

## **In Consideration of a *New Approach to Tourism: A Critical Review of Fair Trade Tourism***

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### **Abstract**

Tourism research has highlighted the negative consequences brought on by tourism development. As a way to address such impacts a proliferation of alternative approaches have emerged in the discourse projecting alternative ways to conduct and participate in tourism which provide greater benefits. A by-product of ecotourism and the Pro-Poor Tourism approach has applied fair trade principles to tourism. The aim of this paper is to explore the development and application of fair trade principles to the tourism industry by reviewing secondary data. The key research questions that this paper addresses are: What has been the impetus to identify and apply fair trade principles in the context of the tourism industry? What countries have gotten involved in Fair Trade Tourism? What are some of the implications, issues and concerns regarding the implementation of Fair Trade Tourism? The critical review of the Fair Trade Tourism concept identifies that tourism practitioners, academics and tourists must pause to reflect on this approach as a way to strive for better treatment of people and a way to eradicate poverty. As such, the author raises a number of key concerns regarding the rhetoric of fair trade and its various meanings, the implementation of fair trade as a poverty eradication mechanism, its context and effect.

*Key words: fair trade, Fair Trade Tourism, FT TSA, Fair Hotels Ireland, tourism approaches.*

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### **Introduction**

A number of tourism researchers have commented on the sometimes less than admirable consequences that tourism may have in optimizing community benefits. D'Sa (1999, p.68) states for example, that contemporary tourism is highly exploitative, socially damaging and ultimately, a "justice issue". Tourism has been referred to as a "victim of its own success" (Lisle, 2008, p.5) and an agreement has been reached, among some researchers (e.g., Brown & Hall, 2008; Scheyvens, 2007; Chong, 2005; O'Hare & Barrett, 1999; Britton, 1982) that the tourism industry worsens the global disparity of wealth and exacerbates structural inequalities. Such inequalities are intensified by the movement of Western tourists who's spending often benefit wealthy multinational companies rather than local struggling communities.

Effectively, tourism is an industry that operates through an unfair global economy perpetuating the structural inequalities between wealthy consumers and disempowered locals (Dine, 2001). Mathieson and Wall (1982) state that the host-guest interaction is often unequal and unbalanced based on the difference between material wealth and also differences in power. Such structural inequalities are further highlighted as destinations cater to the short-term demands of tourists whose economic influence outweighs the longer-term needs of local communities. Tourist sites are thus becoming increasingly commodified as a way to meet the demands of the intercontinental travelling elite (Dine, 2001). Consequently, tourism is responsible for creating an array of environmental damages.

Several tourism researchers have alluded to the negative connotations associated with tourism despite the potential enriching benefits it can create for community fabric (Andereck et al., 2005), infrastructure and service improvement, economic potential and job creation. For example, local residents express concerns about increased traffic, crowding and congestion and urban sprawl (Andereck et al., 2005). In addition, tourism built around sensitive ecosystems has the potential to be negatively affected; they are also at risk of losing vegetation. Furthermore, national parks are at risk due to excessive visitor numbers (Sasidharan et al., 2002). Vehicles can cause annoyance to animals (Sasidharan et al., 2002) and the feeding of wildlife can have a variety of impacts as it can alter the natural behaviour patterns and dependency on human contact for the provision of food (Orams, 2002, p.281). Therefore, a number of negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts have occurred over time due to the development of tourism. Such impacts have ultimately drawn attention to a lack of ethical awareness in the tourism industry. As such, Page (2003, p.18) puts forth that the consideration of ethics in tourism development is necessary so that “exploitation” does not become its legacy. The development of a number of approaches have emerged as a way to improve such impacts.

A number of approaches have emerged recommending a progressive form of tourism such as ‘alternative tourism’ (Krippendorff, 1991); ‘responsible tourism’ (Wright, 2006; Wheeler, 1991); ‘sustainable tourism’ (e.g., Eagles et al., 2002); ‘eco-tourism’ (Fennell, 1999); ‘ethical tourism’ (Fennell, 2006; Butcher, 2003; Tribe, 2002) ‘just tourism’ (Hultsman, 1995); and ‘Pro-Poor Tourism’ (PPT) (e.g., Scheyvens, 2007; 2002; 1999; Ashley et al., 2001). Such advancements provide an opportunity for stakeholders to choose specifically how they would like to participate in the industry, as a way to mitigate some of their impacts. Furthermore, such approaches demonstrate a movement towards good governance thus providing opportunities for diverse contributions from governments, NGOs, academics, tourism operators, host communities and tourists. Diverse involvement has provided a way to respond in the climate of ‘new tourism’ (Poon, 2003; 1993). Alternative forms of tourism demonstrates progress towards a new pedagogy in the tourism industry; due to the focus on creating benefits for host communities and the shift towards good governance which encourages and values the participation of many stakeholders. A by-product of ecotourism and the PPT approach has applied fair trade principles to tourism. The aim of this paper is to explore the development and application of fair trade principles to the tourism industry by reviewing secondary data. The key research questions that this paper addresses are: What has been the impetus to identify and apply fair trade principles in the context of the tourism industry? What countries have gotten involved in FTT? What are some of the implications, issues and concerns regarding the implementation of FTT? The paper will now move on to describe the notion of fair trade and how such principles have been applied to the tourism industry.

