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PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ РОЗВИТКУ ПІВНІЧНОАМЕРИКАНСЬКОЇ МОДЕЛІ ЕКОНОМІЧНОЇ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ

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The article presents an in-depth analysis of the North American model of economic integration, focusing on its transformation from NAFTA to the USMCA. It explores the current state of economic cooperation between the USA, Canada, and Mexico, assessing the region's role and competitiveness in the global market. Particular attention is paid to the structure and dynamics of trade flows, investment activity, and GDP growth. The analysis demonstrates the impact of globalization, the growing importance of digital trade, and the recovery of integration processes after the COVID-19 crisis. It outlines key development areas such as technological and industrial cooperation, energy integration, and labor mobility. Despite challenges related to structural asymmetry and trade competition with China, North America retains significant development potential in high-tech sectors, nearshoring, and unified digital standards. The article offers strategic insights into institutional harmonization, regression modeling of economic impacts, and future directions for the advancement of the North American integration model.

Keywords: economic integration, North American economic integration model, NAFTA, USMCA, international trade, global competitiveness, digital transformation.

У статті здійснено комплексне дослідження північноамериканської моделі економічної інтеграції в контексті її трансформації під впливом сучасних глобальних викликів та переходу від НАФТА до угоди USMCA. Проаналізовано еволюцію інтеграційної взаємодії США, Канади та Мексики, виявлено ключові особливості цієї моделі, що базується на усуненні торговельних бар'єрів, активізації інвестиційної діяльності та уніфікації стандартів без делегування суверенітету наднаціональним органам. Акцентовано увагу на макроекономічних результатах інтеграції, зокрема стабільному зростанні ВВП країн-учасниць та інтенсифікації внутрішньорегіональних торговельних потоків. Окрему увагу приділено цифровій трансформації співробітництва, впровадженню нових стандартів трудових відносин та екологічної безпеки, що стали пріоритетними у межах оновленої угоди USMCA. За допомогою кореляційно-регресійного аналізу доведено суттєвий вплив торговельної взаємодії з регіональними партнерами на динаміку ВВП США, де встановлено найбільший вплив частки експорту до Канади. Виокремлено перспективні напрями розвитку моделі – індустріальну кооперацію, енергетичну інтеграцію та цифрову синхронізацію, які мають на меті створення стійких регіональних виробничих кластерів, здатних витримувати зовнішні шоки. Встановлено, що північноамериканська інтеграція в сучасних умовах виступає інструментом підвищення конкурентоспроможності регіону на фоні посилення глобальної конкуренції з боку Китаю та інших потужних економічних блоків. У роботі обґрунтовано необхідність подолання структурної асиметрії доходів, податкового навантаження та рівнів автоматизації, а також інституційних бар'єрів, що стримують потенціал економічної синергії. Запропоновано стратегічні орієнтири для поглиблення інтеграції через перехід від виключно торговельної до глибокої технологічної взаємодії, гармонізацію нормативів, розвиток спільного науково-дослідного простору та спільне реагування на виклики кліматичних змін і міграційного тиску. Успішна реалізація оновленої моделі в межах USMCA може слугувати прикладом для інших регіональних об'єднань, які прагнуть досягти економічної стабільності шляхом адаптивного узгодження національних потенціалів.

Ключові слова: економічна інтеграція, північноамериканська модель економічної інтеграції, USMCA, НАФТА, міжнародна торгівля, глобальна конкурентоспроможність, цифрова трансформація.

