

Inspection: competition and digitalisation

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The Société générale de surveillance, whose presence in Geneva since 1915 has been described, is not alone. Its international competitors, several of which have offices in Geneva, contend for the market in inspection, certification and testing, a global market of which commodity trading is only one segment.¹ Inspection is going digital: sensors, imaging, automated sampling, electronic certificates and lot traceability are transforming a trade that once rested on the inspector at the port and the laboratory. The frauds of 2020, described in Part H, showed that inspection documents could be forged or reused. Since then, trading houses and banks have demanded tamper-proof electronic certificates linked to the lot and to the vessel.

For the Geneva cluster, this development is an opportunity: the presence of the global headquarters of a leader in inspection, of its competitors and of the associated laboratories gives Geneva a capacity for innovation in the certification of commodities, including for the sustainability criteria, origin and carbon footprint that the markets increasingly demand. The following chapter shows that the measurement of commodity trading remains imperfect, even as the measurement of the goods themselves advances.

1 Notes

1. Cotecna, “Notre histoire”: founded in Switzerland in 1974 by Elie Georges Massey, headquartered in Geneva since 1975, a pioneer of pre-shipment inspection programmes for governments, more than 6,000 employees; Wikipedia (en), art. “Bureau Veritas” (Antwerp 1828, headquarters in Neuilly-sur-Seine, 82,000 employees) and art. “Intertek” (London, more than 45,000 employees, more than 1,000 laboratories and offices). ↩

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