## **Fair Trade**

Fair trade aims to alleviate poverty through trade by promoting and building the fair trade movement (Ransom, 2001). It is a market-based poverty alleviation mechanism that ensures the payment of consistent and (when compared to prevailing market prices) high prices to producers in the Majority World. It encompasses a commitment to the achievement of social and environmental standards through the payment of fair compensation for products and labour. In addition, it adopts sustainable environmental practices, the provision of social services, and investment in local economic infrastructure (Boluk & Haydon-Clarke, 2009).

Fair trade readdresses the inequality in economic distribution through trade, specifically focusing on the human element. Such considerations are often neglected in the process of free trade based on its primary focus on the bottom line. Effectively what is ensured in the process is

that the prices paid in exchange for Fairtrade products provide safe working conditions, a living wage, and human dignity (Witkowski, 2005). Fair trade is popularly referred to as a “trading partnership based on transparency, dialogue and respect seeking greater equity in international trade” (Clark, 2006, p.24) and seeking to harness sustainable development by way of offering better trading conditions with marginalized communities and producers in the South. Fair trade works towards six goals:

1. To improve the livelihoods and well being of producers by improving market access, strengthening producer organizations, paying a better price and forming long-lasting trading relationships;
2. To promote development opportunities for Southern producers, especially women and indigenous people;
3. To raise awareness among consumers of the negative effects on producers of international trade so they positively exercise their purchasing power;
4. To set an example of partnership in trade through dialogue, transparency and respect;
5. To campaign for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade;
6. To protect human rights by promoting social justice, sound environmental practices and economic security (Clark, 2006, p.25).

### **Fair Trade Tourism**

FTT is embedded in the fair trade movement similarly concerned with addressing the imbalances in trade. It is primarily focused on the extent to which the application of fair trade in regard to trading partnerships, consumer awareness, and certification, can inform tourism development at tourism destinations, as well as overseas (Pluss, 2003; Kalisch, 2001; Evans & Cleverdon, 2000). Ultimately FTT provides a better deal for tourism producers and service providers in the Majority World (Cleverdon & Kalisch, 2000).

The fair trade notion has emerged as a way to readdress the sustainability and inequality issues that exist within the tourism industry. The concept of FTT has been referred to in theory - by a limited number of researchers- either as a natural progression (Wheat, 1999) or an urgent call (Carbone, 2005) in both tourism theory and praxis. For example, Wheat (1999, p.3) begins to question “if we can have fair trade commodities [e.g., coffee and bananas] can we have fair trade tourism?” Furthermore, Carbone (2005, p.561) describes the urgency in protecting host countries and communities participating in tourism from government, big business, and environmental exploitation, thus “employing fair trade practices” is a way to guarantee living wages for employees. In theory although little research has discussed FTT a working definition has been proposed.

In 1999/2000 a NGO known as *Tourism Concern* facilitated an international network in order to discuss the potential application of fair trade principles to the context of tourism (Kalisch, 2001). The outcome of the international network facilitated by *Tourism Concern* was a working definition of FTT.

*Fair trade in tourism is a key aspect of sustainable tourism. It aims to maximize the benefits from tourism for local destination stakeholders through mutually beneficial and equitable partnerships between national and international tourism stakeholders in the destination. It also supports the rights of indigenous host communities, whether involved in tourism or not, to participate as equal stakeholders and beneficiaries in the tourism development process* (Kalisch, 2001, p.11).

Effectively, FTT is a civil society partnership, with a corporate ethical code of conduct and trade partnership, and a Fairtrade product that is monitored and certified. *Tourism Concern's*

deliberation over their initial definition of FTT was informed by ‘Southern Perspectives’ based on experiences of international development in countries where poverty and inequality have been a direct consequence of dynamic power relations (Tourism Concern, 2009). As a consequence, *Tourism Concern* (2009) had several countries in mind for potential FTT implementation including India, Brazil, Gambia, Uganda, Namibia and South Africa.

