

Research Project

Concepts of Fair Trade in Britain

Third-party funded project

Project title Concepts of Fair Trade in Britain

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Organisation / Research unit

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Department

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This project addresses the topic of fair trade from a broad and historical perspective. It looks at its early beginnings in the 1960s and '70s, when different concepts of fair trade were debated. The proposed project's aim is to establish a British case study and compare it with my already existing Swiss case study. Through it, I will try to show that in the 1960s there was a window of public interest in an abstract and academic *economic concept* of fair trade. For example in 1969 the British Haslemere Group, a spontaneous group of development activists, published a declaration demanding the opening of the British market to goods from developing countries as well as the modernisation of developing countries' economies. At the same time, the professional British development NGO Oxfam changed its focus from giving food aid to the starving to providing technical support to smallholder farmers. Today, economists voice the demands of the Haslemere Declaration, while development NGOs have adopted the *small-holder concept* of Oxfam. In the 1970s, the Haslemere Group disintegrated. Oxfam split its fair-trade activities into two levels: On the commercial level, the development towards the Fairtrade trademark set in. On the political level, development NGOs would become powerful engines of the anti-globalisation movement, opposing free trade, international organisations and multinational companies. Their common figurehead would be the smallholder farmer, whose interests Oxfam claims to protect. However, by neglecting the economic concern for market access and modernisation, the fair-trade movement silently allowed for Western agricultural protectionism.

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