



**Kaleidos
coop**

Lieu de vie et de travail
transfrontalier
Grenzüberschreitender
Lebens- und Arbeitsort

On vous attend!
Wir erwarten
Euch!



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REPORT
WFTO-Europe
Biennial
Conference 2023

11th-13th
June 2023



Les Jardins de Gaïa,
Wittisheim (Strasbourg),
France



EUROPE



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Introduction

Three years ago WFTO-Europe's Biennial Conference 2020 was going to be held in Athens, Greece, but was cancelled last minute with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time we would never have thought it would take so long before the next occasion for the European members of WFTO to gather in-person. Finally, on June 11th to 13th, we were able to convene, with our conference being hosted by Guaranteed Member, Les Jardins de Gaïa, in Wittisheim near Strasbourg, France.

This time, the WFTO-Europe Board and secretariat offered a package that included accommodation in order to keep members close together and encourage more networking and out-of-workshop discussions. Additionally, the conference offered an experience of the Alsace region, with wine-tasting at a small, ecologically-minded producer in the neighbouring village, delightful Alsace cuisine and, not least, sampling of Jardins de Gaïa's tasty teas. On top of all this, outstanding chocolate brought by Guaranteed Member, Bouga Cacao.

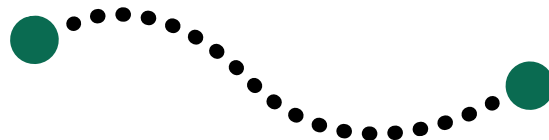


The conference was timed to coincide with the Strasbourg session of the European Parliament, for which we organised an event with MEPs, together with the FTAO. On the same occasion, we held meetings with local Social and Solidarity Economy actors in Strasbourg to discuss shared goals and efforts. The elected representative for SSE at Ville Strasbourg also joined to share the vision of the city.

We wish to profoundly thank Jardins de Gaïa for their outstanding hospitality. Also many thanks to all who participated, in-person or online, and those who contributed otherwise. This report is for keeping the important discussions from the conference going, especially for those that could not join. As said many times during those days: *This is just the beginning.*

Day 1

Workshops



Marketing and promoting the label

The workshop on marketing and branding was led by the Branding & Marketing Manager of WFTO Global, Natalie Hesketh-Mare. Natalie is part of the Marketing & Communications team in Culembourg. "Doing business without advertising is like winking at someone in the dark", she says in the beginning of her presentation, which was tailored to mission-led enterprises from Europe and can be found separately in attachment.

"Marketing should be seen as an investment and not as an expense. The created brands associations are crucial to tap into existing emotional connections and expand your brand's reach to new audiences by aligning with organisa-

tions like WFTO that share similar values and beliefs", Natalie made clear.

After her presentation, the plenum discussed and brainstormed on their use of media as well as how to go about social media services that do not go in line with the beliefs and vision of the World Fair Trade Organization (Example of Elon Musk and the use of Twitter).

Coming soon: WFTO will launch its new website as well as updated Brand Guide which will be shared for use with its members.

Worldshops - To innovate or to survive?

This was one of the two workshops held in the first workshop session of the conference: Participants discussed the current situation of worldshops all over the world - recognising that there are different types and concepts (Examples were given: Weltladen in Germany vs Artisans du Monde in France).

How can worldshops innovate to attract young people and like-minded movements?

Participants agreed that worldshops need to get “outside their circles” and join forces with other movements, such as local and transregional movements. The two most mentioned were alignments with local food movements as well as with youth movements like Fridays for Future.

Closer collaboration with movements and the idea of more local food supply chains can bring up new business opportunities while working with youth activists movements can bring new ideas. At the same time worldshops were born as a space to exchange ideas.

What is the commercial place of Worldshops today?

One participant reminded all that: “We should not forget that the FT movement comes from its shops. The idea of doing trade and business in a way that is fair and based on the principles of mutual benefit. Worldshops made the start of the broader movement.”

Participants discussed the risk of “FairWashing” by cooperating with big retailers - a well-known and controversial discussion within the Fair Trade movement. Generally, opinions are divided between going into the mass market to boost sales on the one hand and relying solemnly on Worldshops selling only fair (and sustainable) products, in order to avoid risks of becoming part of mainstream companies' promotion of also their non-Fair Trade activities, on the other.

A lot of critique has been directed toward the first approach: “Fair Trade is and should also be about the producers not about the products,” said one. However, it was also recognised that a trend amongst young people still does go to alternative ways of consuming. Reference has been made to second hand as well as to local food and textile supply chains.

The question remains how to align with those concepts rather than the mass market? Getting into their markets while still using the Fair Trade philosophy along value chains (from business practices on the ground to marketing and branding).

