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Citation for final published version:

Samuel, Anthony , Peattie, Kenneth and Herman, Agatha 2020. Fairtrade towns: unpacking the dynamics of locally developed ethical retail geographies. *Geoforum* 117 , pp. 114-123. 10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.09.012

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.09.012>

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# **Fairtrade Towns: Unpacking the Dynamics of Locally Developed Ethical Retail Geographies**

## **Abstract**

One of the most significant recent developments in ethical retailing is the Fairtrade Towns initiative. Its emphasis on the promotion of Fairtrade consumption within entire urban landscapes, and the communities and organisations within them, represents a geography of consumption into which millions of consumers are actively or passively enrolled. This empirical research paper considers Fairtrade Towns as retail geographies that connect across scales, shaped by the local, and yet expressing ethics and care on a global scale. Within them, local activists are revealed to adopt a novel role as ‘citizen marketers’ promoting FT consumption by local consumers and institutions by both utilising their own social networks and adopting marketing practices more usually associated with industry professionals. The resulting evolution of Fairtrade Towns is shown to have passed through two stages. The first supporting the broader global ‘mainstreaming’ agenda of the FT movement, with the second more focused on a novel contribution of local ‘sidestreaming’ to horizontally interconnect a range of types of place within a locality. This process has enrolled novel types of place and space as components of a local ethical retail geography, but this is revealed to potentially generate both synergies and tensions across different types of local place and stakeholder.

## **Keywords:**

Fairtrade, Retail Geography, Place Marketing, Fairtrade Towns, Local

## **1. Introduction**

Fair and ethical trade are seen as a means by which contemporary forces of globalisation might be harnessed in the interests of the poor to create more equitable forms of economic development. Research to date has frequently combined geographies of consumption with geographies of responsibility perspectives, placing a particular emphasis on the role of 'the consumer' and the potential to mobilize them in pursuit of more equitable and sustainable development (Evans et al., 2017). Fairtrade (FT), as the highest profile ethical trade initiative, is characterised by Alexander and Nicholls (2006) as having evolved through three phases. The first built trust in the authenticity of the FT principle and brand to link producers and consumers in ways that gave the latter an emotional and rational impetus to change their purchase behaviour. The second 'mainstreaming' phase broadened the available product range, widening retailer involvement and attracting new types of consumers by making FT 'less earnest and more glamorous' (p:1244). The third 'place based' phase sought to further extend the consumer base through locally focussed efforts that encourage consumers to act locally on their ethical concerns. Among such place and community-based initiatives, Alexander and Nicholls (2006) put forward the Fairtrade Town (FTT) scheme as the prime example.

The type of ethical consumption in this third phase combines the two place/space perspectives that Amin (2002 & 2004) proposes as central to geographies of consumption. Firstly, the conventional (if somewhat limited) view of place as 'container spaces' within which activities such as consumption take place, comprising 'territorial entities: local economic systems, regimes of regulation, a place called home' (Amin, 2004: 33). Secondly a newer, more relationally-based 'spatiality of globalisation' (Amin, 2002: 385) which in this case involves valuing consumer

purchase and consumption habits for their ability to ‘act at a distance’ and show a social responsibility for distant others.

Early research considering the economic and developmental implications of ethical trade and consumption tended to adopt a global commodity chain approach (Fine, 1993), with a particular emphasis on the distribution of power within them (Goodman and Watts, 1997). This however led to criticisms that it overemphasised processes and sites of production; neglected the impacts of consumption practices (Bek et al., 2007; Leslie and Reimer, 1999); and created a narrow view of provisioning systems as composed of highly linear connections between a chain of actors (Bek et al., 2007) beginning with producer communities and ending with consumers. Later research work broadened out the relatively linear commodity chain perspective to consider systems of provision as an ‘ethical complex’ (Friedberg, 2004), encompassing consumers, producers, suppliers, retailers, non-governmental organizations, media and the various institutional arrangements through which ethical trade rules and standards are negotiated (Popke, 2006).

Beyond an ongoing debate as to whether ethical consumption and trade simply bolsters the existing neoliberal economic system rather than challenging it (Jaffee 2007), the practical and economic benefits of fair and ethical trade have been both queried and researched in terms of their impact on producer communities (see, for example, Bek et al., 2007; Neilson and Pritchard, 2010; Oneto and Arnould, 2011). As Neilson and Pritchard (2010:) observe:

The common modus operandi of research in this area has involved ‘vertical analyses’; researchers follow the trail of products upstream to sites of production. The value of such approaches is that they identify the social contexts of participation in fair and ethical trade, the effects of such on governance

structures within trade value chains, and the financial benefits from fair and ethical trade for producers. Consequently, the research literature is replete with place-specific studies of how participation in such-and-such a scheme affected the lives of such-and-such a producer or community and, as a consequence, there is a strong empirical record of how fair and ethical trade changes the lives of those who participate in such schemes.

Both Neilson and Pritchard (2010) and Bek et al. (2007) have sought to provide more ‘horizontal’ analyses of ethical provisioning networks and the processes through which individuals and communities engage with fair and ethical trade, but such work again focuses on production. At the consuming end of such networks, although there is considerable research exploring the motivations, role and behaviour of consumers (e.g. Darian et al., 2015; De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007; Low and Davenport, 2006), this tends to be abstracted from the specific social and economic contexts and relationships within which they act. Goodman and Bryant (2014: 8) argue that:

the politics of ‘caring at a distance’ that Barnett et al. (2005) link to ethical consumption and its processes of working to create economic alterities is often only really realised in producer-consumer networks that encompass and blur place(s) through connections across the everyday spaces of what Lee (2006) calls the ‘ordinary economy’.

How such networks might function within specific places of consumption, and the potential for horizontal connections between diverse ‘everyday spaces’ and within ‘ordinary’ local economies to promote the purchase and use of ethical commodities remains under-explored.

