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**Sustainable Value Chains and Labour – Linking Chain  
and “Inner Drivers” – From Concepts to Practice**

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## Abstract

Global value chains are driven by considerations of cost and efficiency but just as much by power relations. This appears evident from studies of industrial relations and labour outcomes within value chains, especially those where *driveness* is most explicit. Within a context of disaggregated but more coordinated production across borders, the standards “industry” continues to grow as a regulatory structure of chain outcomes. Yet the processes by which many workers and communities continue to be made *flexible, vulnerable and voiceless*, within value chains, are not so clear.

The research discussed in this paper is aimed at exploring the feasibility of labour rights promotion within the context of sustainable global value chains. By this it is meant that the conditions of work and livelihoods (e.g. at the beginning of chains) are “decent/good” and that these are compatible with the *reproductability* of their environment. A central concern is how to improve the conceptual lenses we use to analyse labour outcomes, and their governance, within value chains. This ISS (Brazil-Holland) project is based on a desire to more effectively link 1) the actors which drive chains, with 2) considerations of work, livelihoods and security for the workers and communities (i.e. their “inner” drivers) supplying those chains.

The question of this research derives from a comparison of the “logic” (e.g. efficiency) of these chain *drivers* vis a vis the “logic” of those at the beginning of chains. The fundamental starting question concerning sustainability is thus whether such competing “logics” can be resolved within global value chains? The concept of *governmentality* expands the theoretical frame for the consideration of how *messages /rules/norms* are established, transmitted and contested across these chains. Labour process analysis (expanded with considerations of gender, livelihoods and human security) is suggested for use with those at the beginning of chains.

Chains are not static - they are “webs of interaction, where negotiation takes place between actors (and with institutions) at each node” (Loconto, 2010, p. 217). The substantive evaluation of *Decent Work*, livelihoods and Human Security possibilities in a sustainable context therefore requires research into the existence and viability of multiple “logics” between nodes within such chains. Such studies have much to contribute – to academic and conceptual debates on labour rights and sustainable development, to Government policies in respect to fair trade, sustainability, procurement and human rights and, to the policies and strategies of social movements and other civic actors.

## Keywords

Value chains; sustainability; precarious work; social and economic upgrading; flexible labour; labour processes; labour rights; labour voice; livelihoods and human security; governance; governmentality; control-consent-resistance; logistics- ports- advanced services; Brazil-Holland

# Sustainable Value Chains and Labour – Linking Chain and “Inner Drivers” – From Concepts to Practice<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

In the depths of the Brazilian Amazon many hundreds of families cultivate various fruits as one part of their effort to feed and provide income for their families. It is a difficult task surviving and providing for everyone's needs and aspirations. These cultivation strategies also involve an intra-household division of labour, with children often switching between earning and learning. Knowingly or not, many of these quite poor families end up providing their fruit harvests to an efficient, well organized chain of buyers, logistical processes, ports, manufacturers and brands located in the Global North<sup>2</sup>.

The literature on these “chains of global production” has shed some light on how their governance structures play a role in shaping the position of gainers and losers, with suppliers and workers at the beginning of chains in developing countries generally being placed in the weakest position in the process (Dolan, 2004; Pegler et al, 2011). Media attention and consciousness raising activities by civil society groups engaged with ethical trading issues have made consumers in the North and South more aware of these chains, of questions concerning sustainability and of the massive differences in value and income at each end of the chain (CCC; Bair (ed) 2009; DeMars, 2005). Unions have been particularly strident in highlighting the potential consequences of the governance of chains for labour rights and international labour standards (IJLR, 2009).

In this regard, many researchers and policy makers are of the view that *economic upgrading* and *cluster promotion* could help stabilise the flexible and insecure situations being faced by many workers at the beginning of these chains (UNIDO, 2004/6). There have also been some attempts to categorise work types, typologise the (albeit limited) conditions under which labour rights improvements and economic upgrading might go hand-in-hand and, to relate these categorisations to certain benchmarks of outcomes for workers (Knorringa and Pegler, 2006; Barrientos et al, 2010). Recently, there is recognition of the need to more fully integrate logistics and advanced services processes into studies of chains as they, in themselves, will be highly determinant of value distribution within the chain and of social outcomes (Jacobs, 2008; Jacobs et al, 2011). Environmental sustainability has clearly become a more mainstream concern at a global level. Yet, despite these developments, our level of understanding of the processes at work within and across these global chains is still quite piecemeal. From a research point of view, this is underlined by the (continuing) present lack of integration of

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks (but no responsibility) extended to ThanhDam Truong and Peter Knorringa for their continuing guidance on this project.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. for passionfruit pulp to Northern Europe via Rotterdam Port, see case study 3 in Pegler, 2009, pp12-14

labour, sustainability and logistical considerations within most chain studies (e.g. Coe et al, 2008).

This is the context within which this study is placed. The aim of this paper (project) is to explore the potential for labour rights improvements within sustainable value chains. By this it is meant that the conditions of work and livelihoods (e.g. at the beginning of chains) are “decent/good” and that these are compatible with the reproductibility of the environment within which they take place. A central concern is how to improve the conceptual lenses we use to analyse the position and role of labour in chains. The construction of a methodology for such a study must engage with a series of empirical observations and conceptual debates relating to global value chains (GVC’s) – that is, cross country physical production processes but also ones that embody *messages* (“logics”) that are *transmitted* across space.

The observations upon which this study rests primarily relate to labour outcomes in chains and their categorisation. The debates, however, are more about how we describe and conceptualise the management of these chains and the evolution and legitimacy of the *message(s)* embedded within them. The fundamental starting question concerning sustainability is thus whether the “logic” of chain *drivers* (e.g. of lead firms, buyers, financiers and logistics coordinators) can be compatible with the “logic” of those who source and help *build* the product? The following sections summarise the empirical and conceptual debates (s2.0) behind this question and specify (s3.0) this problematic and conceptual framework for the GOLLS (“governance of labour and logistics for sustainability”) project. Section 4.0 outlines the operationalisation of the research – in terms of product and locational selection, (initial) benchmarks of analysis and indicators. Section 5.0 concludes the paper and notes future stages and applications for the study.

## **2 Value Chain Governance and the Question of Labour**

### **2.1 Working in Chains**

#### ***2.1.1 Labour outcomes in chains – a contingent & unfinished picture***

The broad categories of producer and buyer driven value chains seem to be a useful way to start a categorisation of labour outcomes in value chains. Particularly when we add the more recent rise of supermarkets and large retailers as direct buyers/coordinators of sourcing (see Dolan and Humphrey, 2000/4), a number of connections emerge in respect to labour outcomes. Hierarchical and semi-hierarchical governance situations, much more likely in buyer driven examples, appear (*ceteris peribus*) more limiting in respect to the involvement of local firms and labour in more skilled and valued parts of the operation (Humphrey and Schmitz, 2002). This appears to be related to company’s responses to the risks of managing production “at a distance”.

Greater optimism has been shown for labour conditions improvements in chains with a producer orientation, due either to technological scale/fixity, existing local attributes (skills/cluster depth) and the more formal factory

based nature of production and jobs, for goods such as ceramics, dental implements, cars, refrigerators, compressors and the like (Pegler, 2000; Schmitz and Nadvi, 1999; Humphrey 2003). However, many such studies also confirm that such relatively good outcomes are neither fixed nor static - new forms of work organisation and labour management can evolve. These may include modified forms of outsourcing/in-sourcing and contractual relations (e.g. Abreu et al, 2000; Zang, 2008)<sup>3</sup>.

A number of factors seem to make a difference in respect to whether developing country firms have the (initial) opportunity to participate in economic improvements via their engagement with global production (i.e. via upgrading). These are not only due to the type of chain but are also a function of its complexity, the initial point of entry/"insertion" in the chain (i.e. high or low), the level of cluster development and the embeddedness and effectiveness of representation and social action (Knorringa and Pegler, 2006, Table p477). Many local environments may start at a low level of insertion, not have (what are generally considered) "good" cluster conditions and have social movements/unions who are marginalised, lowly resourced or both. Combined with the greater relative growth of more "footlose", buyer driven chain examples (Gibbon et al, 2008b), the existence of these difficult conditions does not paint a good picture of prospects for social outcomes due to the globalisation process.

The issue thus goes far beyond the question of economic upgrading promotion to a consideration of how probable is it that the social conditions of those "supplying" the initial product will also improve?...what does it depend on? Secondly, even if it seems that both economic and social upgrading are possible, what is the basis of this logic? That is, social/labour outcomes may vary greatly in different parts of the chain or if looked at beyond a solely work or skills (vs. livelihood/community development) perspective. Moreover, the material condition and perceptions of the people whose livelihoods are affected (as a result of "insertion"/upgrading) may be quite different to what we assume is an improvement, "progress" or more "sustainable"(Barrientos et al, 2010).

Prior to tackling such conceptual and ethical questions, we should first look more closely at the outcomes and determining features, as exposed by a sample of studies, of labour conditions in value chains. One aspect this demonstrates is how the literature is divided between macro and micro perspectives. Both have their strengths and weaknesses yet each is important to consider if we wish to evaluate labour outcomes and prospects, and the factors affecting this, within and across value chains.

