

Fair Trade and Ethical, Responsible and Solidary Consumption: A University Educational Proposal

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Abstract: It begins with a summary of the results of a previous research project, where Environmental Education (EA) indicators were identified based on a knowledge dialogue, where ethical consumption and the promotion of fair trade markets as basic indicators for an EA are highlighted. Based on this, a new project is proposed, whose motive is the creation of educational strategies to promote responsible consumption within universities. The methodology used is described through a questionnaire on consumption habits applied to 462 university students, the results and the multiple educational proposals, which integrates: conferences and workshops, social networks, information capsules in the monthly Ahimsa Newsletter, promotion of markets for local and agroecological fair trade, and the degree of graduates with research topics related to ethical consumption.

Key words: fair trade, ethical consumption, educational proposals

1. Introduction

The planetary scenario regarding the environmental, energy, social and economic crisis, seems to be separated from the western style of consumption, and although reality shows the opposite, recognizing that link can commit to taking responsibility for it, more precisely — being co-responsible — and it seems difficult to give up “self-realization” through consumption, because it implies depriving oneself of habits that concurrently plunder the planet, not only natural goods, badly called resources, they also destroy ecosystems, they undermine the economy of small businesses, and they make indigenous communities disappear stripped of their territory in order to carry out the expansion of agribusiness, extractive industry or hotel districts, just to mention some of their purposes.

Although the phenomenon of consumption has been studied academically as a form of self-realization, and

on the other hand there are also studies on the predatory capitalist lifestyle, Paul Kennedy states that there are fewer attempts to study them so that the interconnection between them is observed, in addition to the invisibilization of the growing dissatisfaction of the consumer, his loss of power from indebtedness, which calls for the collective challenge to transcend the individual perspective favored by the system [1].

The need to study consumption in direct link with the impact it causes, is the rationale of this article, with the main objective of laying out educational proposals, that help to make these interconnections visible, so that in the future changes can be generated in the behavior of the student population, that are more consistent with the care of the planet.

The second part of this article summarizes the precedents that gave rise to this research, from an experience that originated in a knowledge dialogue, in order to identify Environmental Education indicators, based on transdisciplinary research in the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UAEMéx).

The third section has the purpose of summarizing the theoretical foundations where the view is

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contextualized from the commitments that a critical and active University must assume, both in the training of its students on responsible consumption, as well as in the creation of conditions that allow the connection with its community through local fair trade, from a transversal and transdisciplinary perspective, which generates conditions for a non-violent quality of life. A fourth section corresponds to the methodology that substantiates the educational proposal in matters of responsible consumption, including the results obtained by applying a questionnaire of consumption habits to a university sample of 462 students and which allowed the creation of educational proposals focused on the modification of the behavior of the university consumer population, which are described in the fifth section of this document, section six corresponds to the conclusions.

2. Background

In 2016, an investigation was completed, its purpose was to identify Environmental Education (EA) indicators, initially obtained from the theoretical analysis, and subsequently based on the creation of a knowledge dialogue that was integrated into three stages, in which researchers, civil society, people dedicated to art, guardians of indigenous tradition, among others, participated. At the end of the process, four general indicators finally resulted: the first was awareness raising, understood as the possibility of generating knowledge, attitudes, skills and abilities to assess the impact of one's behavior on the environment, including the promotion of a biophilic culture (love towards the Community of life), as well as the transcendence of the anthropocentric approach; the second is related to the rationale of the present investigation: ethical consumption, which was within the framework of solidary cooperation, fair trade, and the sense of reciprocity and co-responsibility. The third indicator is related to the establishment and maintenance of university contact with the community, based on transdisciplinarity:

Establishes and maintains contact with the community: identifies their needs, listens to their proposals, merges support systems, and integrates local, native, indigenous, art, spirituality, culture and science knowledge in parallel hierarchies into academic and community programs. It implies transcending the classroom space and theoretical thought through contact with nature and the community. It includes sustainable inter-institutional collaborative work, with Networks, Government, NGOs and other Universities [2].

