



The Economic and Energy Crises during Chavez and Maduro's Governments

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Summary

The purpose of the paper is to understand and explain what could have affected the economic and energy crises during Chávez and Maduro's governments (1999 to present). Also, the present analysis tries to grasp what the possible barriers are, and gives possible policy solutions. In our hypothesis, the crisis in Venezuela has roots mainly in the Chávez government, so a deeper research of what could have affected this crisis is important. For this purpose, the paper uses a quick historical background of Venezuela from the late 1990s until present days. Also, different authors and perspectives are used to explain the crisis and then give potential policy solutions. In the empirical part, some explanations are given. Possible barriers encountered to these solutions and how they can be overcome are also forwarded. The main hypothesis here is that an oil rich country, a medium to low development level with weak institutions, a left-wing political party in the government in Latin America and then foreign involvements and interests, could be the place of an induced international crisis, due to U.S. – through its different power complexes – and possibly other developed countries interested in the oil.

Key words: Maduro, Venezuela, Energy, U.S, Reconstruction.

Las crisis económicas y energéticas durante los gobiernos Chavez y Maduro

Resumen

El propósito del trabajo es comprender y explicar qué pudo haber afectado las crisis económica y energética durante los gobiernos de Chávez y Maduro (1999 al presente). Además, el presente análisis intenta captar cuáles son las posibles barreras y ofrece posibles soluciones políticas. En nuestra hipótesis, la crisis en Venezuela tiene sus raíces principalmente en el gobierno de Chávez, por lo que es importante una investigación más profunda de lo que pudo haber afectado esta crisis. Para este propósito, el documento utiliza un rápido trasfondo histórico de Venezuela desde finales de la década de 1990 hasta la actualidad. Además, se utilizan diferentes autores y perspectivas para explicar la crisis y luego dar posibles soluciones políticas. En la parte empírica se dan algunas explicaciones. También se transmiten las posibles barreras encontradas para estas soluciones y cómo pueden superarse. La hipótesis principal aquí es que un país rico en petróleo, un nivel de desarrollo medio a bajo con instituciones débiles, un partido político de izquierda en el gobierno de América Latina y luego involucramientos e intereses extranjeros, podría ser el lugar de una crisis internacional inducida, debido a

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Estados Unidos - a través de sus diferentes complejos de poder - y posiblemente a otros países desarrollados interesados en el petróleo.

Palabras clave: Maduro, Venezuela, Energia, EE.UU., Reconstrucción.

As crises econômicas e energéticas durante os governos Chavez e Maduro

Resumo

O objetivo do artigo é entender e explicar o que poderia ter afetado as crises econômicas e energéticas durante os governos de Chávez e Maduro (1999 até o presente). Além disso, a presente análise tenta entender quais são as possíveis barreiras e fornece possíveis soluções políticas. Em nossa hipótese, a crise na Venezuela tem raízes principalmente no governo Chávez, portanto é importante uma pesquisa mais profunda sobre o que poderia ter afetado essa crise. Para esse fim, o artigo utiliza um rápido histórico da Venezuela desde o final dos anos 90 até os dias atuais. Além disso, diferentes autores e perspectivas são usados para explicar a crise e fornecer possíveis soluções políticas. Na parte empírica, são dadas algumas explicações. As possíveis barreiras encontradas para essas soluções e como elas podem ser superadas também são encaminhadas. A principal hipótese aqui é que um país rico em petróleo, um nível de desenvolvimento médio a baixo, com instituições fracas, um partido político de esquerda no governo da América Latina e depois envolvimento e interesses estrangeiros, poderia ser o local de uma crise internacional induzida, devido aos EUA - através de seus diferentes complexos de poder - e possivelmente outros países desenvolvidos interessados no petróleo.

Palavras chave: Maduro, Venezuela, Energia, EUA, Reconstrução.

1. Introduction

The present paper tries to explain and give policy solutions as to what could have affected the economic and energy crises during Chavez and Maduro governments (1999-present). Possible solutions and alternatives to the crises are shown through different internal policies that could have been put into practice by those two governments. The research question then is: what could have caused and impacted the economic and energy crises during the last two Venezuelan governments? This research question arises because the crisis in Venezuela is closely linked to energy, and more specifically to oil. Venezuela could be considered a "petro-state" for relying most of the government's revenues through oil export and production. Furthermore, it is a country that has the largest proven petroleum reserves in the world. As oil is closely related to geopolitics, ecology, economy, development, among other themes, a better understanding of the Venezuelan's problem will be useful for future research in the field, or anybody interested in energy and conflict issues. The theories and authors used in the essay in order to understand and answer the above mentioned inquiry are a few: Michael

Klare, Mary Kaldor, *Ending the fossil fuel era* book, Paul and Percival Goodman, and articles of various authors, such as Noam Chomsky, Jonathan Feldman, Barry Commoner, Cyrus Bina, and specific articles relating to the Venezuelan crisis such as *The Political Economy of Oil, Autos, and the Urban Environment in Venezuela*, among other articles. In addition, different ideas and variables will be critically researched, such as the resource curse paradigm.

The data used to measure oil influence on the Venezuelan government, and therefore the dependent variable, is the percentage of energy consumed coming from oil (oil industry dependency and influence). Data on the GDP growth and HDI development, such as poverty, crime and health care are analysed and measured between those years as well. The participation of the country's business elite in the oil is researched, since there could exist a transnational alliance between the Venezuelan elite and foreign influence. The share of oil exported to other powerful countries such as the U.S. is analysed, as well as international sanctions.

The essay, then, is divided by the following format: a historical background, beginning in the late 1990s until the present days. A debate of the main theories and books related to oil, conflict and energy, as well as articles that research the Venezuelan case is also formed. A methodology that connects the theories to empirical analysis, and then an empirical analysis and discussions of theories is also made. Possible solutions as to what could have prevented the crisis, what could be the barriers to these solutions and how to overcome them is made in the end. The final part of the essay is the conclusion of what could have affected the crisis, what are the possible solutions for change and how possible barriers can be overcome.

2. Background

2.1 A change for Venezuela: Chavez

For Venezuela, 1998 is a year of enormous changes. In December 1998, Hugo Chávez was elected president of the country with a percentage of 56%. Chávez was the leader of the Fifth Republic Movement party. A socialist-inspired party that tried to end the old government policies of austerity and privatization and to change the Venezuelan system with a new constitution. (Tinker Salas, 2012. 135). With the creation of a new legislative assembly, the government adopted in late 1999 a new constitution that entered full regime in 2000. To emphasize the idea of a new beginning and a connection with the theory of Patria Grande by Simon Bolivar (the project of a united South American community), the country changed its name to The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Furthermore, following these ideas, the new constitution reinforces the notion of multiethnicity and pluralism of the country (Tinker Salas,

2012. 138). According to the vision of the Fifth Republic Movement party, the new structure allowed a more active participation in political life by society and it also extends respect for human rights to people who previously did not benefit from protection (Tinker Salas, 2012. 139).

The new constitution and generally Chavez's project denoted a turning point in the foreign policy of Venezuela. Before the 1998 election, it was common sense that Venezuelan necessitated good relations with the global system and in particular with the U.S. for exporting its petroleum. Conversely, one of the main ideas of Chavez's project was to fight the global imperialism carried out by the United States. Venezuela started to view any connection with the U.S. in a negative way. This quickly led to a change in the internal Venezuelan society. The medium and upper classes that followed the American lifestyle began to be considered as an elite that did not fit into the true spirit of the new Venezuelan state (Tinker Salas, 2012. 140-141). These positions induced Venezuela to enter into economic political agreements with enemies of the United States. Particularly Cuba, China, Russia, and Iraq (Tinker Salas, 2012. 142).