The FTT initiative, as a significant development in ethical provisioning systems and the third phase of FT’s development began with the establishment of Garstang as a

FTT in 2001 (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006). They have since expanded rapidly across the globe and by early 2020 there were a total of 1867 FTTs operating in 30 countries, with 425 operating in the UK (Fairtrade Towns, 2020). A full breakdown of FTTs operating across the Globe is demonstrated in Table 1: *Fairtrade Towns Across the Globe*.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Fairtrade Towns (2020).</b>
Germany	648
United Kingdom	425
Austria	207
Belgium	200
Sweden	64
Republic of Ireland	48
USA	45
Norway	37
Luxemburg	32
France	28
Canada	27
Spain	19
Finland	16
Czech Republic	12
Switzerland	10
Lebanon	9
Australia	8
South Korea	7
Japan	6
Brazil	3
India	2
Poland	2
Ghana	2
Equador	2
Columbia	2
Costa Rica	2
Denmark	1
Estonia	1
Paraguay	1
Cameroon	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1867</b>

Table 1: Fairtrade Towns Across the Globe: Source Fairtrade Towns, (2020)

Through its emphasis on the promotion of FT consumption within entire towns (and cities and villages) and the communities and organisations within them, the FTT movement represents a geography of consumption into which millions of consumers across the globe are actively or passively enrolled. Despite their prevalence, and recognition for helping to mainstream the FT label (Nicholls and Opal, 2005) they still remain comparatively under-researched and under-theorized.

This paper draws on qualitative research undertaken within eleven FTTs in the UK to explore them as a novel form of retail place involving practices and relationships that can extend our understanding of how ethical and alternative retail geographies can develop and operate. In doing so it contributes to our understanding of how space, place, and ethics 'intermingle' to create a cultural economy of alternative retailing, which Goodman and Bryant (2014) describe as both crucial and yet under-explored.

## **2. Fairtrade Towns as retail geographies.**

Retail geography is a major strand of geographies of consumption research (Hartwick, 2000). Its emphasis on the places involved in selling and purchasing complements, and is intertwined with, 'downstream' research into spaces of consumption such as the home (Domosh, 1996) or the body (Crewe, 2001) and 'upstream' research considering full 'systems of provision' (Fine and Leopold, 1993). Retail geography combines insights from cultural studies, politics, anthropology and history to extend our understanding of consumption beyond a focus on economic rationality, utilitarian value, supposedly passive consumers and the moment of purchase (Crewe, 2000 & 2003). The literature concerning retailing places is large, multi-faceted and challenging to encapsulate, but reviewing it reveals five key opportunities for generating further insights through studying FTTs.

Firstly, there are opportunities to fill the gap between work from the first wave of retail geography studies dominated by a small and increasingly concentrated group of major retailers and their supply networks (Marsden et al., 1998) operating within formal urban spaces (such as high streets, shopping malls and supermarkets (Crewe, 2000), and later work focussing on more alternative, subversive and marginal (either spatially or economically) spaces such as jumble sales or charity shops (Crewe, 2000; Goodman and Bryant, 2014; Gregson et al., 2002). Much of the retailing effort within FTTs concerns what Crewe (2000) characterised as the understudied sites of mundane and everyday provisioning beyond malls and supermarkets.

Secondly, retail geography studies tend to focus on specific types of provisioning sites such as shopping malls (Warnaby and Medway, 2016) or charity shops (Goodman and Bryant, 2014; Gregson et al., 2002) and the linear supply chains for individual commodities such as cut flowers, furniture, fashion and fruit (Popke, 2006; Cook, 2006). However, as Glennie and Thrift (1993) note, commodities, related product advertising, consumer reflexivity, and consumption intertwine and converge across several different systems of provision. Jackson and Thrift (1995:207) frame geographies of consumption research as addressing '*how social relations of consumption are constructed through a tissue of sites*', creating opportunities for research spanning across multiple types of site to help understand how they might interrelate.

Thirdly, the recent emphasis of consumption research based in the 'search and social' online realm (Srinivansan et al., 2016) has created opportunities to rebalance this with a renewed emphasis on research considering specific locations as retailing contexts and the influence of place identity.



Fourthly, as Hartwick (1998) notes, the emphasis on consumers can create a gap in terms of our understanding of the role and contribution of the people working within retail settings. This creates opportunities for more research focusing on those responsible for distribution and retailing and the ways in which they interface with, and potentially influence and mobilise, consumers.

Finally, there is an opportunity to better connect the disciplines of retail geography and marketing, which became oddly disconnected once the former moved beyond its early marketing-focused work on retail location (Crewe, 2000). Geographers have since contributed much insight into the ways that consumer knowledge and consumption choice is shaped by the rich social interactions, places and networks of urban life (Barnett et al., 2007; Mansvelt, 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). However, there are opportunities to complement this through research into the influence of marketing in terms of people, processes and practices. There is also a reciprocal opportunity for the marketing discipline to move beyond its traditionally limited view of place in terms of points of distribution that fails to grasp the ‘particularity of place[s] as a lived experience’ (Sherry, 2000:277) and the importance of consumption spaces in consumers' lives and experiences (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

Goodman and Bryant (2014: 8) argue that:

...research and writing has barely just begun to explore in any real detail the fundamentally important ‘place’ of retail – and that particularly of ‘alternative’ retail – in the creation and practices of alternative economic geographies.

We contribute to this ‘beginning’ by researching the real, physical, governed spaces and places of FTTs (Malpass et al., 2007) as retail geographies. In doing so, it reconnects to Glennie and Thrift’s (1992) still pertinent call for a better understanding

of consumption practices as everyday situated activities occurring in the spaces and places that people occupy and construct. The distinction and relationship between space and place is revealed in a review by Agnew (2011) to be both complex and contested, but for our purposes it is sufficient to adopt what he outlines as the simplest distinction, that place refers to the specific and space to the general. The paper also addresses Crewe's (2003: 359) call to progress research into geographies of retailing and consumption through: 'fine-grained analyses of how, why and where consumers act and interact in structured webs of significance .... with commodities and in specific temporal and spatial settings'.

