



**The Journal of Fair Trade
Futures, Finances and Activities
May 2024**

Discussion Paper for JoFT Society Meeting 9th May 3pm GMT

Introduction

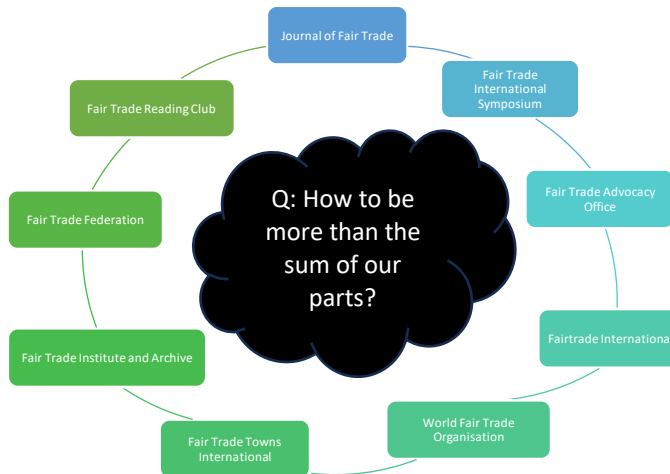
Happily, we are beginning to see a core grouping attending our May and November meetings and in touch with us about the ‘ideas’ and ‘thinking’ that the fair trade movement needs for a reboot and to become more influential and visible to all those who think trade and a just transition must be fairer.

Our movement is diverse but faces many challenges now, just when fair trade’s experiences, practices and advocates have so much to offer. We are many, and clearly can be much, much more than the ‘sum of our ‘parts’ with a stronger, more incisive set of voices and arguments about the core values of fair trade and their relevance for consumers, producers, businesses and economies. The Journal of Fair Trade is proud to be playing a small role in this effort.

Consultations

Since our last meeting in November, we have reached out to many of you, held discussions online (Feb, March, April) and been busy seeking to support and interact with many of you. Not all. The work is ongoing but there are decisions to be made and options to pursue.

This paper is aims to summarise discussions and table practical ideas for discussion and decision!



The list of people who have given inputs so far is provided below. Thank you!

The Journal of Fair Trade: Story So Far...

The Journal of Fair Trade was conceived as a means to ‘reboot’ the thought and strategy of the fair trade movement. And, to do this at a time when the idea/ideals themselves were in retreat and, arguably, being eclipsed¹. The Journal of Fair Trade aims to provide a platform to underpin and demonstrate the rich history and experience of fair trade academics, thinkers, activists, producers, practitioners and activists and steer the movement into maintaining its catalytic and transformative role.

The launch in 2018 (Volume 1), and all activities since, have been tirelessly and patiently supported by radical, independent social science publisher, [Pluto Journals](#). We are currently publishing Volume 5. and have a pipeline and pathway through to Volume 8. The Journal of Fair Trade has been a bit of a ‘guinea pig’ for Pluto Journals – a way to test the bounds of public support, the importance of Open Access, and build some of the systems and that might be needed for activist and progressive journals, whose significance lies not only in academia but life, work, the economy, the political world.

What is clear is that since Pluto Journals flipped all of its 20+ journals into Diamond Open Access in 2021, some of the main assumptions and ‘theory of change’ for The Journal of Fair Trade (see below) has been demonstrated (2018-2023 figures). It has done this through: rapid growth in readership (see table); extraordinary diversity and range of authors and readers worldwide[with JoFT accessed by 687 (est) Global South Institutions in 115 = Global South countries.

Year Year-by-Year Usage		Journal of Fair Trade – Theory of Change
2019	70	<i>“The greater the diversity and number of people who read and write for the Journal of Fair Trade, the better and more impactful the ideas developed and published will be, and the more influence on society and business the Fair Trade Society and our supporters can have.”</i>
2020	83	
2021	13,201	
2022	16,104	
2023	21,608	

What has not been demonstrated (yet) is the influence of these ideas on society and business. This will take more time. We need to continue to build the Journal’s reach and submissions, and to achieve key professional indicators e.g SCOPUS – a journal database/listing demonstrating the high quality of a Journal and improving its attractiveness to would-be contributors.

Why a Fair Trade Society?

The Journal of Fair Trade is not housed in a specific university or institution and has a mission reaching beyond teaching and academia. It was always the intention for the Journal to be owned and governed by people who passionately share and support the mission and approach. In 2021, after researching and consulting on possible structures, we settled on a feasible model for an owner/member run **Fair Trade Society** and commissioned legal work to draw up a draft constitution.

Since 2021 we have focussed on building up recognition/visibility and supporters through the Journal of Fair Trade convened Society meetings (twice each year in May and November) and outreach by the team and our pioneer members. We have run a pilot membership scheme with options to join (pay dues) and support (donations) and experimented with different systems: Kindlink, paypal, woocommerce etc.

