

WORKING IN ‘CHAINS’? REFLECTIONS ON ‘THE GOVERNANCE OF LABOUR AND LOGISTICS FOR (SOCIAL) SUSTAINABILITY’ IN GLOBAL PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Labour outcomes within GPNs are frequently negative or problematic, especially at the beginning of value chains (Barrientos et al 2011; Pegler 2015). This is generally considered to have a strong relation to governance processes, thus the nature of regulation and corporate responsibility norms. Yet there are few studies of this governance-labour relation from a multiple product, “whole” chain (e.g. from production to port/s to sales) level and within a comparable context. How might such comparisons of governance processes help us understand power dynamics and promote more socially sustainable GPNs?

This paper reflects on this question using an ongoing cross-country, interdisciplinary study² of chain governance and labour outcomes between various Brazilian production locations, Rotterdam port (the most significant for Brazil/ second largest globally) and beyond. The contrasts and comparisons in labour fortunes between, for example, “old” (e.g. oranges), “new” (e.g. acai) and “alternative” (e.g. Amazonian soya) chains provide sobering reflections on the power of capital, importance of logistics and ambiguities of state action, but also the tenuous social sustainability links between suppliers and consumers.

Even within this key, growing bilateral (Brazil/Holland) context, the gulf between the “logic” of chain *drivers* and those at source still questions the prospect of sustainable chains. Yet there are still spaces (various nodes, including ports) at which labour/civic action may find space / “voice”. The studies also benefit from a broadened perspective on labour processes, via the use of human security considerations.

Thematic Conference foci: governance of GPNs/ the labour process/ methodological (innovation)

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² GOLLS (2011-) – governance of labour and logistics for sustainability, [http:// iss/researchprogrammes/ciri/projects/golls](http://iss/researchprogrammes/ciri/projects/golls)