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JENNY VINUEZA

Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas - ESPE, Ecuador

MARCELA VITERI

Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas - ESPE, Ecuador

ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE THE UNIVERSITY-STAKEHOLDERS OF FAIR TRADE: A LOOK FROM THE DIFFERENT ACTORS

Abstract:

In the present investigation, the issue of fair trade is addressed with a focus on sustainability and highlights its importance in promoting equity in global trade. The problem addressed in the research is the lack of links between fair trade organizations and universities, and how this affects the study and development of this type of trade. The methodology used is non-experimental and intentional sampling is used. The units analyzed are fair trade organizations, state services, non-governmental organizations, and universities; semi-structured interviews and secondary information sources produced by the participants are applied to stakeholders on their web pages. Among the main conclusions, it is identified that fair trade organizations perceive a lack of interest and knowledge about fair trade in universities, which makes collaboration between both parties difficult. In addition, it is pointed out that universities are not familiar with the concept of fair trade and lack trained personnel in this field. Organizations demand more research topics and propose collaborations through talks, workshops, and fairs at universities. It is observed that public institutions also face difficulties in approaching academia and fair trade organizations due to bureaucracy and lack of funds. On the other hand, it is highlighted that universities do not have macro projects on fair trade, although they show openness to broaden knowledge in this area. Likewise, it is revealed that most of the career directors are unaware of fair trade issues, but they recognize its importance as a development alternative

Keywords:

Fairtrade, Sustainability, Universities, Fair trade

JEL Classification: D21, I21

Introduction

The fair trade approach is based on the sustainability paradigm as a conceptual framework. Sustainability, as defined in the United Nations Brundtland Report (1987), implies development that meets present needs without compromising those of future generations. This definition recognizes three fundamental dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. Amartya Sen (2000) for his part, highlights freedoms as the ultimate goal of development; there is a significant empirical relationship between political freedom, social opportunity, and economic achievement. Furthermore, he argues that these different kinds of freedoms can be mutually reinforcing.

Fairtrade works on ten international principles, these are: 1) opportunities for disadvantaged producers; 2) transparency and accountability; 3) fair business practices; 4) fair pay; 5) no child or forced labor; 6) no discrimination, gender equality, freedom of association; 7) good working conditions; 8) capacity development; 9) promotion of fair trade; 10) respect for the environment (World Fair Trade Organization - Latin America, 2022).

Fairtrade, as per Fair Trade International (2022), aims to ensure fairness in global trade by upholding values like dialogue and transparency. It enhances living conditions for disadvantaged producers, particularly in developing nations, through equitable pricing, decent work environments, and sustainable practices. Serving as an alternative to conventional trade, fair trade strives to rectify global trade inequalities and injustices. It underscores the importance of fairness, transparency, and producer involvement, fostering economic and social development (Renard, 2003).

Fairtrade, per Fair Trade Advocacy Office (2018), offers a people and planet-centric business model. It emphasizes transparency in global value chains, connecting stakeholders from producers to consumers. The movement urges fair trade practices through governmental and international influence (Coscione & Mulder, 2017). In modern society, fair trade gains relevance for equitable commerce and worker protection. Despite popularity growth, many remain unaware of its benefits (García, 2011).

A highly relevant aspect is the lack of knowledge about fair trade in universities. Although these institutions are tasked with educating individuals with analytical skills and critical citizenship, important issues such as fair trade are often neglected. This situation is cause for concern since future market leaders and professionals could be the first to be familiar with this global initiative (Comet, 2022).

The general objective of this research is to analyze the elements that influence the university-stakeholder relationship of fair trade. For this, the following specific objectives have been determined: 1) Identify the points of view of fair trade organizations regarding the work of the university around the theme of fair trade; Determine the main difficulties for the rapprochement between the university and the stakeholder's fair trade; 3) Identify how universities work on fair trade issues.

Problem Statement

The theme of fair trade is important for Ecuador; Since 2007, the country's government has designed public policies that support it (Fair Trade Advocacy Office, 2015). The problem with this research is that there is no link between fair trade organizations and universities and how it could contribute to the study and development of this type of trade.

To investigate the framework of the interested parties of the CJ in Ecuador, with particular emphasis on the role of the university, the research question is posed: In what way can the Ecuadorian university contribute to the work of fair trade organizations?