Another important point of the foreign policy of Venezuela under the Chavism was the project of a Latin American community. This idea was carried out by the Venezuelan administration and it found the theoretical support of many South American countries. In fact, the situation was politically favourable. During these years Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras and Ecuador were governed by leftist leaders. In this period, countries of Latin America and Central America began to create new international organizations - such as UNASUR, CELAC, ALBA - to diminish the OAS (Organization of American States, where the U.S. was part of it) (Tinker Salas, 2012. 143).

2.2 Chavez and the oil sector

Chávez took the presidential office during a troubling period for the petroleum market. In 1999 the oil price/barrel was slightly below \$11. To resolve the situation, the Venezuelan administration moved in two ways. First on an international level with a strengthening of the role of OPEC to allow better price control. In the summer of 2000, Chávez visited all the OPEC member countries and in 2002 the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, hosted the summit of the leaders of these countries. During these events, Chávez repeated his critique of the U.S. power and he admitted his intent of liberation from the American imperialism. On the other hand, Chavez acted in the domestic level with a reform of the oil market and in particu-

lar redefining the role of oil companies including the company PdVSA, state-owned since 1976.

Repeatedly, the conflict between the oil companies and the state was represented by Chavez as a struggle between elite and the will of the people. Venezuela decided to change all the agreements with the petroleum companies. As a result of this situation, some American oil companies including Exxon Mobil and Conoco Phillips abandoned the Venezuelan market. Russian, Indian, Chinese, but also some other American companies, continued to operate, nonetheless. In the meantime, in 2001 the government published 49 laws to allow a stronger control over the public company PdVSA (Strønen, 2017. 49). To reduce dependence on the American market and to open up to new buyers, PdVSA begins to export oil to other countries. In this situation of radical change, in April 2002 the opposition called for a general strike (Strønen, 2017. 49-50) (Tinker Salas, 2012. 149-150).

The protests caused deaths. This put Chávez's government to the test. Social groups of businessmen, including members of the PdVSA, the Catholic Church, part of the army and of politics, also with American support, carried out a *coup d'état*, supporting an alternative president candidate (Strønen, 2017. 49-50) (Tinker Salas, 2012. 156). The *coup* quickly failed and Chavez returned to power. The will of the opposition to dismiss the government, however, did not stop. In December 2002, Chavez opponents called the nation to a general strike. The economy started to slow down quickly. In just one year, Venezuela's GNP fell by 24% (Strønen, 2017. 50). Once again, however, the opposition had underestimated Chavez's support among the Venezuelan citizens and also among the support of leftist governments of Latin America. Consequently, the government came out as the winner.

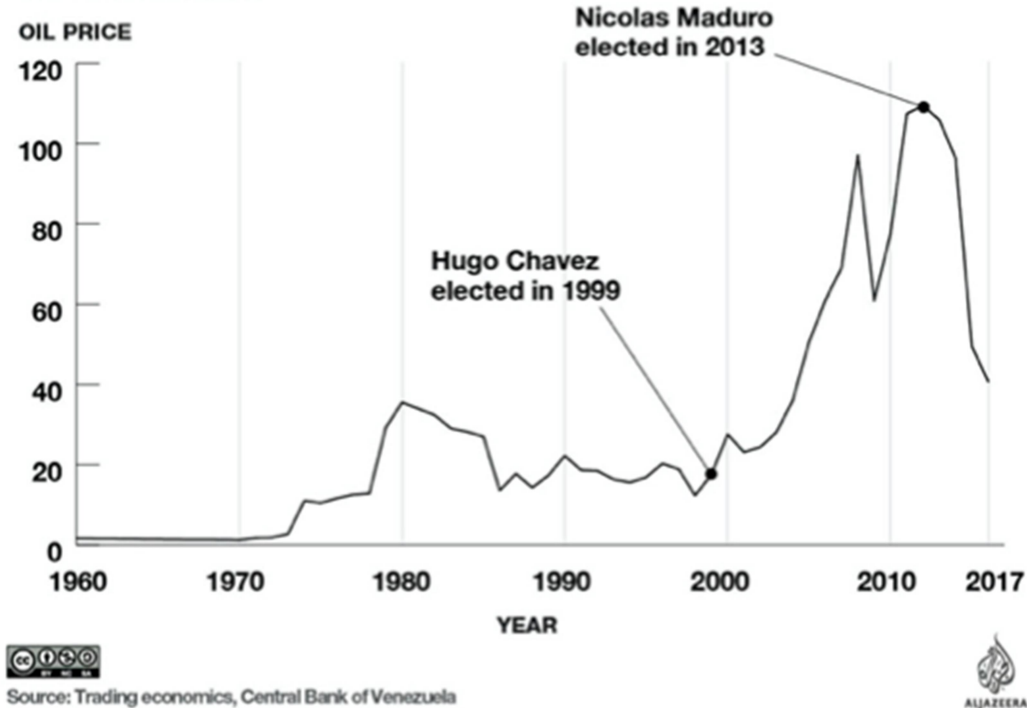
2.3 Economy growth and improving life standard

After the 2002 *coup* attempt and the 2003 general strike, Venezuela managed to find stability. With the control of the oil market and in particular of the PdVSA, the government began to implement an expansive economic policy. In addition, as we can see in Figure N.1, the Venezuelan government benefited from an increase in oil prices from an average of \$ 19.3 per barrel in 1999 to \$ 99.7 per barrel in 2008.

Figure 1 – Price of oil since 1960

Global oil prices

Oil prices have been falling since 2014, which has left the Venezuelan government unable to maintain the system of subsidies that functioned during the oil boom years.

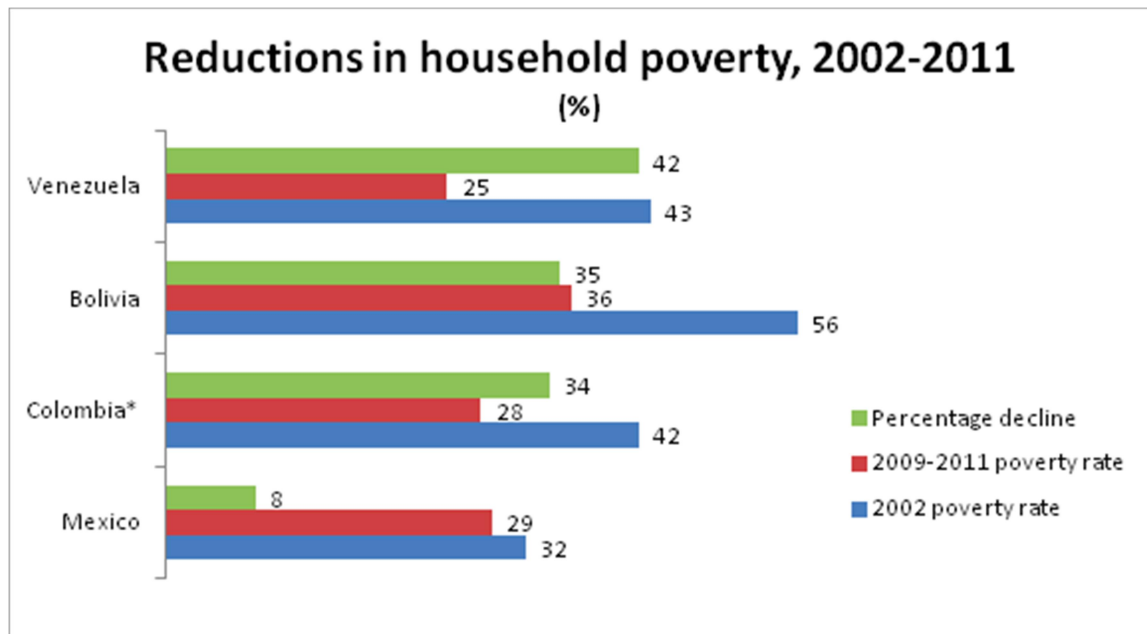


Source: Trading economics, Central Bank of Venezuela, 2017.

