

# A Joint Seminar with the Department of Geography

## Topic: Firms versus Floors

### Interrogating labour struggles within and beyond global production networks

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#### ABSTRACT

Recent literature has called for stronger engagement between labour geography and global production networks (GPN) research, in part through closer examination of labour's agency within GPNs (cf. Coe and Hess 2013). However, even in those GPNs and countries that have been targeted by NGOs and international initiatives such as the ILO/IFC Better Work programme, labour's 'preferred' geography of mobilization often has been focused not so much on the enterprise or even GPN level, but on other scales, actors/communities and topics such as repressive labour laws, industrial level bargaining, freedom of association, and the establishment of minimum/floor wages. Furthermore, some of these struggles are deeply intertwined with movements for democratization and/or with emergent forms of social movement unionism (cf. Doucette 2013). This presentation seeks to explore the apparent friction between firm and sector level strategies of social upgrading through tripartite engagement and multi-stakeholder initiatives on the one hand, and grassroots labour movements' goals and actions on the other hand. It thus aims at taking further emerging research on the 'dark sides' of strategic coupling (Coe and Hess 2011) through closer investigation of the interface between horizontal and vertical governance structures in GPNs (Lee and Gereffi 2016) and beyond.

#### SPEAKER:

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[Dr Martin Hess](#)

Senior Lecturer in  
Human Geography  
University of Manchester

#### CHAIR:

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[Professor Neil Coe](#)

Department of Geography  
National University of  
Singapore

#### DATE:

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Friday, 15 Sep 2017

#### TIME:

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3:30pm – 5:00pm

#### VENUE:

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Earth Lab #02-03  
Department of Geography  
Block AS2, Level 2  
5 Arts Link  
Singapore 117570



# Martin Hess

Martin Hess is a Senior Lecturer in Human Geography in the School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester and first joined the Department as a Research Fellow from 2000 until 2003, before returning in 2004 to take up his current position. Following his undergraduate and graduate studies in Bamberg and Munich, Martin worked in the Department of Economic Geography at the University of Munich, Germany, where he also obtained his PhD. Having held a Visiting Scholarship at the University of Hong Kong in 2001-2002, Martin spent three months in 2011 working as a Visiting Scholar at the International Labour Organization in Geneva. His main research focus lies in the analysis of global production networks (GPNs), labour and regional development. In particular, he is currently interested in the embeddedness and power configurations of GPNs and their implications for development outcomes, especially in logistics and garments.