Statement of the problem. In the context of the modern restructuring of the global economic order, regional integration associations are undergoing a period of profound transformation. The North American integration model, which for decades was defined by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has entered a new phase with the implementation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). This transition is not merely a legal formalization of new trade rules but a strategic response to global challenges: the crisis of multilateralism, the rapid pace of digitalization, and the need to ensure the resilience of supply chains. For the countries of the North American region, the transformation of the integration mechanism is aimed at creating a more resilient and coordinated economic ecosystem capable of competing with the European Union and the growing influence of the Asia-Pacific region. The analysis of these processes and the evaluation of the North American model's prospects are essential for understanding the modern tools of regionalism that ensure national growth and competitive advantage in the international market.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Contemporary studies on regional economic integration provide a substantial theoretical basis for analyzing the North American model of integration and its transformation under current global challenges. In the article by M. Savchenko, M. Varlamova, and M. Shkurat [18], the authors examine the evolution of regional integration groupings in the system of global trade and economic relations. Using cluster analysis, they assess the competitiveness of the world's leading integration blocs and conclude that regional agreements play a decisive role in strengthening countries' positions in international trade. M. Savchenko and D. Oryshko [17] investigate the impact of international integration processes on the system of international economic relations. The authors characterize the main forms of integration, identify key development trends, and emphasize that regional cooperation contributes to economic growth, trade expansion, and the improvement of countries' competitiveness. T. Derkach [2] analyzes regional economic integration within the broader context of globalization. Particular attention is paid to the North American experience, especially the functioning of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which the author considers one of the most successful examples of trade liberalization and production cooperation. Ye. Erfan [4] explores the current state and dynamics of global integration processes, highlighting the growing role of regional trade agreements and the intensification of competition among major integration centers. The study emphasizes that modern integration associations are increasingly adapting to technological and geopolitical transformations. I. Polishchuk and V. Vilkhivskyi [16] focus on the institutional and political dimensions of international integration. They stress that integration associations not only foster economic cooperation but also shape common regulatory frameworks and mechanisms for coordinating member states' policies.

Highlighting previously unresolved parts of the overall problem. Despite the significant contribution of these studies, the transformation of the North American integration model following the replacement of NAFTA by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) remains insufficiently explored. In particular, further research is needed to assess the impact of the new agreement on regional competitiveness, supply chain resilience, and the adaptation of North American economies to post-pandemic and geopolitical challenges.

Formation of the objectives of the article (task statement). The purpose of the article is to analyze the structural and functional features of the North American model of economic integration in its current state and to identify the prospects for its development by evaluating the impact of transformation mechanisms (specifically digitalization and investment activity) on the regional competitiveness of the USA, Canada, and Mexico.

Summary of the main research material. In a globalized world, where economic interdependence is reaching an unprecedented scale, integration associations are becoming key platforms for increasing national competitiveness [3]. North America, as one of the leading economic regions, demonstrates a distinctive pattern of deep integration between countries with different levels of development, economic structures, and resource endowments [19]. From the creation of NAFTA to its transformation into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the region has passed through a difficult stage of adaptation to new economic realities [23].

Economic integration as a phenomenon is analyzed through several approaches:

– Neoclassical: focuses on trade effects.

– Neoinstitutional: analyzes institutional frameworks and rules.

– Evolutionary: views integration as a dynamic process of mutual adaptation.

Thus, each of these approaches highlights different dimensions of integration; however, in the case of North America, they should be considered in combination. The region demonstrates a hybrid model of integration where market-driven mechanisms dominate, while institutional coordination remains limited. This combination leads to flexible but asymmetrical development, which distinguishes the North American model from more institutionalized integration blocs such as the European Union.

In this context, competitiveness should be considered not only as the ability of countries to produce goods and services that withstand international competition, but as a system of factors that ensure growth sustainability, innovation dynamics, and social integration [24]. The International Institute for Management Development (IMD) defines world competitiveness through a set of indicators, including overall performance, economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency, and infrastructure [8].

The analysis of IMD indicators demonstrates that the level of economic development of the United States, Canada, and Mexico is significantly differentiated, which directly influences the nature of their integration interaction. Their dynamics over the period 2020–2024 (fig. 1) reveal not only the current state of economies but also the trajectories of their strategic development.

The overall competitiveness ranking indicates that the United States consistently occupies leading positions among the world's economies due to its strong institutional environment, advanced innovation ecosystem, and high business productivity. Canada demonstrates relatively stable and balanced performance, maintaining solid middle positions in the ranking. Mexico remains in the lower segment, reflecting persistent structural weaknesses in institutional quality, infrastructure, and business efficiency. Although these differences create asymmetry within the integration bloc, they also contribute to economic complementarity, as each country performs distinct functions within regional value chains.