The high price of oil quickly led to an economic growth. Between 2003 and 2009 the GDP grew annually by +13.5% (Venezuela Analysis, 2009). The growth affected also the non-oil sector from a share of 11.7 in 2003 of the Venezuelan GDP to 14.2 in 2007.

The government implemented in 2003 a development program called *Misiones* for the population concerning health, education, literacy, pensions, energy, sports etc. (Tinker Salas, 2012. 193-195). This brought in the first decade to a marked improvement in the living standards of Venezuelans. Extreme poverty in the period 1999-2011 declined from 23% to 8% (Venezuela analysis, 2012). In the period 2003-2008, there was a decrease in economic inequalities (Venezuela Analysis, 2009). Infant and child mortality declined by over one-third, the first from 21.4 to 13.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, the second from 26.5 to 17.0 deaths per 1,000 live births. Furthermore, under the Chavez's regime, sanitation and access to drinking water increased. In ten years (1998-2008) unemployment dropped from 11.3% to 7.8%. In 2008 92.2% of the total labour force was employed, with a percentage of 16.6% in the public sector and 75.6% in the private sector (Venezuela Analysis, 2009).

Figure 2 - Reductions in household poverty between 2002 and 2011 in certain Latin American Countries



Source: Latinobarómetro, 2013

2.4 End of the Chavez era

After a long period of illness, in March 2013, Hugo Chavez died. Nicolas Maduro, the former vice president of Venezuela, succeeded Chavez after his death. Maduro was facing a serious economic situation in Venezuela. Since 2013, with the devaluation of the Bolivar, the country's monetary problems had increased. This led to a shortage of first-order goods in the Venezuelan market. Also, between March and April the capital, Caracas, suffered energy problems with blackouts (Tinker Salas, 2012. 209).

Despite these problems, Nicolas Maduro won the elections in April 2013 with a minimal difference in the votes against the opposition candidate. (7,587,579 votes against 7,363,980). Other major crises and protests occurred in 2014, again with the support of the opposition. In particular, these protests arose from the middle and upper-class neighbourhoods of Venezuela (Tinker Salas, 2012. 213). The biggest problems were the “skyrocketing” inflation, the lack of primary goods, and the crime problem. (Tinker Salas, 2012. 215) Although the government managed at first the strong revolts, these became gradually stronger ending in an institutional crisis in 2015.

2.5 The Venezuelan crisis from 2013

From the election of Maduro in 2013, the economic, institutional and social crisis in Venezuela became more serious. Since 2016, the country has had a negative GDP growth index of approximately -15% per year (Banco Central de Venezuela, 2018). The Venezuelan problem is, first of all, a crisis in its oil market. Since Chavez was elected, Venezuela started to lose production capacity. From about 3 million barrels per day when Chavez came to power in 1999 to 1.3 million b/d in 2018 (OPEC, 2020). The initial drop in production was caused by poor management of the oil industry and insufficient investment. Another issue was the lack of qualified human capital (Boomberg, 2019). The crisis worsened due to American sanctions, first in 2017 by limiting business exchanges between the United States and Venezuela and then, in 2018 by stopping the country from exporting oil to the U.S. In addition, the country had to cope with a reduction in profit revenue from the unfavorable situation of the international oil market. In fact, the price of oil has decreased from 100 \$ in 2014 to around 30 \$ in 2016 (Alcantara et al., 2019).

Another important factor in the crisis is the devaluation of the Venezuelan currency. Following expansionary policies and the loss of international creditors, Venezuela arrived in April 2018 with an annual inflation of +15.657. (Forbes, 2018). This unstable economic situation led to serious problems for the entire Venezuelan social system. For example, between 2012 and 2016 mother mortality doubled and deaths from infections grew by + 63% (Page, Doocy, Ganteaume, Castro, Spiegel, Beyrer, 2019). The crisis led to a lack of primary goods, like food. The poorest populations were unable to eat properly. Mainly for these reasons, during the crisis emigration increased significantly (Alcantara et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

The methodology used in the paper is the following: Compare the authors and theories used in previous part with the empirical analysis, through bridging links. Both the theories and the empirical parts are divided in three main perspectives: 1 - Resource Wars; 2 - U.S. Hegemony; 3 - Ecological Utopian. These perspectives show what's going on and not going on, as well as what could be helpful and policy-wise. The dependent variables and indicators used, to be certain that the theories are applied, are the following: percentages of oil that U.S. imports from Chavez and Maduro government's, different discursive analysis indicators of Venezuela's governments, the presence of

U.S. military in Latin America, the U.S. international oil companies in Venezuela, polls research, number of proven oil reserves in each country. Also, the methodology will be an analysis of the following statistical measures (independent variable):

- The politics and economy of both governments between 1999-present. Looking at GDP, military expenditures, oil-rents in % of GDP and poverty;
- The oil profits in Venezuela;
- Biggest foreign oil companies present in Venezuela, their profits and oil production over time;
- The U.S. oil relationship with Venezuela;
- Venezuela oil production, U.S. import from Venezuela, Venezuela reserves;

Key Authors	Theory	Factor	Measuring System
Mary Kaldor, Michael Klare	Resource Wars	Resource Dependency	% of oil imported from Venezuela to U.S.
Noam Chomsky, Cyrus Bina	U.S. Hegemony	Foreign influence in Venezuela	Discursive analysis; polls research; international and U.S. oil companies in Venezuela
Goodman; Commoner; Feldman, Princen	Ecological Utopians Alternatives	Alternatives Energy; fuel consumption. development programs	Government programs. percentages of oil consumption in Venezuela

Table 1 - Methodology used in the paper

4. Theory

In order to help answer and explain what might have affected the Venezuelan crisis, and what the possible policy alternative are in order to overcome the crisis, the following theories and authors will be used: Michael Klare, Mary Kaldor, Cyrus Bina, Noam Chomsky, Commoner, Feldman, Thomas Princen, Paul and Percival Goodman, and specific articles regarding Venezuela.

4.1 Resource Wars

Different authors research the role of oil and its impact for different countries. Michael Klare and Mary Kaldor are among the most prominent authors in the area of energy competition, geopolitics and what position different agents have on this conflict. Klare researches the top producing and oil reserves countries in the world and their clash with powerful and consuming countries. As he affirms in the beginning of his book *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet*, a world of rising powers and shrinking resources is destined to produce intense struggle among an expanding group of energy-consuming nations for control over the planet's remaining reserves of hydrocarbons and other key industrial materials (Klare, 2008: 7). For Klare, therefore, states will be the main actors for the pursuit and control of energy resources, and he defines the term resource wars, in which he means this competition between states as well as the closing era of "easy oil" (Ibid, 37). As our economy is based on a finite resource, such as oil and other finite materials, this competition to obtain most of this wealth and richness will increase. Especially between rising powers. For him there is a new geography of conflict and a zero-sum game relationship between states. Multinational oil companies – both private and state-owned – are also active players in the international system. In addition, the importance of developing countries and new powerful nations in the geopolitics game, such as China and India, for example, can't be denied as well. As Venezuela has one of the most oil reserves in the world, it is vital its role in geopolitics as well.

