

Call for papers: AAG 2017, Boston, April 5th – 9th

Geographies of dissociation – Analysing practices of valuation from cultural and political economic perspectives

Session Organizers:

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Value is one of the key concepts in economic geography. It lies at the heart of understanding unequal economic development or the formation of markets, commodities and prices. Two thriving sub-fields within economic geography have become centrally concerned with practices of value creation: the cultural economic geography (CEG) and the global production network (GPN) analysis.

- CEG contributors highlight that commodities achieve high prices on markets if they are successfully associated with entities representing positive, extra-economic values, e.g. the association between sports gear and a basketball star. However, complementary processes, which mainly aim at hiding away problematic aspects of commodities ('dissociation'), e.g. disconnecting the t-shirt from the working conditions in a sweat shop, so far have been glossed over.
- GPN approaches pay attention to how and under which conditions products are created, but do not specifically focus on the social construction of value. The price of a good is regarded as a measure to assess the distribution of value capturing among producers, but prices themselves are largely taken for granted. The very process how value is constructed remains obscure.

While CEG focuses mainly on the consumption side, GPN approaches put a stronger emphasis on the production side. The main idea of the proposed session is therefore to bring together representatives from both fields in order to explore possibilities of how to combine ideas from both strands in a novel way.

The notion "geographies of dissociation" might be of particular relevance in this endeavor as it denotes the trading zone between cultural economic geography and GPNs within which we expect significant space for conceptual innovation in understanding processes and regimes of valuation. While there is now a growing body of literature on geographies of association and the geographies of brands and branding (cf. Pike 2015), arguably less attention has been paid to the geographies of dissociation. The latter refers to the relational work undertaken to create value that encompasses practices of hiding away potentially problematic aspects of a commodity from the consumers' awareness and to actively conceal references between a product and service and the conditions under which it has been processed. Such dissociations have been little explored empirically so far, yet according to insights from the fields of ethical consumption and corporate social responsibility they are likely to occur in many sectors, such as, for instance the fashion and garment industry (dissociation between sweat shops and flagship stores), food production (dissociation between healthy nutrition and practices in the meat industry) or electronics manufacturing (dissociation

between Apple and Foxconn). The session will explore the extent to which geographies of dissociation can be part of and might contribute to the wider project of developing a cultural political economic geography (cf. Hudson 2008).

We welcome paper submissions addressing (but not limited to) one or more of the following topics:

- Regimes and geographies of valuation in GPNs
- Material and semiotic flows, circuits and spaces in GPNs
- Practices and agents of dissociation in GPNs
- The co-production of meaning by producers, civil society actors and consumers
- Processes and places of market construction and dissociation, e.g. auctions
- Stabilisations and destabilisations of valuation regimes
- ...

Anyone interested in presenting a paper in this session should submit an abstract of up to 250 words to Martin Hess (martin.hess@manchester.ac.uk), Oliver Ibert (oliver.ibert@leibniz-irs.de) and Dominic Power (dominic.power@su.se) by 1st of October 2016.