

The role of labour as an environmental regulator – Analysis of the environmental commitments contained in transnational framework agreements

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The urgency of environmental action preceded the covid crisis but an inclusive transition to a greener society has become a key feature of recovery plans in Europe. The necessity of a green transition also concomitantly appeared as an opportunity to reframe and rethink debates around industrial relations and union identities (Thomas, Doerflinger, 2020).

In that context, this study provides a framework of analysis of transnational framework agreements (TFAs) – a joint attempt by organised labour and transnational companies to address challenges around development of industrial relations and green transitions in global production networks (Newsome et al., 2015). Indeed, in recent years those agreements have started to include increasingly detailed environmental provisions and therefore act as a relevant framing device to examine processes of regulation in and around the workplace (Boyer, 1987; MacKenzie & Martínez Lucio, 2014).

A database of environmental provisions contained in TFAs has been compiled and analysed to draw conclusions about their substantive content, scope, geographical and sectoral distribution. This analysis has been complemented with semi-structured interviews involving environmental policy experts within the international union movement. Those interviews have been designed to develop an understanding of the regulatory environment surrounding those TFAs, with a specific focus on the role of labour actors.

Global in their reach, the role TFAs can play in the larger context of environmental regulation will be discussed in light of the fact that their design as well as the practices associated with them remain firmly anchored in a European context.

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