

Producers Involvement – the Next stage of Fair Trade Development. The Case of Poland

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Abstract: **Background:** The idea of this paper is to show how countries from so call so-called Eastern Block could contribute to the development of Fair Trade (FT). Poland, as a leader in political and economical changes in Eastern Europe, as well as being a very fast-developing country, could be considered a good representative for all states belonging to this Block.

Research objectives: The goal of this paper is to assess the market for Fair Trade products in Poland and identify the tools which could speed up its development.

Research design and methods: It is a conceptual paper, based on the literature review and thus secondary data. A literature review is used to determine the contemporary character of FT as well as identify the stages of its development.

Results: It was the case in Poland where in 2018 the wholesale of FT products started its boom. Before, due to some obstacles, which were also identified, the sales had been marginal.

Conclusions: It is suggested that a new stage of FT development is coming, in which its growth is sped up by engaging companies to produce goods which have the FT component.

Keywords: sustainability, Fair Trade, Poland, wholesale sales

JEL Codes: L22, Q56

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1. Introduction

The most cited definition of Fair Trade (FT), which was formulated by FINE (the name comes from founders – four Fair Trade networking organizations – FLO, IFAT, NEWS!, EFTA), specifies that it 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 marginalised producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are actively engaged in supporting producers, raising of awareness and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade” (International Fair Trade Charter, 2018, p. 11).

In a narrow sense, FT means “The buying of products from producers in developing countries on terms that are more favourable than free-market terms, and marketing of those prod-

ucts in developed countries at an *ethical price premium*" (Bird & Hughes, 1997; De Pelsmacker, Janssens & Mielants 2005, p. 51) and basically it is about inequities between the so-called Global North associated with developed countries and Global South where most people are poor.

Fair Trade is not an organization but a movement, which results in developing socially responsible supply chains, which, by definition, means that the beneficiaries are small producers and local communities in the poorest countries in the world. From the macroeconomic point of view, FT tries to become the alternative to conventional trade in a contemporary economy characterized by aggressive competition directed towards cost reduction. As it was noticed by Becchetti and Huybrechts (2008, pp. 733-750) it represents one of the most interesting examples of breakthrough innovation in the functioning of contemporary economic systems. But the development of this innovation depends on other movements in the market and involves the integration of ethical principles in consumer decision-making (Hira & Ferrie, 2006, pp. 107-118).

The contemporary FT market is considered as a "mixed-form market" where different types of players coexist (Becchetti & Huybrechts, 2008, pp. 733–750). They include non-profit organizations, co-operatives and for-profit mainstream companies (including importers and labelling organizations). They represent "a market niche based on the image of solidarity with small producers of the Third World and equity in trade relationship" (Renard, 2003, p. 95). It emerged in the process of historical development and contemporary competition, conflict and partnership among these players thus determining the direction and speed of market dynamism.

The other important element of the FT market is merchandise which could be divided into two main categories, first: foods and beverages and second: fashion, gifts and home products. The first group includes coffee as the flagship product but also tea, bananas and other tropical fruit, dried fruits, cacao, chocolate, spices, rice, wines and so on. In the second group, one can find handicrafts like clothing, jewellery, flowers and others e.g. cotton textiles.

The idea of this paper is to show how countries from the so-called Eastern Block could contribute to the development of Fair Trade. These countries also have their own problems to solve in order to join the group of well-developed economies as they were not involved in colonialism so the issue of helping people from the poor South could not be immediately addressed and has been still a matter for the future. Following this assumption some research from Poland, one of the biggest and most developed countries in the Eastern Bloc, is presented. They show how the weakness of this country becomes a strength in the process of developing the FT market. Nowadays a Fair Trade initiative is important due to its contribution to sustainable development.