Conversely, Mary Kaldor understands that both public and private – such as international oil companies – have a role in competition and geopolitics. She studies six cases, such as the one in Casanare, Colombia, and in which ways the multinational oil company BP plays a role in that Colombia's conflict. Furthermore, she affirms that there are three main explanations for the oil and conflict issue: geopolitics, greed and petro-state (related to the rent-seeking cycles in different levels). Due to the necessity of oil and their high revenues, the economy is still "addicted" to oil. As she affirms that the world's insatiable demand for oil is the main driver behind oil rents – the extraordinary profits generated from its sale give rise to a 'rent-seeking cycle'. This process has a transformative impact on both state and conflict. The dynamics of this cycle are determined by competition to capture oil rents at different levels (Kaldor, 2007: 274). In addition, Kaldor defines the concept of "new wars", in which they are often linked with ungovernable states, where non-oil tax revenue is falling, political legitimacy is declining and the monopoly of organised violence is being eroded (Kaldor, 2007: 2). Those three explanations are associated with the "new wars" related conflicts. For

her, "new wars" involve large numbers of non-state actors. Oil revenues financed different sorts of non-governmental actors, and also through the contribution of petrodollars. Kaldor studied Iraq as another case, where oil revenues financed non-governmental actors in all sorts of indirect ways (Ibid, 2007: 8-32).

Furthermore, in the case of Colombia, she affirms that a detailed case study of the interactions between oil and its socio-political environment can reveal much more about the relationship between oil and armed conflict than a focus on armed actors alone (Ibid, 2007: 261). Good for Kaldor it is important to have a redistributive authority around the oil. In fact, the lack of a redistributive authority, acting in a recognizable sense in terms of the "common good" of the society, can have a profoundly negative impact on conflict in the global South (Ibid, 2007: 260). The root problem, however, is the same for both authors: multiple states struggling for limited resources situated in specific geographical places. The problem is that this competition has taken on a predatory form, but they argue that this pattern doesn't have to be the norm. A deeper global cooperative international order could prevent rent seeking and oil related conflicts. In particular through diplomacy.

The "Resource Curse" paradigm is related to the idea of instability when oil prices are volatile. This paradigm can be applied to the Venezuelan context because it is a country that relies most of its economy on oil, and still is less developed than many other countries that do not possess natural endowments. One of the internal policies that affected the Venezuelan crisis is the fact that its economy is based almost entirely on oil revenues. Both recent Venezuelan governments did not try to diversify their energy economic policies. In addition, there is not much political will to expand its economy, such as wind power policies in Norway. It struggles to thrive in Norway but not in Denmark, because as Espen More's article suggests, "vested interest structures serve as powerful influences on energy policy" (Moe, 2012: 19). The Venezuelan government clearly favors oil in relation to other energy sources, since "governments who insist on neutrality with respect to new industries are bound to keep favouring the existing actors" (Ibid, 29). Good Also, different articles suggest that the Chávez government started to use oil revenues to finance "social power foreign policy". As some argue Chávez's "social power foreign policy" – through oil revenue – has produced an impressive shield for Venezuela. As Corrales affirmed, "It protects Chávez against international criticism even by those who know better, and gives him a reputation for humanitarianism among those who are less informed" (Corrales, 2009: 102). Nevertheless, despite this statement, Chávez actually helped poorer countries.

Aside from that, the instability in Venezuela could have started – apart from the fact that Chávez was spending money abroad in ways that polarized rather than united potential allies, as well as a complete disregard for promoting efficiency in the Venezuelan oil sector (Maingot et al, 2011: 41) – when U.S. and other developed countries foreign influence, together with the Venezuelan oil capitalist class elite, started to act in the country to destabilize the left-wing regime. As some authors affirm: "The (Venezuelan) government's alliance with members of the private sector should not be considered strategic, but rather tactical, with the goal of securing enough political and economic stability to sustain the process of change" (Ellner; 2017).

4.2 U.S. Hegemony

Different authors understand U.S. hegemony and how it interacts in other countries in many ways. Noam Chomsky argues that states use propaganda to pass their agenda. Furthermore, Chomsky suggests that the U.S. used to perform (and still tries when the ruling government is not of their interests) *coups* in Latin America, as he affirms: "the latest attempt to sponsor a military *coup* was in 2002 in Venezuela, but the United States had to back down when the government it helped install was quickly overthrown by popular resistance" (Chomsky, 2007). Also, there was turmoil in Latin America, where democracy is taken much more seriously than in the West, and overthrow of a democratically elected government is no longer accepted quietly (Ibid, 2007). As it becomes clearer, the role that Venezuela plays in international energy and geopolitics is increasingly important. In addition, other articles suggest that different foreign organizations play a role in the Venezuelan conflict. As Ellner affirmed "The adversaries (of Maduro and Chávez government) include Venezuela's major corporations and business groups, the U.S. government and the Organization of American States (OAS), the Catholic Church hierarchy, university authorities, and the news media, in addition to the traditional political establishment and labour unions" (Ellner, 2017). The refusal of the opposition and its allies to recognize official electoral results, even those certified by international observers is also normal in the country (Ibid, 2017).

For Chomsky, Washington's main concern is Venezuela, the leading oil producer in the Western hemisphere. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that its reserves might be greater than Saudi Arabia (Chomsky, 2007). For this matter, one of the main issues that affected the economic and overall crisis in Venezuela was U.S. intervention. Also, Washington's aggression against the governments of Chávez and Maduro demonstrates that in terms

of foreign policy, little distinguishes Republicans and Democrats (Ellner, 2017). One of the other threats to U.S. hegemony is that Venezuela, along with other South American countries such as Bolivia, for example, had elected popular governments. They have popularly elected governments. Venezuela leads Latin America in support for the elected government, increasing sharply in the past few years under Chávez. As Chomsky affirms, he was bitterly hated in the United States because of his independence and enormous popular support (Ibid, 2007).

Similarly to Chomsky, Cyrus Bina talks about the role that U.S. have in international politics and how this loss of hegemony might have affected the Venezuelan Crisis. To him, oil is the effect—not the cause—of the U.S. war in Iraq. The cause is the collapse of the Pax Americana, the loss of American hegemony (Bina, 2004, 19). Bina highlights that neither the rhetoric of democracy nor the purported “access” to “cheap” oil is the cause of U.S. intervention in Iraq. In the past U.S. had power to maintain hegemony in the world, but now it needs another way to keep its hegemony (Bina, 2004). As in the case of Venezuela, U.S. rhetoric of the defence of democracy in Venezuela could be understood as U.S. trying to keep its hegemony in one of the most possessors of oil reserves countries. American foreign policy then is closely linked with trying to keep its hegemony and power.

The article “The U.S. and Venezuela, Rethinking a Relationship” by Romero and Kelly (2002) investigates more closely the historical strategic relationship between both countries, the U.S. and Venezuela. This relationship was based on four main promises that caused a preliminary stability. The first one is the strategic importance of the country within the hemispheric context as a trustworthy partner and supplier of oil. The second one is the fact that Venezuela was more stable than other countries in the region. The idea of the historically exceptional condition of the Venezuelan case as compared with other countries of the region. The third promise is the predominance of cooperation over conflict in both countries' dealings with each other; and fourth, the predominance of bilateral issues in U.S.-Venezuelan relations simplified the nature of contacts between them (Kelly; Romero, 2002: 2).

Adding to this, is the fact that U.S. is one of the leading countries that imports oil from Venezuela. The major shift occurred when a left regime entered the government of Venezuela. As these authors also affirmed "The coming into power the government of President Hugo Chavez in 1999 seemed to mark a turning point, even a breaking point, whose meaning should be examined in the context of the long-term history of U.S.-Venezuelan relations" (Ibid, 2002: 3). Furthermore, Chavista governments have been under near-continuous assault from the time Hugo Chávez first took office in 1999. Few elected governments in re-

cent history have faced such sharp confrontation and polarization over such a prolonged period, or met with such a multitude of powerful and hostile forces (Ellner, 2017).

