

About the Conference

The Conference on Emerging-Market Transnational Corporations and Sustainable Development in China and Abroad took place at Wuhan, China, on 29 and 30 October 2015. Together with other international and Chinese experts, I was kindly invited by Hubei University to present my latest research and discuss ideas in the field with other colleagues.

The main topic of discussion was outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) in developing economies and the process by which the largest companies in these economies invest abroad and become transnational corporations. Other related themes came up during the two days, most notably the economic relations between China and the rest of the World, and particularly with the United States.

The papers presented and the discussions that followed reflected the current economic and political environment. As was noted in the opening ceremony there are two different policy trends regarding foreign direct investment (FDI) in the world. On one hand, some important economic integration agreements are being negotiated, notably the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, that are intended to continue and deepen the internationalization of business. On the other hand, Governments are demanding from transnational corporations a positive impact in terms of sustainable development, and are increasingly willing to implement policies that attempt to secure such an impact.

OFDI from developing countries is no longer a new topic. In 2014 35% of total OFDI in the world came from developing countries, but there is still much debate about the determinants, sustainability and impact (both on home and host countries) of these investments. In Wuhan we could listen to the most recent research on this field from the perspective of China, Eastern and Central Europe, the Near East and Latin America. Most of these international experts have participated in the Emerging Market Global Players project of the Columbia Center for Sustainable Investment in the United States.

Chinese scholars at the conference were mainly interested in their country's international economic relations. This showed up in a number of papers discussing the performance of transnational corporations in China, the potential impact on China's manufacturing sector of recent trade agreements, their current and future place in global value chains, recent trade disputes, and the impact of global monetary developments on China's manufacturing sector. The relationship between China and the United States dominated many of the presentations, but relations between China and other countries from Asia were also discussed, including the recently announced initiative of "one belt, one road".

While most research from China focused on the manufacturing sector (with a couple of exceptions on banking), from Colombia came an analysis of the investment climate for Transnational Corporations in the mining sector.

Overall the presentations and discussions were mostly concerned with the impact that cross border trade and investment flows can have on sustainable development. This was approached sometimes through the effects that inward FDI has on developing local capacities, or through the effects of outward FDI in the home economy or on other occasions through the opportunities that trade relations open up to local firms.

All the sessions were well attended with students and faculty members from the University and beyond. The efficient organization and facilitation ensured that there was always enough time for lively discussions. Above all, it was the kindness and dedication of the organizing team that we will remember and that ensured the success of the conference. It was an opportunity to get to know new colleagues and meet personally others whom we may have been in contact previously.

The topics under discussion will continue to be relevant in the coming years, as developing economies increased their share of global economic activity and their companies continue their international expansion. I can only expect that the ideas discussed in Wuhan, and the relationships established will allow us to understand better these issues.

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