Five areas were recognized by *Tourism Concern* (2009) regarding areas that require change in order to achieve greater equality for participating communities. Such areas include: International Trade Agreements; tourism industry (including transnational corporations and independent investors); destination community stakeholders; consumer behaviour and destination government policies. Moreover, *Tourism Concern* (2009) identified the need to prioritize several beneficiaries in host communities who:

- have not previously had a voice in the tourism decision-making process;
- are economically and socially disadvantaged or discriminated against;
- are ready to engage with the national/international market yet need the necessary technical and organizational support;
- are employed in the formal and informal tourism sector.

Although *Tourism Concern* has continued FTT dialogue they are still awaiting funding which has hindered their progress and efficient FTT implementation (Personal Communication Stroma Cole, Chair of Tourism Concern, 25 June 2009).

While few researchers have written on FTT, cross pollination between Fairtrade products and FTT is beginning to take place in practice. This is typically recognized in the context of gastronomy tourism. As such, coffee and tea tour programmes are in operation in several countries in Central and South America, India and Africa. For example, coffee tours were developed in 2008 in a small community in Mexico with the intention of “providing tourists with a socially and environmentally sensitive tour of the coffee farms and communities involved in fair trade” (Chesworth, 2010, p.172). This is similar to a community-tourism programme in Peru referred to as MINKA which translates to working together for the greater good of everyone. MINKA fair trade provides opportunities for travellers to visit communities and textile producers and stay with local families in Collasuyo, Intihuatana, Taquile Island and along the MINKA Trail (MINKA Fair Trade, 2011).

Over 3000 producers are said to be affected by the MINKA organization which has facilitated sustainable development practices in marginalized communities since 2005 (MINKA Fair Trade, 2011). Similar benefits have been derived in Tanzania, East Africa where several coffee farmer communities have implemented a “sustainable form of coffee-related tourism” (Goodwin & Boekhold, 2010, p.181). The Fair Tourism Project in Tanzania has subsequently created locally owned and managed coffee tours which return sizeable benefits to individuals, families and their communities. Another example of a community that practices FTT is Makaibari Tea Estates in India. Makaibari is the only tea company that is locally owned and operated in India- the rest are owned by multinational companies. The Darjeeling tea that is produced on sight is Fairtrade certified and as a way to accommodate the constant flow of visitors to Makaibari some villagers in 2005, opened their homes to paying guests. Consequently, 13 families initiated a home stay programme and formed a group called Hum Tera which looked at ways in which they could provide comfortable accommodation for Western visitors. This included the installation of Western style toilets which improved the hygiene in the area. Currently, there are 21 families providing accommodation at a rate of \$25USD per couple including meals. The profits have been regenerated into the community by way of creating a computer centre benefiting nearly eighty children, a scholarship fund to assist individuals in studying horticulture, the creation of a community loan fund –which has assisted 100 families

with housing needs, medical needs, education, livestock and small business development (Makaibari Tea Estates, 2011).

South Africa experienced success with fair trade and subsequently FTT post-apartheid. As such, South Africa became the first country in the world to develop a national certification scheme that applies the principles of fair trade to the tourism industry; and is externally audited.

### **Fair Trade Tourism South Africa**

The application of fair trade practices was initially investigated from the perspective of agriculture based on the disparity and unequal treatment created in agricultural trade (FTTSA, 2009). Thus, following a feasibility study undertaken in the mid 1990s, exploring the potential for South African producers to enter the fair trade system (FTTSA, 2008) the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO) certified South African cooperative farms. Accordingly, certified products are referred to as Fairtrade South Africa (FTSA) label. South Africa is currently the world's largest exporter of Fairtrade certified products (FTSA, 2009).

Following the implementation of FTSA products a government document, known as the Tourism White Paper (RSA, 1996), addressed tourism in South Africa as a 'missed opportunity'. The White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism (RSA, 1996) identified tourism as a priority for national economic development and is the core of South Africa's new tourism policy. The concept of PPT was recognized in the Tourism White Paper as a way to develop responsible tourism. The Tourism White Paper (RSA, 1996) argues that, if pursued responsibly, tourism has the potential to positively improve the quality of life of all South Africans. Key principles embodied in the White Paper include the encouragement of community participation and the sustainable management of resources (Boluk, 2011). Applying the principles of fair trade in the context of tourism has the potential to maintain a pro-poor focus, while also ensuring sustainable tourism business practices based on the criteria necessary to achieve such certification. Based on the success of FTSA as applied to agricultural commodities, the recognition of tourism in South Africa as a 'missed opportunity' and decisive action demonstrated by a few stakeholders, an NGO established a certification recognizing FTT in South Africa (Boluk, 2011).