2. Literature review

A growing interest in Fair Trade has been related to its contribution to sustainable development (SD) which is expressed in its goals (Redfern & Snedker, 2002, p. 11) and discussed *inter alia* by Strong (1997, pp. 1-10), Śmigielka, Dąbrowska and Radziukiewicz (2015). The main contribution is in offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South, due to the fact that FT defines the terms and rules of cooperation between producers, intermediaries and final buyers (Nicholls, 2002, p. 7). But it should be noticed that this main relationship as well as the others began to be revealed only in the course of the development of both concepts (Low & Davenport, 2005, pp. 148–149). In the early nineties, the last century when sustainable development was mostly associated with

protecting the environment the relationship was considered as rather weak because promoting environmentally sustainable production was more important than helping people. It has changed along with the growing popularity of the UN definition of sustainable development which set up its goal more broadly as "meeting current needs without compromising future generation's needs" (Brundtland, 1987) and including those related to the fight against poverty and social inequalities.

Fair Trade values stand alongside 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at the UN Summit. The Fair Trade idea can be found especially in Goal 2: *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*; Goal 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*; Goal 8: *Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all*; Goal 12: *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns* and Goal 17: *Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development* (UN, 2022). As a consequence nowadays it is stressed that FT contributes to the sustainable development of less developed countries by offering producers and workers better prices with stable market links. On the other hand, FT's purpose has been enriched with environmental objectives. It involves the development of social and environmental projects which is part of the reason why consumers pay premium prices. So it also supports the other goals of SD as environmental protection, health care or education.

Fair-traded products offer consumers the added benefit of contributing to sustainability. The price that consumers pay for FT product includes the so-called Fair Trade Premium (Community Development or Social Premium) which is invested in building community infrastructure: schools, health clinics, provision of educational scholarships, improvements in water treatment systems, conversion to organic production techniques (Dragusanu, Giovannucci, & Nunn, 2014, p. 220). FT as a supply chain takes care of people, the planet and, at the same time, is profitable in fulfilling three main conditions for sustainability, coined by J. Elkington (Elkington, 1997) and discussed, *inter alia* by Slaper and Hall (2011), Seretny and Seretny (2012).

Referring to FT as the corporate social responsible supply chain at the beginning of which there is sustainable production, characterized by using sustainable, natural and recycled material as well as an environmentally responsible process (MOSAIC, 2021). Then there are trading companies which contribute to sustainable development through their attitudes and consequences or a combination of these. In the end, there is the ethical consumer, with a feeling of responsibility for a society which expresses such feelings by the means of purchasing behaviour (De Pelsmacker, Janssens, & Mielants, 2005).

The history of Fair Trade is the history of institutionalization and mainstreaming of its product in which four waves could be identified (Nicholls & Opal, 2005; Śmigielka 2018a). The first one is related to the work of relief and charity organisations, which became active after World War II (Bowen, 2001; Stefańska & Nestorowicz, 2015; Tallontire, 2000, p. 167). They were involved in importing and selling goods produced in Global South countries but also in Eastern Europe. In Europe, a nongovernmental British organization started to sell goods from less developed countries in its own stores and via catalogues. The idea was not to include profit-oriented retailers and wholesalers which shortened the distribution channels and allowed distributors' margins to be passed to the producers. It was worth noticing that the relationships in distribution channels were based on trust but the scale of the market was small.

The next wave of FT development started with the setting up of the first Alternative Trade Organization (ATO) what happened in 1965 in the UK. It was followed by other organizations,

which tried to marry social development with trading activities like Perketi in Jakarta (1975) or Traidcraft in the UK (1979) (Redfern & Snedker, 2002, p. 5). ATO aimed at diminishing the role of the exploitative middleman in trading transactions. The supply chain developed by them involved small farmers and cooperatives, which were responsible for the production process, producer groups controlled by ATOs and finally shops with exclusively fair trade assortment only (Worldshops) or catalogue selling.

The incorporation of retail business into the supply chain in the eighties last century initiated the third wave of FT development considered by some scholars e.g. Moore (2004), Hira and Ferrie (2006), as one of the most important. At that time agricultural product like coffee and tea began to be added to the assortment. It created a so-called mainstream channel of supply which included producers' groups which had to be certificated by Fairtrade Labelling Organization International – FLO (nowadays Fairtrade International), middlemen and finally goods being offered to consumers in hypermarkets, supermarkets and other conventional retailers. As a starting point of this wave, the launch of the first certification label Max Havelaar in 1988 was accepted (Mohan, 2009). This phase of FT's development is also characterised by the progressive institutionalization of this movement.