Methodology

The present study is a non-experimental investigation because it is carried out without the deliberate manipulation of variables and only the phenomena are observed in their natural environment to later analyze them (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014). In addition, the results correspond to a transversal or transectional moment because the data collection process occurs in a single instant.

According to Vasilachis (2006), purposive sampling can be applied; For the present study, the following criteria were used: the units analyzed are fair trade organizations, state services, non-governmental organizations, and universities; according to their participation in the structuring of the Ecuadorian Fair Trade Strategy (Ministry of Foreign Trade, 2017).

As a data collection technique, a semi-structured interview with open questions is used; and as a secondary source of information, public information is produced by the stakeholders on their web pages.

The situation of Latin American Universities for fair trade is analyzed, and secondary data sources from the web pages of the organizations by which the universities are evaluated are used; for Latin America, it corresponds to the Latin American and Caribbean Coordinator of Small Producers and Fair Trade Workers (CLAC) (2022).

Finally, a semi-structured interview is applied to the directors of twelve careers related to fair trade in the Province of Pichincha.

Results

Different points of view of fairtrade organizations regarding the work of the university around the theme of fair trade

Fairtrade organizations highlight the challenge of limited awareness and knowledge about fair trade in academia and society. Despite Ecuador's progress in fair trade policy, universities lack familiarity with concepts like fair trade, solidarity economy, and sustainability. This results in a lack of training and expertise in these areas among both faculty and public institutions. Existing projects are often limited to specific agreements, lacking a comprehensive approach that integrates academic work with organizational efforts. Only a few teachers engaged with fair trade attempt collaboration, but lack of support from authorities hinders progress. This underlines the emerging and evolving nature of these topics.

The organizations perceive that the universities are not involved in these issues, since it is believed that there is a lack of political will and institutional commitment to address the issue of fair trade. This is due to the absence of subjects related to fair trade in the curricula and the lack of specialized careers in this field.

Fairtrade groups collaborate with educators via talks, workshops, and university forums, engaging in fairs to promote fairtrade, short internships occur within these organizations.

They request increased research involvement, aligning university programs with investigation and product development for fair trade certification. Public universities, however, note procurement challenges due to their mandate. They suggest supporting fairs, self-consumption, or internal use of fairtrade products instead.

The university points out that, although there is a lack of knowledge about fair trade, it provides an opening to expand knowledge on this subject where fairtrade organizations promote talks, workshops, and training, among other aspects that motivate not only staying in knowledge but also that it be put into practice. The university has been concerned with maintaining links with the community and solving specific issues, but there are no macro projects on fair trade.

Collaboration among fair trade organizations, public institutions, and universities lacks structure and clear objectives. Universities primarily focus on conventional trade, with fair trade not integrated. Organizations prioritize internal needs when approaching universities and ministries for projects or research, lacking coordinated efforts. Unlike more developed European countries, Ecuadorian society lacks awareness of environmental, health, and responsible consumption issues.

Difficulties for the rapprochement between the university and the *stakeholders* fair trade

There are some difficulties in the rapprochement between fair trade organizations and universities. Among them is the signing of agreements, which strenuous process that should be more agile and simple not all Fair Trade Organization (FTO) macro agreements with the universities or, if they do, they are with one or two to work on specific issues. When there are signed agreements, sometimes there is no will on one of the parties to renew them; the students fulfill bonding hours and there is no contribution from the university.

The FTO points out that rapprochement is difficult not only with academia but also with State institutions because there have been mergers of ministries and a high turnover of public officials who are unaware of the issue of Fair Trade; The new public officials are unaware of how the university can contribute in matters of Fair Trade; there is a lack of funds in universities for research and non-governmental organizations have fewer and fewer funds for Latin America. In this sense, bureaucracy becomes a problem, since when resources are obtained it is difficult to manage the allocation of money.

Activities carried out by universities on the theme of fair trade.

Within the interview with the directors of the Race; 86.59% do not know about fair trade issues; teachers associate fair trade with certain principles such as 1) fair price for the producer and consumer; 2) fair trade relations; 3) creation of opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers. 90.2% of the teachers interviewed consider that the CJ could be a development alternative for the countries.