A number of studies have painted a broad macro or sector level picture of the labour impacts of a company's involvement with global value chains and of

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<sup>3</sup> Related fieldwork at local operations of TNCs in Brazil (e.g. Whirlpool; Phillips) between 2003 and the present has provided author with numerous examples of 1)workplaces where, in reality, only a small proportion of the assembled workforce actually work for the firm in whose workplace they are working, as well as 2) growing examples of wage bill "smoothing"/averaging (thus overtime "removing") of monthly wage payments.

how the potential benefits of this may be enhanced. These studies are useful but only as an overview in relation to labour/social themes. For example, an OECD study argued that core labour standards would not damage competitiveness and trade performance (OECD, 1996). Follow-up studies confirmed this, at least in respect to core standards and for an “adequate” minimum wage - if promoted via accepted social processes for its determination (OECD, 2000). The extensive UNIDO (2006) study, on the other hand, is optimistic about concurrent upgrading and social condition improvements. Yet it essentially only offers up a (hopeful) typology of what firm and employee benefits might come about through “more comprehensive” cluster promotion. A detailed study of the textiles and clothing sectors, in contrast, suggested a more mixed picture of “winners and losers” as a result of chain insertion. For instance, the “looser” group of workers appeared to include a disproportionate number of women and elderly. An additional development of concern related to questions about contractual conditions and security for those (the “winners”) in continued or new employment (Nadvi et al, 2004).

Studies by Kucera and others paint quite an optimistic picture at a country level (Kucera, 2001; Kucera and Sarna, 2004). Essentially, they suggest that while wage and condition improvements may lead to employment reductions, other aspects of Decent Work (such as a clear and stable industrial relations environment and other capability enhancing aspects of employer policy) may have a (more than compensating) positive impact on employment, efficiency and competitiveness. They see this net positive effect as reflected in country level trade and FDI figures. The powerful implication is that both improved social conditions and firm success (e.g. upgrading) are compatible with engagement in globalisation.

The questions remain as to whether these results translate to the micro firm level and what does this depend on? How might these suggested outcomes vary by sector, by type of national economic and labour regime and the like? Are there any trends or recurring themes that emerge? For this we need to turn to more detailed case study evidence, especially examples of the (increasingly dominant) buyer driven type, as is done below.

Many present case studies of buyer/retailer driven chains tell fascinating and varied stories but ones with a number of common threads (Pegler et al, 2011; Dolan 2004; Kritzinger et al, 2004). The broad term *flexibility* is often used to describe task allocation, employment decisions (e.g. gendered) and the labour pool sourcing (e.g. of migrants) commonly found for labour use under many agricultural, textile and raw material value chains, for example. This is often reflected in new forms of segmentation of the workforce, much as has been observed in many producer driven chains (Pegler and Knorrington, 2007). A second common characteristic is that of insecurity or *vulnerability* (of income, tenure, basic needs etc). Relatedly, many such workers lack *voice* – as in the right to or availability of independent and adequate representation. These three characteristics distinguish not only the situation of many of those in the informal economy but also work outcomes of numerous people and communities who are linked to value chains.



Yet these case study descriptions of “flexible, precarious” labour also highlight the strong connection of specific outcomes to changing commercial, administrative or consumer pressures and to a re-grouping of the role of capital/management at various points within the chain. For example, across the many studies of African vegetable production, what seems clear is that young females (especially migrants) became the flexible labourers “of choice” for local farms facing the opportunity (i.e. the pressure) of higher production standards for direct supply to UK supermarkets (Dolan, 2004; Dolan and Humphrey, 2000/4). In other instances of export agriculture, quality pressures further up the chain sometimes result in relatively better labour management models at source (Vellema, 2002/5). However, in others we see strengthened roles for local middlemen as key agents in social control (and as “opponents” to unions/cooperatives) within locally based arrangements for the supply of product to chain leaders (Pegler, 2009). Within the cotton chain, cutthroat competition and low skills levels generally result in more expressive and simple labour control outcomes, especially for women (Siegmann and Shaheen, 2008; Siegmann, 2006).

Examples of clothing sourcing arrangements from Southern and Eastern Europe, on the other hand, underline how small changes in institutional arrangements (e.g. EU entry conditions; OPT supply models) can greatly influence the chance of local job opportunities in developing regions (Staveren/Mazura/Nunez, 2006). Yet, clothing industry examples such as these (involving SMEs), as well as outsourcing models used by large international firms, also highlight ambiguous outcomes. Small Eastern/Southern European workshops supplying *cut and trim* clothing orders to Holland offer work where no other employment opportunities may exist but offer little job security or chances of skill development (Staveren/Mazura/Nunez, 2006). On the other hand, when companies like NIKE consolidate their supply base and intensify their *lean production model* in distant regions, these firms often leave their (already distant) operations more exposed to worker and union organisation and action than in the past (Merk, 2008/11).

Overall, in each of these examples, governance changes at various points along the chain have been introduced, due to risks and competitive pressures and as a result of the need to maintain production control “at a distance”. In most cases labour at the beginning of the chain bears the brunt of these attempts to secure value added, profit and competitiveness (i.e. in terms of *flexibility, voice* and *vulnerability*). In addition, labourers there are generally in a weak position to challenge or enforce new (in)formal regulatory regimes or representative options (Pegler, 2009). Yet, resistance and space for contestation sometimes emerges. Nevertheless, despite such reflection, how much further have we gone in drawing clearer patterns from these case studies - what kind of connections do they make to broader levels?

In response to such questions, some authors have attempted to typologise and categorise labour/social outcomes within GPNs. For example, Knorringa and Pegler (2006) presented generalised, multi-layered hypotheses of the conditions necessary for simultaneous upgrading and improvements in labour conditions. Based on a consideration of various studies, we offered an initial,

sobering picture of how difficult it may be to achieve various commitments (e.g. to quality) and features (e.g. high skilled work and well embedded representative unions) at the one time. However, the limits of this somewhat normative “wish-list” are further exposed when it is noted that upgrading – 1) may lead to negative outcomes (e.g. “lock in”); 2) may be structurally very improbable due to issues such as industry skills features; and 3) may sometimes actually offer fewer opportunities than “downgrading” (Barrientos et al, 2010).

Other studies have taken a different approach and blended descriptive outcomes with diagrams, rankings, and evaluations (i.e. relative to standards and criteria such as codes, certification and normative frameworks such as *Decent Work*). Quite rightly, gendered concerns receive the bulk of empirical and conceptual attention within many of these studies. For example, studies of fruit from Latin America and Africa have used hierarchical pyramid type representations of labour conditions by type of worker (e.g. packhouse vs. contract) (Barrientos et al, 2003; Kritzinger et al, 2004). The more precarious and “most”<sup>4</sup> informal work types in such pyramids is made more explicit in other studies that show employment condition rankings running from – (to pick a few of the stages) – own employers, to informal enterprise workers to, eventually, home workers (Chen et al, 2004). These same pyramids note the strong positive correlation between these less favourable employment hierarchies and earnings and gender representation. Further refinements to such works are studies that note the continuing inability of codes and ethical trading initiatives to reach many (the most vulnerable) workers (Nadvi, 2008; Barrientos and Smith, 2007). This is especially so in respect to rights that promote processes and negotiated relations (sometimes called enabling rights). This is underlined by further pyramidal representations which highlight the fact that even ILO guidelines and the most ILO centred (i.e. most comprehensive) codes not only miss a large proportion of the informal economy but also any serious consideration of reproductive work (Barrientos et al, 2003), the *care economy* and the relation of these issues to productivity levels within the paid economy.

Recently, we have seen ambitious attempts to present overarching frameworks for use in the consideration of *who gains from chains?* – i.e. the question of social upgrading. Moving beyond dichotomies based on notions of regular vs. irregular jobs, authors such as Barrientos et al put the central question in a number of ways – is there a trade off between the quantity and quality of employment, or, will rising standards necessarily reduce job opportunities (Barrientos et al, 2010)? They then note that for social upgrading to have any real significance it must go beyond measurable standards (i.e. employment conditions) to the facilitation of enabling rights (i.e. employee relations)<sup>5</sup>. Putting the fundamentals in this way thus lines up considerations of the trajectories/factors behind changes to work closer to broader normative benchmarks such as *Decent Work*.

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<sup>4</sup> i.e. there are many grey lines between formal and informal worker categorisations – one observed being those workers who are informal but who have high/er expectations of continuity than others (Dolan, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> As with other works – noted too are the key issues of flexibility and vulnerability across many studies.

The base of this model as a framework of analysis is in its characterisation of five different identified types of work and their relative (i.e. proportionate) importance within key sectors<sup>6</sup>. These work types range from small scale household work and low skilled labour intensive work through to moderate and mixed skilled jobs (with some economic/skills upgrading potential) up to the final knowledge intensive “labour aristocrats” of the “modern era”(Barrientos et al, 2010). By suggesting that there may be possibilities for combining economic and social (i.e. measurable & enabling rights) upgrading across each of these job/sectorial scenarios offers another way of asking questions (and making characterisations) about the factors which both determine and may change governance such that labour gains a more equitable share of globalisation.

This is a useful addition to conceptual thinking for studies related to questions of upgrading and GPSs. It will certainly provide a useful “umbrella” for various studies in many different contextual environments. Anchoring the discussion to normative frameworks such as *Decent Work* also brings it closer to underlying concerns such as security and to a process/enabling focus – something of key significance, especially to vulnerable groups.

However, as a framework it is still quite broad and top-down in orientation. There seems little doubt that future research in this area must be capable of integrating case studies and that chain governance considerations must be linked to social outcomes. Yet core issues such as *flexibility*, *voice* and *vulnerability* require further problematisation at the individual, firm, inter-firm levels. In this light, another approach might therefore be to start with a more micro consideration of what people do in their work and livelihoods (at both conceptual and empirical levels) and then put this within a consideration of the spatial and political processes determining chain structures.