The paper's focus on 'what people do and can do' through 'projects that are rooted in place' to develop ethical consumption also reflects Hadjimichalis and Hudson's (2007: 99) call for more research taking this approach. Subsequently our analysis demonstrates how FTTs, as ethical retailing and consumption complexes, are constructed and promoted by a network of stakeholders who interconnect and modify a multiplicity of everyday social spaces and physical places to locally create an 'urbanism' capable of influencing consumer knowledge and choice in the quest to care for distant others (Barnett et al., 2011; Malpass et al., 2007).

## **2.1 Fairtrade: From products to places**

This paper concerns fair trade, which differs from ethical trade in that whilst the latter focuses on employment conditions throughout supply chains, fair trade focuses on the equity of trading relations, particularly for small-scale producers (Neilson and Pritchard, 2010).<sup>1</sup> We more specifically focus on accredited FT products, whose

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<sup>1</sup> 'Fair Trade' refers to the movement as a whole, while 'Fairtrade' signifies the market regulated by Fairtrade International (FTI) and Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO-CERT).

marketing emphasises how producer communities benefit from a 'fair' and stable commodity price, and which have a history of over 40 years, encapsulated by Doherty et al. (2013). Over the past two decades FT consumption has emerged from an 'alternative' consumer choice to become one of the best known, and most purchased, ethical labels in the marketplace (Nicholls and Opel, 2005; Doherty, Davies and Tranchell, 2013). Its global market share in 2018 was worth approximately US\$9 billion, which represents 1.6 million farmers and workers across 74 developing countries (Fairtrade.net, 2020; Fairtrade Annual Report, 2018). In the UK FT sales in 2018 reached over £1.6 billion, with 93% consumer brand recognition and 83% trust in the FT label (Fairtrade Annual Report, 2018). FT has also been an important aspect of research in consumption and retail geographies, particularly relating to ethical consumption (e.g. Barnett et al., 2005) and its influence on retailers and their supply chains (e.g. Le Mare, 2008).

FT witnessed a rapid post-millennium 'mainstreaming' through its adoption by global brands including Starbucks, Nestle and (up until 2016) Cadburys (Nicholls, 2010). Much of this reflects improved marketing management and attention to product quality, branding, accreditation, and access to supermarket channels (Davies, 2009). The marketing, retailing and consumption of FT products has been considered from perspectives including gender bias (Morrell and Jayawardhena, 2010), consumer citizenship (Samuel, Peattie and Doherty, 2018; Peattie and Samuel 2018; Barnett et al., 2011; Low and Davenport, 2007), consumer response to Fairtrade offerings including their ethical component, price, quality, labelling and certification (De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007; Hira and Ferrie, 2006; Low and Davenport, 2006;), and Fairtrade promoters' struggle to balance the pressures for FT to expand and mainstream in order to "do more good", whilst remaining true to its ethical roots (Golding 2009).

The FTT initiative has place-specific roots beginning in 2001 with the accreditation of Garstang (UK) as the world's first FTT. This introduced the novel concept of accrediting and branding a place of consumption rather than products or a place of production. Accreditation depends on demonstrating achievement against five criteria including:

1. The local council must pass a resolution supporting Fairtrade, and serve Fairtrade coffee and tea at its meetings, in offices and canteens;
2. A range of Fairtrade products must be available in the town's or city's shops and served in local cafés and catering establishments (targets are set according to population);
3. Fairtrade products must be used by a number of local workplaces (estate agents, hairdressers etc) and community organisations (churches, schools etc);
4. The council must attract popular support for the campaign;
5. A local Fairtrade steering group must be convened to ensure continued commitment to Fairtrade status.

(Fairtrade Towns, 2016)

Once accredited, a FTT reflects Mansvelt's (2005) notion of a geography of consumption within which people, products and places are socially constructed around the ethos of responsibility, enacted through the promotion, sale, purchase and consumption of FT products.

One early exploration of FTTs comes from Nicholls and Opal (2005) who view them as instances of place-based marketing that develop and use effective, proactive and politicized marketing networks to link an evolving number of actors including products, producers, places, audits, and certification processes to market FT products to new and existing consumers. Other contributions include Wheeler's (2012) sociological exploration of one FTT focusing on FT support and consumption as social

practices; Lyon's (2014) study of American FTTs from a political economy perspective focusing on relations between FTT groups and other entities; and Peattie and Samuel's (2016) discussion of FTTs as a people-centric form of social business.

Our most substantial understanding of FTTs to date comes from pioneering work undertaken in Bristol (Cloke et al., 2011; Malpass et al., 2007; Pykett et al., 2010). Barnett et al., (2011: 197) develop the notion of 'Fairtrade urbanism' in which FTTs have two important marketing and retailing dimensions. Firstly '*educating, informing and engaging residents about shared responsibility of place that stretch beyond the local*'. Secondly FTTs' '*use of jurisdictional power to change collective infrastructures of consumption*', which has similarities to conventional marketing strategies related to distribution channel access whilst going beyond conventional commercial market structures. This process demonstrates a place's ability to make a difference to what is consumed there (Mansvelt, 2005), that the promotion of FTTs goes beyond appealing to individual ethical consumers and that, as Styhre and Engberg (2003) highlight, social 'organizational space' should also be recognized for its potential to influence consumption. Barnett et al. (2011: 180) conclude that:

*The fair trade movement mobilizes existing, geographically embedded social networks with the purpose of sustaining a vision of alternative, economic and political possibilities, networks rooted in local alternative economic and political possibilities, networks rooted in local church communities or in localities where local businesses, fair trade activism and willing customers collude to generate a thriving fair trade scene.*

Since the FT movement aims to create, and depends upon, FT consumption, the dominant focus in FT research has been on consumers, their behaviour, and the values, attitudes and knowledge that shapes it. The work of both Barnett et al. (2011), and Wheeler (2012 a), who explored the experiences of FT-supporting consumers within a