Nevertheless, according to some other articles, such as “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy” by Corrales (2009), Chávez launched a new Venezuelan foreign policy, through a social power diplomacy paradigm. As we affirmed in the historical part, Chávez launched what seems to be a new type of asymmetric foreign policy threat – to the U.S. – (Corrales, 111). Having said that, although the rhetoric of Chávez was anti-American and anti-imperialist in nature, oil cartels like Chevron and Total were still able to operate in the Bolivarian Republic (Antonopoulos, 2018: 53).

4.3 Ecological Utopians

In this section, it is presented the ecological approach. The ecological vision seeks new alternative ways of development as opposed to old patterns. The purpose is to create a fairer, more stable and more respectful (for human and the environment) model of society. This approach has some key points: society, the production system, the economic system and technology, these are all interconnected and man-made. This allows humans to change them through choices and decisions, individual (bottom-up) or public. (Commoner 1970; 1977; 1990; Goodman, 1962; Feldman, 2016; Krahnman, 2013). The main point of ecological utopians is the transition from oil to new energy resources. Less dependence on oil contributed to solving some economic, social and environmental problems. The ecological vision calls to rethink the entire system. It is not just an energy shift but it affects many aspects of human life. For example, Commoner shows how subjects such as biology, science, urbanism, etc. are necessary to create a transition. (Common 1970). In this section, we analyze the ecological approach with the aid of two books – *The end of the fossil fuel era* by Thomas Princen, Jack P. Manno, and Pamela L. Martin, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* by Percival and Paul Goodman – and some articles by Jonathan Michael Feldman and Barry Commoner.

The book *Ending the fossil fuel era* starts from a historical fact. Every energy transition, from human power to animal, from animal to wood, from wood to coal, from coal to oil, has brought improvements in people's lives. (Princen, Manno, Martin, 2015: 3). New technologies are the tool to implement this latest modern energy transition that will allow the abandonment of oil. The vision of this book is that leaving oil in the ground is positive and realistic (Twenty-Century realism) given by the enormous social, environmental and economic cost that

would result in continued use. In particular, the book takes into consideration the case of oil in the Amazon and the decision by the state of Ecuador not to use it. Ending the extraction of oil marks a new beginning of a transformation for Ecuador into a new system with alternative energy resources and sustainable practice (Princen, Manno, Martin, 2015: 118). Leaving oil in the ground is a project that represents a challenge to create a new system for Ecuador. In this vision, the book tries to explain a new social lifestyle: The Good Life and the good mind. An idea of living in harmony with nature rather than dominating it.

The Book *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* shows how urban planning is an important aspect of human beings. Each community plan is based on technology, standard of living, political and economic decision, geography and history of a place (Goodman, 1947: 15). City planning is not just about buildings but it is a decision of values, of economy, which concerns the future of society. The book tries to show this link between urban planning and technology, capitalism (both public and private aspects), and values. It exposes that a change to a new system is difficult. There are some problems such as the low propensity of people to change and the threat of war that slows the process. To solve the first problem, it is necessary to create social participation. Give people knowledge of the change and make them part of this transition (Goodman, 1947: 19).

To study Berry Commoner's thought, we used three papers. The first *Beyond the teach-in* dated 1970, shows how pollution has been a constant problem in the industrialization era. There is a need to find a solution. To do this, a general study using a variety of subjects is required. The purpose is to try to reorganize society to survive. The tool of change is technology. Yet, Commoner focuses on the problems that technology brings with it (Commoner, 1970: 64). In the second study dated 1977 *The poverty of power* Commoner highlights three crises during the 70s in U.S.: the crisis of survival, the energy crisis, the economic crisis. We need to act in a unified way. These three crises refer to three systems. 1- ecosystem, 2- production system 3- economic system (Commoner, 1977: 1-3). Energy represents a constant in these three systems. To tackle the energy issue, we need to open a great debate to create a bottom-up solution. Furthermore, sharing knowledge represents an important aspect of this vision. The first step in finding a solution to energy issues is to understand why these sources create pollution. The second is to rethink their use (Commoner, 1977: 5). In the third paper *Making peace with the planet* dated 1990 Commoner focused on the production system. In particular, the power of the consumer and technologies. Commoner highlights some major problems in the energy industrial sector. The need for large funds to modernize it, rising pric-

es etc. For Commoner the solution to this issue may be to decentralize the system to focus on local energy needs.

The study “Technology, Power and Social Change: Comparing Three Marx-inspired Views” by Jonathan Michael Feldman focuses on technology as a tool for changing the system. It shows three different Marxist approaches to the relationship between technology and system. According to the first view, technology is not the solution because we need to change the system first. The second vision sees the possibility of system change through technology. The third view is that system change requires technology to take place. Three groups are shown. In particular Eco-socialists and Eco-reconstructionists are important. The first considers technology the problem and at the same time the solution (Feldman, 2016: 29). The other group is characterized by a more utopian thinking. They believe that technology can be the first seed to create a new system. This analysis moves in the internal changes in the system. Some important groups include schools and universities, media networks, regulatory frameworks, cooperatives and defense firms (Feldman, 2016: 30)

5. Empirical Analysis

In this part of the paper, the empirical analysis of the theories is made dividing between three major perspectives: Resource oil dependency (Kaldor and Klare); U.S. Hegemony (Chomsky and Bina), and Ecological utopians (Goodman, Commoner, Ending the Fossil Fuel Era book).

5.1 Resource Wars

In this perspective, the theories by Kaldor and Klare will be used and empirically tested. The empirical analysis used here through Kaldor and Klare theories are possible international alliances of oil producing countries by discourse analysis; data of numbers of oil reserves found each year; possible numbers of non-state actors in the Venezuelan crisis; and the role of international oil companies in Venezuela.

Both for Kaldor and Klare, conflict occurs because of a finite resource and states are fighting to guarantee its energy future security. More than just focusing on the armed conflicts, for Kaldor it is important to study the interactions between oil and its socio-political environment, because it can reveal much more about the relationship between oil and armed conflict than a focus on armed actors alone (Kaldor, 2007: 261). The same can be applied and

researched empirically in the case of Venezuela. If a historical discourse is analysed, it is feasible to conclude that U.S. oil companies operate in Venezuela not only to secure its oil security, but to control the region: "While Venezuela accounts for only about 1% of Chevron's global crude production, it remains strategically important given the nation's vast untapped reserves. Proponents of Chevron's position argued that withdrawing would cede market share and influence to Russian and Chinese companies. Chevron is the last remaining major U.S. explorer in the country. Rivals Exxon Mobil Corp. and ConocoPhillips exited a decade ago after then-President Hugo Chavez seized control of their assets" (Crowley; Kassai: 2020).