In terms of Economic Performance, both the United States and Mexico improved their positions between 2020 and 2024, while Canada maintained stable results. This indicator is particularly important for regional integration because stronger economic growth in one member country stimulates trade, investment, and production activity across the bloc. At the same time, unequal growth rates may generate cyclical imbalances and affect the distribution of trade and capital flows within the region.

The Government Efficiency ranking reflects the quality of public institutions, regulatory stability, and the effectiveness of economic policy implementation. The United States and Canada maintain relatively high positions, indicating strong institutional capacity and predictable regulatory environments. Mexico, however, continues to face challenges related to governance quality and policy enforcement. These disparities influence the effectiveness of integration, as the implementation of common

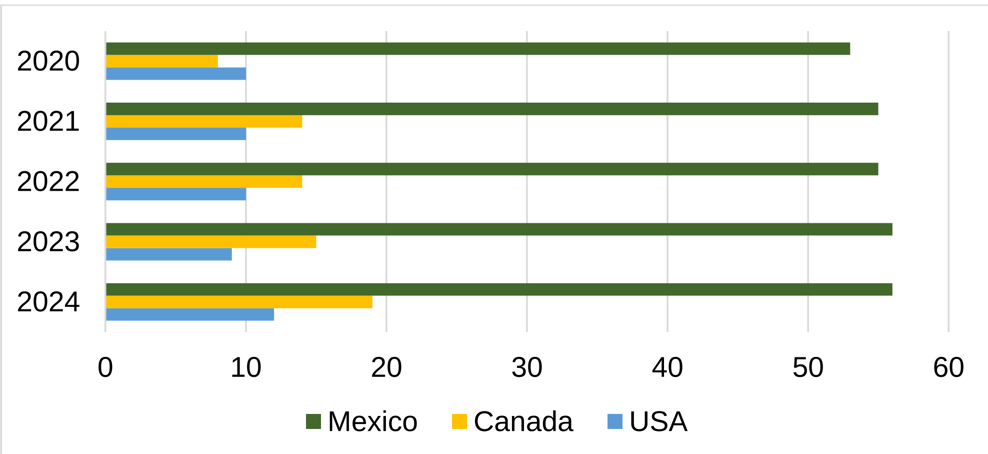

Figure 1. Positions of USMCA countries in the "Overall Performance" world ranking, 2020–2024

Source: compiled by the author based on [8]

USMCA rules depends on the institutional compatibility of member states.

The Business Efficiency indicator demonstrates the competitiveness, innovation capacity, and managerial effectiveness of the private sector. The United States holds particularly strong positions, supported by its advanced technological base and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Canada maintains stable performance, while Mexico faces notable constraints. This differentiation is especially relevant in the context of nearshoring, as firms relocating production from Asia increasingly allocate innovation-intensive activities to the United States, while Mexico strengthens its role as a manufacturing and assembly platform. Canada serves as a stable intermediary within regional production networks.

The analysis of Infrastructure confirms that the quality of transport, energy, and digital systems remains a critical determinant of regional competitiveness. The United States and Canada benefit from highly developed infrastructure that facilitates efficient logistics and cross-border production. Mexico, by contrast, still requires substantial investment in modernization to enhance its participation in higher value-added segments of regional supply chains.

Overall, the combined assessment of IMD indicators suggests that the competitive advantages of USMCA countries are formed at different levels. The United States leads in innovation, business efficiency, and infrastructure; Canada demonstrates a balanced model of economic and institutional development; and Mexico offers cost advantages in manufacturing but remains constrained by institutional and infrastructural limitations. This differentiation strengthens functional specialization within the region and supports the development of integrated North American value chains.

Despite some fluctuations in individual rankings, the United States continues to maintain global leadership in economic performance and infrastructure, Canada preserves stable competitiveness, and Mexico gradually improves its economic performance while facing persistent challenges in institutional efficiency and infrastructure development.

There are also structural differences in the economies of the USA, Canada, and Mexico that create significant asymmetry (Table 1). This manifests not only in macroeconomic indicators but also in the nature of employment, levels of automation, tax philosophy, and labor organization.