Another approach to attract more people was shared from a WFTO-E member from Denmark: become known as the best in town for some product areas. Once you have decided on the product you want to specify, give it room and visibility in your shop and in your communication. In the Danish case that meant:

- Hammocks and hammock chairs
- Baskets
- Door mats
- Alpaca Socks

Participants concluded and agreed on the importance of having a similar discussion with like-minded youth movements. Fairs like the Ambiente Fair in Frankfurt can play a crucial role to get in exchange with new business opportunities and other movements.

Follow-up and next steps

Following the Berlin Summit in August 2022 a group of members has gathered for discussing the very issues of this workshop. The WFTO-Europe secretariat leads the group and the next meeting will be after the summer. To join this working group, please reach out to Mikkel Nørgård, WFTO-Europe coordinator, at coordination@wfto-europe.org.

Project & Advocacy Officer, Fabian Richer, will also exchange with the Young Fair Trade Advocates and try to bring them into the discussion.



Northern Producers

The topic of North-North Fair Trade has been long discussed, both within the WFTO and the Fair Trade movement at large. Some schemes still reject Northern Producers, while WFTO allowed for it with a resolution in 2017. However, within the European membership questions remain over where to draw the line on marginalisation for producers based in Europe, for example. So the topic was an important one on the agenda at this conference, too.

Mikkel Nørgård (WFTO-Europe) first outlined recent work of the Northern Producers Working Group, which agreed on a set of specific criteria to propose to the GS & Monitoring team at Global. These were discussed in a meeting, where the team at Global said they could at best be used as a set of recommendations for members to improve their Fair Trade practices. Global's current strategy is rather to minimise the difference between Northern Producers and other producers within the GS and their focus is primarily on

the model (mainly mission-led) when monitoring Northern Producer applicants and members.

Participants of the workshop discussed different ways of looking at Northern Producers to determine what makes them part of Fair Trade. Social impact was raised as a defining factor, but others mentioned that impact is the outcome, while the GS is mainly focused on process. Then, if a Northern Producer is successful and gains a firm economic footing, would it cease to be verified as a WFTO member, one asked. This pointed to a potential issue with using social impact as a factor. All agreed, however, that the Fair Trade is needed in certain sectors in the North - well-known issues with exploitative conditions in agriculture across Europe, as well as in textiles and fashion, make a clear case for Fair Trade in Europe. Paola Plaku (FTAO) also noted that it is important to discuss the ways to distinguish Northern Producers with other Fair Trade schemes, since this is a topic that divides us as a movement.



GS Review

This workshop was organised together with EZA Fairer Handel (Austria) and GEPA (Germany) with the aim to foster a deep and open discussion within the European membership on the proposed revisions to Guarantee System, which have been recommended by the Standards Committee.

The workshop kicked off with a summary of the background of the review process and the recommendations. Julian Fellner (EZA Fairer Handel) shared how GEPA and EZA had notified WFTO Global about inconsistencies they had met when working on their SARs or doing monitoring of their trading partners also member of WFTO. Mikkel (WFTO-Europe) gave a few updates on behalf of Global on the progress:

- All recommendations have been taken to heart by the Board of Global
- An action plan has been laid out which is monitored by representatives from the Board
- Potential two-tier membership will be discussed in fora created for the purpose (like the town hall already held) with a final vote during the Cape Town Summit in 2024

Julian then went on to share the concerns of EZA and GEPA considering the recommendations, which were shared in the form of an open letter shared with the Board of Global and Board of WFTO-Europe, as well as participants of the conference. Equo Garantito had also shared an open letter with similar concerns on what the recommendations might mean for members.

The discussion in particular centred around the potential form of two-tier membership and the worry that it would create a kind of inequality within the membership of those taking the significant, extra effort and costs of following the GS. Some pointed out that communicating the difference in membership to citizens or customers would be very difficult. Leida Rihnhout (WFTO Global) clarified that it is still a long process to discuss and shape the actual form of the two types of membership. WFTO is a verification scheme (of businesses), not a certification scheme (of commodities), and the idea behind having two tiers would be to grow the network of like-minded businesses working towards system change and having mission-led business models better challenge the mainstream profit-extracting approaches.

Additional concerns were mainly over the costs of running the GS and the HR capacities needed. One raised the point that higher expectations to the GS and monitoring team at Global should be accompanied by a willingness to pay higher membership fees. In response, Leida said that some restructuring had been done and with those resources at Global are now sufficient. The proposed strategy is to move towards a more consultant-like approach rather than the strict GS that we currently know.

Finally, there was a clear request from participants to Global to keep them better informed along the process, for example in the form of regular town hall meetings.

