

Resilience, Convergence and Fair Trade

Notes compiled following a workshop held on July 5, 2015 led by
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and
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Resilience has many meanings but here is concerned with the capacity of human and ecological systems to absorb stresses, maintain functionality and adapt and reorganize so as to improve sustainability in the face of continuing threats from climate change.

Similarly *Convergence* is a term used in many fields. Here it has a particular connotation derived from the recent EU-funded [Converge Project](#) which was designed “to rethink globalisation within planetary limits”.

According to the [Schumacher Institute](#) website “The research was inspired by the Global Commons Institute’s concept of [Contraction and Convergence](#) (C&C, Meyer 2002). This framework outlines a process through which we can avoid dangerous climate change by stabilising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases while promoting global social equity. C&C proposes that every person has a right to emit an equal per-capita share of carbon. This would mean that industrialised nations would, overall, reduce their emissions, while levels in developing countries would increase as they continue to develop quality of life.

The Converge Project extended this principle beyond greenhouse gas emissions to account for factors like natural resources, energy, governance, trade and human wellbeing. Recognising the relationships between social and environmental issues, we view convergence as a visionary concept that needs to part of the pathway to global sustainability.

It’s vital to note that Convergence is not about creating one homogenous culture; it promotes diversity while advocating universal concepts of human rights.”

“The framework that emerged from the project – the movement towards a fair share for all within planetary boundaries – was called ‘convergent globalisation.’ It is supported by sustainability science and is grounded in an ethic acceptable to progressive social movements, developed and developing nations, and across different global belief systems.”

This pre-conference response by Ian Roderick to the question, “Why is Fair Trade important to your organisation?” explains the Schumacher Institute’s interest in holding Resilience, Convergence and Fair Trade together (emphasis added).

“Over recent years, environmentalists have increasingly realised that social and economic factors are intimately connected with ecology. Conservation now includes regeneration and restoration – the active reshaping of nature involving people, money and technology. To protect ecosystems, to reduce loss of species, and to prevent more damage requires communities to have the capability and resources to nurture nature. There is of course a moral imperative that people should always, and in all places,

receive a fair and decent income to support their families and community but we also argue that fairness is a prerequisite for a balanced relationship between people and the environment.

Fairtrade is at the heart of this. In a prosperous city like Bristol it is easy to forget the long supply chains that bring in just about all the stuff we consume. We often run an exercise at events where we ask attendees to think about what they have used that morning that was 'Made in Bristol.' Local milk and allotment food are mentioned often but not much else! From computers and cars to bicycles and bread, our products may be assembled locally but the raw ingredients are from much further away.

Yet here we are, passionately engaged in trying to green this city and make it more resilient than before. We will only really succeed if we make sure that other communities at the far ends of our supply chains are just as green and resilient as we are.

At The Schumacher Institute, we call this convergent resilience – putting in place processes to help other communities improve their resilience at the same time as improving our own. Fairtrade is essential to this; it addresses the exploitation of people producing our goods. Without fair and decent incomes communities are vulnerable, the fabric of society and the environment weaken and eventually that means our resilience lessens. While social justice drives Fairtrade, there is also an element of selfishness – our own sustainability demands that our resources are fairly produced and responsibly managed."

In the workshop Ian's basic points were

- Every community depends on every other community
- Convergence across nations is essential: seeking equity within planetary limits.
- The world faces a multitude of threats and opportunities.
- Building our own community resilience is important but building that of others is more so.
- Nuts are a great example to explore this network of community dependence.
- Fairtrade builds resilience.

Kate Gaskell told stories about [Liberation Nuts](#) relationships with cashew nut growers in Kerala, India. [Cashew nuts](#) grow singly beneath a cashew apple. They are surrounded by a double shell containing an allergenic resin and potential skin irritant. Properly roasting cashews destroys the toxin, but it must be done outdoors as the smoke can cause severe, sometimes life-threatening, reactions by irritating the lungs. The limited output of each cashew fruit plus the health hazards in harvesting mean that cashew farmers in Kerala, where nothing is done with the apple, have a big interest in direct access to the international cashew market through Fair Trade partners like Liberation Nuts.

Interesting ideas were opened up but time was limited. Kate reported later that "It was inspiring to hook-up with the wonderful world of the Schumacher think-tank – Ian and I were both enthused by how case studies from our Fairtrade nut producer communities helped to convey the complex concepts on resilience and convergence that are fundamental to improving equality and living within our environmental means."