Structural asymmetry among the economies of the United States, Canada, and Mexico simultaneously promotes regional specialization and reinforces development disparities. While differences in economic structure and productivity enhance the efficient allocation of resources within North America, they also complicate convergence and may strengthen hierarchical patterns of integration. At the same time, external factors increasingly shape the evolution of regional cooperation. Geoeconomic competition, supply chain disruptions, and divergent approaches to digital transformation and environmental policy create new sources of fragmentation. In particular, the United States and Canada prioritize green and digital transitions,

Table 1

Structural economic asymmetry as a barrier to cooperation

Parameter	USA	Canada	Mexico	Implications for Regional Cooperation
GDP per capita ($US), 2023	80,706	54,517	13,826	Sharp income inequality – a challenge for fair integration
Economic Structure	Services (80%), Industry (19%)	Services (70%), Industry (28%)	Services (58%), Industry (33%)	Asymmetry creates different demand for market protection policies
Tax Burden	High (progressive scale)	High, regional autonomy	Low, mostly indirect taxes	Incompatibility in fiscal coordination
Automation Level	High	High	Low	Risk of job losses in Mexico during production integration
Union Influence	Stable	High in the public sector	Limited	Inequality in labor rights complicates a unified policy

Source: compiled by the author based on data from [9; 22] whereas Mexico remains more dependent on traditional industries, limiting the formation of a fully integrated regional economic space.

External shocks increasingly shape the trajectory of North American integration, the resilience of the USMCA framework depends on the ability of member states to coordinate responses to external challenges. Without such coordination, external pressures may intensify internal asymmetries and weaken the overall coherence of the integration model.

In order to assess the quantitative dimension of integration processes in North America, it is necessary to examine the statistical relationship between intra-regional trade flows and key macroeconomic indicators. Within this study, a regression framework is applied to evaluate the impact of intra-regional trade (Intra-trade) and foreign direct investment (FDI) on the overall economic performance of the USMCA member countries [15].

To further investigate the role of integration in shaping national economic outcomes, the analysis focuses on the United States as the largest economy in the region. A correlation-regression approach is employed to identify the relationship between US GDP and bilateral trade flows within the USMCA framework. The following variables are included in the model:

– Y – US GDP at current prices, USD billion.

– X_1 – share of exports from the USA to Canada, %.

– X_2 – share of exports from the USA to Mexico, %.

– X_3 – share of imports from Canada to the USA, %.

– X_4: Share of imports from Mexico to the USA, %.

In the first stage, a correlation analysis (Table 3) was performed to establish the level of dependence between the indicators and to exclude multicollinearity.

The initial regression model included four explanatory variables (X_1–X_4) representing the structure of US trade flows within USMCA. However, during the diagnostic stage, statistical tests indicated the presence of multicollinearity among several variables, as well as the lack of statistical significance for some coefficients (p-value > 0.05). In order to avoid biased estimations, a stepwise reduction procedure was applied. Insignificant variables were sequentially excluded, resulting in a more parsimonious specification of the model.

The final model includes only statistically significant predictors and demonstrates improved explanatory power (R^2 = 0.8881), confirming its suitability for interpreting the

Table 2

External economic factors in the cooperation of the USA, Canada, and Mexico

Influential Factor	Description of the factor	Geostrategic Context	Potential Risks for Cooperation
Trade competition with China	China is displacing Mexican production in exports to the USA	The USA introduces protectionist measures against Asia but does not always coordinate with Mexico	Gap between the interests of the USA and Mexico in supply chains
War in Ukraine and global energy	Energy crises and price shocks due to conflicts and sanction regimes	Canada benefits as an exporter; Mexico suffers from import dependence	Lack of a unified energy policy complicates integration
World digitalization	Growing role of data, cybersecurity, and IT standards	USA dominance, Mexico’s digital divide, Canada’s regulatory caution	Technological disproportion hinders the creation of a digital market
Climate change	Different approaches to climate obligations and environmental regulation	Canada is a "green" leader, USA fluctuates, Mexico has a resource-based economy	Conflicts of interest regarding "green" subsidies and carbon standards
Migration pressure	Flows of labor migrants from Central America through Mexico to the USA	Mexico as a transit zone, USA policy of containment, Canada’s policy of attraction	Lack of a unified migration strategy destabilizes labor markets

