



Master topic proposal

Refining regulation: Transparency challenges in the gold commodity chain.

Switzerland refines around 80% of the world's gold, but the provenance of the ore is not always clear. This has been particularly flagged up as a problem in relation to so-called conflict minerals, but it has also come up recently in relation to the problem of tax evasion: some of the ore that is imported to be refined in Switzerland is produced through the informal economy. This means that the refinery industry in Switzerland largely develops on ore that has produced no tax revenue for the poor countries where it has been extracted.¹

This MA topic broadly proposes to tackle this problem from the Swiss end, through an analysis of Swiss regulation on the refineries that import gold to Switzerland, and to identify the regulatory bottlenecks that make transparency a difficult aim to achieve.

The MA project involves desk-based work as well as interviews with key informants along the gold commodity/customs chain in Switzerland (customs administration, NGOs, refinery staff, etc). Some of the key empirical and analytical questions that the student will ask are:

- What have been the main changes in the way that gold imports are regulated in Switzerland?
- What has been the impetus of these regulatory changes (e.g. trials, NGO whistle-blows,..)?
- What are the configurations of political and economic interests between actors (e.g. refinery corporations, swiss administration) involved in gold regulation, and how do these interests coincide and compete?

The questions outlined above are only indicative, and the student is encouraged to narrow them down, and formulate new ones according to her/his own interest in this topic. In addition to conceptual insights on the global linkages between economic and political power, this master topic also has high policy relevance.

For further queries please contact Muriel Côte (Muriel.cote@geo.uzh.ch)

¹ See for example <https://www.bernedclaration.ch/campaigns/agoldenracket/> and https://sehen-und-handeln.ch/content/uploads/2016/01/OEK2016_Studie_Gold.pdf