

FTIS 2026 – University of Cologne, Germany

Pre-organized Panel by:

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and

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Thematic Stream: Dynamics in the Global South

Title: When the Map Moves: The Changing Dynamics of Fair Trade between North and South

Short Description:

This panel examines how contemporary global dynamics increasingly challenge North-South categories that have long framed Fair Trade amid climate, market, and ethical change – inviting reflection on what new maps of fairness, interdependence, and global trade can inform research and practice today.

Abstract: Fair Trade historical roots lie in a vision for a fairer model of global trade that would redress structural imbalances between North and South. From its origins, it was built from a stable premise: retailers and ethical consumers in the North, and producing communities in the South. Yet, these problematic categories are increasingly in motion. The boundaries between North and South are unsettling as actors in the South move beyond the role of producers taking on processing, product development, and branding, while the North now includes producers facing vulnerability linked to climate change, economic precarity, and volatile markets. At the same time, production and trade patterns are shifting. These developments reveal that the geographic categories of Fair Trade have never been fixed—shaped by changing configurations of power, vulnerability, and expertise. We invite contributions that examine how these changing dynamics challenge the architectures of Fair Trade and the ways they are conceptualised by scholars. How do emerging forms of production, trade, and governance compel a remapping of Fair Trade's global order? What new alliances, dependencies, and imaginaries of so-called 'fairness' arise in this transformed landscape? What old/new concepts assist with thinking about these changes? We invite panelists from diverse disciplinary backgrounds interested in challenging Fair Trade's analytical categories. We welcome contributions that illuminate how North and South are constructed, deployed, and contested within Fair Trade's changing landscape, and which point toward new frameworks for understanding fairness, interdependence, and global trade in an era when old maps no longer match the terrain. Keywords: North-South relations; transnational transformations; spatial and relational dynamics; climate and market change; ethics and responsibility.

Against the Voiceless Producer: Rethinking Participation in Fair Trade

Critical Fair Trade scholarship has long highlighted the limitations of Fair Trade in addressing the unequal relations (see e.g. Arnould et al., 2009; Bacon et al., 2008; Le Mare, 2008) persisting between the fixated categories of a “consuming North” and a “producing South” (Naylor, 2014). Scholars have pointed to asymmetries embedded *within* the movement itself, including divergences between producers’ own accounts of their involvement and their romanticised, marketised representations for consumers (Dolan, 2005, 2008; Lyon, 2011; Wilson, 2010), structural constraints on women’s involvement (Ange et al., 2019; Reynolds, 2021), unequal power dynamics in defining Fair Trade practices and meanings (Herman, 2019a, 2019b), and mismatches between the movement’s universal moral discourse and producers’ moral experiences (McEwan et al., 2017). Taken together, this body of literature has called for the need to better foreground producers’ “voices” within the system (Bennett, 2016; Besky, 2010; Touri, 2020).

In this contribution, however, I contend that the persistent framing of Global South actors as lacking voice or empowerment paradoxically obscures the ways in which they have shaped, and continue to shape, the Fair Trade movement. Without dismissing the enduring inequalities that structure Fair Trade, I suggest that this is primarily a conceptual and analytical problem: dominant frameworks tend to privilege, and thus render visible, particular forms of participation – most notably market participation – while obscuring other social and economic engagements through which Global South actors contribute to Fair Trade’s development.

Drawing from Naylor’s work (2018, 2019) and employing a diverse economies framework (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008), this contribution re-reads existing Fair Trade scholarship to foreground evidence that unsettles the narrative of the voiceless producer. Without introducing new empirical material, it re-packages existing insights from the literature to make Southern producers’ contributions more visible.

Rather than offering a comprehensive account, this contribution seeks to open a conversation about how analytical frameworks shape what becomes visible in North-South relations, and how alternative frameworks might offer opportunities to foreground different forms of participation, agency, and voice, in an attempt to “decolonise language, epistemologies, and methodologies” within Fair Trade (Tallontire et al., 2024, p. 7).