FTT, demonstrate how consumers use their local formal and informal social networks to spread FT awareness and engagement, acting as a form of ‘market maven’ (Feick and Price 1987). Wheeler’s (2012 a) research helped to progress the discussion of FT: “.. away from current accounts of (Fairtrade) consumption that rely on models of conscious and expressive consumer choice and instead demonstrates how consumption is shaped by shared structures of knowledge, institutional frameworks and infrastructures of provision” (p. 126). Additional research into FTTs provides an opportunity to further develop this understanding of the role played by the local consumption environment in shaping consumption and the opportunities to extend and deliver FT provision. This study sought to understand how such networks operate in terms of the marketing practices and processes that drive them, what they represent in terms of a distinctive form of retailing geography, and the roles played by key stakeholders within them. As such this research aims to complement and build on those studies that focus on either the behaviour of individual consumers, or the operation of global FT supply chains. Significantly the paper unpacks and conceptualises how novel types of places and spaces have become effective components in driving up local ethical consumption, while also generating synergies and tensions across different types of local places and stakeholders.

### **3. The empirical study**

Over four years, FTTs were explored by capturing qualitative data from the social situations, views, motives, interactions, interpretations and everyday actions of ‘key insiders’ (Blaikie, 2000), the activists involved in establishing and running FTT steering groups. The core elements of qualitative enquiry included: Ethnographic involvement over three years within one FTT and membership of its Steering Group; Semi-structured interviews with 29 FTT group participants covering eleven different towns (Bridgnorth, Cardiff, Carmarthen, Garstang, Hereford, Keswick, Merthyr Tydfil, Millom, Oundle, Swansea and Worcester); and three days spent with a founder of the

FTT movement, including discussions, interviews and a narrated tour of Garstang exploring its emergence as the first FTT.

The qualitative data captured, represented by interview transcripts, researcher journals and other documents, was analysed via immediate line-by-line coding (by hand), then focussed coding to condense and thematise the data. Further details about all aspects of the methodology and the coding regimes applied can be found in a dedicated methodology paper (Samuel and Peattie 2016).

The findings demonstrate the complex interplay of people, places and practices that contribute to a FTT's creation and operation as both a retail geography and an important component of the ethical complex of FT provision and consumption.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 FTT's two stage development**

Although Alexander and Nicholls (2006) characterise FTTs as a third place-based phase in FT's development that supersedes the second mainstreaming phase, our findings revealed two stages within the development of FTTs with different relationships to mainstreaming. The FTTs studied had initially seen their work as supporting the conventional mainstreaming process, with the emphasis placed on auditing and expanding the availability of FT products within local retailing outlets (incorporating both national chains and independents):

*What I think Fairtrade Towns suddenly did was bought it to the masses, and made it a peoples' movement .... the Fairtrade Town movement has always been, not about promoting Fairtrade as an alternative, but about the mainstreaming of Fairtrade (Chairman of FTT, Garstang)*

However, with the success of the mainstreaming of FT and as its adoption by ‘conventional’ brands and retailers has progressed, the relevance of FTTs conducting availability audits and targeting conventional retailers receded:

*Goal 2 for example, is totally defunct now, when you have Cadbury’s Dairy Milk in every petrol station or whatever, you know it doesn’t mean anything anymore. So we have to completely revise what Fairtrade towns mean now and take it to the next step (Chairman of FTT, Garstang).*

This led to a second phase of FTT activities and a switch of emphasis towards organisations and places less closely associated with food and drink retailing. Whilst the mainstreaming within the first stage of FTT’s evolution involved extending FT from Low and Davenport’s (2007) notion of ‘the alternative high street’ into actual high streets, the second stage took FT beyond the conventional high street into a range of new types of container space.

#### **4.2 FTTs and the pluralities of place**

Unlike the vertical ‘single strand’ studies that typify retail geography research and ethical trade studies (Neilson and Pritchard, 2010), this study revealed FTTs to evolve into locally focused networks interconnecting very different types of place and space through which FT products could be promoted and retailed. Many of the contributing types of container space have been flagged up as potential retail places within FTTs, but not in a way that integrates them as a ‘tissue of sites’ (Jackson and Thrift, 1995) for retail and consumption. Conventional channels such as retailers and hospitality providers were complemented by more unconventional channels including places of worship, which have played a pivotal and multifunctional role in the development of



FT (Cloke et al., 2011; Doran and Natale, 2011), and places of education in which the curriculum often provides a route into consider FT and its role in sustainability, accompanied by opportunities to sell FT products to children and include FT within school events (Pykett et al., 2010).

A combination of the third FTT accreditation criteria, requiring FT adoption amongst local employers and community organisations, and the emphasis of the second stage of FTT development and its focus beyond the high street, led FTT activists to recruit dentists, post offices, hairdressers, tourist information offices and solicitors (amongst others) to pledge to support 'their' FTT by using FT products on their premises in whatever capacity they could. Activists would also volunteer to give talks on FT to a range of local clubs and organisations to promote FT and the adoption of FT refreshments throughout their community. These efforts to interconnect and extend the places involved in providing and promoting FT products were observed to generate a mixture of synergies, tensions and novel arrangements.