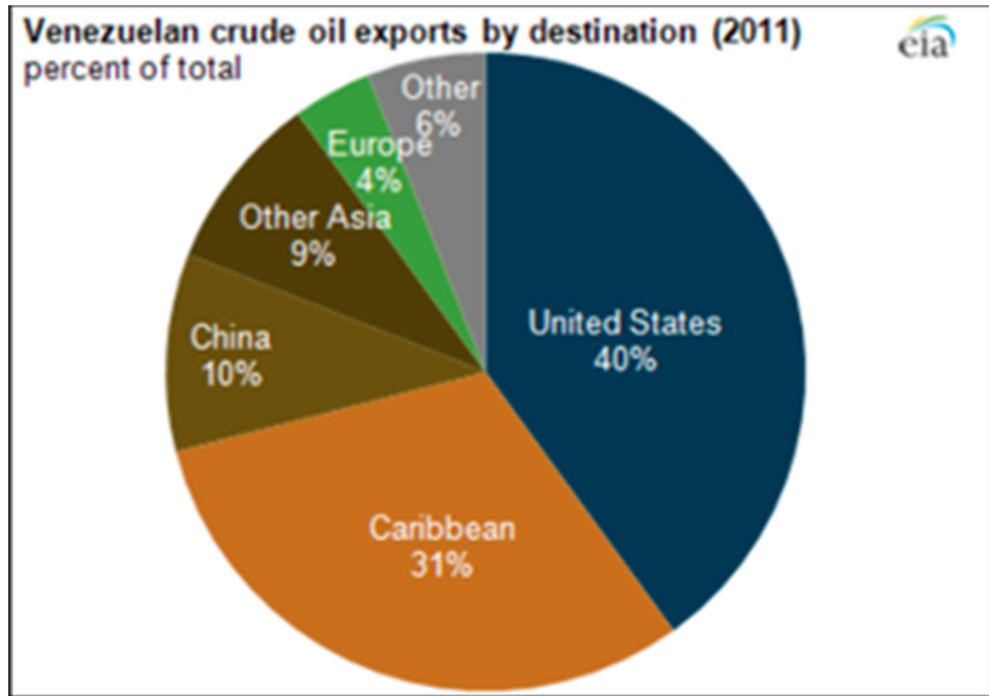
Recently Trump administration approved a renewable license to Chevron continuing operating in Venezuela: Its renewal represented a win by some in the administration, such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who see keeping a U.S. company in Venezuela as an asset that could lead to a speedy recovery after any ouster of Maduro (Brice; Gardener, 2019). Despite foreign oil companies still present in Venezuela during Chávez and Maduro's government, the success of the Bolivarian revolution saw Venezuela under Chávez become increasingly anti-American, anti-imperialist and staunchly against neo-liberalism and its institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Antonopoulos et al., 2018: 49). Chávez wanted the region to be completely independent from US capitalism, to reduce the significant influence of the US on the politics and economics of Latin America; and perhaps most importantly, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), with an aim of creating the virtual currency SUCRE to replace the US dollar across the Americas, directly challenging US influence and domination in the region (Ibid, 50).

Researching past speech discourses indicator and actions of Chávez and Maduro, it is plausible to conclude that Venezuela tried to get some alliances with countries that have the largest oil reserves in the world, to protect against U.S. sanctions. As it is possible to see by Maduro's speech last year: "Our country hopes to receive the solidarity and full support of the member countries of OPEC and its ministerial Conference, in the fight we are currently having against the illegal and arbitrary intrusion of the United States in the internal affairs of Venezuela," Maduro wrote (Lawler; Soldatkin: 2019).

By the same way, Maduro also affirmed to other OPEC nations: I seek "your firm support and collaboration to jointly denounce and face this shameless dispossession of ... important assets of one of the members of OPEC", the letter said (Ibid, 2019). Similarly to Kaldor, Klare affirms that it is paramount to foster greater international cooperation and exploration of new energy initiatives. In the case of Venezuela, it can be concluded that there isn't a strong policy incentive for this new energy paradigm. The next figure shows the percentages

of oil export to different countries by Venezuela. In 2011 U.S. was the top importer of Venezuelan oil.

Figure 3 - Venezuelan crude oil exports by destination in 2011



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2011.

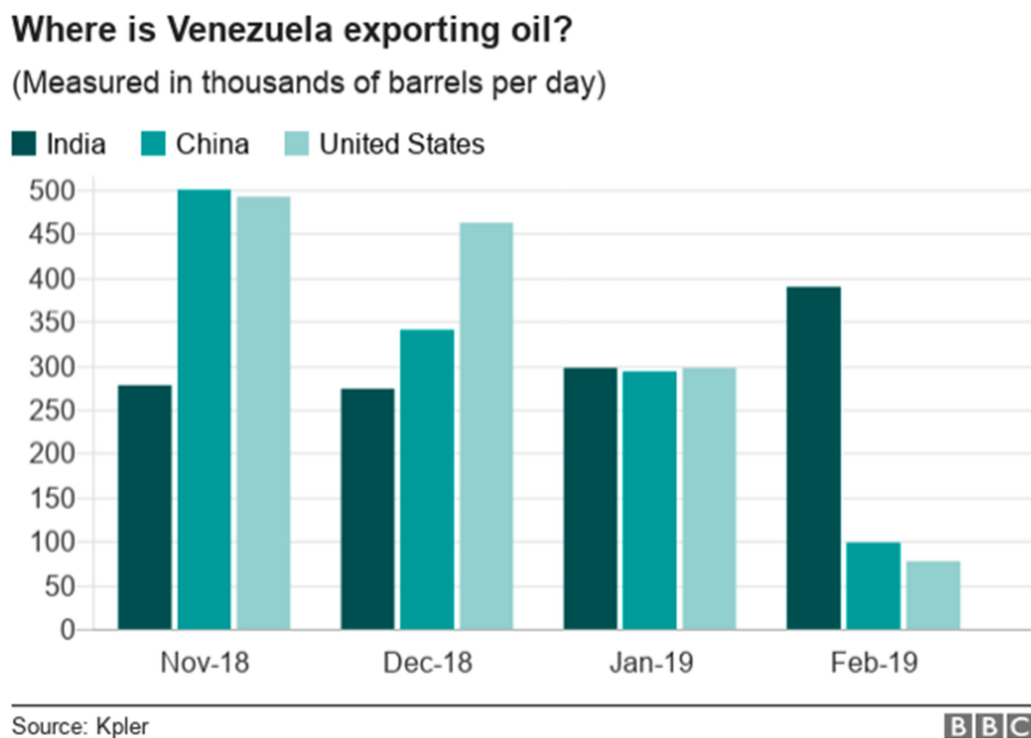
5.2 U.S. Hegemony

As the main research question is to find out what could have affected the crisis in Venezuela, this part gives possible results, through Chomsky and Bina lenses, and discover if these theories are indeed valid for the Venezuelan case, through empirical and historical analysis; social indicators, polls researches among others.

Chomsky affirms that the U.S. uses oil not only for energy needs, but mainly for control and hegemony, as he demonstrates in the case of Iraq (Chomsky, 2007). As Chomsky affirms, the threat for the U.S. is to lose its hegemony and the independence of countries that do not cooperate with them anymore (Ibid, 2007). As in the case of Iraq: a sovereign and partially democratic Iraq could be another contribution to developments that seriously threaten U.S. global hegemony (Ibid, 2007). The same could be applied to Venezuela after Chávez gained power (left-wing ruling government). Despite propaganda by U.S. and other media, in 2013 Venezuela was one of the top countries in the Latin American region where people from there (42%) were satisfied with the democracy in the coun-

try (Latinobarómetro, 2013). Furthermore, the reduction in the overall poverty is noticeable also in the studied years and by the same polling agency that did the previous analysis. Recently the U.S. government recognized Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's president. This could be understood as an example, through Chomsky theory, that leaders that are aligned with U.S. foreign policy and interests are more likely to receive U.S. support. Nevertheless, despite a diminished oil import from Venezuela, U.S. still plays a preponderant role in the imports of Venezuelan. Also, Venezuela, on average, exported about 500,000 barrels of crude a day to the United States in 2018, according to U.S. Energy Department data (Eaton et al., 2019). The next chart shows the top three countries Venezuela exports its oil to.

Figure 4 - Countries where Venezuela is exporting its oil



Source: BBC, 2019.