Day 2

Kaléidoscoop - meetings with Colecosol, CRESS and Strasbourg Ville

The second day of the conference was dedicated to meetings with local Social and Solidarity Economy actors as well as the event in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

In the morning, the meetings took place at the co-working space, Kaleidoscoop. First a tour of the space took place with a presentation of a few organisations presently working within Civil Society or contribution to the Social and Solidarity Economy, which is quite strong in Alsace and Lorraine, with Strasbourg as a strong hub of activity.

The meetings were hosted by Colecosol, a collective promoting Fair Trade (both South-North and North-North) and encouraging citizens to support a solidarity-based and socially responsible economy. Their executive officer, Marie-Lux Philippe, introduced their work in the Grand Est region of France, which is focused on awareness-raising and education, especially through activities involving simulation games, e.g. in elementary schools. They also have strong collaborations with actors in German cities of Freiburg and Karlsruhe, just across the border.

Next, Philippine Jaquet presented CRESS, a support organisation for Social and Solidarity Economy in the Grand Est region of France. She shared that in France, SSE makes up 10% of GDP and 14% of private employment. CRESS works by connecting SSE actors and networks in its region and by developing, researching, training and promoting SSE in France. In fact, CRESS played an active role in the creation of the Kaleidoscoop co-working space, in particular the Fair Trade and second-hand shop hosted there, which participants browsed through before the lunch break.



After Philippine, Antoine Dubois, elected representative for Social and Solidarity Economy at the City of Strasbourg, spoke about the dedication of the local authority of Strasbourg to supporting SSE. In particular, City of Strasbourg collaborates directly with Colecosol and other actors to ensure an enabling environment for SSE to thrive in Strasbourg and the Grand Est, recognising how this type of enterprises and actors contribute to a more resilient local society. As he said to all participants, Fair Trade and SSE, on behalf of Strasbourg: *"You are home."*

Overall, it was valuable to discuss and exchange experiences with these different actors of the Social and Solidarity Economy, our closest allied movement. SSE is clearly strong in France and many from the movement are keen on collaborating - and already actively promote Fair Trade as part of their activities. Mr. Dubois also confirmed the interest of Ville Strasbourg in mobilising public procurement to better support SSE and Fair Trade.



Event at European Parliament of Strasbourg

A highlight of the conference was the planned event at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, which was co-organised with the FTAO and hosted by the MEPs, Marlene Mortler (EPP) and Claude Gruffat (Greens/EFA). It was organised around the theme of Local Fair Trade for the European members gathered to share their experiences as Fair Trade Enterprises in Europe with MEPs in order to consider how the EU could support them and similar mission-led business models. The aim was to have MEPs recognise the contribution of such enterprises and models to the just and green transition in the EU and prompt them to think about how the business practices of such models could be scaled up and adopted by mainstream companies.

The FTAO had helped prepare a Policy Brief based on work done jointly with WFTO-Europe within the H2020 project *School Food for Change (SF4C)*. It served to both prepare participating members on points to emphasise during the event and as a brief to hand to MEPs on policies they could back in the EU legislative process, e.g. utilising public procurement proactively to support sustainable and Fair Trade businesses. Paola Plaku (FTAO) also summarised them at the event itself.

Marlene Mortler (EPP) expressed her support for fair conditions for farmers in Europe as well as worldwide, and emphasised that in the end there is a need for a global discussion and approach. In particular she stated that "I do not want multinationals playing with farmers. This has not been a good development in Europe." As such the conversation had high relevance for WFTO's work on the topic of Northern Producers, where Fair Trade is expected to be essential for making agriculture sustainable - especially in Europe. Claude Gruffat (Greens/EFA), however, added that Fair Trade is also crucial in sectors like cosmetics, textiles and fashion. He further emphasised that he wanted to mobilise the EU to safe-guard the values of Fair Trade and to combat unfair competition by mainstream misuse of the concept.

The event concluded with the consensus that more meetings were needed to collaborate on promoting initiatives the EU could undertake in support of Fair Trade. Claude Gruffat wants to organise a gathering of Fair Trade stakeholders in autumn for identifying specific initiatives together. WFTO-Europe will play a part in this gathering, so we will keep you updated.



Thank you for participating!

After the event in the European Parliament the conference closed with a visit to the local Artisans du Monde shop in the centre of Strasbourg. Participants were welcomed by the volunteers operating the shop and had the opportunity to speak with them about topics discussed the past days.

On behalf of the WFTO-Europe Board and secretariat, many thanks to all that participated in, and contributed to, the conference. Being the first gathering of European WFTO members in three years, it seems clear that crucial topics need to be discussed in person in order to progress. We encourage you to join WFTO Global's summit in South Africa in 2024. And naturally, we are looking forward to host you again in Europe in 2025.





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