

So verändert Corona Gesellschaften im globalen Süden

Welche Auswirkungen hat die Covid-19-Pandemie auf Gesellschaften und globale Wertschöpfungsketten im Süden? Ein Forschungsprojekt der HWR Berlin erarbeitet theoretische und empirische Erkenntnisse.

18.11.2021 — Prof. Dr. Christina Teipen

The project Varieties of Covid-19 Reactions and Changing Modes of Globalization in the Global South aims to fill gaps in research on the impact of Covid-19 on social upgrading trajectories in global value chains (GVCs) through theoretical and empirical contributions. Overall, it aspires to observe in a timely manner how key players in the Global South as well as external players like lead firms reacted to the Covid-19 crisis, and to which extent existing socio-economic regimes and varieties of capitalisms shape these crisis reactions.

This intermediate research could immediately tie up to current research results of the applicant referring to a period before Covid-19 and then feed into a longer-term research proposal on structural reorientations of social upgrading trajectories in the Global South after Covid-19.

A unique and specific interdisciplinary approach

Theoretically, the project will bring together GVC approaches and comparative institutionalism through a unique and specific interdisciplinary approach. The combined interdisciplinary theoretical framework will make exclusive contributions to the literature on GVCs, industrial policy, comparative institutionalism and labour sociology. In particular, we will link vertical perspectives on how national sectors are integrated in GVCs with horizontal perspectives aiming to explain the relevance of national politics and institutions.

The Covid-19 crisis represents an irretrievable opportunity to test whether social upgrading and downgrading trajectories of the last two decades, which the applicant has analyzed with the help of an international research team, matter for this type of crisis management. Therefore, we aim to exploit this period of severe disturbances in order to scrutinize path dependency or reorientations within previous GVC constellations and national policies. The outcome could form an important pivotal point for further theoretical efforts to conceptualize the interaction of economic and social upgrading trajectories and national policy regimes.

How do India, Brazil and South Africa manage the crisis?

Empirically, it will contribute to the literature by examining the crisis management in India, Brazil and South Africa and the impacts of Covid-19 on social and economic upgrading trajectories in these countries, which have not been researched yet. Brazil is an example of a large emerging economy with strong, albeit currently contested, labour power. India stands for an emerging economy with weak labour institutions and a huge informal sector. South Africa achieved social upgrading in some sectors, such as the automotive industry, with huge inequalities in other segments of the labour market. These differences

make it worthwhile to enquire about general influences of national socio-economic regimes or even if new modes of globalization are evolving.

Comparative analysis of the automobile and garment industries

The project is exceptional in its comparative analysis of the automobile and garment industries, which is rarely conducted in the literature on social and economic upgrading in GVCs. While the garment industry as an overall low-tech industry offers generally less opportunities for economic upgrading, the automobile industry represents a sector with huge economic upgrading prospects. In a recent research project, we have already analyzed that during the last two decades, in countries of the global South and in both industries, social upgrading has depended on GVC governance as well as on the role of labour power. It is therefore empirically of interest to reconstruct how COVID-19 has affected these two contrasting sector trajectories in the context of three different national institutional systems.

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