



Fair trade from Europe

Fair trade no longer an exclusive North–South story

Fair trade products of French farmers organisations © Ethiquable

Over the last forty years, fair trade has proved to be a strong development model built on a cup of coffee from Latin America and a chocolate bar from Africa. It is a way for consumers to fight existing inequalities between the North and the South. But what about our own farmers who are also victims of the existing agricultural model? Isn't a Greek farmer entitled to a fair price for his produce? These issues have occupied European fair trade movements for a while. Over the last few years more and more concrete initiatives in the area have emerged.

Trade, not aid

The historical basis of the fair trade movement lies in the *trade not aid* principle of the 1960s: Provide 'third world countries' with development opportunities by paying a fair price for their products. That way, fair trade has established strong partnerships between producers in the 'poor' South and consumers in the 'rich' North.

But for some fifteen years now, this exclusive North–South story does not make sense any more. At the time, the first South to South fair trade initiatives emerged. The pioneers were from Latin America, but also in Asia and Africa local fair trade initiatives emerged that target the local middle-class purchasing power.

A matter of priorities

For at least as many years, there has been a latent demand for North to North fair trade too. When around about the turn of the century throughout Europe the fair trade movement shed its worldshop straitjacket, approached supermarkets and saw turnover boom, more and more critical questions were raised. At the World Social Forum, fair trade was approached with certain suspicion because its essentially export-targeting development model conflicts with the key concept of food sovereignty. The environmental movement raised questions about transportation and the climate and advocated shorter value chains. The fair trade movement replied that exports can go hand in hand with the local strengthening of farmers' organisations. Moreover, coffee, cocoa and bananas cannot be cultivated in Europe.

When in 2009 European dairy farmers were close to despair because the price of milk did not even cover the costs, fair trade organisations were asked to put their familiar fair trade labels at the service of European farmers. **Fairtrade International** (FI, by and large the main labelling organisation, to which also Max Havelaar-Belgium belongs) kept its distance.

"That's not to say we don't wholeheartedly support the cause of these farmers. We strongly believe that the principles and values of fair trade should and could be applied to farmers wherever they live in the world", reacts Barbara Crowther of the Fairtrade Foundation. However, our label was established for small farmers and workers from some of the poorest countries of the world. That is our focus." Karlien Wouters of **Max Havelaar-Belgium** agrees: "It is not that we do not want to. Behind the scene we have already supported Belgian farmers to market their product. But the challenges in the South are so big and complex that we prefer to target our resources on these issues." These points of view are still backed by many fair trade organisations.

Alliances

"The living conditions of farmers in the South and the North are not comparable, but the economic mechanisms they are confronted with are identical. Fair trade should also be about advocacy for and with farmers in the North", says **Artisans de Monde**, the French network of worldshops. Their view has been translated into concrete partnerships with French farmers' organisations. Organic fruit and vegetable baskets can be picked up in worldshops and fair trade products are sold on farmers' markets.

A comparable move is made by the international **Fairtrade Towns** campaign. In some countries, including Belgium, a sixth goal has been added to promote fair trade: Launch a new municipal initiative to promote the local consumption and production of sustainable foodstuffs.

Mountain herbs and olive oil

Actually getting a 'fair trade' label on products from European farmers is a next step. The phenomenon is not new. Austria's **EZA**, a fair trade organisation, has offered organic herb tea from a group of Austrian farmers in Mühlviertel since 1986. There are also a few Eastern European produ-



Albanian olive farmers at work © Claro



cers in fair trade partnerships. **Claro**, a Swiss fair trade organisation, has partnered with farmers from mountain villages surrounding Tirana since 2004. That way, Swiss consumers can choose between Albanian and Palestinian fair trade olive oil.

"As long as FI does not allow certification in Eastern Europe, it will remain tough for farmers' groups to be part of the game", says PhD student Filip Brkovic. Artisanal producers are not facing this problem because the **World Fair Trade Organisation** (WFTO) does not exclude any regions. For instance, handicrafts from Bosnia's BHCrafts, which was established after the civil war with Norwegian help, have found their way to many markets via fair trade channels.

Anti-Mafia

Italy is a genuine pioneer of North to North fair trade, but its story is peculiar. In 2010, after years of preparation, **Altromercato**, the largest Italian fair trade organisation which includes 300 worldshops, launched the **Solidale Italiano** product line. It aims to offer products of Italian social co-operatives, first and foremost from Libera Terra. This movement has fought the Mafia throughout southern Italy since 1995, among others by starting up agriculture projects on land that was confiscated from members of the Mafia. The offer in the Italian worldshops is now broadened with local wine and olive oil, limoncello, passata and pommodori. Recently, the product range was extended with products from co-operatives that work with prisoners or teens who have lost their way and via a peace project in Bosnia with blueberry juice and jam. Many Italian worldshops commit to distributing local organic produce and contribute to the establishment of an alternative agricultural model in both the South and the North.



Libera Terra in action © Laboratorio di Legalità Francesco Marcone

Bio meets fair trade

This decade also saw advocates of organic farming take initiatives to close the gap with fair trade. "Organic farming can only survive if farmers can live off it", states Hans Hohe-nester, the president of **Naturland**. Naturland works with 50,000 German farmers and manages a label for ecological

agriculture. For many years Naturland has certified products of overseas partners of **Gepa**, the largest fair trade organisation in Germany. In 2011, this partnership was deepened with the creation of the **Naturland Fair** label, which gives producers and processors in the North an opportunity to prove that they meet organic and fair trade criteria. The first was for a producers' group from the Bavarian Alps which saw its fair organic milk processed with fair trade cocoa and sugar in Gepa's broad range of milk chocolate products. Other partners and products followed suit, such as the Italian farmers from *the Marches* region who provided durum wheat as the basic ingredient for quinoa spaghetti.