The new mainstream channel on the one hand caused a significant increase in sales of FT products. On the other hand, it was criticised for losing the original character and values of the movement (Mohan, 2009; Low & Davenport, 2005). In spite of criticism, the mainstream market has been growing because it is beneficial for small producers because increases their sales at fair prices (Reed, 2009).

The next stage of FT development could further spread this idea due to the fact that countries of the Global North will be considered as recipients of it. It involves so-called domestic FT which tries to address fair trade principles (fair price, fair labour conditions, direct trade, democratic and transparent organizations, community development and environmental sustainability) also in well-developed countries which raises the question of consumer willingness to pay for these ethical attributes (Redfern & Snedker, 2002; Howard & Allen 2008).

The other possibility for spreading the idea of Fair Trade has been created by changing economic systems towards a market economy in Eastern Europe (Slovakia, Czech Republic Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania). In these countries, although located in the North, due to political and economic reasons, Fairtrade goods had not been present until the nineties last century when they underwent dramatic market system changes. As a consequence, some of them, which had benefited from this idea after World War II, due to fast development could now become the new geographical market for FT products.

3. Research design and method

This paper is conceptual paper aimed at adding one more stage to the stages of Fair Trade development. Its idea come from literature studies as well as from the market observation. Literature studies has allowed to identify stages of Fair Trade.

Trends in the development FT in Poland, observed by the Author, have been justified by the analysis of the Fairtrade product's sales, which is based on the secondary sources. The case of Poland has been chosen due to the role of this country in political and economic changes in Eastern Europe. To relate the growth of FT wholesale sales and changes in its structure with changes in the law, the logical thinking has been used.

4. Fair Trade development in Poland – the main drivers

In the Annual Report 2016-2017 “Creating Innovations, Scaling up Impact” it is noticed that, over the past two decades Fairtrade has gone from being a small niche initiative to a movement with global reach (Fairtrade International, 2017). Global sales of Fairtrade products reached €7.88 billion in 2016, with steady growth across most countries where Fairtrade has an established presence with an NFO. The market that grew fastest last year was Austria, with an increase of 46 p in Fairtrade retail sales, mostly due to the excellent reception of Fairtrade Sourcing Partnerships Programs in the country. France, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, four mature Fairtrade markets, also experienced substantial increases in sales, all with more than 20 percent growth. It means that the certification process and then involving big corporations have contributed a lot to the development of this initiative.

As the focus is on Poland the value of the market of Fair Trade products was estimated at approximately 0,3–0,5 mln Euro in 2010 but had grown systematically reaching about 8 mln Euro in 2016 and 119 mln Euro in 2020 (see Figure 1).

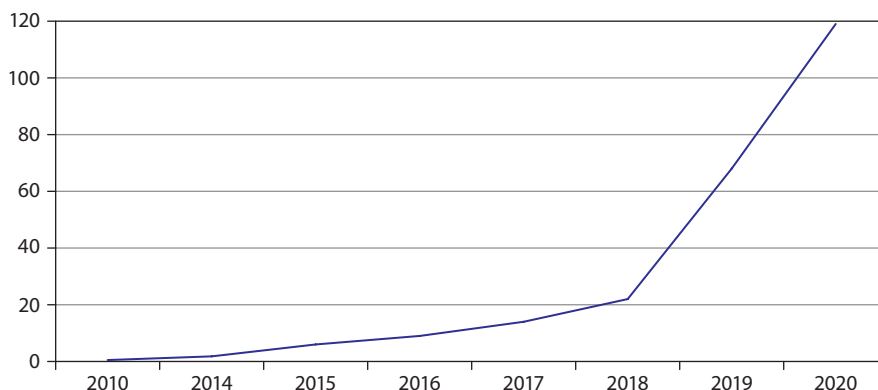


Figure 1. Net wholesale value of FT product in Poland (in millions Euro)

Source: Based on data from (Fairtrade Polska, 2021).