The above quotation represents a summary of all the aspects that emerged in the dialogue, expressing an urgent need to listen to society and integrate it into the contribution of solutions to change the predatory course that humanity has sustained in recent decades. And finally the fourth indicator was linked to the EA with the impact on actions of peace, non-violent quality of life, decline and emancipation; with the respective propositional criticism, where food sovereignty is included as an emancipatory action of social justice, which, if achieved, could impact on the recovery of a planetary life that is healthy and fit for life.

As can be seen, the above indicators are closely related, so that within the present investigation their interdependence will become more visible.

3. Critical and Active University

One of the elements that is important to consider in education, is the fact that everything that is done is interconnected, we are not isolated, our actions impact from the inside and the outside of ourselves, and studies on ecology have confirmed it, "[...] An immense accumulation of knowledge indicates that all things are connected, every living object is necessary, nothing is useless"[3]. Another aspect, related to the statement above, which requires consideration in a university education regardless of the discipline chosen, is the need to preserve the habitat and the protection of natural diversity or biodiversity, as well as the evaluation of the social and economic impact that derive from the exhaustion of natural goods, where it is important to prevent conflicts between the populations

that are affected by the use of goods such as water [4]. Each discipline, university or postgraduate career, can and should be integrated into the study of these problems, from its particular approach, there will always be connections: from law, biology, marketing, ethics, agronomy, and so on.

The act of consuming in an uncritical way, involves two aspects: depletion and destruction [5], but due to the powerful marketing processes, the depletion of goods and the sustained destruction of different ecosystems, goes unnoticed by the general population, causing the displacement or extinction of animals and the disappearance of communities, mainly indigenous. This context comes to be thought of as “natural” and “necessary”; however, if our own homes or universities were in danger of disappearing because large industries required our space, it would no longer seem so natural.

It is also important to mention that all these social problems are interconnected: poverty, malnutrition, pollution, and environmental predation, which have a common denominator: humanity hypnotized and tied to a relentless productive system along with an overflowed uncritical consumerism that separates it from nature, and that provokes the vulnerability of the most disadvantaged populations on the planet, where basic aspects such as access to food and water are out of reach.

Research at the University of Xalapa in Mexico, considers retaking the role of public universities in generating spaces to reflect upon the training of its professionals, so that they recognize the causes of the food crisis and act “[...] to generate food production and consumption strategies with sufficient quality and quantity” [6].

4. Methodology and Results

Sample: An intentional sampling was carried out with the student population at the bachelor’s level of the groups that each academic member of the research project was in charge of, according to the subjects they were teaching at the time. The total number of participating students were 462, of which 56% were

Table 1 Careers

%	Bachelor level careers
37.4	Dental surgeon
13.4	Tourism
9.0	Psychology
.9	Zootechnical agronomist engineer
7.0	Alternative means of conflict resolution
6.0	Accountancy
3.7	Social work
13.6	Others

women and 44% were men. The careers that participated were according to what’s shown in the Table 1.

