**Theme 1: Europeanisation and internationalisation of employment relations**

**Global Labour Governance**

Within the initiative on global labour governance by IRRU and the University’s Global Research Programme on Global Governance, a number of start-up activities have been launched, with the aim of developing a larger research portfolio and major research project.

Jimmy Donaghey and Juliane Reinecke have started exploratory research on the response to the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster. This industrial incident has triggered an unprecedented level of cooperation among companies, social movements, labour organisations and other NGOs in formulating a response, in particular the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. This cooperation among various actors makes it a revealing case to understand how co-operation around the issue of socially responsible global supply chains is formulated at the intersection of local, national and transnational levels. The research, based on interviews with involved organisations, also seeks to further develop the analytical framework to examine the interface of labour based and consumer based social standards. Key research questions include: How did companies cooperate with other industry members in formulating a response? How did companies cooperate with NGOs and trade unions in formulating a response? What were the challenges in this process? How were they overcome? What constitutes best practice in terms of the development of socially responsible supply chain management?

IRRU has strengthened its collaboration with Renmin University for research on labour standards in China. Guglielmo Meardi visited the School of Labour and Human Resources in October, and Dr Wei Huang of Renmin visited Warwick in January 2014. Collaboration has focussed on launching in China a similar survey of multinationals to those that IRRU, with other research partners, conducted in the UK, Ireland, Spain and Canada. The survey on foreign multinationals in China would combine a part on HRM structures, comparable to that of the previous surveys, with a module on participation to labour standards initiatives. Meardi and Marginson, as well as IRRU Associate Fellow Tony Edwards of King’s College, will travel to Renmin in the Summer to finalise the project with Professor Weiguo Yang and Dr Wei Huang of the School of Labor and Human resources, and with Prof. Weidong Wang of the National Survey Centre in Beijing. The plan is to conduct a pilot project with funds from the National Survey Centre and to submit a large funding application to the National Science Foundation.

In a parallel project funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation, Juliane Reinecke investigated the issues of business responsibilities and responses to human rights abuse (including forced and bonded labour) in the global value chain of conflict minerals from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Through extensive document and interview materials from across three continents, Reinecke examined the process through which responsibility for a problem is attributed to particular actors, which is crucial for the framing of global policies on human and labour rights. While private companies have taken on increasing responsibilities for what were previously considered public issues, what counts as public or private responsibilities remains highly contested. The case study on the Democratic Republic of Congo examined the process of responsibilisation involving NGOs, state and industry and identified mechanisms through which responsibility frames are made binding and resilient, showing how private and public responsibilities may emerge and shift over time and involve a broad spectrum of actors in complementary and conflicting roles.

**Coordinated wage bargaining in Europe**

Building on work on changes in collective bargaining as a mode of labour market governance in several European countries, undertaken as part of the EC FP7 project ‘Gusto’, Paul Marginson has undertaken secondary analysis of a range of sources to examine the impact of the crisis on the arrangements for multi-employer bargaining which are a core feature of industrial relations in most western European countries.

The continued viability of coordinated, multi-employer bargaining arrangements as a cornerstone of labour market regulation across western Europe has come under increased threat since the onset of the
Already, ongoing pressure for decentralization had corroded the capacity of sector agreements to specify universal standards applicable at company level. Procedural mechanisms articulating the two levels had become looser and more open-ended. Under the crisis, this process has been taken further in northern European countries, whilst in southern Europe - under pressure from the European institutions - a frontal assault on multi-employer bargaining arrangements is now underway. Crisis-induced measures to strengthen European economic governance intensify the pressures for coordination of bargaining across borders, but the conditions for successfully realising this have significantly worsened given the undermining of existing capacities for effective coordination within national bargaining systems.

Relatedly, Marginson secured a contract from Eurofound for a comparative analysis of changes in wage setting mechanisms in the EU’s twenty-eight member states, to be completed in the first quarter of 2014. As well as tracking changes in the levels, coverage and flexibility of collective wage bargaining arrangements, the analysis investigates whether changes are originated by employers and trade unions themselves; and/or influenced by pressure from governments; and/or required by international institutions as a condition of financial rescue packages. It will also assess the relative influence of macro-economic, micro-economic and political/institutional pressures on the different kinds of change taking place.

In a parallel development, Manuela Galetto has built on the comparative research on collective bargaining in the health sector from the ‘Gusto’ project to investigate more in depth the implications for gender equality. The analysis focuses on the extent to which recent procedural and substantive changes in the mechanisms of labour governance in the hospitals sector (in particular decentralisation and individualization of pay determination) have had disproportionately negative effects on the female workforce, and on possible responses given that the European Commission has placed greater emphasis on the role of social partners on addressing the gender pay gap.

**Change in national industrial relations in the EU**

Guglielmo Meardi spent two months at the Max-Planck Institute für Wissenschaftsforschung in Cologne to advance the book stemming from his ESRC fellowship (2010-12) on comparative employment relations. He presented the first version of his analysis at research seminars in Cologne and at the Böckler Stiftung (research foundation of the German Trade Union Confederation), pointing at the effects of international forces on weakening industrial relations associational and on the paradoxical side effect of increased political and legal regulation, and based on empirically-based assessments of the effects of migration, multinational companies and EU policies.

Two particular implications of the research are leading to follow-up work. First, the resulting relevance of the historical institutional approach has been applied to explain the surprising similarities in the development of tripartism in Spain and Poland, two countries where it was introduced within the context of democratic transition, and where parallel functions, dysfunctions and, recently, crisis can be observed. Secondly, Meardi identified some unintended consequences of recent reforms in Southern Europe, and he presented them in academic and policy publications and events. Meardi is now involved, as an academic advisor, in a European Union Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue project on collective bargaining in European countries affected by the sovereign debt crisis. The project, led by former IRRU member Aristea Koukiadaki of Manchester Business School, focuses on the impact of industrial relations reforms on collective bargaining in the manufacturing sector in Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Greece and Romania. He is also an advisor on a Norwegian project led by the FAFO Center in Oslo on multi-level governance in the European labour market, and on a German-Austrian one led by Linz University on the Europeanisation of trade unions.