Ecuador has been recognized as one of the Latin American countries that has made the most progress on Public Policy on fair trade (Clark, 2017). However, 82% of career managers do not know about fair trade laws in the country.

Despite the little knowledge of the Career Directors in fair trade issues, there are subjects where these issues are worked on the most as indicated in Table No. 1.

Table No. 1: Minimum contents of the subjects and careers in which they are taught.

University Degree	Name of the subject	Minimum contents of the subject
Business Administration	Associative Organization and Fair Trade	Fairtrade
	Business Law 1	Civil Law: Classification of Human Rights; Labor Law: Duties and prohibitions of the worker, Introduction to the Labor Code.
	Business management	Basic business management concepts, management processes, corporate social responsibility, and business innovation.
	Production	Management by processes, operations, and productivity.
Economy	Theory of competencies	Imperfect competition, externalities, uncertainty
	Economic development	Theories of economic development
Forest	Community Development	Fairtrade and its principles; Organic, agroecological agriculture, fair trade as a trend of the European Union and Latin America.
	Rural and agribusiness information	Agribusiness: concepts and dimensions, segments of agroindustrial systems, coordination of productive chains.
	Alternative technologies	Sustainability, principles of thermodynamics, development of alternative models for the recovery of natural resources with technology, ecological cycles, and reduction of carbon dioxide sources.
	Sustainable development	Fairtrade opportunities for countries such as Ecuador.
	Environmental	Social and environmental responsibility.
	NRM	Sustainable development, Sustainable Management Strategies of Natural Resources, Protected Natural Areas, Natural Area Management Plan.
Accounting and auditing	Environmental audit	Fundamentals of Environmental Audit application, regulations applicable to Environmental Audit, Environmental Impact Tools.
Foreign trade	Transportation, packaging, and packaging	Package and environment.
	Biocommerce and multicultural integration	Biocommerce; Collection and/or production, processing, and commercialization of goods and

		services derived from native biodiversity. Commercial exchange processes.
	International Business	Negotiation, negotiation principles, business culture, fair trade.
Tourism	Tourism	Tourism and Sustainable Development Tourism and Environmental Legislation, Cultural Heritage, Environmental Education Socio-Economic Reality.

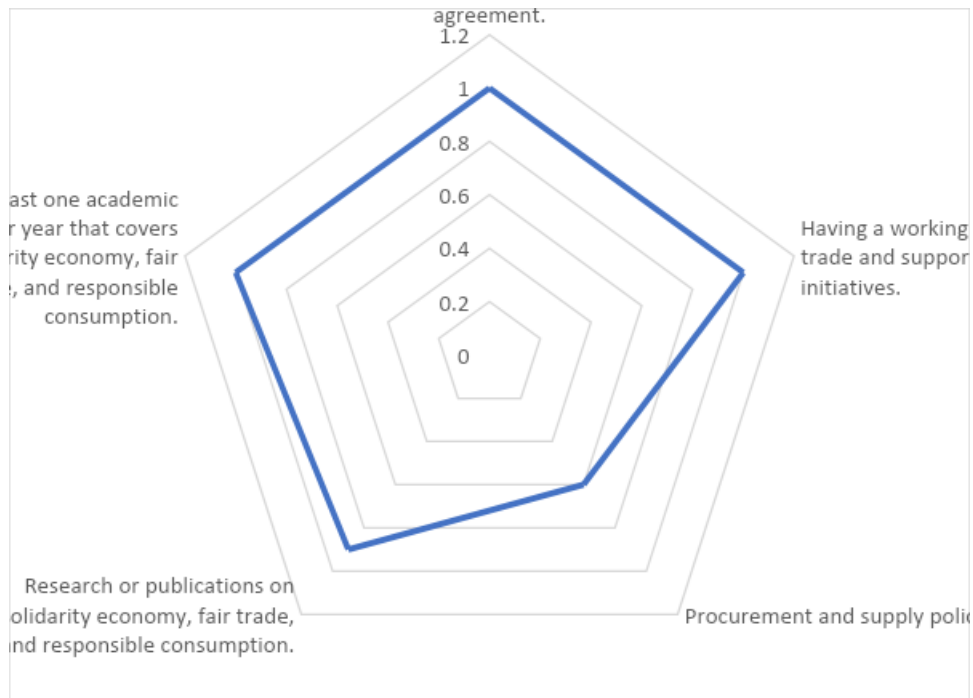
Source: Author's own work

Worldwide some organizations work and promote fair trade, the solidarity economy, and responsible consumption, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Coordinator of Small Producers and Fairtrade Workers (CLAC) who encourages the participation of Latin American Universities that meet various criteria as observed in Table No. 2 and Figure No. 1.