Within such a framework, it seems vital that consistent connections between inter-firm processes and the intra-firm sociology of work (e.g. in respect to the interpretation of *flexibility*) be made. Additionally, indicators of work based outcomes, such as a sense of enablement, must tell us more about the atmosphere of work relations (i.e. the balance of power, “anomie” or “managerial prerogative”) than will information about the instruments or structures put in place for achieving it. This may best be done by starting with micro based information about work, livelihood dynamics and preferences and of any new pressures on them as a result of changes in value chain management. These can then be used to *look back up* at meso level frameworks and concepts such as *Decent Work*, institutional guidelines, framework codes of conduct and the like. The next section briefly canvasses various historical-conceptual foundations of labour rights analysis which may provide building blocks to such a research method.

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<sup>6</sup> That is the broad sectors of – agriculture, apparel, automotive, IT hardware and business services.

### ***2.1.2 Unpacking and re-packing the analysis of work - from macro and micro perspectives to questions of human security***

A continuing issue within labour and development studies is how might we relate micro perspectives on work to broader theories of the development process? For example, to what extent is it useful and realistic to talk about propositions such as “global (post)fordism” or even “peripheral fordism”(Lipietz, 1982; Silva, 1991)? Bridging this conceptual gap between micro and higher levels is important to this study’s desire to link chain *drivers* and labour at source. Accordingly, the following paragraphs present a précis of a number of conceptual views of labour in the South from these levels, a discussion which also helps us go further in contextualising notions of *flexibility, vulnerability and voice*.

While classical political economists differed as to many of the micro implications of task subdivision, the early (old) international division of labour (OIDL) was generally seen as a somewhat static and dual one based on the colonial extraction of raw materials from the South and associated pre-industrial models of labour use and organisation (Munck, 2002, pp24-50). This spatialness took on a less static but still dual form when linked to neoclassical models of growth based on multipliers, linkages and “trickle down”. Models of dependency and core-peripheral relations differed most with Neoclassicals in terms of the potential stimulating effect (or not) of these economic differences between the North and South. Yet each school highlighted a changed/new international division of labour (NIDL) based on incipient light manufacturing (thus mainly semiskilled assembly work) in the South compared to comparative advantages based on higher skilled capital-intensive activities in “core” countries (Munck, 2002; Frobel et al, 1980; Lipietz, 1985).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s many authors suggested that this was again changing and that (for various reasons) the depth of industrialisation had become more profound and dynamic (especially due to the key role of TNCs) in many parts of the South (Evans, 1979). This view connected with new conceptions of the state (e.g. relative autonomy / class alliances e.g. the *triple alliance*) and other actors (e.g. unions / responses to organised labour) and had important implications for characterisations of work and employment opportunities in some regions (Lipietz, 1985; Munck, 2002)<sup>7</sup>. This view of a more fluid process of capitalist development (globalisation) and interdependence between North and South, has to be tempered on the basis of variations of form, speed and potential of this process across countries and regions (Mittelman, 1995, pp278-283; Littler, 1982)<sup>8</sup>. Yet, this discussion added new dynamism to the debate about the likelihood of self-sustaining development in the South. Strict dualist and core-periphery models were becoming even more questionable. This set the scene for a more spatially

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<sup>7</sup> One of these being a noted rise of women within the organised manufacturing/assembly workforce (Mittleman, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> e.g. many older forms of peasant labour, contract work etc continued and hybrids of these continue to exist.

focused consideration of production and work outcomes (and of their growing separation, within global value chains) in later years<sup>9</sup>.

On the other hand, in this earlier period, authors such as Braverman (1974) did venture more specific hypotheses (e.g. further Taylorist task division/skill degradation) in relation to trends in labour outcomes corresponding to perceived (e.g. monopoly) phases in capitalism. His pessimism for labour outcomes has been criticised (and defended) on many fronts (Spencer, 2000). Yet his brave venture closer to the micro foundations of labour processes spurred a very rich period of theorising in respect to the labour process and Marxian based conceptions of surplus value extraction (Knights et al, 1990).

Structuralists following Braverman added nuance to his overly generalised view of skill degradation – questioning its universality, but most importantly noting that control may not be so regular and explicit and will frequently (if order is to be restored) be ameliorated by institutions, hierarchies and structures (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977). Burowoy (1985) went further at a micro level. While he continued a tradition of emphasising the significance of surplus value extraction and inherent tensions between capital and labour (thus alienation), he added a view that the point of production was a key but not the sole unit of analysis. Moreover, what people did in their work has an economic and political dimension – subjective responses to work situations (e.g. the ambiguity of *games*, such as output bonus maximisation) must be taken more seriously than just *false consciousness*. Control, conflict and consent often co-exist in work situations. On the other hand, Burowoy also bravely ventured back up to the macro level in his attempt to link this more nuanced model of “production politics” with regime types<sup>10</sup>.

What then does this add to our desire to more adequately conceptualise *flexibility*, *voice* and *vulnerability* within labour theory? How might a Labour Process perspective be used within such a multi-layered approach to labour questions?. In this regard, many aspects of the original Burowoy model need adaptation. The most striking failing of Burawoy’s model was its lack of integration of gendered aspects of work and of links between the paid and unpaid sectors. In addition, its original grounding in “factory” politics meant that its updating to take account of new (often more insecure and *vulnerable*) types of work relations involved in a massively expanding informal economy (especially in developing regions) was required. Yet, an integration with livelihood and capability considerations (e.g. instances of rights constraints) may see its focus on control, consent and conflict dynamics having continuing relevance in studies of labour within a sustainability context. This is especially so if it takes sufficient account of local labour market dynamics, much as is

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the 1990s-2000s witnessing a growth of many more studies grounded in considerations of the labour process, gender equity and social development. Many linked this to questions of the validity and continuity of Fordism (Silva, 1991). These issues arise again (at least implicitly) in the works of Castells, Gereffi (1994) and others in respect to value chains.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. hegemonic despotism stage.

suggested by Social Structures of Accumulation (SSA) theory (Kotz et al, 1994) and concepts such as Local Labour Control Regimes (LLCR) (Riisgaard, 2009).

In contrast to these micro considerations of work, at the meso and firm level the early 1980s also saw a new wave of theorising which continues to have profound effects on these visions of labour processes. For one, the Flexible Specialisation (FS) Hypothesis was highly influential in challenging existing conceptions of the nature of production and work within large-scale factory spaces vs. small-scale workshops (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Its suggestion that industrial regeneration would/was coming about from small innovative, flexible suppliers of both standard and leading edge products and inputs contrasted with a vision of inflexible, rule bound Fordist relations within “old” industry. The implication of this for development and work processes was that the transfer of this model would further reduce North-South differences in relation to the division of labour (Elgar and Smith, 1994).

Conceptually and empirically these notions of flexibility came to be questioned. First, the suggested dichotomy within the model was exaggerated and stylised (Lane, 1988, Atkinson and Meager, 1986). Later developments highlighted many variations in form as well as the clear applicability of many flexible production techniques and technologies within large-scale enterprises (Pegler, 2000). More importantly, the schema came to be connected to views of flexible, high skilled, motivated workers in small firms vs. bureaucratically-encumbered workers in large ones (Knights et al, 1990). Not only did this skim over many debates concerning motivation-security or of the impact of hierarchies (within sociology and industrial psychology) but it also bypassed the considerable labour studies literature in respect to labour market segmentation,<sup>11</sup> both as a phenomena and a strategy (Edwards et al, 1975; Harris, 1987). This confusion went further with discussions of *flexibility* frequently moving between it as a firm based ideal type, a firm based reality, a labour market feature, a task related issue or attitude and a negative/positive process for workers vs. a key aspect of employers’ requirements of workers (Wood, 1989; Pollert, 1988; Womack and Jones, 1994).

What might we take from this is in relation to the further analysis and conceptualisation of labour in chains? On the one hand, the discussion of the issue of *flexibility* must clarify the level being discussed and degree of abstraction being used. Each are valuable but distinct and with different implications. Secondly, combining a consideration of inter-firm and intra firm issues seems to be important for analytical and conceptual development. Yet the experience of the FS debate suggested we should avoid overly optimistic assumptions about issues of power, conflict and control within relationships (either between firms or between management and labour within the firm).

Nevertheless, the combination of techniques and motivation emphasis within the Human Resource Management (HRM) and Total Quality Management (TQM) Schools of the 1990s came, once again, to directly challenge the basic tenants of conflict and control inherent within a labour process perspective (Knights et al, 1993; Storey, 1995; Delbridge et al, 1992).

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<sup>11</sup> That is, primary vs. secondary jobs in labour markets and internal-external condition differentiation within firms.

What ensued was more than a decade of analysis and debate over suggestions that work was becoming more satisfying/unified and that a unitarist form of industrial relations, within which unions were either unnecessary or more conciliatory, was becoming the norm (Ackers et al, 1996; Thompson and Smith, 2010). Yet, aside from a greater focus on issues such as care and call centre work, these empirical battles in respect to the fundamentals driving work and subjectivity (i.e. “inner drivers”) have left labour process theory at something of a standstill in terms of conceptual innovation (Thompson and Smith, 2009<sup>12</sup>).

On the other hand, the early part of this century saw further attempts to link concepts of *flexibility* and *leanness* within alternative models of the firm and of interfirm processes. Many of these seem to think of the firm as one part of a more amorphous network. Authors such as Palpaceur (2000) have tried to combine inter and intra firm issues, within such a network context, in their conceptualisation of new models of enterprise excellence (re. *New Competition Theory*). Yet, as discussed below, whether such models serve as a useful benchmark for an analysis of the labour processes in chains depends on how effectively they link these inter and intra firm levels, especially when much of production occurs in outsourced suppliers spread across a number of countries.