Bavarian farmers promoting 'own' fair trade chocolate © Gepa

A similar story developed in France. In 2002, five organic business entrepreneurs established an organisation that was later branded **Biopartenaire**. Bringing together organic and fair trade is the core of their business model. In collaboration with the controlling body, Ecocert, this led to two new labels in 2010: **Bio Equitable** for North–South value chains and **Bio Solidaire** for French value chains. Now, eleven small cooperatives and farmers' groups from southern France sell organic and fair spelt flour, camelina oil, chestnuts, vegetables, rice, soy or sunflower oil.

Paysans d'ici

But it is the French cooperative fair trade organisation, **Ethiquable**, that has made most progress. Influenced by French farmers' union, Confédération Paysanne, they considered support to the *agriculture paysanne* in France. This family farm model is typically small-scale and sustainable; it fosters biodiversity and is based on traditional knowledge. Cooperatives that use this model often use short value chains to reach consumers but Ethiquable wants to provide a broader reach and strengthen their position.



For instance, in the Têt valley fruit farmers suffered from heated competition with the huge Spanish orchards just across the border. Their organic production consists of older varieties of apricots and peaches, but the low prices in the high season are problematic. Instead of selling part of the harvest to non-organic Spanish juice processors, the fruit farmers work with Ethiquable to produce organic juices and jams. Currently, Ethiquable's

Paysans d'ici project offers some twenty products of ten cooperatives in southern France. A second French fair trade organisation, Alter Eco, followed suit, but stopped after a

recent buy-out. Note: French legislation for small businesses defined and recognised the concept of 'fair trade' in 2005. In May 2014 it included 'North to North' relations.

Fair trade criteria for the North

Ethiquable's **Paysans d'ici** charter contains a whole set of criteria for agricultural practice itself (organic farming), for organisational matters (cooperative models) and for products (local, *produits de terroir*). Moreover, farmers must present a local development project that goes beyond simple marketing products. Ethiquable for its part commits to fair prices, pre-financing, a premium for the project and complete transparency.

Farmers in the North

In 2013, Belgium's **Oxfam-Magasins du Monde** jumped on the bandwagon. "We had been playing with the idea for a while within our movement and for many years several worldshops had served as a depot for people who had subscriptions to vegetable baskets", says Sophie Tack. "In addition, Oxfam International clearly states we are facing global challenges. Tomorrow's agriculture will not just have to produce food but also ensure biodiversity, conserve natural resources and fight climate change. That is why maintaining family farming is essential in the North and the South." Now, the **Paysans du Nord** product range includes artisanal beer from the Brasserie de Lesse cooperative, a range of Ethiquable France products and milk from Biodia. "Meanwhile we have evaluated this approach with our volunteers and



Fair milk?

Milk prices have been in free fall since 2001. In its search for solutions the European Milk Board embraced fair trade. Meanwhile, milk cooperatives in Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, France and Italy have found retail partners to sell 'fair milk'. In Belgium this is Fairebel. In all of these countries, the milk sector itself labels the product as 'fair' and distributes the higher price consumers are willing to pay to the farmers. This is possible since the fair trade concept is not a trade mark.

Like Gepa, Oxfam-Magasins du Monde has recognised an organic milk producers' group as a partner. Biodia uses an innovative price mechanism and cows are not fed soy from the other side of the globe. Small detail, Biodia chocolate milk carries the Fairtrade label. This label is for the certified cocoa and sugar following the regular criteria applicable to compound products.

customers and we are even more convinced this is the way to go”, confirms Sophie Tack. “We feared the message would become too complex, but people now find it more coherent instead.”

Terra Etica

Halfway 2014 the offer of fair ‘North products’ in Walloon and Brussels worldshops was further extended, following the **Ethiquable Benelux** launch – copied from its French colleagues – of four products under the new brand name **Terra Etica**. “For pear syrup and gooseberry jam we work with Belgian farmers of the ‘Organic from here’ project”, says Vincent De Grelle of Ethiquable Benelux. “But we consider supporting family agriculture mainly as a European project. That is why we are so proud that we can also offer two Greek tapenades. The farmers’ group in Mistros on the island of Euboea tries to further pursue the sustainable, traditional combination of high olive trees with raising goats. The group processes both the high-quality Kalamata olives and feta locally.”

Within the **Belgian Fair Trade Federation** (BFTF), a federation with only French-speaking members, criteria for fair North products are being drafted. They aim to disseminate them in 2015. But the Flemish worldshops will also discuss this in the months to come. “Our grassroots movement will decide”, says Arne Schollaert of **Oxfam-Wereldwinkels**. “But we want to discuss this in depth. An extra shelf for North products means one shelf less for South products. And this is not just about the shops, but also for advocacy and awareness-raising, political work and communication.” It nicely sums up the choice the fair trade movement is facing.

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What about the labelling organisations?

We discussed FI and Naturland Fair earlier. In 2013, Ecocert, in addition to the *Equitable* label, created a *Solidaire* label for organic products from the North that meet adapted fair trade criteria. Fair for Life can also certify European producers in accordance with its criteria.



Cookies from social cooperatives that work with prisoners © Altromercato

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