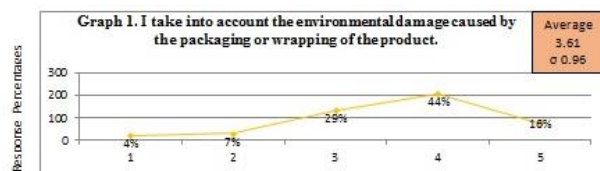
4.1 Instrument

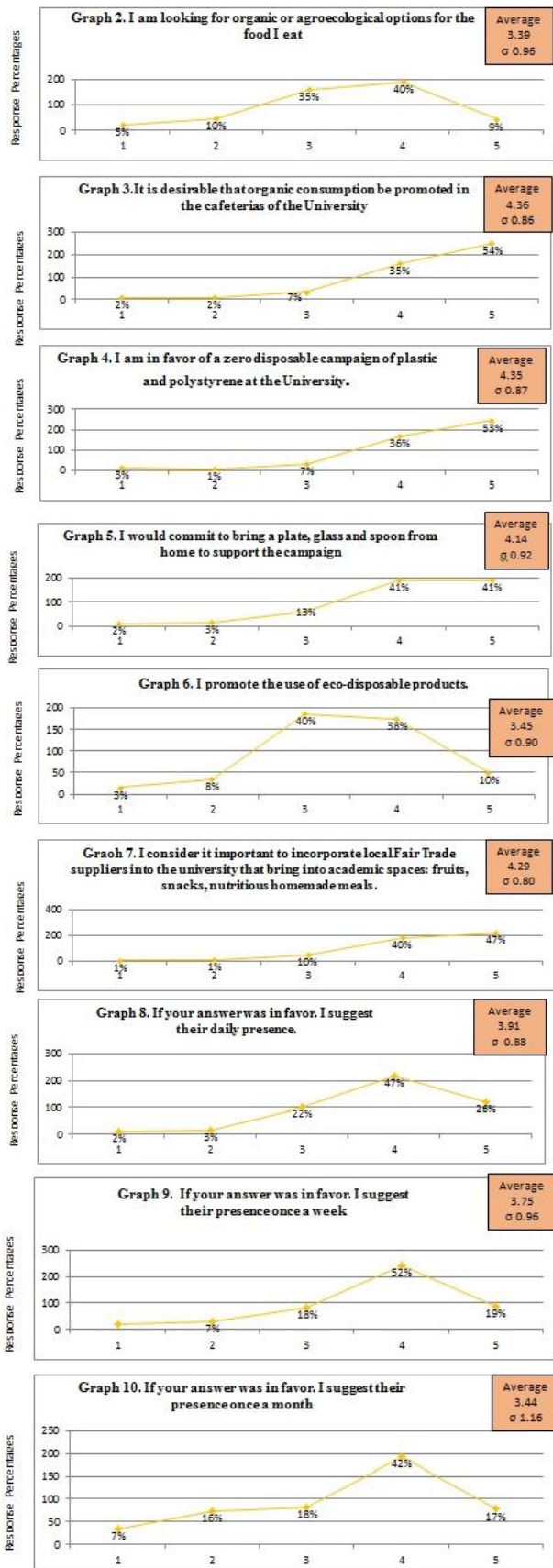
A Multiple Choice Survey was applied, combined with complementation reagents, whose purpose was to identify their habits based on environmental care and consumption preferences, and attitudes towards the presence of local agroecological markets within university facilities. Before the final application, a pilot was conducted with 18 university students, 10 men and 8 women, it was necessary to omit a question in which no one contributed, and modify the wording of reagents 1, 2, 5 and 7, the final questionnaire can be found in Appendix I.

4.2 Main Results Obtained

The following graphs show the central tendency measures (Mean and Standard Deviation) as well as the response percentages for each reagent presented, according to the Likert scale, where:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Totally agree





It can be seen in the preceding graphs that all responses had an average greater than 3, which is a score of the indecisiveness scale, where the lowest three corresponded to reagents (2) with an average of 3.39, “My decision to purchase is affected by the environmental impact of the packaging”, (10) with an average of 3.44 “Presence of fair trade and agroecological markets once a month” and the (6) with an average of 3.45 “I promote the use of eco-disposable products”, with an average of 3.45, of the three cases, the reagent that presented the greatest variability was 10 with a standard deviation of 1.16, and it should be noted that it was the highest deviation of all reagents, while for the other cases it was 0.96, and 0.90, respectively.

On the other hand, we have the reagents that obtained the highest score in the average:

(3) “It is desirable that organic consumption be promoted within the University” with the highest average of the entire questionnaire 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.86.

(4) “I am in favor of a zero disposable campaign of plastic and styrofoam (polystyrene) at the University”, with an average of 4.35, and a standard deviation very similar to the previous one (0.87).

(7) “I consider it important to incorporate local Fair Trade suppliers into the university that bring into academic spaces: fruits, snacks, nutritious homemade meals”, with an average of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 0.80, the lowest of The 10 reagents.

Also in the last section, corresponding to the open response reagent number 11: “Suggestions to achieve an awareness campaign for students on ethical, responsible and solidary consumption”, you can see the five main categories of response in Table 2.