The finances of the Journal allow for only two (very) part-time paid freelancers: one responsible for the Society and communications, and the Journal Manager, who is responsible for all processes up to production for

¹ [“Who cares about Fair Trade? An introduction to the Journal of Fair Trade and the Fair Trade Society”](#) published on 1 February 2019, Volume 1. Issue 1.

publication. Most of you will have interacted with Ellie Sugg and Emma Anderson. Editorial roles are all unpaid/pro bono. Publication, hosting, and library engagement (S2O) are being led by an equally small team at Pluto Journals. Roger Van Zwanenberg addressed our last meeting and his fascinating description of the ‘world of journals’ and the challenges of open access for independent, diverse and radical journals is available.

The Journal has a strong pipeline for publications (two issues per year), through to Volume 8 (2027). Some of these are underway, near completion, or being well circulated. Unsolicited submissions continue to reach us, many are bang on topic, and are from both academics and practitioners, and add real value to the body of work. There is a lot more we can do, proactively and collaboratively, noting particularly the pressing and key themes raised during recent meetings (see below).

There are opportunities to consolidate the Journal’s and the Society’s finances and be a useful and inspirational actor in our movement. There is also a necessity. Being hosted by Pluto Journals brings with it the fundamentals and the core/needed capacity of any operation: banking, financial reporting, administrative support, and wider marketing including a vibrant Pluto Journals newsletter, and S2O library engagement as part of a ‘portfolio’ of radical journals all now available as Diamond Open Access publications. Pluto Journals is also now a **Jisc approved supplier** which means that UK members can support our collection of 20 Diamond Open Access Social Science Journals. Also, Pluto Journals has become a member of **OASPA**, a diverse community of organisations engaged in open scholarship, to encourage and enable open access as the predominant model of communication for scholarly outputs. In the last year JoFT was indexed on **DOAJ**, the Directory of Open Access Journals.

We are reaching the point, after five years, where we need to be sure that the Journal and Society and its work can be sustained without the core financial support of Pluto Journals.

Futures: Ideas on the Table

Forming one Fair Trade Society

The original concept was of a **Fair Trade Society** including academics, thinkers, activists, producers, practitioners and activists. The Journal team has promoted the idea of a supporter Society in our twice-yearly forums as convener [viz The Journal of Fair Trade Society]. In 2021, after researching and consulting on possible structures, we settled on a feasible model for a Fair Trade Society and commissioned and paid for legal work to draw up a draft constitution which is ready for discussion.

A proposal is also under discussion by FTIS to form a Society of FT Academics. In discussion, we have concluded that there may not be room for two societies! Plus, there may be synergies and overlaps in our audiences, needs and visions. Combining the concept of a Fair Trade Society seems obvious, as there is no obligation of academics to publish in the Journal of Fair Trade *per se*, while Society members would most likely want to support the broader mission and amplify the visibility/voice/reach of the Journal of Fair Trade as a platform for a diverse range of voices. The advantage is: a head start and leverage what we have all been gradually building.

For example: The FTIS lacks some of the basic infrastructure to support year-round activity, a permanent web/social media presence, an operational way to ‘join’, activity between its biennial conferences, promote intersectional collaboration and producer participation, and develop ways systematically to involve more academics and researchers, especially in the global south.

It is proposed that we form one Fair Trade Society for this purpose.

We can structure the participation as broadly as possible.

We can keep a low financial bar (as now) for inclusive and broader member access, but define additional constitutional categories such as founders/owners and supporter/allies. This would help us to ensure we can raise sufficient funds year-on-year for the core proposition to work and flourish. What is this? A working budget for operations plus capacities for new project development, some additional activities and membership engagement, and support for online/events, et al . This is approx. £18-20k per year.

In the constitution, we can craft the mission for membership and structures that serve the movement as a whole, as well as specific and defined academic and communications/impact arenas. We could also enable and formalise the intention to pursue common or collaborative projects in areas of interest that members propose.

Strategy for Communications and Audience Building

The broader fair trade audience building and engagement is not optimal or expanding. A topic raised during the consultations is the need to seek engagement with a far wider range of organisations and dynamic, ethically intentioned businesses: those who operate within at least some of the (WFTO) 10 principles and systems but will never manage all nor desire to join; or who are self-identifying fair trade organisations.

Concrete “step-by-step” ideas raised include:

- There are a myriad number of events, networks, initiatives, and publications. These could all be considerably amplified by conscious collaboration and sharing apps/calendars and a communications strategy which starts by helping us to speak to and help each other.
- All agree that Annual Reports and FT/sustainability Report-type publications (a la TNI State of Power annual Publication) are challenging and a huge task but there might be a way to prepare a form of a periodic digital ‘news digest’ in collaboration with members/authors and those who sign up to post on the events calendar. Examples were provided eg The Do Good Institute <https://dogood.umd.edu>

It is proposed that we develop an online events calendar

- We provide posting options for online videos/graphics/notices for easy sharing with a view of expanding attendance/building audiences.
- We consciously link-connect our respective social media platforms/presences: building an automatic cascade for outreach/notifications and for widening all of our audiences etc.