An example of synergies comes from the relationships between places of worship (within this study limited to Christian churches) and other places of FT provision. FT churches mandate FT products (including refreshments and even communion wine) as the default choice for their everyday activities including official business or socialising within their grounds. This study encountered frequent religious endorsement of FT's development agenda with church leaders using their religious platform to promote its consumption:

*I quite often preach on Fairtrade as an ethical issue as a response to other gospel readings and a call for social justice .... I was trying to get the congregation to think about their own behaviour as consumers and how they might be able to help producers in developing countries who themselves may be struggling to feed their families. (University Chaplin, Carmarthen).*

Churches also played a practical role in distributing FT products. However, this was primarily viewed as a sampling and marketing communications exercise, which introduced individuals to FT products. Participants indicated a belief that FT products sold within places of worship had a symbolic value beyond generating sales revenue:

*As a church organisation, we are not actually encouraging people to buy anything in our church, we encourage people to go out to the shops and buy it because by doing that you increase the availability of Fairtrade products for everybody. (Trade Craft Rep, Swansea).*

This has several implications. It supports Nicholls (2002), and Low and Davenport (2006) who suggest that 'traditional' channels of FT distribution (including churches) are more likely to result in FT's developmental message being appreciated. It represents a marginal retail space that is not acting as an alternative to the conventional, as is the case with second-hand outlets, charity shops and car boot fairs (Goodman and Bryant, 2014), but as a complement to them. Finally, it also reflects FTT churches functionally linking Golding's (2009) competing conceptualisations of pragmatic and ideological FT marketing: ideologically promoting FT products as an ethical purchase, whilst seeking to connect people to mainstream retail outlets that are pragmatically perceived to have a greater ability to make a significant difference.

An example of tensions being generated through such interconnections also comes from the involvement of churches in promoting FT, where in multiple churches there was evidence of 'pushback' against a perceived over-commercialized promotion of FT. Participants, when probed about any problems they encountered when recruiting FT churches, expressed a disappointment in certain leaders who opposed the use of places of worship to, as one Church Elder had framed it, '*blatantly promote specific*

*businesses and brands.*' Another set of recurring tensions reflected activists' discomfort with the idea of effectively working for free to promote major global brands that had adopted FT as part of mainstreaming:

*Starbucks has had one line of coffee which is Fairtrade and they have made a lot of advertising about it, so you go into the shop and you think it's all Fairtrade but it isn't and I do think that is very cheeky. And I thought all of Cadbury's was going to go Fairtrade, if it's just going to go for one product, and the rest is going to be...I think that is completely missing the point and I don't really want to support that. (Social Enterprise Manager, Cardiff).*

*All of that Starbucks stuff and the Cadbury's stuff has absolutely nothing to do with us at the grass roots level, nothing whatsoever. (NGO Worker, Keswick).*

A third area for tensions encountered was a perceived clash between the global focus of FT and support for the local:

*Sometimes people like farmers and certain councillors will sort of say: 'you're not doing anything for local produce are you?' (Chair of FTT, Garstang)*

This perceived clash between a sense of loyalty to the container space of the local economy and the ethical spatiality of globalisation represented by FT was observed by Lyon (2014) in American FTTs where the process of building custom for FT supply chains was seen as being in competition with support for local farmers and produce. Amongst the UK FTTs studied here, there were attempts to pre-empt or resolve such tensions by stressing international solidarity amongst farmers and linking both support for FT and support for local produce as part of a wider pro-sustainability agenda:

*Fairtrade is something that we think about in terms of international development, but of course our local farmers are not getting fair prices from the supermarkets. So ... we wanted to try to promote fairness with our local farmers as well, by showing that one does not exclude the other, that all farmers deserve a fair deal (NGO Volunteer, Bridgnorth).*

There were also examples of FTTs opening up novel places and types of space to act as vehicles for the promotion and consumption of FT. One example was the recruitment of libraries:

*Another area I've gone into recently is libraries and some others have gone into libraries as well and that is another way to raise profile with talks and stalls... To actually be allowed to sell in a library seemed quite a change in philosophy really. (Teacher, Swansea).*

A further example came from an activist identifying, within a school that was already supporting FT, a space to develop its support further and more consistently:

*I went to \*\*\*\*\* High School, I used to go there every year, and talk to the children about Fairtrade, and you say ok that's great, fantastic, and then you go to the staff room and you're offered a cup of Nescafe, and I said "Well this is hypocritical, you've got to change that!" (Chairman of FTT, Garstang).*

There were also many examples of activists using local events to further promote FT. FTT accreditation makes no reference to organising events, but doing so, and linking them to social and cultural events throughout the year was the norm in the towns studied. This was particularly the case during FT Fortnight, which Wheeler (2012 b) highlights as a key opportunity for activists to mobilise FT consumers. Such events were symbolically recognised for their ability to further urbanise FT (Malpass et al. 2007) by transforming existing places such as town halls, cinemas, theatres, pubs, school halls, village greens, town squares, community centres, parks and other open spaces into places that are defined temporarily through the promotion and consumption of FT products:

*We had a drumming event once and we got a lot of young people to come. They came for the drumming, not for the Fairtrade, but we sell Fairtrade beverages and snacks, and it's about just trying to get the message over. I think, in that sense they can get the message and not in a preachy way, but in a 'this is part of our community too' sort of way. (Community Representative, Oundle).*

Such events demonstrate FTTs' ability to extend Low and Davenport's (2006) 'alternative high street' and connect everyday places not normally associated with sales and consumption to FT marketing and 'actively construct and change spaces and places which, in turn, recursively affect consumption practice' (Goodman et al., 2010: 13).

#### **4.3 Representing the local: FTTs and local councils**

Since accreditation requires formal local council support and participation, FTTs rely on councils for legitimacy in their role as an organisation acting across, and representing, their locality. As Barnett et al. (2011: 195) note: '*(by) recruiting the local authority actors, the fair trade movement embeds fair trade into place identity and placed systems of governance over local provisioning*'. There was also a reciprocal dimension to the process of legitimization, with FTT activists keen to leverage perceived popular support for FT to promote it as part of the democratic mandate for local government:

*"I mean, if a council believes it represents its town on behalf of serving the people, if the people support the Fairtrade Town initiative and it shows, then the council should respond to the will of the people. That happens in some*

*places and again it doesn't happen everywhere.” (Chairman of FTT, Garstang)*

In practice the FTT involvement of councils, beyond their basic container space role in making council premises a place of consumption serving FT refreshments at all official meetings, varied widely. Across the eleven towns researched, council involvement, as described by activists, ran from ‘*lip service*’ to ‘*virtually taking over*’, with stronger support being seen as highly beneficial:

*“I think a lot of this stems from the city council. If you’ve got them on your side and they’re enthusiastic, it makes a tremendous difference.” (Cafod Volunteer, Worcester)*

An important aspect of local council support was that it potentially opened up key council-controlled places and spaces for the FTT campaigns to use including town halls and other council-owned public meeting places (usually at no cost) to hold community events such as conferences and producer tours promoting FT, and providing opportunities to sell FT goods at farmers’ markets and other council-controlled sites and local events at a reduced cost. The most supportive councils went beyond this relatively passive gatekeeper role to provide active and practical support for the activists’ efforts, including marketing support in developing and forwarding press releases, producing and distributing advertising copy, producing directories of local FT suppliers, and creating specific display units.

