

ASA-Kaleidoskop

Date: 20 – 21 November 2015

Venue: EUREF-Campus 13, Torgauer Str. 12-15, 10829 Berlin

Summary of the workshop “Fair Trade and Sustainable Consumption: Changing attitudes and future prospects in South and North”

by Lisa Lampe

Well equipped with coffee and water the workshop participants quickly started to exchange previous knowledge and workshop expectations. Actors of the fair fashion industry, researchers of related fields as well as people simply interested in learning about Fair Trade and sustainable consumption, joined the group this morning. After a short discussion the chairs Katharina Utzolino (Fair Trade Consultant, Nord-Süd Kontor in Hamburg) and Steve Fotso (University of Hamburg) stated that the goal of this workshop was to learn about the core principles of fair trade and to critically discuss current trends and developments.

Steve Fotso started with an introduction to the terms sustainability and Fair Trade. He explained that the ten globally accepted Fair Trade Principles derived from the three dimensions of sustainability and were elaborated by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). Its definition of Fair Trade is as follows: *“Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South.”*

After having learned about core principles, the participants had to solve a small quiz and match different actors according to their role in the supply chain of fair trade. It became clear that the wide range of producers, retailers, and labels causes that consumers easily get “lost in certification”. Furthermore some actors like GEPA and Weltladen show full commitment to Fair Trade standards whereby e.g. Nestlé and Lidl sell some Fair Trade products in conventional discounters. Most participants were surprised that Nestlé labels its Kit-Kat chocolate bar in Great Britain as Fair Trade product because its cocoa is bought according to a “fair trade light” policy. As the term “fair” is not a protected term, transparency standards are difficult to impose. A good platform to learn more about different standards and certifications is befair.be.

After a delicious lunch break – with mainly regional and seasonal products for which no Fair Trade certificates (need to) exist – the group started the second part of the workshop with a small quiz on facts and figures of Fair Trade. Some participants won various fairly traded chocolate bars. They for example got right that Ireland has the highest per capita Fair Trade consumption with 49€ per year, that the most sold Fair Trade product worldwide is banana, followed by coffee and cocoa, and that globally 1.5 million farmers work in the Fair Trade business.

In order to critically discuss different approaches to Fair Trade and Best Practice examples, the participants formed small groups and worked with selected texts which they later presented on posters. A first group read about Konafcoop, a cocoa producer organization in Cameroon. After its formation in 1981, Konafcoop walked a long way to get certified as Fair Trade producer in 2007. While their status as certified farmer cooperation increases their income and brings in money for the development of premium products, it simultaneously implicates high costs for certifications and their renewal.

A second group explained that in order to become certified by the WFTO the entire supply chain from producer to sales has to comply with Fair Trade standards. This rather new certificate is still widely unknown. An in depth monitoring process creates a bigger guarantee for consumers but comes along with high audit costs and might seem overwhelmingly difficult for small producers.

In contrast to the integrated supply chain route of the WFTO label, the next group discussed alternative ways to get a single product certified as being Fair Trade. The well-known FairTrade label implies that all ingredients in a mixed product like a chocolate bar that can be certified, must be certified. However, a new slightly modified label only guarantees that a single ingredient (e.g. cocoa) in a mixed product is a Fair Trade product. This increases the overall volume of fairly traded products and creates incentives to participate. At the same time customers get even more confused and the lack of transparency can lead to 'green washing'. One of the participants concluded the presentation with the words "What you see is not what you get".

The last group dealt with an approach that goes beyond the ideas of Fair Trade. Reading a text by Nico Paech about post growth economy, they discussed how lifestyles have to change in order to overcome an economic system that is based on continuous economic growth.

After the group work and presentations all participants had the opportunity to further discuss the texts and related issues in a 'world café'. Concerning the issue of certification the question arose if Fair Trade labels are needed if actors give full transparency about every step of the supply chain to their consumers. Many wanted to go deeper into the topic of a post growth economy and statements like "how many fairly traded Christmas presents do we need to live a sufficient life" were discussed.

The two actors from the improvisational theater aptly concluded that, by discussing approaches and trends of the Fair Trade movement, the workshop raised even more questions and – correspondingly - that questioning (trade practices) is crucial.