In addition, through the observance of oil imports, military presence, among other indications, it is possible to come to a conclusion that one of the factors that caused the Venezuelan crisis is the many international embargos that U.S. pushed on the country on both Chávez and Maduro governments. One of the first ones was the failed military *coup* in 2002. In addition, one indicator that can be used, is the number of U.S. military presence in South America and more precisely in Venezuela. According to Chomsky, the U.S. military presence in Latin America is increasing substantially (Ibid, 2007).

Also, the elites of Venezuela could be playing an important role in affecting the conflict. "There has been substantial interference from Washington in the form of economic sanctions, with the complicity and co-operation of some of the largest and most powerful corporations in the country (in Venezuela), many of which are funding the opposition "(Bryan, 2019). As Chomsky affirms oil resources are concentrated in Zulia province near Colombia, the one reliable U.S. land base in the region, a province that is anti-Chávez and already has an autonomy movement (Chomsky, 2007). As one of the indicators is the number of U.S. military personnel in Latin American, it is noticeable an increase of the U.S. military in the past years in the region. This happened mainly after a left-wing government was elected in the region, with the objective of fostering a more independent area. The new mission is to combat "radical populism"—the term that is regularly used for independent nationalism that does not obey orders (Ibid, 2007). The concern for U.S. then, is independent nationalism, as it is the case of Venezuela. Chávez and Maduro's government doesn't pursue neoliberal policies and could be more interested in the foreign autonomy of Venezuela. These policies are not aligned with the foreign policy and interests of the hegemon. As Chomsky affirms, "the countries that have most rigorously observed neoliberal principles, as in Latin America and elsewhere, have experienced a sharp deterioration of macroeconomic indicators as compared with earlier years" (Ibid, 2007). Therefore, if Chomsky theory is applied to the Venezuelan case, and looking at the different indicators such as numbers of U.S. military presence in Latin America, the percentage of oil imported to U.S. from Venezuela, U.S. oil companies in Venezuela, and public support to democracy, it is possible to come to a conclusion that it is indeed the case. As figure 3 shows, Chevron is one of the top U.S. companies that is still present in Venezuela.

Figure 5 - Western Companies' oil projects in Venezuela

Source: FT research, 2017.

By the same view, Bina understands that U.S. hegemony is falling, and for this reason, he views the increasing U.S. conflicts as a way of saving its power and hegemony. In order to save this hegemony, U.S. has been promoting wars against weak states, a symbolic enemy that seemed inevitable (Bina, 2004: 8). Looking at an empirical analysis through Bina's perspective, it is possible to notice, during the failed *coup* in Venezuela in 2002, that the Bush administration was overwhelming in favour of the supposed-to-be new president in 2002, Pedro Carmona. The Observer asserted that the U.S. administration was not only aware the *coup* was about to take place, but had sanctioned it, presuming it to be destined for success (Vulliamy, 2002). Thus, in the view of the U.S. foreign policy and for them, the Venezuelan threat is the result of the loss of stability in the global system, and also loss of U.S. hegemony. The U.S. is interested in controlling the region for the enormous quantity of oil in Venezuela. Therefore, the U.S. foreign policy is adapted accordingly to which government rules the country. What might have affected the crisis then, through this perspective, is the internal Venezuelan policies focusing to be more independent through a more autonomous foreign policy, and not complying with U.S. big complex interests.

A policy alternative, through this perspective, would be to diversify the economy with the objective of not being solely dependent on oil and therefore less vulnerable to international oil prices. As a consequence, international influence on the country would be less felt. The

creation of a wealth fund in Venezuela or saving wealth reserves when international oil prices are high is also a policy alternative, like what Norway did in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the barriers to this policy alternative (diversification) are many, mainly because changing the *status quo* is difficult, and as different articles suggest, vested interest structures serve as powerful influences on energy policy (Moe: 2012; 19). The policy planning, or the "architects of policy" is carried out under the military, energy and other power complexes counselling, in order to meet their private interests.

5.3 Ecological Utopians

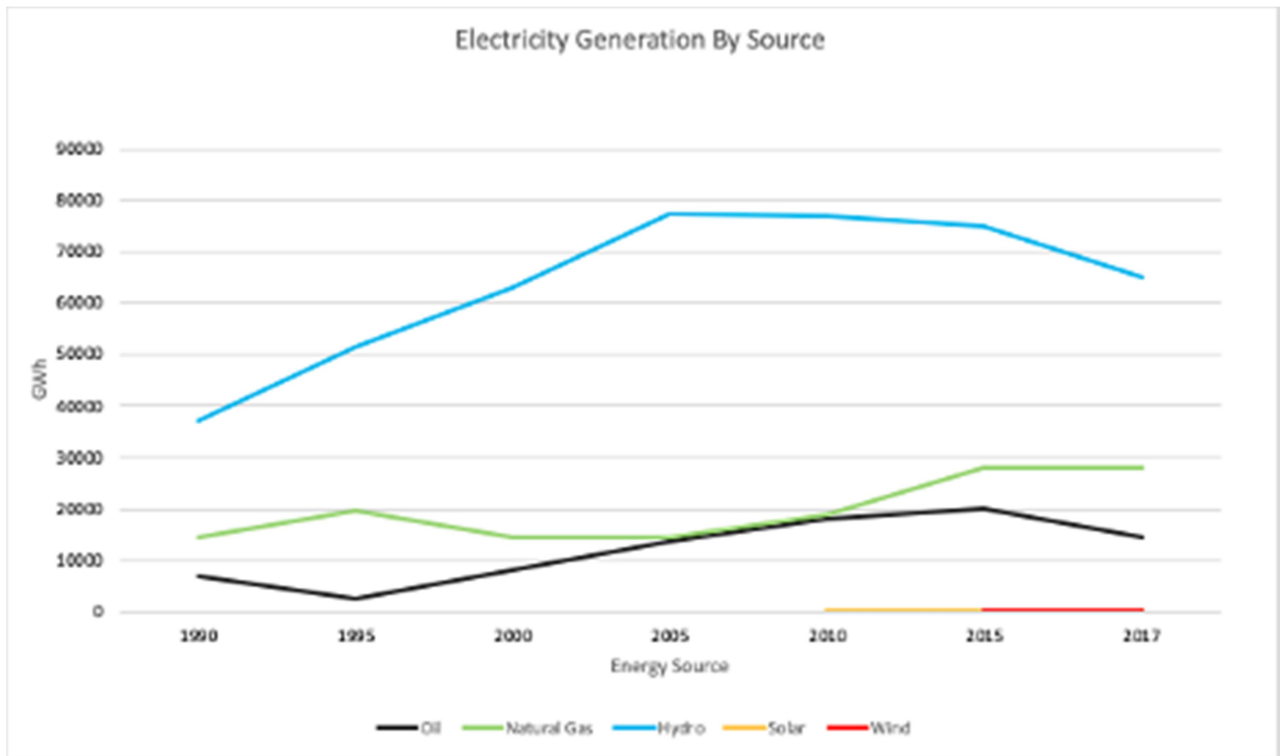
The propose of the ecological approach is to start a transition not only about energy but also regards the social and economic aspects. We have explained how some important points are the use of alternative energy resources and the construction of a more conscious society, with more responsibility towards change and challengers and towards the market (for example the attention for the purchase of products and the consumption of energy). (Commoner 1970; 1977; 1990; Goodman, 1962)

Venezuela has a strong link with oil. In particular for the oil rent. This represents the first problem for the country. Downsizing profits derived from oil means redesigning the Venezuelan state system formed thanks to these profits. The ecological transition is a great challenge for the country. Yet, as highlighted previously in the book *Ending the fossil fuel era*, the case of Ecuador can be an example to be followed. An important point to analyze how the utopian ecological approach moves in the Venezuelan system is to look at the level of social and local groups. According to the ecological vision, there is a need for participation and sharing of political choices in society. The propose is to make people participate in the social change and at the same time to allow this change to conclude. Analyzing Venezuela from the late 90s, the first step towards achieving this proposal was certainly the constitution of 2000. Following the ideas of the Chavism, the new constitution reinforces the concepts of pluralism and multi-ethnicity of Venezuela, giving voice to all levels of society. This reform seeks to empower citizens by promoting the concept of direct democracy. Also, the state calls for the defense of human rights, political pluralism and access to knowledge. For example, the constitution extends the rights of aborigines and women (Tinker Salas, 2012. 138). The new constitutional project can be seen as the first building block to create a system linked to an utopian ecological vision, more favorable to bottom-up solutions associated to local society. To create participation, sharing and knowledge.