From 2010 to 2018 sales was growing very fast and but still constituted a small share of the Polish market. According to the research conducted by K. Wasilik (2016) Fair Trade products only supplement normal range of shops merchandise. The widest range of goods produced according to Fair Trade principles is offered by internet shops specializing in the distribution of certified products. The largest of them is the shop of Polish Fair Trade Association (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Sprawiedliwego Handlu, PSSH), which is a licensed distributor of Fair Trade products which means that it also supplies these goods to the retail and catering chains (PSSH, 2022). In internet shops, customers may purchase food of the highest quality while maintaining social and environmental standards as well as non-food products, such as e.g.: clothes, music CDs, musical instruments and interior design elements.

The first physical store in Poland which adheres to the Fair Trade principles was opened at the end of 2011 in Poznań. The shop was established as part of an international project *Aware&Fair*. The project was created with the cooperation of the City of Poznań, PSSH and two German Fair Trade Organizations – El Puente and Dritte Welt Partner, which supply the PSSH

Association with certified products that come directly from small farmers and craftsmen from the countries of the Global South. At present, the *Aware&Fair* project initiated in Great Britain includes 23 countries around the world. In addition to commercial activities, the facility also deals with the promotion of the movement aimed at increasing the awareness of the idea of Fair Trade among the residents of Poznań and its surrounding areas (*Fairtrade Polska*, 2011).

Fairtrade products are found in the organic food shops like "Żółty Cesarz", "Bio Planet" or "Organic Farma Zdrowia", shops offering products from around the world as well as in supermarkets, hypermarkets, discount stores, drugstores of such chains as Tesco, Auchan, Carrefour or Aldi. There are also more and more cafes, clubs or bars, where the Fair Trade goods are available (e.g. Starbucks, Tchibo and Stop Cafe at Orlen petrol stations). But the qualitative research reveals staff in retail outlets do not have any knowledge on the FT certificate and organizations which sell FT products and do not promote them. For example, in self-service stores there are not special shelves devoted to them.

Over the years in Poland we may observe an increase in the number of products certified as Fairtrade on the shelves of Polish shops. Food products constitute a decisive majority; however, more and more frequently non-food products, such as cosmetics or clothing. It is worth mentioning that coffee and tea were regarded as the most frequently purchased items (Radziukiewicz 2015, p. 81–82).

A lot of efforts to promote FT in Poland has been done by its institutions which spread the information about it as well as educate the young generation (Śmigielka, 2018b). The results which are observed include growing numbers of FT towns and schools. Also so some initiatives to make the FT products more available to the consumers has been taken by retailers.

When comparing these actions with what is done in the well-developing countries it should be clear that it has been not enough to boost the sales of FT products. The main obstacle is the price of FT products which is higher than the price of similar products without the FT logo. The quality of products and the competitive price are the most important determinants of Polish consumers' decision choice. COVID-19 pandemic and growing inflation in Poland has made the price factor even more important while factors related to sustainability, including FT label become less important in consumers' decision process (Strategy&, 2022). As a consequence FT products become less competitive.

So how to explain the boost in wholesale sales of FT products which could be observed since 2018? Analysing sales by product categories it should be noticed that in 2020 cocoa product became the leading product category (84% of wholesale sales followed by coffee 14%). Four years before coffee was the leader with 82% whereas cocoa had only a 15% share in sales.

At the same time, the engagement of producers was raised. In 2020 there were 41 companies engaged in different ways in FT production; 23 were certificated companies, 12 Fairtrade licensed and 6 certificated with Fairtrade licences. Among them, there were 14 new companies.