In 2002 South Africa launched its trademark certification known as Fair Trade Tourism South Africa (FTTSA). The goal of FTTSA is to promote equitable and sustainable tourism development through "awareness raising, capacity-building, advocacy and the world's first tourism fair trade certification programme" (FTTSA, 2007/2008, p.2). The long-term vision of FTTSA is for "a just, participatory and sustainable tourism industry" providing meaningful benefits for both hosts and guests (Seif, 2001, p.5). FTTSA certification is based on quantifiable criteria regarding labour standards including wages, the treatment of people, local employment, procurement opportunities for families and communities, HIV/AIDS support, black empowerment and a number of environmental conservation practices (FTTSA, 2010) (see Boluk 2011, p.243). A three stage process is required before a business can earn FTTSA certification including a self-assessment, on-site assessment and an adjudication process where a decision is made by a panel and comprehensive feed-back is provided regarding suggested improvements for successful applicants, as well as advice for those applicants who were not successful. There are currently 64 certified FTTSA businesses (FTTSA, 2011) ranging from accommodation suppliers to activities and attractions.

## **Fair Hotels Ireland**

In addition to the emergence of FTT in countries in the Majority World fair trade has also surfaced in the Developed World. Although fair trade was developed as a way to assist marginalized producers the fundamental principles have recently been applied to the context of the accommodation sector in Ireland (*Boluk, forthcoming*). Fair Hotels Ireland began in May of 2010 with the goal to support and promote quality employment in the hotel industry. A Fair hotel is one that:

- Treats their staff fairly by paying them a fair wage and minimizing risk in the workplace,
- Takes their responsibility as an employer seriously,
- Demonstrates respect for human rights and the voice of their employees,
- Values the work of their employees and
- Understands the significance of the people-centeredness of the hospitality industry (Fair Hotels, 2011).

Thus Fair Hotels are concerned with attracting and retaining skilled workers who are reminded that the work they do is valued (Fair Hotels, 2011). There are currently 46 Fair Hotels across Ireland (Fair Hotels, 2011). Ireland is currently the only country in the world to have developed such a programme.

The above sections have provided an overview of the diverse application of fair trade principles and philosophies in the context of the tourism industry. Accordingly, the discussion evolved from a focus on some of the pressing impacts tourism has created which has led to a discussion on alternative forms and approaches to tourism. Currently, fair trade in tourism has been considered by few researchers in theory. Although in practice it is recognized in a number of countries in the Majority World and recently in a Developed country: Ireland. The paper will now move on to critically review the notion of fair trade in tourism from a theoretical and practical perspective.

## **Critical Review**

The discussion on the adoption of fair trade principles, practices and philosophies have created a number of questions for the researcher. A number of key concerns regarding the rhetoric of fair trade and its various meanings, the implementation of fair trade as a poverty eradication mechanism, its context and effect will be discussed in this section.

A fundamental discussion that has yet to take place in the literature on fair trade and FTT is in regard to the need and/or right to implement Western models in the context of the Majority World. Seemingly, fair trade is a model that has been created in the West based on Western understandings and perceptions of what the South is enduring and what Southern communities need and consequently *should* want. Thus there is an assumption that Western consumption interests and desires are equivalent with those of individuals living in the Majority World. As such, one could question the ethical implications of such fair trade implementation based on Western influences. Perhaps fair trade and FTT could be criticized for being a contemporary form of colonialism reiterating some colonial discourses regarding a civilizing mission and cultural re-production, having an influence on identities, imparting new forms of individualism, developing regimes on values, developing new means of wealth and placing increased value on money. Accordingly, those communities that employ fair trade and FTT may fall victim to taking instructions from individuals outside of their community, perspective and consequently their cultural norms.

*Tourism Concern* and their efforts to develop an international network may refute such colonial criticisms because they engaged in an initial dialogue with local destination

communities to establish what is 'fair' from the perspective of local communities. Thus even though the mechanism was created in the West its implementation was dependent on local people's voices. However, even though an initial dialogue was carried out perhaps a continuous dialogue is required with local people because as conditions change over time including, but not limited to, political and economic conditions so might one's definition on fairness. To further substantiate this point an individual who has not previously been involved in tourism may need some exposure to the industry prior to developing a firm understanding of what is fair in tourism. Therefore, a continuous dialogue should be encouraged.