The overriding view of the (Palpaceur) “New Competition” model was that the new dynamic enterprise must decide which activities remain as a core, which they externalise and which should be quasi-internalised. Within the core, labour looks much like the flexible, motivated high skill workers noted by many other managerial optimists (e.g. Kochan and Osterman, 1994). Yet the categories of externalised competencies and quasi-internalised work are even more striking. For example, the author notes that externalised work may involve homework and more temporary and uncertain contractual relations (Palpaceur, 2000; pp363). Yet they also argue that, on balance, this may not be so deskilling and that the existence of this sector may in fact put positive efficiency pressures on core workers. A similar level of sociological optimism applies to the concept of quasi-internalised work and the relation of firms (somewhat equal and unproblematic) within the cluster (Palpaceur, 2000, pp367-70).

It is quite striking how the analysis critically applies concepts such as motivation, power, trust and the like for much of their analysis of inter-firm relations yet reverts to alternative assumptions (i.e. temporary work as a motivating factor vs. a feature of *vulnerability*) for intra-firm relations. Thus, while models such as Burowoy’s will have to move considerations of subjectivity beyond the physical point of production in more radical ways, models such as this should be seen as fitting within a more optimistic, managerialist end of the spectrum of possible inter and intra firm outcomes. Recent studies of labour at the beginning of value chains (Dolan, 2004; Pegler

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<sup>12</sup> See pp256. This gap can also be seen in the fact that concepts such as *lean production* were also left somewhat open and insufficiently linked to global processes - e.g. chain governance dynamics.

et al, 2011), while needing further conceptual grounding, offer a very different picture to what is implied by many advocates of so-called “New Competition”.

Returning to the macro level, building on the broader political models of authors such as Wallerstein (1980) and the development potential suggested by Evan’s (1979) detailed sectorial studies, Gereffi (1994) gave us a more practical structuralist critique of global processes. As argued by authors within human geography, this conceptual development process may further benefit from meso level elaboration and linking to network processes, especially in relation to the role of logistical processes and advanced services in chain governance (Jacobs, 2008). These may help greatly with our understanding of the spatial logic behind company decisions to both produce in various locations as well the movement of goods and services between source and end points. The further development of micro concepts and methodologies for the analysis of work, reward and the subjective/material condition of labour, at key points as well as along such (varied) networks, remains a challenge to a deeper and more integrated understanding of chain governance impacts.

What then might be some of the elements that allow labour theory to be extended and applied to empirical studies of labour in value chains? At one level, the issue can be seen in terms of the notion of labour control “at a distance” - of how chain managers search to maximise efficiency and minimise costs and contractual risks and that this “triggers” changes in labour organisation and management at a local level (Raworth and Kidder, 2009). The macro process thus has links (albeit not always clear, explicit or simple) to meso and micro levels. In addition, the further spatial separation of production decisions and labour outcomes may, especially for many of the products under consideration<sup>13</sup>, suggest that changes will be required to the concepts and units of analysis we use – i.e. that of the firm, work, participation / representation and the like. They will certainly require the integration of gender concerns and considerations of informality. The following discussion brings together a number of the concepts noted in this section into a modified framework for considering labour processes in chains.

Micro concepts should underpin any such model. In this regard, the preceding discussion has noted that considerations of *voice* and *vulnerability* are fundamental and that *flexibility* is a key problematic issue. Moreover, labour process theory leans closest to a view that alienation will arise due to task separation. However, we have a number of conflicting suggestions concerning work and attitudes, from theory and empirical studies, which act to further problematise this view. First, people gain a lot more out of work than just income – relational processes and a sense of contribution highlight how income and consumption are not as dominating as the *message* of capitalism may suggest (Gasper, 2009). Yet insecurities of work and livelihood are very real for many – especially within a context where labour is generally treated as merely a cost. Many conceptualisations of work and attitudes (and the indicators often used for them – e.g. productivity; aspirations of career movement) implicitly accept this cost/income driven narrative. Capitalism as a

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<sup>13</sup> e.g. primary products and inputs, often cultivated at various rudimentary levels of extraction and not so organised settings.



system overvalues consumption and values work but only to the point that it allows one to buy the products made in markets (Gasper, 2009, p28). In contrast, a focus on concepts such as Human Security and Well-Being offer alternative conceptual foundations as well as a deeper and broader base of reference for analysing peoples' work, livelihoods, hopes and expectations - ones which may not have to follow this logic.

The Human Security framework basically relates to the security of a person/peoples in their daily lives, and seeks measures to protect them against important threats to their livelihood (Gasper and Truong, 2008). This often means guaranteed minimums, basic rights and stability. In this sense it links strongly with many aspects of the earlier *Basic Needs* framework of the ILO and to the sense of security underlying the concept of *Decent Work*. Moreover, it challenges us, in thought and in our studies, to focus on the attitudes and fragilities of life in more ways than just a standard review of tasks, skills and checklists based on standards and norms (Gasper and Truong, 2008). What is the underlying ethos of a particular work/livelihood situation? What *drives* workers' activity, hopes and desires in a fruit gathering community or in a housing estate linked to plantation agriculture, for example?

From a Human Security perspective, these "inner drivers" relate to things like – the degree to which workers/people distinguish the quality of life from simply consumption; the degree to which they are driven by solidarity vs. individualism and to the degree to which their activities are based on a personal belief in the need for the re-generation of nature rather than the mastery and exploitation of what "the land" can produce (Gasper, 2010b). Where ones capabilities and values sit in relation to these issues will be strongly influenced by the local context. Moreover, in terms of subjective evaluations of work and work relations, this contrasting narrative of human endeavour suggests that alienation (so central to much labour process theorising) may be overcome (or at least ameliorated) when we feel that what we do is good and worthwhile, in and of itself. If it has meaning, fairness and a sense of dignity (Gasper 2009/10)<sup>14</sup>. Yet, in accord with labour process theory (LPT), this perspective suggests that we will also wish to have some sense of control over what we do (Gasper, 2009).

How then may we combine these ideas into a useable framework for considering peoples and communities' position within value chains? One way may be to start with a reformulated view of labour processes – i.e. what people do (and get from their work) and how they feel about it. More specifically, this would mean adding to a traditional consideration of skills/tasks, employment conditions (measurable rights and benefits), employee relations (process rights in the firm) and industrial relations conditions (process rights more generally). From the start, considerations of gender proportions, access, rights and care considerations would need to underscore the concepts used to frame an evaluation of labour conditions. To the degree to which they seem relevant, measures of livelihood assets, capabilities and multiple types and locations of work would also need to be integrated. The important impact of local factors on these outcomes, as highlighted by concepts such SSA and LLC Regimes,

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<sup>14</sup> Thus also, but not only, in terms of reward/economic livelihood.

would highlight the embeddedness of people's options and constraints within local labour markets and value systems. The responses of workers to representation (by unions, co-operatives or even self help networks) would be framed by the "agendas" and interests of these bodies but also by this local context.

Underlying such a model of local production politics stand the "inner drivers" noted above. Conceptually, the study must highlight the ambiguities and insights of workers views in a non-romanticised way. The author's existing research with workers at the beginning of chains in developing countries holds ample examples of the *stories* that might underscore and elaborate a consideration of human security and its sense of place. For example, a questioning of the level of consumerism inherent within modern production regimes seems to emerge from workers statements that 'this Japanese production model (of continuous-continuous improvement – sic) does not fit with ... values'(Pegler, 2000, p3). Similarly, when comments were made as to differently labelled products speeding off a modern conveyor, workers showed their understanding of intensified product differentiation within value chain production by saying "no, no ...they are the same product but just destined for different consumer groups (levels of acquisition – actual words)"(ibid, Chapter 5). Workers within the same industry also showed how their conceptions of solidarity had been challenged by TNC inspired company unionism when they noted "unions are good, but not here,.. if you complain to the union here you are out on the street the next day!" (ibid, Chapter 6).

Considerations of a sense of security, fairness and solidarity come out of other examples. Women working for TNC controlled chains have complained that men receive more per product (tomato) picked but also noted that, while hotel work pays less, it is preferred as it gives a stronger sense of security of livelihood (Pegler et al, 2011, pp109-112). Moving to a more organisational level on such themes, when a quite democratically based cooperative attempted to persuade growers to supply specific quotas of a greater range of products (and thus stabilise and improve income earning) a large number of families responded by leaving the cooperative network. Apparently, despite offering tangible economic benefits, this was neither the way they wished to work, be organised or be represented (Pegler, 2009, pp28-30).

These examples add not only a qualitative ethnographic perspective on production politics but also considerable insights into the ambiguities due to contrasting narratives of human security, dignity and livelihoods. There does seem some value to applying such ethnographic techniques, within a human security focus, to studies of labour processes in chains. A sense of empowerment (or lack of) and mood (*etbos*) of the workplace starts to become evident, whether or not these same workers are covered by mechanisms such as codes, NGO projects, ethical trade or not. Yet despite the richness of this micro consideration of livelihoods, work and security it is the same local (labour control regime) context which may put constraints on the degree to which process rights, thus certain securities and sense of alienation, may be deepened by a solely locally based labour rights focus. Conceptually, this also helps us move to the firm and inter-firm levels for this framework.

A view of the “firm” as a more amorphous and opaque entity, and part of a network of multi-actor relations, may be quite useful constructs to employ within such a framework, especially as operations (production vs. control) are even more severely and distinctly separated by global chains. While the nature of organisational structures and processes will differ between workplaces and employment types (e.g. informal, homework, community based, factory spaces etc) the division of labour and of reward and opportunity remain of fundamental importance. Human resource management (HRM), in all its forms, must be judged in its performance on these levels and in terms of control and autonomy. A focus on human security will give us greater insights into whether HRM’s *lean* and *flexible* work systems and contractual arrangements are actually seen as a benefit by workers, for example<sup>15</sup>.

