



**** CALL FOR PAPERS ****



**LAW &
INFRASTRUCTURE
OF GLOBAL COMMERCE**

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International Conference

7-8 July 2022

// Theme: Infrastructures of Global Value Chains (GVCs)

Global value chains are animated by management strategies that make use of the unevenness and fragmentation of the global regulatory space. Such offshoring and outsourcing are however conditioned upon the existence or establishment of certain infrastructures that make just-in-time circulation of raw materials, goods, labor, information and capital ‘frictionless’ and cost-efficient. These infrastructures that currently enable the largest part of production and extraction of resources globally, range from logistic devices (like containers, ports, and cargo ships) through epistemic and bureaucratic practices (like auditing and supply chain IT) to large-scale geopolitical strategies (like the Chinese Belt and Road initiative) and form a backbone of contemporary capitalism. The centrality of infrastructure is best illustrated when it stutters, as during workers’ strikes and anti-oil blockades, or in the various instances of value chain disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the emblematic case of the blockage of the Suez Canal by the grounded container ship Ever Given in 2021.

Against the conventional assumption of infrastructure and logistics being mundane and passive facilitators of exchange, there is growing awareness that infrastructure is ‘where the action is’ – it actively shapes global trade, both its normative underpinnings and material outcomes. Socio-legal scholarship adopting perspectives of ‘Legal Materiality’ and Science-and-Technology-Studies (STS) as well as ethnographic accounts of logistics have recently provided illustrations of how

infrastructure brings about a certain reality and normative idea of global commerce. It reshuffles the global economic order, carries an imprint of an ideology of free trade and creates new types of vulnerabilities when it molds territories and lives around it. As such, infrastructures are distributive arrangements with effects on racial, gender, and overall core-periphery injustice that further sustain and reinforces global structures of (colonial) economic and political domination and subordination.

// **Perspective: Entanglements between law and infrastructures**

Infrastructure's relation to law and normativity is recursive: Infrastructure can be the *target* of regulation and be required to follow certain normative constraints. At the same time, infrastructure may be understood *as regulation*, as it sets in motion certain technical, logistical or managerial processes that entail normative orientations, such as favoring seamless and speedy delivery of commodities over a careful assessment of externalities. Moreover, infrastructures endow subjects involved in supply chains with different degrees of agency.

With this conference, we are interested in exploring the entanglements between law and the different elements of infrastructure that underlie global value chains. What conceptions of law can capture the role of infrastructure, its regulation, as well as normative and material implications? What effects does upholding the circulatory system and adding to its resilience, a current political priority of regulators around the world, have on sustainability, labor, and human rights? How is the expansion and consolidation of infrastructure regulating life of both humans and non-humans? What space exists for legal and non-legal contestation and resistance, and where do we see such resistance being exercised in the complex material and immaterial labyrinth that are transnational commercial relations?

// **Call and possible topics and angles**

Our inquiry is particularly interested in the role of different 'sites' for a proper and contextualized understanding of the entanglements of law and infrastructures in global extraction and production. The sites where we can observe the effects of infrastructures and their contestation are manifold: **1.) Factories, farms, and sites of extraction (mines, seabeds, offshore platforms); 2.) logistical hubs (ports, ships, transportation systems), 3.) lead firms and trading companies, and 4.) large-scale retailers, supermarkets and distribution platforms.** In our vision, in all these socio-legal spaces, ideas and concepts of law meet the operational logic and flows of production and extraction. Each relies on different infrastructural (legal, material, paradigmatic, etc) arrangements for its internal operation and its connections with other sites.

We invite contributions that engage with the role of law or normativity in one or several of the above-mentioned sites of global production and that use legal, ethnographic, sociological, geographic or related approaches. As cross-cutting angles, we are particularly interested in the following three themes:

(1) Story-telling, narratives of sustainability

E.g.: How does law approach (enable, narrate, inhibit, reject...) greenwashing and the 'green' transition along sites of extraction and production? How is information on sustainability performance (ESG) generated, circulated and constructed through documenting practices of audits, transparency statements and supply chain IT?

(2) Agency, alliances, resistance

E.g.: How does infrastructure change our conception of agency and publicness? What new or unlikely alliances (between actors, legal fields, concepts, ...) or cognitive frames does 'thinking infrastructurally' about global production suggest? What is the role of agency in the bureaucratic managerial practices that lead firms employ to satisfy obligations of supply chain due diligence? How and whom does current infrastructure (dis-)empower? What is the agency of those most directly involved in value creation and the communities of which they are part? Is retooling and rethinking infrastructure a way to strengthen those actors who are currently engaging with non-extractive processes of value creation (cooperatives, communing practices and other forms of organized economic activity striving to operate in non-extractive ways)?

(3) Time, acceleration, digitalization

E.g.: How are speed and seamlessness of global production facilitated in the regulatory framework and echoed in our collective imaginary ('supply chain disruptions')? What is, more specifically, the role of standardization, modularization and algorithmic governance of supply chains? If time is money, is law a tool to guarantee or impose slowness? What are the legal and political implications of a shift towards 'supply chain resilience' and how can it be anchored in infrastructural arrangements? Historically, what has been the role of law and infrastructure (eg trade routes) in colonial and imperialist plundering and how do colonial continuities manifest themselves today?

// Practicalities: Timeline, participation, publication

To submit a paper proposal, please send an extended abstract of ca. 500 words to legalinfrastructure2022@uva.nl. Please dedicate particular attention to the methodology and aims of your contribution. We welcome papers with empirical, conceptual, and normative orientations. Deadline: **April 30, 2022**. Selection results will be communicated in the **first week of May**.

Selected participants will be expected to submit a mini-paper of no more than 3.000 words (footnotes including) summarizing their intervention by **June 15**. While no immediate conference publication is planned, we will explore interest in a joint publication project (Special Issue) in the medium term.

The event will be held in a **hybrid setup**. We have some limited budget available to support travel and accommodation upon request and on a needs-basis, in alignment with [JPI Climate's principles for climate-friendly research](#). We hope to create some synergies with travels to the Annual Meetings of the [Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics](#) (SASE – July 9-11, Amsterdam) and the [Law and Society Association](#) (LSA – July 13-16, Lisbon).

As part of the conference, there will be a possibility to join a guided tour and discussion at the [Port of Rotterdam](#).

// Legal strategies meeting: Roundtable 'Contesting infrastructure', July 8

The event will be complemented by a roundtable in the afternoon of July 8 titled 'Contesting infrastructure', meant to offer a platform of exchange on recent legal, political, artistic and other

strategies to address the inequalities and injustices of global production via the contestation of its infrastructural underpinnings. Initiatives such as delivery worker strikes or port blockages have emerged as new political tactics that understand the seamlessness and pace facilitated by infrastructure as overriding concerns for labor, human rights and sustainability. This roundtable puts at the center the voices and experiences of civil society actors, NGOS, associations and collectives that are currently engaged in forms of resistance and rethinking both in Europe and elsewhere, and will be open to all participants of the conference. More details will be communicated in due course.

// Sponsors

The conference is supported by the Sectorplan ‘Transformative Effects of Globalization and Law’, the ‘Sustainable Global Economic Law’ Research group at the University of Amsterdam, the ‘Globalization & Law Network’ at the University of Maastricht, the Law and Development Research Group at the University of Antwerp, and the PortCityFutures research program (hosted jointly by Erasmus U Rotterdam, Delft U and Leiden U).