It is worth mentioning that for the design of strategies, the proposals according to the resulting categories were taken into account, with the exception of the E “that the university cafeterias sell healthy food, at a good price, hygienic and without disposables”, because this strategy, is not didactic and corresponds

Table 2 Suggestions for designing educational strategies in responsible consumption in food.

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
I	Talks/conferences and workshops that integrate: environmental care, organic or agroecological food, the transition to change	105	23%
II	Videos and posters on social networks.	60	13%
III	Zero disposable campaigns, organic consumption, local consumption, healthy food.	77	17%
IV	Fair trade markets within the faculties with traditional healthy. Food without disposables.	102	22%
V	That the university cafeterias sell healthy food, at a good price, hygienic and without disposables.	49	11%

to the Governance of the University; however, it will be followed through the collegiate bodies, and its procedures are still in process. The following section describes the chosen strategies.

5. Educational Proposal on Environmental Education, Preliminary Results

For the construction of the strategy proposed in this section, in addition to considering the results of the previous diagnosis, we proceeded to visit universities that have been pioneers in environmental matters, starting inside the institution, mainly with the student population. Among them, the National University of Distance Education in Madrid (UNED) was visited, directly with María Novo, who created the UNESCO Chair of Environmental Education in 1996, under an agreement from the principal ship of her University. Novo is an important precedent for any person who wishes to investigate Environmental Education, and from a transdisciplinary perspective, her contribution towards the importance of art as another way of knowing is evident in her project known as Ecoarte [7]. In addition, the UNIMINUTO University Corporation was visited in Colombia, directly to the Agroecological Engineering Program with Adriana Chaparro, the leading founder of a network of agroecological markets

in Bogotá, whose importance and impact on the peasant and student population has set an important precedent in matters of EA, especially in agroecological production and its sale in fair trade markets [8].

Another visited institution of superior education was the Complutense University of Madrid, within the Department of Education and the Faculty Formation Center, with Bienvenida Sánchez, member of the research group SOCIDES (Inclusive Societies for a Sustainable Development) with whom a chartered work has been sustained since 2014, which has included conferences, workshops, research projects, publications [9, 10], knowledge dialogues and degree thesis direction.

The University of Granada (UGR) has been an important space that has allowed Mario López — research professor at the Institute for Peace and Conflicts — to complement the view of EA from the Gandhian perspective, both from a historical perspective, and from the fundamental principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (force of truth and spirit) [11], and with whom collegial events have also been held through seminars and research stays. Another researcher visited at the UGR was Professor Emeritus Alfonso Fernández-Herrería, of the Department of Pedagogy of the Faculty of Education Sciences, from whose perspective of the Earth Charter, has developed a transdisciplinary work that favors learning from internal awareness, guided through relaxation and meditation, complemented by the creation of an Earth's Journal, as a didactic strategy [12].

Likewise, the University of Córdoba, a pioneer Spanish institution since 2008 in promoting responsible consumption and fair trade markets where teaching, research and management join, Mayté Hernández Merino of the Cooperation and Solidarity Area was the hostess of this visit, having the opportunity to spend time together in the solidary breakfasts of the Kiosko Gallipatos, where local suppliers come on Thursdays to

sell breakfasts to the university's community. The management of fair trade and responsible consumption are strengthened with the research of its undergraduate students, whose subjects in different countries are studied and reported in their thesis. Their Vice Chancellor for University Life and Social Responsibility comments:

The University of Córdoba wishes to become a reference in Education for Development and Cooperation, so that the university's community and, above all, its graduate students take action, not only with scientific-technical solvency, but with social awareness and commitment. Only with this harmonious conjunction will we be contributing to truly improve the living conditions of today's and tomorrow's society [13].

Another visited organization was the FUHEM Madrid, (Charity and Social Foundation Home of the Employee), which started in 1965 and has now become an important reference in research and practice on environmental awareness, through its FUHEM Ecosocial area, which publishes periodically magazines and books, written by authorities on the subject, not only of Spain. The academic and shared bibliography contributions that Yayo Herrero, at that time General Director of the foundation, and Santiago Álvarez, Director of FUHEM Ecosocial provided for the project, represented a break point in the theoretical foundation of the strategies that are presented later, and that the FUHEM supports in different levels of education, from basic to university [14].