The constitutional reform locates some problems and barriers. Firstly, educating the people about challenges and change is a long-term project, difficult to implement, which cannot be limited to an edition of constitutional principles. Another difficulty is the presence of a group in the society linked to the traditional politic, in the Venezuelan case in particular to corruption. (Tinker Salas, 2012. 140). As was highlighted in the historical section of this analysis, Venezuela managed to improve living standards during the Chavist period. (Tinker Salas, 2012. 192) A necessary point to create civil responsibility is to improve the school system. During the Chavist period, Venezuela increased access to primary and secondary schools (not only to school-age children but also to adults). Analyzing civil responsibility in the energy sector, Venezuela has carried out knowledge projects on the responsible use of energy and energy-saving. In 2006, the Energy Ministry launched *Mision Revolucion Energetica* (MRE). One of the first phases of this project was the change of 52 million conventional incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. Almost four thousand volunteers went door to door to bring new bulbs and to teach people the importance of responsible energy use. (Massabié, 2011: 47) The participation of the government in social change in Venezuela has been impressive. The real (inflation-adjusted) social spending from 1998-2006 more than tripled (Venezuela Analysis, 2009).

Also, an important factor was the actively direct participation in this social program of the government-led oil company PdVSA. In the first three quarters of 2008, PdVSA spent \$13.9 billion in public spending, 6.1% of the Venezuelan GDP (Venezuela Analysis, 2009). Following the state project, during this period the company launched programs of help, for instance to fight food problems (Tinker Salas, 2012. 195).

The main point of the ecological approach is the energy transition from oil to renewable energy. As already said, the Venezuelan economy is profoundly influenced by the petroleum market. As we see in the Figure 5, the Venezuelan energy market has hydropower as its primary resource (IEA, 2017).

Figure 6 - Electricity generation by source in Venezuela

Source: IEA, International Energy Agency, 2017

In 2008, 73.4% of the energy produced was from hydroelectric sources. The equivalent of 140,000 barrels of oil per day more for export (Massabié, 2011: 48). The propose of the Venezuela government is to decrease the oil used for the internal market in order to increase the oil for export. This energy policy brings the alternative energy sector, although it represents the first source of energy consumed, to remain a luxury based on oil. The lack of attention and the unwillingness to truly create an autonomous sector capable of maintenance has led to a detriment of the capacities and possibilities of creating electricity from renewable sources. (Massabié, 2011: 47-49)

As early as 2011, Germán Massabié claimed that the Venezuelan energy situation was on the edge of an important crisis (Massabié, 2011: 49). The scholar highlighted some choices that could and can heal the problem of alternative energy sources in the Venezuelan system. The first is long-term investments to design new plants and to improve and update the obsolete system. The second solution is to change the government mentality. Making the alternative energy sector free in the energy market. Making the transition not to increase oil export but to create a stable local system of energy sources (Massabié, 2011: 42-50).

6. Conclusion

Venezuela is deeply dependent on oil. It dominates Venezuela's economy, accounting for almost all its export earnings. As seen in the previous sections, Chávez and Maduro's governments used oil revenues to finance countries that are mostly against U.S. interests and to impulse a deeper regional policy and integration, that would not be influenced economically and politically by the U.S. government many complexes 'interests. As some authors suggest, for all its power, the United States does not seem to possess an effective counterstrategy (Corrales, 2009: 110). If the U.S. is forced to exit Venezuela, China and Russia might make a move and take control of the world's largest oil reserves. The crisis in Venezuela is the combination of economic and political competition and interests, therefore, different authors propose distinct solutions to the crisis. According to the perspective Resource Wars with Kaldor and Klare, one of the solutions is to foster a deeper international cooperation between countries and corporations, as well as the importance to find new energy sources. Sources that are more environmentally friendly and not finite. Nevertheless, as it was debated previously, there are many barriers to the above-mentioned solution. Due to the oil abundance in Venezuela, the automobile is the main means of transportation and the national policy favours it in detriment to other means, such as public transportation (Angotti, 1998).

Overcoming the temptation to build more roads and to produce more cars will be hard to change. Furthermore, to break the auto habit and use the oil revenue to finance environmentally friendly transportation is problematic in the country, since it is intrinsically related to geopolitics and confronting interests. A possible way to overcome these barriers – within the resource wars theory – would be to encourage the elections of representatives that are more willing to cooperate internationally. This can be achieved, since, as seen previously, U.S. and Venezuela used to have friendly relations until Chávez came into power. It would be important, however, to keep a respectful relationship with mutual benefits in all instances.

A policy alternative would be to foster greater international cooperation among multinational oil corporations and states. Klare affirms that it is important to redirect the competitive impulses now channeled into the hunt for vital resources into a cooperative effort to develop new sources of energy and climate-friendly industrial processes (Klare, 2009: 261). Also, another strategy would be to increase the research for alternative energy sources, so that competition and resource conflicts for the oil energy-based scarcity would diminish. The support of the Venezuelan government to alternative and renewable energies would indeed be needed to make this transition happen. In addition, the automobile centered paradigm would also need

to change to diminish the international competition for oil. Nevertheless, the power that the oil, energy and military complexes have on each country and policy planning are notorious, and the barriers to these transitions can't be denied.

Seen through the U.S. hegemony perspective, the solutions would be to diversify the economy in order to be not highly dependent on oil, and to create a wealth fund to protect the country when oil prices are low. Nonetheless, changing the *status quo* might be difficult and diversifying the economy is not a trivial action. A possible way to overcome this barrier would be to change the overall incentive and influence of the energy and military complexes through government financing, NGOs and research, so that diverse energy sources complexes would gain more power. In other words, changing the way power is accumulated, and possibly changing the system would be needed. It is a similar policy solution as to the utopian would propose, but a redesign of society is indeed of paramount importance. For both the Resource wars and U.S. hegemony paradigm, however, what affected greatly the Venezuelan crisis is competition for oil. Specially through U.S. hegemony perspective, the U.S. influence in Venezuela as well as the coming of a left-wing government in the South American country also affected greatly the worsening of the crisis. The U.S. then has used indirect means to destabilise the country.

Finally, according to the ecological approach, the search for solutions to the current crisis of the Venezuelan system finds its answer in the energy transition. A change in the energy source leads to a change in the system. In the previous sections, we analyzed how the ecological society –outlined by the utopian approach– is represented in a positive way, with more direct democracy, more knowledge, more participation and more responsibility. A first barrier is a mistake that the ecological approach is bringing an unconditionally positive change. The energy transition could not represent a real change but only a shift that will not affect the whole of society. The real engine of change must be civil sense. A social transition towards a fairer and richer society brings with it the energy question. Energy change should not be implemented as an obligation to the limits of nature but as a moral duty of society. The book *The end of fossil fuel era* ends with a part dedicated to the concept of the Good Life and the Good Mind. Here, according to our idea, this concept must be the starting point of the book. The Good life and the Good mind must be the cause of the energy transition, not the effect.

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