

**Paper Abstract: “Towards a Fair Global Economic Regime? A regulationist reading of the Fair Trade Regime” (working title)**

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The Fair Trade proposal, though still small in proportion, is becoming each day a bigger phenomenon. Its importance has not stopped increasing since the 1990's and only a decade later the total amount of fair trade goods sales was estimated to be at US\$500 million, growing at 30 per cent each year. It is not, however, only a matter of growing volume which should turn our attention to this phenomenon, there is also the matter of novelty involved: we are invited to join a global moral economy where market rules do not have the last word, but are put under discussion by conceptions of justice and emancipation.

If Fair Trade, then, appears as an alternative in both an economic and a political dimension, and its popularity does not stop growing, especially among those concerned with social change and activism, it becomes fundamental to truly understand what it is really about. We need to know how the Fair Trade regime is structured and the way it operates. Once we have a clear picture of a whole regime and its different spheres, we can understand what the consequences for political action and social change are. The working hypothesis behind this proposal is that Fair Trade presents itself as an alternative global system, as a way of emancipating the producer through the introduction of moral minimums to the economy, but it actually does very little to escape from the dominant capitalist logic and, consequently, its effects are much less important than what one would expect. In this way, this structuring of an alternative global economy leads to a certain kind of activism which, in the end, is functional to the structures it seeks to attack.

The main theoretical concepts which work as my point of departure are taken from the Regulation School. I have stated that Fair Trade appears as an alternative both, economically and politically, consequently, I have chosen this approach in order to transcend a mere economic approach, putting the capitalist relations in connection with the social and political domains.

Most of the literature studying Fair Trade presents a major weakness: they focus only in one part of the economic process (i.e. production, circulation, consumption), reifying a single sphere as an independent arena when it is actually only one part of an interconnected system. My main objective in this research will be to grasp the structure as a whole, to understand how these different economic spaces are structured and work, how they relate to each other and, most importantly, how they are regulated in order to be compatible and assure reproduction. That is why I have chosen to analyze fair trade as *mode of development* composed by a particular *regime of accumulation* and its respective *mode of regulation*. These three concepts are the theoretical core developed and commonly used by the three main approaches within the Parisian Regulation School.

In order to complement this approach, I have decided to include in my theoretical framework two very important concepts which have been developed by the regulationist approaches in Amsterdam and Germany, those of the historical bloc and the hegemonic bloc. These two Gramscian concepts, in the first place, allow for the role of agency, since the focus is put on how different classes adopt particular strategies in order to achieve a consensual domination within a given structural context. In the second place, they complement the importance of economy by highlighting the fundamental role of politics and ideology in the construction of hegemony, because of the regulation they exercise through “comprehensive concepts of control”. In the third place, since both schools have put a strong emphasis on the international dimension of regulation, a challenge to the nation-state is proposed together with the need of a “scale relativization”.