As alluded to above, the standard model of production changes further when production location is more rudimentary and involves less fixed production processes (e.g. fruit picking and mulching processes). The greater clarity by which production relates to biological (non-human) reproductivity as well as the particular form of gender relations (both in paid and non-paid work) must also form fundamental building blocks for quantitative and qualitative indicators. One probable outcome and innovation for such studies at a meso level, might be the addition of a re-conceptualisation of the idea of a cluster – to a more regionally specific, gender based, relational and environmentally sensitive form.

Conversely, the employer, contractor or buyer connected to local operations, must also be included within this conceptualisation and be analysed. At a specific level, indicators of policies and plans in respect to production and human resource use must be detailed. Whether and how their values are changing and the degree to which this is influenced by (national/international) policies, standards and pressure groups (e.g. unions/NGOs) are polemic and important parts of this picture<sup>16</sup>.

Another key area at this meso level relates to the conceptualisation of representation itself - the processes and options. Many cases of agriculturally based production in developing countries, for example, have engaged with cooperative/solidarity based concepts and proposals. A fairly recent twist has been the application and promotion of cooperatives (as more humane/democratic options) within vertical and hierarchical chain situations (FBB et al, 2003; Birchald, 2004). While this raises old and new debates concerning the viability of cooperatives, these are promising empirical issues to discuss and call for the re-consideration of these arguments. More traditional forms of labour organisation (e.g. unions) must also be allowed for and analysed (e.g. identity analysis – Pegler, 2009). The depth and breadth of the

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<sup>15</sup> An interesting example of this is research on work which shows that, in contrast to *New Competition Theory*, workers often do not prefer greater mobility across tasks or work stations (Pegler, 2000, Ch5)

<sup>16</sup> One important but under conceptualised issue and question in this regard is the propensity for *responsible production* (Knorrinda, 2007) to spread across firms, within clusters and to other (generally reputation conscious) firms, buyers and retailers. See also Sabel et al, 2007, for other arguments in respect to the *ratcheting* upwards (hypothesis) of labour standards, via voluntary means, in this regard.

agendas and interests of those representing these workers and communities will demonstrate the degree to which any organisation seeking to represent workers interests' wishes to re-frame the narrative of existing power relations<sup>17</sup>, perhaps even one that is closer to a vision of Human Security.

Yet once again, examples of familial based sourcing and production relations will offer other challenges for consideration, not only of collective action dynamics and probabilities, but also due to possible alternative relational objectives and views, as *voiced* by those involved in the production activity. This reflects the need for greater sensitivity to how rights might be framed, and thus claimed, by people and communities linked to production destined for value chains (IDS, 2002; IDS, 2005). Nevertheless, with the locus of chain governance in one place, but with the potential for these buyers to use (local) conditions in another place to solidify their view (*message*) of how process rights should be determined<sup>18</sup>, the analysis must also link to actor networks operating at the macro and international levels. Global value chain dynamics underline the fact that the process of *framing, claiming and realising* rights will involve all levels and various combinations of actors united around particular themes (Anner and Evans, 2004; Anner, 2007; Hale and Wils, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 2007).

This kind of conceptual formulation at micro and meso levels certainly distinguishes the model of labour process analysis to be employed (to varying degrees depending on the case) from factory sociology and more static sustainable livelihood models used by many agencies. Methodologically, it also brings us back to questions of the role of case studies. It confirms and suggests that *story telling* (narratives of livelihoods) will greatly enrich such capability analysis. Yet in view of earlier criticisms of our present unstructured plethora of case studies and of the need to link labour process analysis far beyond the traditional workplace and point of production, it is very important that these ethnographies be consistent, coordinated and relatable to the global processes that they are intended to reflect back up on (a la the Global Ethnographies of - Burawoy et al, 2000). Moreover, studies of "value chain workers" on location may be best if done on a participatory basis (Mayoux and Mackie, 2007).

Finally, from a macro perspective, global chain theories can provide a solid foundation for these concepts. Coriat's (1991) relation of regime democratisation to more explicit bargaining over labour (enabling/process) rights seems to provide a further macro anchor to micro and labour movement processes<sup>19</sup>. Identity analysis of key chain *drivers* should give good indications of how broader chain processes work. On the other hand, the analysis of the propensity of a rights based focus underlying the identity (agendas and interests) of international labour organisations may help to determine how

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<sup>17</sup> That is – who is included, what are the key issues (e.g. process vs. measurable rights) and what are the organisations' priorities. – see Pegler, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> As argued by Lisgard, 2009, s4.

<sup>19</sup> Coriat related regime change (i.e. greater democratisation) to more negotiated forms of bargaining (by firms - with workers and/or unions) and their evolution over time within Northern vs. Southern countries.

effectively labour unions and NGOs work together to promote concepts of human security within the globalisation process (Eade and Leather, 2005).

In summary, this section has gone back into the macro, meso and micro basis of theories of labour in an effort to see how they may be used for a more problematised view of human endeavour in a value chain context. It has offered various concepts, ideas and reformulations of models that might guide a deeper view of three dominant themes in the current labour-chain literature – *flexibility*, *vulnerability* and *voice*. Having raised questions and provided ideas for a reformulation of how we see the “inner drivers” of labour/community action, the next section (2.2) looks at the other end of the picture - to how a more detailed consideration of chain management helps us provide a better understanding of “chain drivers” and the significance of their actions for the spatial consideration of labour outcomes. More specifically, it reviews a number of concepts and theorisations which help us to build on our initial producer / buyer driven typology of chain governance and move towards a framework more suited to an analysis of how the “logic” of global chains is proposed, negotiated and accepted/contested - by other actors (e.g. workers, communities, unions) - within these chains.

## **2.2 Chain Management**

### ***2.2.1 Categorising and conceptualising chain governance***

One of the features of chain theories of global production is that they open up the possibility of relating global processes to firm and sector level strategies. They move away from the World System Theory’s (WST) focus on the capitalist system as the *driver* and instead highlight the fact that key firms often play a leading role in how a chain is organised (Gibbon et al, 2008). GVC and GCC strands of this theory put different emphasis on the dynamics of this process – driven vs. coordinated – and thus come from different assumptions about how power is exercised and reflected between agents (e.g. in networks) (Gibbon and Ponte, 2008). However, they each give us some useful building blocks for this paper’s quest for an improved framework for looking at labour condition determination within chains. This section summarises these contributions to this paper’s conceptualisation of chain management.

The dichotomy of producer vs. buyer driven commodity chains (GCC’s) highlighted two simple ways in which “authority and power relations determine how....resources are allocated and flow...” (Gereffi, 1994, p97). Producer chains have more explicit vertical links between firms (in terms of the division of work/tasks within the chain) but the hierarchy of power appears more explicit in buyer driven situations. This is despite the fact that such buyer-based chains do not often involve formal inter-firm relations along the chain (Bair, 2008). In this view, power or (degree of) *drivenness* is a relational concept – one that evolves within a contested political process. Yet the often argued problem with such a formulation is not only its vagueness in terms of what (technical or political) processes hold these chains together but that many new types of

chain governance and actors can also be observed in practice (Gibbon and Ponte, 2008)<sup>20</sup>.

Global value chain (GVC) theory, on the other hand, attempted to provide a more detailed framework for relational forms and processes between firms in such networks. Lead firms are still important but are seen as being part of a (more politically neutral - *sic*) coordination process. Five types of links are suggested between firms – from market based relations (little coordination), to modular, relational, captive and then hierarchical relations (where lead firms exercise maximum coordination/decision power over suppliers) (Gereffi et al, 2005)<sup>21</sup>. This continuum of coordination influence was seen to be a function of the complexity and ease of codification of information and of supplier capacity/knowledge. This conceptualisation of governance does appear more technically methodical and it does make more explicit links to labour issues such as skills nodes and learning processes/competencies in firms and within chains. Yet the model (especially the modular form of governance) generally limits its locus to the relation between lead firms and first-tier suppliers (Gibbon et al, 2008). Moreover, power is conceptualised as a capacity expressed explicitly within a network of firms (vs. something more diffuse). Thus the appeal of a concept of a chain is delimited and even the idea of the embeddedness of social relations (e.g. trust development) as a sociological basis for network formation (and counterpart to transaction cost explanations of the firm and networks) remains overwhelmingly situated at a micro level (Bair, 2008).

Other authors imply that, even if we accept the technical view that the complexity and codification of information between firms are central issues behind governance form (whether equal or hierarchical), the role that emerges for supplier firms, and thus workers, within these chains should still be seen as part of a evolving social process. Networks, and thus power, are relational constructs, they derive from practice and are contested at inter and intra firm levels (Hess, 2008)<sup>22</sup>. Some writers suggest that Global Production Network/System (GPN/GPS) theory is capable of doing this as it integrates a macro political focus on network dynamics with a micro focus on intrafirm processes (i.e. work issues) and societal relation formation, in a way that GCC and (especially) GVC theories have not (Bair, 2008). If this is so then we might move closer to a view of how values (whether for quality, the environment or for labour conditions) become embedded at local, network and territorial levels – i.e. along chains. Yet, while the concept of *drivennes*<sup>23</sup> (as a general proposition) and vision of power as an evolving relation may seem reasonable starting points, it remains to be seen how clearly GPN theory, and studies claiming to use this methodology, can actually elucidate these processes.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, increasingly via supermarkets (Dolan and Humphrey, 2000/4).

<sup>21</sup> Humphrey and Schmitz, 2002, added one more empirically evident form – quasi-hierarchy.

<sup>22</sup> i.e. The squeezing of margins down the supplier chain and the transfer of such risks and responsibility for “lean” production responses – often falls on workers (Raworth and Kidder, 2008; Dolan, 2004)

<sup>23</sup> That is power is a relational concept and something that has different degrees and levels of explicitness (e.g. hands on vs. hands off).