Keywords: Fair Trade; participation; Global South agency; North-South relations; analytical framing; diverse economies

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Reconfiguring the mental maps of fair trade activism: From the rise of the 'Third World' to the emergence of a decolonial movement

Proposal to the panel “When the Map Shifts”

Planned attendance: In person

The mental maps of the fair trade movement have considerably shifted since the movement first emerged in the 1950s. The current shift from South-North relations to a more localized frame (South-South, North-North and South-North) marks the transformation of the movement from a postcolonial to a decolonial one. To understand how such shifts of mental maps evolve and how they relate to earlier frames, this paper examines two earlier transformations of the mental maps in the history of the fair trade movement. First, it discusses how the focus from fair trade for 'poor countries' was superseded by the 'Third World' during the 1950s and 1960s. Second, the paper analyzes how an emphasis on localized producer groups and countries combined with the notion of a 'global South', displacing the notion of a 'Third World' during the 1980s and 1990s. An analysis of these crucial changes in the way fair trade activism was envisioned enables a better understanding of our current moment by drawing attention to the material conditions which enable such shifts and how earlier frames of reference have informed their successors.

Keywords: Fair trade movement, mental maps, fair trade history, Third World, postcolonial globalization

Prof. dr. Peter van Dam is professor of Dutch History at the University of Amsterdam. His book on the transnational history of the fair trade movement, *Fair Trade: Humanitarianism in the Age of Postcolonial Globalization* appeared with Cambridge University Press in 2025. For a full list of publications, see <https://www.uva.nl/en/profile/d/a/p.h.vandam/p.h.vandam.html#Publications>

Title: Fair Trade Histories: Critical Reflections on Organisational Memory and Movement Making

Thematic Stream: (E) Dynamics among Fair Trade Institutions, Consumers & Markets

Author: Matthew Anderson, University of Portsmouth

Participation: In person

Keywords: Fair Trade History, Organisational Memory, Movement Narratives, Memory Politics.

This paper examines how organisational memory has shaped the development and identity of the Fair Trade movement, and how these memories continue to influence its current priorities and imagined futures. Dominant accounts of Fair Trade often trace a familiar path from early campaigning to certification and mainstream uptake. Yet such narratives can flatten the diverse and sometimes conflicting histories that inform the movement's transnational trajectory (van Dam, 2025). Drawing on archival material and existing scholarship, the paper argues that organisational memory operates not simply as a record of past events but as a mechanism through which particular interpretations of fairness, sustainability, and market engagement gain authority (Foroughi et al., 2020).

The paper explores three connected areas. First, we consider how certain histories are elevated within organisational storytelling, while others are downplayed or omitted (Decker, 2025). These patterns of remembering and forgetting shape governance structures and influence how the movement defines justice (Bennett, 2017). Second, we examine how shared memories and origin stories function within movementbuilding efforts (Foroughi, 2020). Key campaigns, moments of crisis, and celebrated turning points become resources for coalition formation and organisational legitimacy, helping determine which actors and strategies are treated as central or peripheral (Coraiola et al., 2023). Finally, we reflect on how revisiting Fair Trade's varied histories might open space for alternative movement directions, particularly in the context of ongoing conversations about decolonisation, climate justice, and the relationship between Fair Trade and other ethical market initiatives (Tallontire et al., 2024).

By offering a critical reflection on organisational memory, the paper contributes to broader discussions about how social movements use the past to understand the present and articulate future ambitions (Berger et al., 2021). We argue that recognising previously neglected or uncomfortable histories may strengthen Fair Trade's capacity to pursue more equitable and sustainable forms of movement making.

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Título: Negociando la autonomía comunitaria en la gobernanza global: Comercio Justo, regímenes de certificación y transformación rural en México.

