Call for Papers: The Missing Link: Integrating Labour with Global Value Chains

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The publication of Gereffi and Korzeniewicz’s (1994) path-breaking work on the Global Commodity Chain (GCC) stimulated a fertile and continuing debate on geographically dispersed systems of production increasingly evident in the ‘globalised’ era. Transnational productive activity was conceptualised as constituting either a Producer Driven Commodity Chain (PDCC) or a Buyer Driven Commodity Chain (BDCC). A signal advantage of the chain metaphor was that it permitted the abstract idea of globalisation to be realised concretely in terms of the relations surrounding tangible commodities.

A subtle but significant shift occurred as academic debates shifted to Global Value Chains (GVCs) and issues of ‘governance’ assumed greater importance. If economic globalisation was generating geographical dispersion and differentiation between places, then GVCs considered the chains’ integrative mechanisms (Gibbon et al, 2008). GVC governance centred on actor strategies, usually large firms, and the prevailing arrangements – in-house, market-based or outsourced associated with the imperatives of coordination and quality standards. Gereffi et al (2005) downscaled the concept of governance from a characteristic of entire chains to the mode of coordination at a particular link in a chain.

In turn, Global Production Network (GPN) theorists critiqued GVC’s restricted framework and its chain metaphor which, to them, mistakenly assumed an invariable vertical and linear sequencing (Coe et al, 2008). Global production was better conceptualised as complex network structures, in which intricate linkages formed multi-dimensional, multi-layered ‘lattices’ of economic activity. One notable advantage of the GPN was its ability to understand firm-centred production networks within the concrete socio-political contexts in which they were embedded. Thus, the global was enmeshed with diverse political, institutional and regulatory influences of the national, regional or local, factors ordinarily abstracted out of GCC and GVC analysis.

Rationale for a Stream at ILPC 2013

This proposed stream aims to continue its successful predecessor held at the 2012 Stockholm ILPC, which attracted a healthy number of papers and stimulated lively debates. However, contributions mostly had a European focus. The rationale for extending this stream to Rutgers (2013) is to make it easier for contributions to be made by North American scholars working...
with global value chain and production network theory, recognising that academics from this geography have played a major part in developing analysis (e.g. Bair, 2008).

The proposers of this stream have already acknowledged the potential contribution of GCC, GVC and GPN theorising for labour process analysis, notwithstanding, of course, their differing emphases and contributions (e.g. Bair, 2008; Newsome 2010; Rainnie et al, 2011; Taylor, 2010). Yet, labour, either as value creator or as agency (collective or otherwise) is frustratingly lacking in much GCC/GVC work (Cumbers et al, 2008, Newsome 2011) and, despite greater regard for its significance within GPN studies, labour is treated as merely one of many potential influences.


In short, we are seeking abstracts from researchers who have been utilising GCC, GVC or GPN approaches, but who additionally are striving to fuse the insights derived from these frameworks with labour either as abstract labour or agency, and particularly with a focus on labour process analysis. Theoretical papers exploring the problematic of integrating GCC/GVC/GPN and labour process analysis are welcome, as are abstracts from those reporting empirical findings, albeit informed by these conceptual concerns. Although studies at the transnational scale are self-evidently important, those focused on the intra-national, regional or local scales have validity. Abstracts from North American scholars are particularly welcome.

Contributions will be undoubtedly be forthcoming from scholars working in diverse disciplines and fields of study, including human and economic geography, development studies, comparative political economy, gender studies, labour market research, the sociology of work and industrial/employment relations. The aim is to encourage a critical engagement between those who acknowledge the salience of core labour theory and others for whom participation at the ILPC may be a new experience. Our intention is to publish an edited book in the International Labour Process series.

References


**Submission Process:**

The International Labor Process Conference (ILPC) is broadly focused on work and employment relations in the context of the broader political economy, with an emphasis on employee perspectives and theory-led empirical research. Visit www.ilpc.org.uk for more information. Any questions please contact: ilpc.admin@ilpc.org.uk

The deadline for submissions of abstracts and panel proposals is October 31, 2012 and decisions on acceptance will be made in December. All abstracts must be 350-500 words in length. Abstracts are externally refereed and papers must not have been previously published or presented elsewhere. Abstracts to general conference and special streams should be submitted at www.ilpc.org.uk.