A final benefit from close integration with the local council was the potential to utilise local landscapes/townscapes to signal a place’s FTT status. This status was

frequently linked to physical changes to local artefacts including flower beds, poster and banner displays, and the flying of Fairtrade flags. This extends the role of physical space within a town from a consumption space to a communications medium promoting FT. Some towns 'proudly' presented their FT status on road signs greeting travellers at their entrances, which are usually limited to identifying the town and (in some cases) communicating some element of history and (place brand) identity:

*I think that it brings a little sense of pride to some people, we have been lucky enough to persuade our town council to put a big Fairtrade Town sign at every entrance to every road into the town. There are six roads into the town, and we got a massive sign saying: 'First Fairtrade Town in Shropshire', which is quite an accolade really. (NGO Worker, Bridgnorth).*

Participants viewed such displays of the FT logo in their town's landscapes and signs as an important visual reminder of the town's FT commitments, acting as a visual cue to prompt residents and reinforce FT consumption as a local social norm helping to combat neutralisation (Chatzidakis et al., 2007) at both individual and institutional levels through a sense of place belonging (Barnett et al., 2011).

#### **4.4 FTT as alternative place-based marketing**

The efforts of FTT activists help to secure access to physical locations in which retailing and consumption activities occur, contribute to a sense of place (as a part of the life and identity of a town, church, school or workplace) and help forge relationships across space (through education, preaching, policy making or consumption that connects FT purchasing with benefits for distant producer communities). As a form of place-based marketing (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006), FTTs can be viewed as place

of origin marketing, since FTT products are marketed on the basis of the virtues of the place from which the products originate. This integrates both of Amin's (2002, 2004) place-based lenses to create a binocular vision in which the retailing and consumption activities within the 'container spaces' of a FTT connects through the 'spatiality of globalisation' to the development agenda and welfare of producer communities. This represents place of origin marketing in which the perceived attributes of a product linked to the place of production relate to the prevailing socio-economic conditions rather than the terroir.

FTTs also reflect a form of destination marketing in that the status of FTT becomes part of the broader marketing of the town as a place. Adding empirical depth to the suggestion of Malpass et al. (2007: 637) that FTT campaigns rely on '*particular devices and discursive strategies through which actors can "speak for the city"*' the FTT movement's achievements in connecting FT consumption to the organisations and groups specific to a given town was often highlighted, and FTT status was promoted to visitors in town guides, websites and via the physical townscape. This connectivity to place is driven by FTT supporters who, by contextualising their understanding of the social makeup of their town, are able to identify and connect FT consumption with the individuals, organisations and places that socially construct its meaning. For example, Keswick was singled out as successful because FT has been integrated into key activities that construct its identity via tourism:

*Well, because this is a tourist town, we certainly wanted to work with the tourism sector, and we have worked with the tourism sector. My hope would be ...that every guest house and hotel in Keswick offered Fairtrade tea and coffee, and every café and restaurant and coffee shop and tea shop all offered it. So that is an aspiration because it does*



*open opportunities to switch Keswick and our tourists on to Fairtrade.*

*(NGO Worker, Keswick).*

This strategy combines the community embeddedness of localism with an appeal to care at a distance reflecting Amin's (2002) spatiality of globalisation. However, as FTTs evolve and become more prevalent, there is a risk that FT status no longer adds to the distinctiveness of town identity in the way that it did for the earlier pioneers of the movement (several of which were amongst the study towns).

The more novel place-based component to FTTs as a marketing initiative is that they reflect 'place of consumption marketing'. As Lyon (2014: 149) notes:

*Fair Trade Towns advocacy moves beyond the primary goal of most third-party certification systems, which is to reconnect commodities, their producers, and their locations of origin in the minds of consumers, by encouraging consumers to think critically about the communities where they themselves live.*

FTTs, as a place-based retailing initiative, have the potential to supplement conventional ethical appeals to support FT and communities in distant lands, with an appeal based on local identity, belonging and social solidarity, and a shared connection to one's town as a place (Creswell, 2004). The promotion of FT across all the pluralities of place was intended to promote FT consumption as a social norm within a particular town, and to connect FT to a range of aspects of the town's heritage, calendar of events, visual identity and governance. By 'localising' the FT appeal it could offer an approach to placating those who perceive conflicts between FT's support of the distant other and support for local economies (Lyon, 2012).

#### **4.5 FTT marketing and retailing interactions**

As well as revealing insights into the retail places involved in FTTs and the marketing processes they reflect, this research into FTTs revealed three interesting and novel aspects of the marketing and retailing interactions and the practices employed by the activists within them:

Firstly, activists would utilise their personal space as somewhere with the potential to facilitate conversations and actions to promote the FT message to family, friends and workmates. Although such individual efforts may seem to reflect conventional ethical consumer behaviour, FTT supporters deliberately used connections within social units to create opportunities to promote FT within 'their place'. They sought to introduce the benefits of FT consumption (as a quality consumer product and a tool for international development) into both their important and banal day-to-day conversations and activities with family, friends and associates:

*I went out for dinner last night and talked about Fairtrade chocolate and Fairtrade coffee, and immediately I got a reaction and I knew it would prompt a reaction. (Soroptimist, Garstang).*

More symbolic behaviours were adopted to start conversations or reinforce an individual's identity as a FT supporter, including the visual display of FT products during consumption in the workplace or through the demonstration of their packaging in the home. Such symbolic displays are in line with Wright's (2004) notion of the fetishized meaning of FT in action, which transform participants' social and symbolic interactions into marketing opportunities that turn personal space into places where FT promotion occurs.