Eje temático: 4. Dynamics in Political Discourses, Policies, Regulations and the Market.
Power-critical discourses and decoloniality

Autora: Silvia Nuria Jurado Celis

Adscripción: Instituto Politécnico Nacional (México)

Participación presencial

Palabras clave: Comercio Justo. Nuevas ruralidades comunitarias. Pequeños productores. Organización social. Gobernanza multinivel.

Resumen.

El Comercio Justo (CJ) surgió hace más de tres décadas, desarrollándose principalmente en los espacios rurales de América Latina. La organización autónoma de los pueblos originarios ha sido una pieza fundamental para que el CJ se consolide como una de las iniciativas más relevantes en México.

La mayoría de las organizaciones de pequeños productores que comercializan a través del CJ pertenecen a pueblos originarios, cuya dinámica social se ha caracterizado históricamente por prácticas de autonomía comunitaria.

En el siglo XXI las sociedades rurales e indígenas enfrentan retos complejos como la migración, la masificación tecnológica en detrimento de la identidad cultural y el abandono progresivo de las actividades agrícolas, entre otros procesos de transformación social.

El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar los procesos actuales de organización social en los grupos de pequeños productores de CJ en México desde una perspectiva histórica, con el fin de visibilizar las estrategias situadas que implementan y examinar como el CJ coadyuva, se imbrica y es negociado dentro de dichos procesos. Para ello se retoma el concepto de *Nuevas Ruralidades Comunitarias* de Rosas y Fuentes (2013), que permite categorizar y comprender las transformaciones de las organizaciones campesinas en el presente siglo.

El análisis dialoga además con los debates contemporáneos sobre gobernanza multinivel y las asimetrías de poder presentes en los regímenes de certificación internacional. Si bien el CJ representa una alternativa al comercio internacional, sus estructuras normativas y mecanismos de certificación pueden reproducir jerarquías entre actores del Norte y del Sur global. Así, se examina en qué medida las organizaciones de pequeños productores negocian, resignifican o tensionan estos marcos regulatorios desde sus propias prácticas de

autonomía comunitaria, con el fin de aportar elementos para repensar la relación entre el CJ internacional y el campesinado mexicano en el siglo XXI.

Title: Negotiating Community Autonomy within Global Governance: Fair Trade, Certification Regimes and Rural Transformation in Mexico.

Conferencia theme: 4. Dynamics in Political Discourses, Policies, Regulations and the Market.

Power-critical discourses and decoloniality

Author: Silvia Nuria Jurado Celis

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Participation: In person.

Keywords: Fair Trade. New Community Ruralities. Small-scale producers. Social organization. Multi-level governance

Abstract:

Fair Trade (FT) emerged more than three decades ago, developing primarily in rural areas of Latin America. The autonomous organizational traditions of Indigenous peoples have been fundamental in consolidating FT as one of the most significant alternative trade initiatives in Mexico.

Most small-scale producer organizations participating in FT networks belong to Indigenous communities whose social dynamics have historically been characterized by practices of community autonomy.

In the twenty-first century, rural and Indigenous societies face complex challenges, including migration, the expansion of digital technologies that may undermine cultural identity, and the progressive abandonment of agricultural activities, among other processes of social transformation.

This paper analyzes current processes of social organization among small-scale FT producer groups in Mexico from a historical perspective, with the aim of making visible the situated strategies they deploy and examining how FT is embedded in and negotiated within these processes. The study draws on the concept of *New Community Ruralities* (Rosas and Fuentes, 2013), which provides an analytical framework for understanding contemporary transformations of peasant organizations.

The analysis engages with debates on multi-level governance and power asymmetries within international certification regimes. Although FT presents itself as an alternative to conventional trade, its regulatory structures and certification mechanisms may reproduce hierarchies between actors in the Global North and the Global South. The paper therefore examines the extent to which producer organizations negotiate, reinterpret, or contest these regulatory frameworks through their own practices of community autonomy, contributing to a power-critical rethinking of the relationship between international FT governance and the Mexican peasantry in the twenty-first century.