



24 April 2018  
4.00 p.m. – 6.00 p.m.  
IRS, Erkner



Invitation  
to the 12th IRS International Lecture  
on Society and Space

## Making the Connections, but Under Pressure: The Logistics Industry in the Asia-Pacific

Neil M. Coe, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

### Abstract

It has become something of a truism to state that logistics (a) are crucial to the everyday workings of the global economy and (b) they have been largely neglected by social scientists. Recent work under the banner of critical logistics, however, has started to address this lacuna, revealing the different geopolitical, military, labour and infrastructural logics that underpin the global movements of commodities on which we all depend. In this presentation I identify a persistent gap in this emerging field relating to the study of the firms that actually coordinate global logistical services, the so-called third party logistics (3PL) providers. In my recent work I have been exploring the organizational geographies of the leading 3PL firms in the Asia-Pacific, the largest and fastest growing regional market for logistics in the world.

The analysis reveals an industry that it is highly variegated in terms of: the origins, ownership patterns and geographic/sectoral specialisms of the 3PL firms; their expansion modes and patterns across Asia; and their strategies in relation to asset ownership and management. While 3PL firms are undoubtedly important actors within the global economy and are strategic partners of their major clients, these firms are also under considerable competitive pressure in a post-2008 context. This emanates from a range of inter-connecting dynamics: over-capacity and cost-competition; strong forces of commoditization and standardization within the sector; the challenge of new asset-light competitors; the entrance of other new players ranging from postal services to Amazon; and the explosive growth of B2C e-commerce and new logistics models. These dynamics pose a challenge to profitability, leading to ongoing processes of consolidation and an industry in which creating a distinctive niche is hard and increasingly requires significant investment in assets.



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### Vita

Neil M. Coe is Professor of Economic Geography at the National University of Singapore, where he also co-directs the GPN@NUS Research Centre.

His research interests are in the areas of global production networks and local economic development; the geographies of local and transnational labour markets; the geographies of innovation; and institutional and network approaches to economic development. These concerns have been explored through research into computer services, temporary staffing and logistics in the UK, Europe and Asia Pacific, the film and television industry in the UK and Canada, and retailing in the UK, East Asia and Eastern Europe. He has published over 85 articles and book chapters on these topics, and is a co-author of *Global Production Networks: Theorizing Economic Development in an Interconnected World* (OUP, Oxford, 2015), *Economic Geography: A Contemporary Introduction* (Wiley, NJ, 2013, second edn.) and *Spaces of Work: Global Capitalism and the Geographies of Labour* (Sage, London, 2003).

He is currently an editor of the *Journal of Economic Geography*.

We kindly ask all participants to register [here](#). Thank you very much.