Secondly, the activists behind FTTs employ a form of 'Pro-Am' marketing. FTTs operate as place-based marketing networks that encompass conventional

commercial supply chains together with places not generally recognised for their retailing potential. As such the FTT movement functions, to appropriate a term more usually associated with golf, as a form of 'pro-am' marketing, in which the marketing resources and capabilities of the commercial players (of products, brands, FT accredited labels, supplier relationships and channels) are combined with, and complemented by, the informal marketing resources and capabilities of other stakeholders (including social capital, institutions, physical places and alternative channels). While the professional may provide the technical expertise and competence, the amateur provides the understanding of local topography and conditions to allow them to thrive as a team. This blending of volunteer and professional efforts is commonplace within charities and social enterprises, but highly unusual in a commercial marketing context. As such, FTT supporters take on a role that is equivalent to Gummesson's (1991) 'part time marketer' but, unusually, operating from outside, rather than inside, the conventional commercial value chain.

In promoting FT through local places ranging from their own homes to local businesses and institutions, FTT supporters go beyond concepts of consumer citizenship or market mavenship normally associated with FT consumption (Barnett et al. 2011; Low and Davenport, 2007; Wheeler, 2012 a) to embody a new form of 'citizen marketer'. As such they engage in a style of brand co-creation that has little commonality with conventional notions that focus on the end consumer/brand manager interface and high involvement products like cars, computers or fashion (Payne et al. 2009). Co-creation research focuses on the 'ends' of the value chain, either relating to product issues (particularly innovation) or consumption processes to which the end consumer contributes. What FTTs reveal is a potential for co-creation in the development and operation of elements of the retail and distribution systems that

connect producers and consumers, and in developing a specific-to-place FTT brand (Samuel, Peattie and Doherty 2017).

Thirdly, FTTs embody the 'crystallization' of global commodity chains in connecting the places of production (that form the basis of the place of origin marketing aspect of FTT), with the places of consumption that FTTs represent. FTTs allow more concrete and personal connections to be forged between specific producer and consumer communities, particularly through representatives meeting at FTT events:

*At Fairtrade Fortnight we hosted a spice farmer from Sri Lanka, we had quite a large programme of events for him, which included a public reception with the mayor, and bits of presentations, and a talk, and he went to the schools and he went to Wolverhampton University and Harper Adams College. He was received very well. We also had a presence on the high street, in the street market all day, on the Saturday. So he was able to talk to the local community there and in the coffee shop. (Volunteer, Bridgnorth).*

This takes FT beyond conventional notions of representing a window through which consumers can view and understand the conditions endured by producers (Goodman, 2004), to become a bridge through which the two can physically meet and become connected. Such connections go far beyond the efforts of 'imagineered' sales tags (Goodman and Bryant, 2014) or packaging photographs of smiling farmers (Barnett et al., 2007) to connect place of purchase to place of development within conventional ethical retailing. Although the direct connections between producers and consumers via such events may seem limited, their coverage in local media and via local schools provides the interlinking of producers, consumers, activists and the media in a way that Friedberg (2004) sees as potentially powerful in driving forward ethical consumption.

By connecting the two ends of the commodity chain in order to create a 'closed loop' of understanding, FTTs go further than conventional FT activity in trying to close the geographical and informational spaces between producers and consumers (Nicholls and Opal, 2005) opened up by processes of industrialization and globalization. The emphasis of FTTs on forging connections (in terms of both meaning and relationships) between specific consumer communities and producer communities acts to transform the nature and understanding of global commodity supply chains. Instead of just existing as abstract vertical economic systems, supply chains become rooted in actual locations and their sense of place.

## **5. Discussion and conclusions.**

This study explores the development of FTTs as a widespread contemporary retailing and marketing phenomenon. It complements existing research into the cultural meaning of consumption that occurs in our homes and other places, and the research into the political and power geographies of ethical commodity chains, by focussing on the role of FTTs, and the activists constructing them, acting as an interface between individual and organizational consumption and commodity chains. Commodity chain perspectives tend to look 'back up' the supply chain, without considering the specifics of the place of consumption. Ethical consumption research in social geography tends to focus more on the 'social' (and issues of culture, meaning, citizenship, ethics and care) rather than on the 'geography' in terms of specific places and their nature, identity and branding. This research considers FTTs as retail geographies that are shaped by local places and people, yet aim to express ethics and care at a global scale in their practices.

Figure 1. seeks to summarise the role played by FTTs and revealed by this research, as a point of intersection between the mainstreaming processes of the global FT movement and what we have distinctively labelled local ‘sidestreaming’ processes. These involve encouraging a plurality of local place types to act as container spaces to extend the availability and consumption of FT products, and also to provide opportunities to attach meaning (spiritual, commercial, educational and policy-relevant) to FT consumption and production. This involves enrolling a range of places and organizations more conventionally conceived of as part of the commercial marketing environment (such as schools, churches, local councils and libraries) as active participants in the FT retailing system, through activists who (as earlier demonstrated by Wheeler, 2012 a) utilize their social networks and influence to build FT supporting relationships amongst them. These places, although very different, are woven together by the activists in ways that establish interactions between the different layers in the ‘tissue of places’ that constitute FTT retailing and marketing, for example FT lessons from the classroom influencing parents’ in-store choices and at-home behaviours (Pykett et al., 2010).