On the other hand, another line of conceptualisation concerning chain governance and the links between the macro (chain drivers) and the micro (labour process/outcome) level can be gleaned from Regulation Theory (RT) perspectives. As with WST, once again it is pressures within the capitalist system that drive change rather than lead firms per se. Capitalist readjustment takes the form of institutional, regulatory change like, for instance, how pressures and conflicts over accumulation processes led to the formation of more stable roles for unions and processes of collective bargaining within the Fordist regulatory model of production in the early 20C (Boyer, 2005). Yet some have also added specific firm based dynamics and chain driver concepts to this conceptualisation of system based change and tried to relate these to the determination of labour outcomes at a more micro level (Palpaceur, 2000/8).

To Palpaceur, for example, new rules of corporate accountability during the 1990s led to a more immediate focus, by many major firms, on financial returns to shareholders (i.e. financialisation). In terms of social partner dynamics this led to a stronger link between company executives and financial agents vs. the earlier relation of industrial executives and organised labour. At a strategic level she argues that this subsequently led to increased specialisation in higher value activities by TNCs, thus further externalisation of non-key and/or lower value operations, and a greater rationalisation of companies supply base (i.e. fewer and larger suppliers) (Palpaceur, 2008, pp395-97).

Despite later moves to a broader stakeholder perspective amid CSR pressures on lead firms (which put even more of the spotlight on supplier responsibility, identification and rationalisation), these views are still often linked to various “mutual gains” type models of employer-employee relations and optimistic cluster and interfirm relations models (Kochan et al, 1994; Sako, 1992; Schmitz and Nadvi, 1999)<sup>24</sup>. Voluntarist and unitarist assumptions (i.e. an agency emphasis) continue to characterise some authors’ vision of labour conditions within clusters, firms and workplaces (cf Palpaceur, 2000). In contrast, in other quarters, corporate governance in many such chains has come to be more strongly linked to precarious employment, especially in respect to female workers in many export dominated sectors (Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Merkle, 2008).

Thus, with more and more cross country production arrangements taking on the *mobile-capital / flexible-labour* features of buyer driven chains, the older social contract embodied in regulated Fordist systems suffered a further blow such that many now question the prospect of chains (and globalisation) having much positive to offer in terms of social conditions (Palpaceur, 2008, pp411-2). Yet the regulation framework (and ideas of others such as Polanyi, 1965) would suggest that, for accumulation to continue, *regulatory* adjustment will occur (Boyer and Saillard, 2002)<sup>25</sup>. For example, in contrast to the 1990s

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<sup>24</sup> And to arguments, from both ends of the political spectrum, that employment at the beginning of these “new” chains may still better than what would have/may have existed without these cross country chains of production and employment (Palpaceur, 2008, p413).

<sup>25</sup> That is, pressures on the mode of regulation may help lead to new institutional/regulatory forms surrounding the model of growth.

financialisation hypothesis, recent ideas in respect to *forces on corporate behaviour* suggest that enhanced international pressures for sustainability (e.g. norm development and adherence in respect to *carbon footprints*) may be having an impact on negotiations between advanced services firms, brand/lead firms, buyers, port managers / route planners and maybe even local ports (Jacobs, 2007/8; Carbon Supply Chain Report, 2009; ITMMA, 2009, p32). The questions are - how these are accommodated or resolved and whether they have any impact on initial parts of the chain?

There are a number of potentially important labour process aspects to this conceptual “marriage” of political economy and management studies. It is an appealing perspective as it tries to develop a map for links between top level *driver* dynamics (e.g. financialisation / sustainability accountability) and these labour movement and sociological processes at the beginning of chains. Consequently, whilst ambiguous in terms of the intra firm labour processes involved, authors like Palpaceur (2008, pp412-3) make reference to the (often multilevel, counter veiling or complementary) role that social movement organisations (SMOs) may also play in this “new” international pre-occupation with equity and sustainability within value chains. More generally, this joining of theory also confirms governance as both a technical and political process.

In summary, therefore, what appears to emerge from this and the above discussion of GCC and GVC theory is that governance refers to a broader process of power relations within and across chains. On the other hand, (the degree of) *drivenness* symbolises power. Within this view of chain management, coordination is a more technical process between specific links in a chain – it characterises the way power is exercised at that link. Regulation theory, on the other hand, adds to this conceptualisation in that it notes that pressures may be exerted on the (institutionalised) norms evident within these chains in order to ensure the continuation of a socially acceptable growth regime (Boyer and Saillard, 2002).

However, the above views of chain management processes are still too sketchy in respect to how the *messages* embedded within these chains (e.g. efficiency; sustainability, quality) come about and are transmitted and with how workers and communities might see and respond to these impulses emanating from other parts of “their” chain. The next subsection turns to how the concept of *governmentality* may provide us with a stronger conceptual bridge between structural aspects of chain organisation and the establishment and legitimisation of the *values* that are observed within and across chains. It may also therefore offer more robust clues as to how contestation and power dynamics lead to particular labour/livelihood outcomes and to how we might study them.

### ***2.2.2 Governmentality – the legitimation of power and control at a distance***

The concept of *governmentality* fits within Foucault’s vision of power as a dispersed process of influence - wherein the subject is a function of their historical circumstances (Huxley, 2008). Studies of *governmentality* seek to illuminate how power acts on others and on *the self* - how a particular message of “how things are done” (e.g. of efficiency) evolves and is or is not sustained.



Whether this process involves the state or not, it is about the legitimacy of *rule* (Huxley, 2008). However, the dominant *rule* evolves, it is not fixed, it can be challenged and it may constantly be faced with alternative rationales.

*Governmentality* is thus about how relationships of power act to influence what we and others think (e.g. in respect to CSR) and do. It could be seen to be a more sociological partner to structural visions of Governance. *Governmentality* is increasingly being used to describe the process by which norms (rules) of quality evolve and are transmitted between one part of a value chain and another (Ponte, 2007). It is also quite illuminating in respect to how supportive institutions (e.g. ISO – Higgens, 2006) and occupations (e.g. Supply Chain Managers – Gibbon and Ponte, 2008a) evolve and act within this process of idea promotion and articulation. It thus has great relevance to this study's desire to conceptualise and study the potential for (alternative) messages of sustainability and labour rights to also develop and how they may be shaped by various actors within a chain.

The apparatus used by authors to illuminate the *governmentality* concept is comprised of the following components - “government”, “programmes of government” and “technologies of government”(Vallentin and Murillo, 2009). “Government” is the rationale or message itself (e.g. markets and individual responsibility deliver ethical outcomes; CSR as a win-win social and profitability strategy for business) and “Programmes of Government” relate to how this message is translated into plans, projects and support structures and is sought to be realised via alliances with intermediaries and other agents. “Technologies of Government”, on the other hand, are the “nuts and bolts” of how the message is measured, calculated and evaluated (e.g. forms, procedures, codes). These usually involve definitions of “territory” (of the idea/policy) and require the exchange of information about such “measurables” between different actors in the process. Together these three components highlight how an idea / a *message* can be made to be real. There are no truths just strategies, within this view. *Regimes of Rationalities* are sub-groupings of mutually supporting ideas and the *Dispositive* is the Foucaultian frame used to describe the grid of material and non-material ideas, actors, agencies and relationships around a particular rationale (Huxley, 2008).

What is most important is that *space* is key to the exercise of power and *governmentality* (Prince and Dufty, 2009). It is evident at a practical level, in this study, in that production does get coordinated across space. This distance relationship of control is also important in that rationales may *meet* at different points. “Projects of Government” in chains may also illustrate contrasts between the views of *chain drivers* and the localised routines, habits and behaviours of those at the beginning of such chains (Huxley, 2008, p1644). This conceptualisation of power processes and the *message(s)* suggests that in all places the subject has been required to identify (if not act on – sic) their subjectivity (ibid).

Consequently, these *spaces* (e.g. chain nodes but also *spaces* between them) become political categories...areas for research in terms of power relations and the assertion of identity by those who occupy them (Prince and Dufty, 2009). As such, whilst disperse, power acts at a distance. It corals and induces, sometimes in repressive ways but other times in the production of new

strategies and opportunities (e.g. in supplying to a particular type of chain). *Governmentality*, therefore, offers another way to enter the micro politics of subjectivity and study human endeavour. It promotes the examination of spatial boundaries – of ideas/”government”, of their reinforcement and of who is included/excluded from this process - thus noting possible limits on the expression of identity and culture (Huxley, 2008). Labour conditions and human security are outcomes of this process.

Whilst accepting these conceptual improvements, others have attempted to add further visions (and critiques) of this evolutionary view of governance as a normative practice and process. For example, others use a concept of “performativity” to show how objectives, such as sustainability, are enacted by the interaction of values and actors (Loconto, 2010). *Stories* of how any particular standard (e.g. for sustainability) evolves and is articulated illustrate “battles” over acceptance, compliance, discipline and legitimacy, as with the *governmentality* view. Yet, whilst studies along this line highlight how values are transmitted and shape/are shaped by interactions, some also suggest that there can be multiple *drivers* (e.g. lead firms, environmental groups and standards) and that the “performance” of (the values of) a particular standard does not have to mean it is effective, just that it is applied (Loconto, 2010). Similar critiques are made of the process emphasis of the *governmentality* view (Ponte, 2007).

A more enriching conceptual addition and deepening of the *governmentality* framework is provided by convention theory (Ponte, 2007; Ponte and Gibbon, 2005). In this view, economic actions (e.g. illustrated by adherence to a standard) only evolve if they have a *justification*. Conventions are rules that emerge in the process of actors’ attempts to solve coordination problems (i.e. within production/chains). In an analogous way to *governmentality* theory, therefore, these actions need to be justified by criteria, by a process, through consultation, concertation and the like.