Another question that comes to mind is: is it acceptable to use the same terminology pertaining to products and services? Or should the tourism industry re-invent the wheel? Does it become complicated if a term applied to products is then used in the service industry in the context of tourism? Certainly there are a number of benefits in using the vocabulary. From a marketing perspective, tourism businesses can attract consumers who may be informed and concerned; thus consumers can make informed decisions about their holiday. However, some consumers may be disillusioned by some forms of FTT because seemingly some FTT businesses are 'borrowing' the term. Within the tourism industry it seems as though fair trade businesses are an outcome of their production of Fairtrade certified products. Thus, some businesses are demonstrating an entitlement to call their services FTT because they have a certified product although they are not operating a Fairtrade certified tourism business. The examples of FTT in the context of textiles, coffee and tea programmes exemplify this concern, as well as the Fair Hotels Ireland scheme –which is solely validated by an Irish union (SIPTU).

My next question is should FTT be applied in the context of the Developed World? In much of the literature discussing fair trade there is a focus on creating an opportunity for 'disadvantaged producers' in the Majority World. This is interesting in the context of the Developed World and specifically Ireland for a couple of reasons. Firstly, many front-line staff employed in the hospitality industry in Ireland are from countries in the Majority World. Does this mean that industries that employ staff from Developing countries should employ fair trade strategies? If so, will car factories and textile industries in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America be the next to implement such strategies and if so who will monitor this? Secondly, it has been recognized that hospitality staff have been notoriously mistreated by working long and unsociable hours, poor working conditions and often receiving little respect from their managers and customers. As such, in the context of fair trade in the Developed World front-line employees may then be compared to 'disadvantaged producers' in the Majority World. What is most interesting to consider regarding the implementation of FTT in the context of the Developed World is whether or not practitioners and hospitality decision-makers are willing to accept the realities of the harsh working conditions that need to be readdressed. In reference to the initial comment made above perhaps it is more suited to implement Western models in Western contexts. Accordingly, the West may be best suited for FTT implementation.

Lastly, and perhaps most regrettably, what is the most unclear about the discussion on FTT is if the scheme and/or certification has created any direct improvements to the well-being of staff and local people. There are of course superficial improvements that have been created in some communities such as the purchasing of equipment which has allowed the provision of skill development and training. However, some practical questions are left unanswered such as: how many jobs are created by FTT? Is FTT reducing poverty in specific communities and if so by how much and what needs to be done to continue such progress? Are FTT communities empowered or would a different exercise be beneficial such as a programme or scheme that was community-led and driven?

## Conclusion

Nearly two decades ago Wheat (1999) proposed that the implementation of FTT would be a natural progression. Wheat's argument that the tourism industry would naturally move towards such fair trade principles seems to be accurate given the realization of various negative impacts that tourism has created.

The aim of this paper was to explore the development and application of fair trade principles to the tourism industry by reviewing secondary data. This paper has illuminated the application of fair trade principles and philosophies in the context of the tourism industry by exemplifying a number of communities and contexts that have chosen to endorse the concept as a way to redress tourism development and/or plan for sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, the paper addressed the three research questions supporting the aim. Firstly, the initial review of the literature identified that FTT is recognized as a by-product of ecotourism and PPT and emerged as a way to readdress some of the negative environmental, social and economic impacts created by tourism. Secondly, this paper described a number of countries in the Majority World that are participating in and offering FTT experiences for tourists in Central and South America, India and Africa. Additionally, it was recognized that FTT practices have most recently been adopted in the Developed World, in Ireland. As such a focus on the fair treatment of people in both contexts has been recognized. South Africa was identified as the first country to implement a FTT certification. Lastly, the paper explored in a critical fashion some of the key implications, issues and concerns regarding the implementation of FTT. As such, the researcher questioned the rhetoric of fair trade and highlighted its various meanings, the implementation of fair trade as a poverty eradication mechanism, its context and questionable effects created for local people.

The critical review of the FTT concept opens up many opportunities for future research. Firstly, the rhetoric of fair trade and its application requires further investigation specifically from the perspective of local people and this should be treated sensitively. More dialogue needs to take place among the local people involved in tourism activities, as well as those that may be affected by tourism but not directly involved. Furthermore the promises and hopes of fair trade and FTT should be explored. The principles of FTT are ideal now it is time to follow-up; is FTT making a difference from the perspective of local people? Lastly, it would be interesting to assess if the hospitality industry in Developed countries are ready to brave the negative reputation that they have earned and adopt FTT principles to rectify their behaviours.

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