Table 2. Achievement of Goals to be recognized as Universities by Fair Trade - Latin America.

Dream.	Criteria	Achievement of Goals
1	Institutional declaration in support of fair trade, signing an agreement.	1
2	Having a working group on fair trade and supporting different initiatives.	1
3	Procurement and supply policy.	0.6
4	Research or publications on solidarity economy, fair trade, and responsible consumption.	0.9
5	Offering at least one academic course per year that covers topics of solidarity economy, fair trade, and responsible consumption.	1

Figure No 1: Achievement of Goals to be Recognized as Universities by Fair Trade - Latin America.



Source: Author's own work

As can be seen in Table No. 2 and Figure No. 1, the difficulty of Latin American universities occurs in the procurement and supply policy as well as in research or publications on solidarity economy, fair trade, and responsible consumption, In the case of public universities, the acquisition of fair trade products is difficult because this practice is not related to academic activities; therefore it is not possible to allocate resources to purchase products such as coffee, chocolate, handicrafts, and flowers.

There are Ecuadorian universities such as the Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH) and the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales that conducted training in social and solidarity economy, and a comprehensive seminar on fair trade and public purchases was developed. In research there is undergraduate degree work, oriented towards fair trade and sustainability; social development, agroecological production; family farming and fair trade; and associative craft practices.

Regarding linkage programs, Innova Café is developed at the Federal University of Lavras - Brazil, where studies and innovations are carried out to promote the agro-industrial coffee sector, contributing to solving problems of agencies and public or private institutions related to the production of low-income coffee a social responsibility approach. Every year the second Sunday of May is celebrated in all the universities during the week of Fairtrade; where universities promote inclusive activities such as seminars, Fair Trade forums, and entrepreneurship fairs.

Conclusions

On the different points of view of fair trade organizations regarding the work of the university around the theme of fair trade.

Limited awareness about fair trade in universities hampers collaboration with interested parties. Addressing challenges tied to knowledge gaps and staff turnover in state institutions is crucial. Close academia, OCJ, and state institution cooperation can foster projects for community benefit and fairer trade. Teacher unfamiliarity with CJ laws results in its absence from curricula and cross-disciplinary integration in various fields.

On the difficulties for the rapprochement between the university and the stakeholders fair trade

The collaboration between fair trade organizations, academia, and State institutions faces hurdles due to ministry mergers and staff turnover, causing knowledge gaps. Financial constraints affect universities and NGOs alike. By addressing these challenges, universities can foster fair and sustainable business practices. This involves establishing flexible agreements with Fair Trade Organizations (OCJs) and recognizing their societal contribution. Embedding fair trade in curricula is crucial, promoting awareness and change towards equitable trade. Integration across disciplines can enhance impact. Overcoming university unawareness is pivotal for training professionals and advancing societal change, highlighting the need for inclusive, cross-disciplinary education on fair trade.

On the activities carried out by universities for the theme of fair trade

Work is done on the principles of fair trade within the subjects or careers if the subject or career is related to the principle of fair trade that teachers know about.

The universities within their substantive functions work on issues of sustainable development, popular and solidarity economy, linkage, and research projects, related to local communities, social organizations, and fair trade organizations and/or popular and solidarity economy, however, the Fairtrade organizations do not receive this work or benefit from it. As these projects progress, the theme of fair trade and sustainability can be positioned in academia.

Ultimately, by actively integrating the theme of fair trade and sustainability in their academic work, universities can significantly contribute to the generation of knowledge, the training of committed professionals, and the social transformation towards a more equitable and responsible economic model.

The campaigns developed by CLAC have helped to position the theme of fair trade in Latin American Universities; However, according to the perception of the organizations, this effort has not been enough for them to perceive its benefits.

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