The extension of these views beyond *governmentality*, however, is seen when convention writers attempt to link examples of situated action to one or a number of their normative “worlds of accepted legitimate common welfare”(Boltanski and Thevenot, 1991). The degree to which one “world” operates more than another helps to explain the response of firms. These worlds (and their firm based triggers) range from the inspirational (creative emphasis), to the domestic (loyalty emphasis), to the civic (open/due process emphasis) to the market (competitive/price emphasis) and to the industrial (productivity emphasis). If quality (or some other standard – e.g. sustainability) has a clearly accepted standard, the “market world”, and thus considerations of cost, would dominate the actions of firms (Eymard-Duvernay, 1989; Sylvander, 1995). On the other hand, if the norm (quality/environment/labour standards) is not “objective” (i.e. not so clear), other “worlds” of consideration enter more into its determination (e.g. civic /more open collective decision making) (ibid; Ponte, 2007).

Convention theory thus adds a more specific model for describing the evolution of different mechanisms for quality (or other standards) determination. It situates struggles for legitimation of firm/actor visions in different “worlds of normative values” and their relative influence on actors in

the chain. It has also been applied to illustrate vertical vs. local horizontal level clashes of justification between actors (e.g. northern buyers vs. local suppliers/clusters) in respect to standards use and adherence (Ponte, 2007).

Overall, the use of *governmentality* and convention theory do appear to provide a useful conceptual framework for looking at the process by which standards (of quality but also other issues) may be proposed, reinforced, contested and revised. Yet they are also open to various critiques – a number of which may provide guidance to further studies. First, whilst a Neoliberal perspective fits most clearly into the “market world” of convention theory, biases inherent in existing social structures may mean that an *unfettered* market perspective is more actively dominant than other “worlds”(Higgins, 2006). Lead firms may, for example, engage in the pre-emptive *placing* of such a “message” before a not-so-equal playing field of actors who are also interested in (social) norm establishment. This, some note, has resulted in the promotion of the currently popular win-win (profitability and sustainability) message for CSR – one based on a voluntarist process and by “government programmes and technologies” (e.g. via agencies such as the ISO) which are supported by passive, facilitative states (rather than other more contested and regulatory perspectives for the state) (Vallentin and Murillo, 2009). In such situations, structure may act as a more dominant influence than some imply.

Secondly, *governmentality* has been criticised for putting too much emphasis on the *message* as opposed to the process, actors and outcomes (Prince and Dufty, 2008). Others point out that *message* success is not assured, that there are many ambiguous responses which emerge and that it may sometimes be difficult to determine whether further *message* development is obedience or whether it is simply the manifestation of efforts to gain more adherence to a particular norm (Gibbon and Ponte, 2008). Consequently, adequately grounding a study of governance/*governmentality* will require a number of stages (Prince and Dufty, 2008):

- to first describe how chains are organised and how the message develops; then to say
- how competing *messages* are spatialised (as “programmes/technologies”) i.e. what they do and where, and how they may differ; and then to
- explain if/how these processes themselves affect the initial message.

In Foucaultian terms, for any example of study this represents a process of explaining the process of rule/*governmentality* in terms of “how it works, what it does and what *we* become, as a result” (i.e. the conduct of conduct – Huxley, 2008). Yet, in the view of the above critiques, it is important that message effectiveness also be actively evaluated in terms of who or what is being left out, ignored or taken for granted in the development of *governmentality* (Blowfield, 2007). Many cases appear to confirm the fact that chain drivers are highly instrumental in pushing risks down the chain and that this puts pressure on local firms and workers (Ponte, 2007; Dolan 2004; Dolan and Humphrey, 2004; Raworth and Kidder, 2008). Nevertheless, research must further disaggregate - looking closely at combinations of governance, coordination and *driveness* and examine the politics of the message, its articulation and contested vs. (apparently) uncontested forms (Ponte, 2007). Chains are not static, they are “webs of interaction, where negotiation takes place between actors (and

with institutions) at each node” (Loconto, 2010, p217). The substantive evaluation of decent work and livelihood possibilities in a sustainable context will require research into the existence, compatibility and viability of multiple rationalities between nodes within such chains.

### 3 Chain Drivers & “Inner Drivers” – a Conceptual Framework

Global value chains are driven by considerations of cost and efficiency but just as much by power relations. This is evident from studies of industrial relations and labour outcomes within chains noted in this paper, especially those where *driveness* is most explicit (e.g. buyer driven situations). Yet the processes by which (too) many workers and communities are made *flexible, vulnerable* and *voiceless* within value chain processes are not so clear. The fact that many public and private efforts to promote social standards/ labour rights have been shown to be deficient in effectively reaching the most needy is great cause for concern and increases the urgency by which questions of sustainable chains and labour must be addressed (Nadvi, 2008; Barrientos et al, 2003; Barrientos and Smith, 2007).

The overall aim of the GOLLS project is thus to explore the potential for labour rights improvements within a sustainable (chain) context. A central concern of this paper has therefore been to suggest a number of ways in which the conceptual lenses we use to analyse the position and role of labour in these chains can be improved. This section brings this paper’s discussion of chain drivers and “inner” drivers together.

The practical question at the base of this project is “what are the main constraints to achieving efficiency, decent labour/livelihood conditions and environmental sustainability within global value chains?” Drawing from the conceptual discussion above, this question can be re-phrased as “how might competing rationalities of sustainability be resolved within global value chains?” This question brings together a number of layers of conceptualisation.

In terms of global production chains overall, this project builds on the idea of *nodes*. The research goes beyond the consideration of value generation and distribution to focus on labour conditions and livelihoods at each node. The other component it highlights is that these nodes are *spatially* linked by physical flows, people, negotiations, rules and the like – a process concepts like governance, *government/ the message* and convention theory helped us unravel. Yet we were also reminded that this process is contested and re-evaluated at various points, by various actors, and that we must be open to hear *less visible subjects*. Moreover, the existence of multiple nodes exhibiting competing/different rationalities underlines the sustainability problematic underlying this study – that is, can these competing rationalities be resolved? The specific methodological orientation of the study therefore could be seen as the evaluation of the *collision* of these rationalities (of these nodes), something that (when disputed) is contested spatially.

From an intra-firm labour perspective, the discussion of the literature on labour impacts and concepts provides guidance as to what needs to be

researched within these nodes. Labour processes in the work environment are ambiguous *spaces* where instances of control, conflict and cooperation co-exist. However, this Burowayian view of the division of labour (and its impacts) must be opened up not only to new levels of distance in terms of where the product is “designed” vs. “made”. Workers and workplaces are very heterogeneous. The concept of the workplace/production process must also allow for variations in formality/informality and community and family connections to actual production processes, thus the thin line that often exists between a focus on work per se vs. a focus on livelihoods. Relatedly, gender, care work and thus particular distributions of production, reproduction and distributive roles will be central considerations examined via interviews, observations and PRA techniques.

In a general sense, a sociological consideration of tasks, employment conditions and relations (and attitudes to these) are still broadly applicable. The separation of rights into measurable and process groups are another useful conceptual categorisation. However, a further understanding of values, identity and a sense of human security are key observations (i.e. the “inner drivers”) that should and will emerge from qualitative research within these nodes (especially, but not only, at the beginning of chains). In this respect, *Story telling* (narratives of these livelihoods) will greatly enrich this analysis of “chain workers” work and subjectivity, whether they labour in the forest, factory or farm.

However, these evaluations of work realities must find their links to organisations and to organisational processes beyond the unit of the firm (i.e. the inter-firm level). At the organisational level, this review has noted that seeing the firm as a somewhat opaque entity and part of a network of multi-actor relations may be quite useful constructs to employ. This perspective will clearly vary in form depending on whether we are considering SMEs, large firms and informal vs. formal types of enterprise within various parts of the chain. However, key organisations involved in *chain driving* (such as financiers, global buyers, logistics coordinators and buyers linked closer to product sourcing) will need to be singled out and analysed in terms of their identity, their production/HRM model and CSR policies (within/across the chain) but also in relation to the organisation’s impact on the evolution and promotion of a “chain *message*”.

The actual chain management process, on the other hand, involves considerations of (overall) chain governance, *drivenness* and of coordination between various nodes of the chain. This paper also argues that “what is the chain?” (what is coordinated and by whom) should be expanded in important ways to include the role of financiers and logistics and their relationship with buyers and other actors in the chain. Following this, the discussion added a more dynamic component to this disaggregated, but still structural, vision of chain management - the concept of *governmentality*. That is, there are relationships of power that may lead to a *message* (e.g. quality standards or financial efficiency) becoming accepted, often without any need for explicit enforcement. “Programmes and technologies of government” are the plans, alliances and evaluative mechanisms used to bolster the *message*. Yet, this paper agrees with the views of others that this process cannot be seen as inevitable,

unambiguous or immutable. The consideration of conflict, different logics and the identities and strategies of organisations attempting to assert alternatives and/or represent those generally less powerful within these chains must form a central part of this grounded analysis of governance and *governmentality*. Alternative *messages* that evolve may also ultimately be reflected (or subsumed) in societal and state sanctioned “policies”<sup>26</sup> and, even, in more open processes for bargaining within industrial relations (e.g. a la Coriat, 1991).

Together these perspectives on “inner” drivers and chain management provide the conceptual base for the consideration of how production, efficiency, value distribution and various imperatives (e.g. quality) evolve, move and are implanted across *space* and of how they impact on families, workers and communities at source. They provide the framework for this study, one whose aim is to promote decent and sustainable work and livelihoods in chains. Yet this conceptual vision must be based on a grounded understanding of governance/*governmentality* – of how the chain works, how it is organised/what it does, what actors believe as a result (i.e. “*what we become*”), and what /who is left out?