Source: compiled by the author based on data from [1; 11; 13; 15]

Table 3

Correlation Analysis Results

	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	Y
X_1	1				
X_2	-0.7804	1			
X_3	0.6998	-0.6128	1		
X_4	-0.8718	0.8347	-0.6072	1	
Y	-0.9424	0.7608	-0.50522	0.9136	1

Source: compiled by the author based on data from [23]

relationship between US GDP and intra-regional trade dynamics.

$$Y = 111544.25 - 4990.65X_1$$

The obtained results confirm the existence of a strong statistical relationship between US economic growth and trade interactions within the USMCA framework. In particular, the model indicates that export dynamics with Canada play a more significant role compared to other trade partners, highlighting the structural importance of the Canadian market for the United States economy. The constructed model confirms that the priority for the development of integration remains the stimulation of investment activity and the maintenance of stable GDP growth rates. However, the high value of R-squared also indicates the high dependence of Canada and Mexico on the economic health of the US economy.

Further development of the USMCA should focus on the transition from trade integration to technological integration, including the formation of a unified R&D space, harmonization of digital standards, and joint development of artificial intelligence [13]. In practical terms, this implies the following key directions:

– Trade harmonization: simplification of customs procedures and unification of product certification, leading to reduced transaction costs and faster goods circulation.

– Industrial cooperation: development of integrated supply chains and investment platforms, contributing to regional production clusters and greater resilience to external shocks.

– Digital synchronization: implementation of common IT protocols, cybersecurity frameworks, and data economy standards, strengthening e-commerce and digital infrastructure.

– Energy integration: coordination of renewable energy policies and infrastructure exchange, ensuring energy security and balanced supply and demand across countries.

– Labor mobility: regulation of quotas for seasonal and highly skilled migration, supporting labor market balance and reducing irregular migration pressures.

These directions indicate a shift from a traditional trade-oriented model toward a more complex, multidimensional system of regional cooperation. This evolution goes beyond tariff reduction and involves the formation of integrated production, technological, and institutional networks. As a result, the competitiveness of the North American region increasingly depends on coordinated policies in innovation, energy transition, and labor mobility, ensuring long-term structural resilience.

Overall, the USMCA is evolving from a linear convergence model into a dynamic system of adaptive interactions shaped by internal asymmetries and external global pressures.

Conclusions. The current state of regional integration in North America, particularly within the USMCA framework, indicates a profound transformation of economic interdependence between the USA, Canada, and Mexico. The transition from the classic free trade model (NAFTA) to a "next-generation agreement" was a response to new global realities, where competitiveness is determined not only by trade preferences but also by supply chain resilience, digital security, and the harmonization of labor and environmental standards. The region demonstrates a distinctive pattern of convergence among the economies with significant structural differences, allowing for the formation of a powerful, integrated economic bloc. Correlation and regression analysis confirmed a tight link between mutual trade indicators and GDP dynamics, especially for the US economy. This indicates high model accuracy and underscores the strategic importance of exports to Canada as a key factor in the economic growth of the region’s core. Simultaneously, the study revealed a high dependence of Canada and Mexico on the economic health of the USA, making the region vulnerable to internal political cycles and administrative changes in Washington. Despite US leadership in "Economic Performance" and "Infrastructure," the research highlighted significant structural asymmetries among the member countries. Mexico continues to face challenges in business efficiency and infrastructure modernization, which limits the realization of the full potential of integration. Furthermore, external factors–such as trade competition with China, the war in Ukraine, and global energy instability–create new vectors of fragmentation that require USMCA countries to move toward a model of "strategic autonomy" and enhanced institutional coordination. Therefore, the further development of North American integration should focus on the transition from "trade integration" to "technological integration". Priority areas should include digital synchronization, the creation of a unified research and development space in strategic sectors (such as microelectronics and clean energy), and the development of a shared migration strategy.

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