creating a region that was economically self-sufficient. However, the discussion also brought to light the fact that the SADCC had supported early on an agenda of open trade with the industrialised countries, certainly with regard to material conditions related to the export-oriented nature of their economies. These tensions continue into the 1990s with the formation of the SADC, as it sought to integrate more closely with the world economy, out of concern of further marginalisation, yet made calls for self-sufficient development as it encountered the possibility of losses of revenue from donors and from trade in lieu of changes in the Eastern European countries. This contradiction continues to exist whilst the RISDP calls for increased liberalisation of the region’s economies in the context of the SADC’s aim to ‘promote self-sustaining development on the basis of collective self-reliance, and the independence of Member States’ (SADC 2003: 6).

This latter point relates to the next theme regarding the independence of states in the region through the process of regionalisation. Many theories of regionalism, based on studies of European integration, conceptualise the process as one in which the transfer
of a degree of state sovereignty to the regional body is a necessary condition to begin and sustain the process. The case of the SADC in southern Africa involved newly independent states (as in the case of Zimbabwe, for instance) sensitive to newly acquired sovereignty, engaging in a process of development that gave their states a degree of legitimacy. Indeed, the very purpose of the SADCC was couched in the language of independence, linking the project of economic independence through regionalism with the larger goal of political independence. In this way, the SADC case represents a different form of regionalism than these theories suggest. This has presented contradictions in the way of states pursuing national development strategies and objectives that are at variance with those at the regional level. This has also presented a contradiction in the form of overlapping membership in regional organisations in southern Africa, where, with the exception of Mozambique, all SADC member states belong to at least one other regional body. Such tensions between region and state have had an important reinforcing and undermining effect on the regional development process in southern Africa.

Lastly, the role of South Africa has been a strong influence on regional development. Having framed the purpose of the SADCC in terms of an anti-apartheid struggle, South Africa had been categorically excluded from the organisation whilst economic relations persisted between it and the SADCC member states. As was discussed above, its inclusion into the SADC in 1994 was met with a degree caution, a sentiment that continues to be present among the member states. Thus, South Africa’s role in the region must be viewed apart from its simple exclusion from formal exclusion from the regional body prior to 1994 then its inclusion thereafter. A tension between the political (apartheid and post-apartheid) and economic (the largest economy in the region with a capitalist form of development) aspects of South Africa in southern Africa have existed and persisted since the formation of the SADC’s regional strategy for development. This tension has been integral not only to the institutional characteristics of the SADC but to the overall process of development in the region, intertwined with the themes of self-sufficiency and greater openness and sovereignty above.
Conclusion
This paper has argued that institutional arguments are insufficient to account for the failure of regionalism as a strategy for development in southern Africa. When seen in the light of Coxian critical theory, such arguments appear static and the power of the institution ceases to be the sole factor in the explanation of the contours of development in the SADC region. Indeed, the power of the SADC becomes that which requires explanation. By considering the interrelated nature of power relations between material capabilities, ideas and institutions that have proceeded dialectically at the levels of states and the world order since the SADC’s inception, three factors emerge which offer a more adequate account of the failure of regionalism to have a discernable impact on development in southern Africa. These may be summarised as the contradictions between the aims of self-sufficiency and the desire for closer integration with the world economy (through relations, for instance, with the European Union), the tensions between regional forms of development and national forms, and the inclusion and exclusion of South Africa in the region. With regard to the first theme, it may be seen that arguments that characterise the SADCC as pursuing a project coordination approach that was superseded by a commitment to market integration with the formation of the SADC in 1992 (Söderbaum 2004: 70) are partial, as these strategies have coexisted in a contradictory manner since its inception. With regard to the second factor, the issue of sovereignty in the southern African case raises interesting points regarding the nature of states and regions with regard to the concept and process of development. Finally, the role of South Africa in the region has been contested with regard to both material and ideational conditions. As such, South Africa’s role in the SADC has shaped and hindered development in the region. Thus, such an approach to the regional political economy of development in southern Africa aims not only to contribute to a more thorough account of failure beyond institutional arguments but also offers a perspective on the complex nature of regionalism as a development strategy.
References


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