Pushing Forward our Collaborations - Projects on the Table

- **FT Reading Club** (Fair Trade Essentials Reading Club): it is good to see that we are beginning to ‘join-the-dots’ on promoting and identifying content and presenters for this part of our ‘thinking’ movement. Sharing and commentary about the sessions on Linked in is starting to build (“Fair Trade Nerds Unite!” being one such post for Edward Millard’s article!). Sessions have participants from most continents and it would be excellent if we could grow this audience and exchange.

Additionally, it would be ideal if the Reading Club might coordinate book review processes, sharing **reviews on the best new and relevant fair trade books**. The Journal of Fair Trade has not yet taken this common and useful role of Journals forward to date as it should!

- **The Fair Trade Institute**: this is an important asset of the movement, and we have heard that it needs a strategic review and transition to a new ‘home’ from its current custodian **CFAT**, Colorado. There is a job to be done to discuss this in detail: what’s needed technically, what costs are involved, and how the archive might be presented/rebranded and appeal to and become useful on a regular basis to a more consciously segmented audience e.g. writers/journalists; students; teachers.

Pressing and Key Themes to Explore:

The most animating part of the consultation discussions identified pressing and key themes to explore.

- **Is Fair Trade “passé”** [*no longer fashionable; out of date OED*]
What is the common ground for a network and partnerships now? Is this WFTO 10 principles or something more variable from place to place?
Some active WFTO members are moving away from traditional FT language in their marketing and discourse. Are WFTO principles scaleable or not and, if not, which are/should be? What is the role of FT in addressing the needs of the most marginalised people – smallholders, women, migrants and refugees – one of its original premises?

Are there new fundamental principles for a broader meaning and scope for fair trade: what are the cross over points where FT delivers/engages with other social and economic movements? Women's rights, ethical/environmental consumption, Fair work, Fair Tax, and so on.

Proposal for Special Issue: on new common ground, language, definitions of good, atypical fair trade, core principles, cross-sections of business. What does it look like now to be good!

Suggestion: Start with a webinar and/or facilitated workshops at upcoming events to frame the questions and debate and identify contributors.

- **Why pioneering FT companies failed** even as B Corps have grown in scope and numbers; other comparable concepts are taking root ([Donut Economics](#)). What went wrong? What worked? What was co-opted? What can be learned from younger/more dynamic fair trade companies (FTF USA) and sectoral organising?
- **Producers' voices; SPO (small producer organisation) data** Darryl noted the need for more contact with producer organisations who have data on environmental and social impacts of fair trade which can demonstrate if/ how goals are being achieved. Anne/ Melanie noted that Universities could get involved with the data gathering on behalf of producers who may not be able to or aware of how to do this. Other models and partnerships might also assist in this:
 - WFTO members operate in 84 countries, affecting more than 1 million livelihoods.
 - Anne noted she was on the Shared Interest Board and fed into the Shared Interest social audit report. This is interesting as it provides a model on top up management's adherence to SDGs and admin level's championing of Fair Trade and sustainability.
 - Peter Freeman commented that he is involved in the Shared Interest Annual General Meeting which is open to Shared Interest members. (There are more than 12,000 investors/members and Shared Interest works with +200 Small Producer Organisation (SPOs).)
- **Farmer-School-University-Towns Connections**

Thinking strategically on what can connect schools, universities and reach local communities/towns and farmers. For example, what are the demonstrated, easy ways to help non-fair trade field working people to get involved. What might be the best form of engagement with and among Fair Trade Universities around the world? What is the potential for this?

Question: Can we gather up, analyse, learn from, study, replicate existing efforts?

There was no shortage of examples even in a short meeting! There will be many more!

Darryl mentioned the Fair Trade India project which helped approx. 50 schools, with students creating online Fair Trade shops for parents and community members with links to other organisations. Christine noted the Scottish project the [90 kg of rice challenge](#) as a social enterprise project for schools, churches and community groups. Christine noted the need for a systematic way of engaging Undergraduates as volunteers to their University Fair Trade group. She noted volunteers in Sussex were very low and wondered if Uni Leeds Anne had any suggestions. Patrick raised the need to translate theory into practice using schools via universities on "how money is spent on fair trade". Meg Brindle noted a Ugandan High school student project with CEO of Pocket Education Uganda <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=579k5FG1F-k> as well as a Ugandan Shea Butter group. Melanie noted the [High School Ethics Bowl](#) project US/ Canada.

List of Participants/Inputs so far WITH MANY THANKS!

Pauline Tiffen, Ellie Sugg, Meg Brindle, Peter Freeman, Carmen, Michael King, Emma Anderson, Patrick Flemming, Darryl Reed, Anne Tallontire, Christine Gent, Andy Good, Melanie Oliviero, Jacqui MacDonald, Bob Chase, Matthew Anderson.

End.