These companies used the opportunity which has been created by the introduction of flexible sourcing model called Fairtrade Sourced Ingredient (FSI) (Fairtrade Polska, 2021). In this model it is enough to use only one Fairtrade ingredient in production to be able to give it the FT mark to the product. It has become the chance for Polish producers of sweets who started to use FT cocoa. Their engagement explains the change in wholesale of Fair Trade products in Poland.

To this success contributed chains of retailers like Aldi, Lidl, and Kaufland which have these products in their stores. Due to the fact that cocoa is the only ingredient of the whole product and due to the cost-cutting policy of this chain the final price for the consumer is not too high.

Polish producers benefit from selling products with the FT ingredient because in their case high price is not a barrier and at the same time they contribute to sustainable development by supporting Fairtrade cocoa farmers.

5. Discussion

The fast growth of the FT movement since the nineties last century has drawn the attention of scientists who examined it from different points of view. A significant part of them focused on individual consumption of FT products. Andorfer and Liebe (2011) analysed 51 journal publications in English which contained theoretical approaches with the presentation of empirical research. They identified two main research approaches: economics and social psychological approaches. Economics approaches mainly focus on consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) ethical premium for FT products, which is considered as the source of additional utility coming from ethical features. Usually, some kind of experiment was applied here as a research method. Referring to social psychological approaches three major areas were investigated: consumer attitudes, information and communication aspect, and consumer values whereas to sociology – consumer identity (Andorfer & Liebe, 2011, p. 417). Most of the researchers used surveys as a research method and convenience samples; only some of them resort to content or conjoint analysis which required random sampling. Recently this research has usually focused on one type of FT product, mainly coffee.

Similar research conducted in Poland has been related generally to all FT products. Research conducted by Radziukiewicz (2015), Teneta-Skwiercz (2016), Wasilik (2016) showed that consumer interest is rather low so there are not big prospects for fast market development.

This paper is rather located in the group of papers which focus on organizational development of FT movement and its consequences (Low & Davenport, 2005; Nicholls & Opal, 2005; Mohan, 2009). In Poland, in the same group, the papers of Zysk (2020) and Śliwińska (2018) should be mentioned. Both papers also show that in Poland market for FT products is not big and perspectives of its fast development are poor.

Here, another perspective is presented. According to it the chance for boosting sales of FT product is not in their final sales to the consumers but in using them as a component in producing final goods, mainly sweets.

This paper contributes to the concept of the development stages of FT as indicated by Low and Davenport (2005) and others. It also shows the new path of its development; however, data from secondary sources should be supported by data from the primary research e.g. interviews with the Polish producers using FT components.

6. Conclusions

For the time being market for FT products in Poland is very small in comparison with the well-developed Western countries. It is due to the fact that most consumers do not feel the idea of paying a price premium which goes to support the poorest countries. The current economic situation does not favour the development of the market for the consumer goods produced in these countries and having a Fairtrade label.

The opportunity of increasing the FT market is in wholesale directed to the producers. FSI has given a chance to many, even small producers, from the countries where the FT idea is still not very popular, including producers from the so-called Eastern Block, to join successfully this

movement. They should be encouraged to take steps towards including in their production FT components, not only cocoa but also others like cotton. In this way, the market for these sustainable products could grow.

Fairtrade Source Ingredient could create a new stage of FT development, due to the fact that products with FT logo do not only have sustainable and quality features but could also be price competitive. Price competitiveness is very important nowadays due to difficult economic situations all over the world. In spite of changes in consumer preferences (in Poland fewer consumers seek sustainability, including FT features) products with FT ingredients could still be able to increase market share.

In Poland, and by analogy in the other Eastern Block European countries, the strategy to develop Fairtrade market should be to push rather than pull which is the opposite of what has happened in Western Bloc European countries. The development of the FT market could be encouraged and fostered by involving Polish producers in supply chains. It should be stressed that the development of the FT market is beneficial to all parties involved; it contributes to the sustainable development of all members of the supply chain working together. On the other hand the policy of FSI could be criticised due to the fact that it contributes to the losing original Fair Trade nature, not to say that the big companies from well-developed countries can use this strategy for increasing their profits.

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