Finally, it is felt that in the first instance studies must focus principally on one key node per chain – the work and livelihoods of workers and communities at source. The logic of what drives agents at this node can then be compared to a (more aggregated/summarised) view of the logic (e.g. of production efficiency) that emanates from key *drivers* and agents at other parts of the chain. Whether these views coincide, coexist or conflict and whether they are or can be resolved will tell us much about how sustainable these chains are or could be. Consequently these studies have much to contribute – to academic and conceptual debates on labour rights and sustainable development, to Government policies in respect to fair trade, sustainability, procurement and human rights and, to the policies and strategies of social movements and other civic actors.

## 4 Operationalising the Study (ies)

How then is this study being organised and operationalised? What are the products, country links, agencies and indicators suggested for use in turning the above concepts into a workable research process? What stages and levels are being suggested for this work?

The choice of research frame has been guided by the following criteria. First, there is a need to select case studies that provide pertinent links (re trade volumes) between two countries and localities in the initial supplying region. Secondly, it was also seen as important to select case study products which illustrate present difficulties in social standards / sustainability compliance and, hopefully, offer some variety in terms of production process and labour organisation. Thirdly, it is hoped to follow these chains all the way from initial source, through sending and receiving ports and buyer/advanced service firms and (eventually) up to final production, distribution and sale. Finally, there was

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<sup>26</sup> e.g. in respect to *Fair Trade*.

a need to assemble a network of researchers, at both ends of the chain, capable of carrying out such a multi-disciplinary study.

Discussions over time led to a decision to carry out studies of chains linking Brazil and the Netherlands, using researchers from both countries<sup>27</sup> and focused on four tradable product groups – wood, fruit, biofuels and scrap. This two-country comparison is very valid based on trade volumes overall (Rotterdam is the single major entry point for Brazilian trade) and for these products. However, the initial product choice has since been narrowed down to just fruit and wood. Biofuels seemed ideal, especially as it raised issues of resource use and sustainability conflicts<sup>28</sup>. Scrap too has appealing potential as it is voluminous and “squares the chain circle” between consumers and producers. Yet both studies must wait until a later stage.

The wood and fruit groups have each been broken into two sub-groups – tropical and temperate. Part of the reason for this split has been related to decisions concerning port choice, sustainability sensitivity and case study contrasts. In the end we have narrowed the wood category further into hardwood (out of Para/Amazonia) and softwood furniture (out of Rio Grande). However, these products (and the question of which Amazonian port to focus on) still need further specification. It terms of fruits we proposed Acai (also out of Para/Amazonia) and Orange concentrate (out of Sao Paulo/Santos).

The volumes of traffic of these products helped to specify the ports. However, Santos and Rio Grande are also old ports firmly under the spotlight due to logistical and advanced services inefficiencies whereas various ports in Para and Amazonia have been under the spotlight due to illegal trading. Yet many have also been selected as sites for massive port modernisation. The primary data case study locations for each product, prior to movement to their respective ports, is another issue receiving further specification.

Another defining feature of the study is the division of production and labour organisation for these products (in these regions). Two of the products are from the Amazon and are based on more rudimentary production models. Extractivism characterises wood cutting, clearing and its movement to port whereas family and community based cultivation and collection methods still dominate Acai production, even for the export market. In contrast, the local orange value chain originates on farms in the interior of the State of Sao Paulo, using formal and informal contract labour to help get it to port, to crushing facilities and then delivery to Rotterdam. Furniture movement out of Rio Grande, on the other hand, is strongly based on small to medium firms, mixed skilled and formal-informal labour (sometimes at a factory level). These features underline the diversity of work, worker types, and contractual/industrial relations within and across chains – all of which are strongly embedded in their local contexts.

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<sup>27</sup> ISS/EUR, University of Utrecht and Wageningen in the Netherlands – FGV (SP), UNISINOS, UFAM and PEABIRU/UFP in Brazil.

<sup>28</sup> Partners to the project at the University of Wageningen have carried out a sub-study of soya and their work is expected to dovetail into the project as trade develops.

The overriding framework of analysis is one of mapping– of work processes, of employee rights and conditions and of opportunities and constraints to these, along these chains. This *following the chain* approach starts, most importantly, with an evaluation of labour processes and of the relation of these to local identities. Base level analysis (questions concerning work and livelihoods and ethnographical accounts) will thus be sensitive to values and enabling labour rights and employment conditions - for situations where home duties, home work, paid work and various forms of informality are often evident. The studies' aims will be furthered by the analysis of the identities and strategies of any representational bodies, NGOs and employers (at local but also other levels/including those of buyers, port managers and route planners). This combination of institutional and agency analysis, at each end of the chain, will help us to provide a more robust empirical picture of why insertion & economic upgrading in value chains may not either a) come about or b) lead to i) more measurable outcomes such as improved tasks and skills or to ii) process outcomes such as improved social relations (e.g. *voice* outlets /gender inclusion) or to iii) an enhanced sustainability focus or sense of human security. Concentrating this detailed analysis at the beginning of the chain and contrasting it to the governance process and *message* emanating from other levels of the chain will allow us to evaluate whether multiple *logics of sustainability* may be compatible and resolvable.

In terms of this first phase of the study, the Acai research is being grounded in an analysis of the community, work and labour division for this now high value export product. This “extended” labour process data drawn from two (i.e. Belem/Manaus regions) Amazonian production locations will be connected to a review of local value chains – that is, sales processes, middlemen relations, logistics, transport and the like. The movement of the product to the local port, its export and the process by which the product is *pulled* to European storage, distribution, marketing and sales points are the types of structural and political economy data is being put together from secondary sources and from interviews with employers and other institutions (in Brazil/Holland). On the other hand, comparative studies of the value chain of other commodities from the Amazon, and of labour/value chain conditions for comparable fruits from other developing countries, will help inform the literature review of issues and constraints to the promotion of sustainability for this product.

Research to date suggests that the vast bulk of Acai consumption is in Brazil, especially Para and Amazonia. The vast growth in sales of Acai to health foods/drinks and ethical consumption routes in the USA (and now growing in Europe) still represents a minimal quantity in comparison. This might help to explain the continued prevalence of rudimentary production, exchange and sale methods, even by large buyers in the Amazonian region. Future developments (which are occurring<sup>29</sup>) to other regions, such as Europe, may affect this domestic/export balance, the price structure and thus competitive pressures

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Dutch firms such as FrieslandCampina have started using Acai much more intensively within their product lines (Jacobs et al, 2011- forthcoming).



for greater efficiency. This may thus bring on new pressures...a new conflict of *logics* in respect to sustainability.

On the other hand, work to date on orange juice concentrate has illuminated a number of quite different features and processes for this chain. For example, Brazilian domestic demand is considerable but exports are very significant. Furthermore, there is a fairly well developed chain stretching from intensive farming, transport, crushing and shipping through Sao Paulo state to Santos and then to Rotterdam Port (the European “gateway”). What is more, Brazilian firms play a quite significant role at both the beginning of the chain and as key chain *drivers*. They own and operate holding facilities in Rotterdam, work via the Port Authorities and deal with advanced services and other manufacturers to get the pulp into end products, then to storage and then onto consumer outlets in other parts of Europe. In this case there may be very different conflicts of logic for this chain – efficiency and the “*market world*” may be quite dominant due to concentrated chain control. Yet, consumer, civil society and (even) advanced services actors may make use of the fact that it this is a “more visible target” to argue more effectively for sustainability/labour rights norms within early parts of the chain.

## 5 Conclusion / Further Steps

It may seem contradictory that critiques of the social implications of globalisation continue to grow at the same time as there has been an explosion in new regulatory standards and structures for labour and environmental issues (Higgins, 2006). Is the problem one of regulation per se or does this reflect more on what we do not know about the way in which global commodity chains operate and are governed? Certain top-down and voluntarist methods for promoting better social outcomes within chains (e.g. voluntary codes) have certainly come in for criticism (Blowfield, 2007; Jenkins (ed), 2002). Yet have social movements been any more successful in promoting sustainability with substantive meaning for those workers, families and communities who are now inserted at the beginning the global commodity chains (DeMars, 2005)?

The study that this paper has sought to develop and describe is directed at providing chain wide studies of governance processes and their impacts on “workers” at source. The GOLLS project seeks to evaluate chain processes and outcomes using a specific set of conceptual constructs and *bottom-up* methods. First, it seeks to link a broadened and more human security based focus on labour processes (e.g. at source) with a vision of chain governance, not just as structures but as *spaces* across which a *message* (of quality, efficiency or other visions of sustainability) is developed, transmitted, challenged and applied. Sustainability then becomes the degree to which opposing nodes/rationalities compromise and adapt. As such it is a classic story of power - of agency versus structure.

Secondly, the project seeks to more fully integrate logistics, ports and advanced services into chain analysis, adding a new (or modified) view of chain *drivers*. Moreover, further studies within this project may look beyond a *chain source – chain driver* comparison and also compare conditions applying to logistics workers themselves within these chains. This would serve to

emphasise the nature of labour processes within quite different industrial relations systems as well as offer new perspectives on polemic debates about labour rights determination within a *modernisation* and (port) privatisation context.

Finally, present studies of Acai, orange concentrate and soft wood furniture provide polemic examples of sustainability debates, work type heterogeneity and contrasting production processes. The question is, whether these factors have any relation to (effect on) outcomes that emerge in respect to work, livelihoods and human security/dignity? Further studies must add to this diversity of sector, chain dimension and employment/production processes. Work on the Brazil-Holland chains of hardwood, scrap and biofuels will build on the present effort. Yet a more long term goal will be to present a picture of chain processes and labour outcomes which truly help us to bridge the present gulf between detailed case studies and broad brush political economy treatises of “the labour question” within the world system.

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