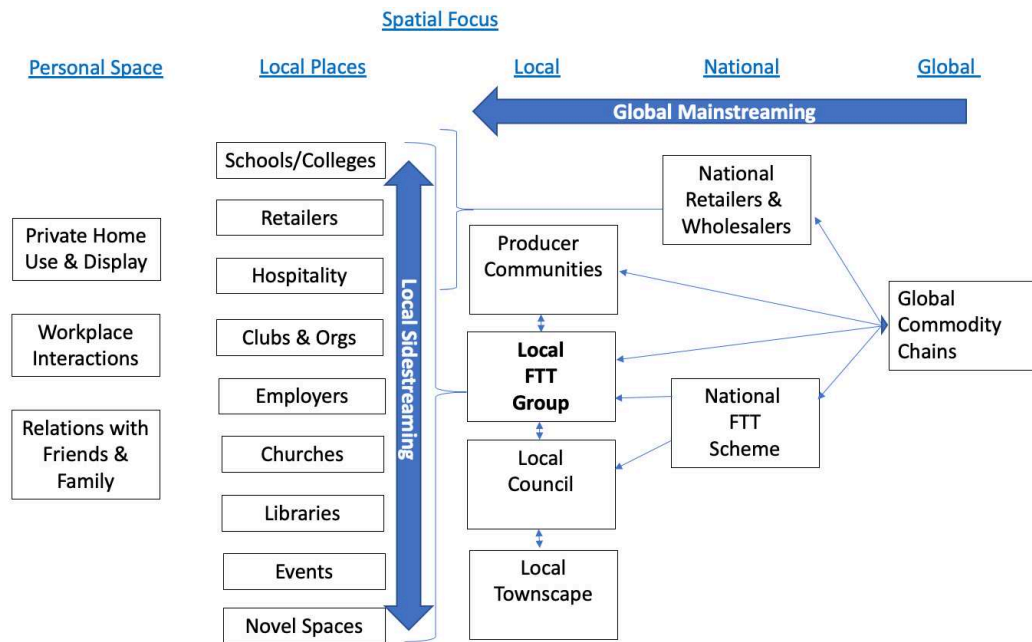


Figure 1: Fairtrade Sidestreaming

Although Nichols and Opal (2005) view the localisation dimensions that FTTs encompass as part of the third stage in the evolution of FT more broadly, one can argue that rather than simply following the mainstreaming phase that preceded it, the development of FTTs partly represent a compensatory reaction to it. Mainstreaming took FT products and marketing towards the conventional retailers and brands. In doing so it lost some of its 'specialness' and the commercial legitimacy gained arguably risked the movement's social legitimacy by diluting FT's message and values (Golding, 2009; Low and Davenport, 2005). The emphasis of FTTs on FT's developmental message, on forging connections with producer communities and linking to the local community's sense of place reflects a quest for legitimacy based on authenticity. It also arguably 'replaces' FT marketing at a time when research is increasingly preoccupied with the online and 'placeless'. Agnew (2011) identifies modern shopping mall style retail locations, that mainstreaming and the first phase of FTT's development actively pushed FT products into, as part of a growing trend towards 'placelessness'. The second stage of

FTT development is more focused on weaving FT into a range of places on the basis of their distinctive role in local life, rather than as nodes in national or global distribution systems. As such FTTs are revealed as able to contribute to FT consumption in ways that encompass the outlets of conventional national and international retailers, the smaller, more marginal spaces of alternative retailing, and the full range of everyday provisioning sites in between.

From a marketing practices perspective, FTTs have evolved through distinct developmental stages. The initial stage emphasizing a growth in local ethical consumption, commercial legitimacy and retail availability, was followed by a stage with an emphasis on distribution beyond normal retail channels, social legitimacy and 're-placing' FT within towns and their sense of identity. Social solidarity, in both an upstream international and a downstream local context, was used as a basis to motivate consumers, retailers and other organisations to support FT marketing and consumption reflecting the oft-quoted sustainability mantra of 'think globally, act locally'. For FTTs this involved global supply chains as abstract economic systems being crystalized to present FTT citizens with a more concrete and human understanding of certain aspects of their consumption, in which the ends of the supply chains are periodically brought together to bridge and reduce the perceived space between producers and consumers. Amin (2002) notes, in reviewing how spatialities of globalization are theorised, that discussions often present the local and the global as separate and oppositional. FTTs, and their efforts to engage individual consumers and local institutions in FT consumption, demonstrate the extent to which global ethics and responsibility are embedded and promoted within the marketing practices of even highly localised container spaces.



The geographies of consumption literature tends to portray the consumer as either a ‘dupe’ or ‘sovereign’ able to exert considerable economic pressure through their spending choices, a power that can potentially be harnessed for political and ethical progress (Hartwick 2000). The revealed role of activists here, as co-creative marketers working to extend local consumption of FT products goes beyond existing understandings of the citizen-consumer to establish a role of FTT supporters as (part-time) citizen marketers who work to co-create connections between producers and consumers. Studying FTTs reveals the potential for politically and ethically motivated citizens to influence their communities, and the global provisioning systems that converge within them, through actions other than purchasing. Motivated citizen-consumers can support FT through a range of actions that help to reshape their local retail economies, from persuasive conversations with friends, families and retailers, to integrating support for FT into roles they occupy within the local community, and even ultimately working as pro-am marketers interfacing with a range of commercial and community organisations.

Writers like Hartwick (2000) and Evans et al. (2017) stress the need to mobilize consumers in order to integrate geographies of responsibility with geographies of consumption. What is often lacking within this debate are details of the mechanisms that can mobilize consumers beyond ethical appeals to redirect their spending. Such mechanisms may be important to understand the retailing and consumption implications of other emerging ethical place-based phenomena such as the Transition Towns Movement or Social Enterprise Places. FTTs represent a means through which individuals as consumers, as citizens and as activists can be mobilized to patronise, promote and develop more ethical provisioning systems that can transform the retail

economies where they live, and the production economies that provide the livelihoods for distant others.

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