

ABSTRACTS

While Brazil has projected itself as a global ethanol fuel leader and shown greater willingness than other sectors to engage with voluntary sustainability schemes, certification uptake remains regionally concentrated in the Central-South and largely absent in the Northeast. The study argues that this disparity cannot be explained by normative alignment or policy design alone but must be situated within the political economy of norm localization. Drawing on Acharya's concept of norm localization, the thesis examines how local actors, particularly the Brazilian Sugarcane Industry Association (UNICA), strategically reinterpret and selectively internalize global sustainability norms to align with domestic priorities which to maintain export access to high-value markets like the EU. However, the scope of this congruence-building is constrained by deeper structural asymmetries, namely: industrial dualism, fragmented land tenure system, and regional production disparities. Through qualitative process tracing and document analysis, the study demonstrates that norm internalization is contingent not only on ideational congruence but via strategic utility and institutional accessibility. By foregrounding these dynamics, the thesis contributes to debates on transnational sustainability governance particularly highlights the limits of voluntary certification as a less universal mechanism in delivering inclusive, sector-wide transformation.

Keywords: Norm Localization, Brazil Sugarcane Ethanol Industry, Voluntary Sustainability Standards, Bonsucro, EU-RED II