It is important to express our gratitude to all the research staff that received our research team in their academic spaces, and whom, in addition to the experience and their time, in all cases shared valuable bibliography of their authorship to follow up on the project. Therefore, it is also important to highlight research stays as deep teaching strategies, because they allow us to immerse full time in the environmental issues that concern us, directly visiting all the scenarios involved, both theoretical and practical, and their impact on the transformation of teaching is much

greater than the single bibliographic reading. This statement also argues that to create changes in the behavior towards the environmental care of the student population, it is essential to start with the teaching staff.

On the other hand, when locating the EA in Latin America, it is relevant to emphasize on some summary aspects such as the trend for:

The search for an inner-learning based on different types of knowledge, that considers and takes advantage of the cultural, natural and historical diversity of each region, developing pedagogical strategies, that are popular, interdisciplinary, intercultural, and integrative [...] 2) the generation of critical thinking [...] purposeful and promoter of more harmonious lifestyles with nature [15].

So considering the previous aspects, as well as the results of the diagnosis, the five environmental education strategies that were finally considered, are:

1) Conferences and workshops

These activities have been implemented, considering the following topics: Social and solidarity economy, Degrowth, local fair trade, responsible consumption [16]; Measurement of food, among the most outstanding, directed openly to the university population and local suppliers.

2) Social network

A channel was created in a social network in order to promote short videos on non-violent responsible consumption, the titles published are: "Ethical consumption from Yayo Herrero"; "Ethical consumption and fair trade"; "Nonviolent ethical consumption from the perspective of Mario López"; "Art and Non-violence in the Work of Carlos Eduardo Martínez Hincapié"; "Non-violent community El Arca 'La Borie Noble'"; "Food sovereignty and fair trade" [17]. A profile on Ethical, social and solidarity consumption was also created [18].

3) Monthly Newsletter *Ahimsa*¹

¹ This newsletter began in 2004, it is co-edited from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México with the Human Rights Committee of the State of Mexico.

It was considered to insert topics as informative capsules, such as: “The recovery of traditional food”; “Food sovereignty: self-management and autonomy” (No. 175); “Palm oil: threat to peace and life”; “Cooperativism: an interdependent autonomy” (No. 171); “Food sovereignty the shortest route for environmental care” (No. 170); “The Earth Charter and the ethics of care” (No. 169), among several related subjects in which bidders, students and academic staff participate for writing [19].

4) Promotion of local and agroecological fair trade markets

In this area, three university spaces have systematically joined in promoting responsible consumption and a culture in favor of the environment, adding a total of 24 fair trade market exhibitions in the year, see Appendix 2 for an example of a poster promoting fair trade markets within the university. Other academic spaces have also started inviting local bidders, at least once a semester. These events have allowed closer communication between suppliers, students, teachers and civil society, in such a way that *in situ* education has been promoted, by facilitating that each supplier can speak and explain the benefits that exist behind each product they offer, in addition to the cultural, local economy, and health impacts for the whole Community of life.

5) Promotion of responsible consumption through research

The approach to the issues of consumption, has also been possible through graduate and postgraduate research, so far we can mention the cases of three thesis already completed: “Habits of consumption and academic stress” of the Faculty of Dentistry. An approach from non-violent quality of life [20]; Habits of consumption and oral health for a non-violent quality of life in patients who attend the Faculty of Dentistry [21], as well as environmental education based on the responsible consumption of food in an ecotouristic park, a Social Work proposal [22], in addition to those in process. These investigations allow

students and the academic staff involved to be trained in the subject addressed, and when they finally present their work to obtain their title or degree, family members and the public are also trained, in addition to the population or sample involved in the investigation.

6. Conclusion

The promotion of a critical University that responds to the urgent needs of the context, is a shared task that includes the aspects of governance, teaching, research, linking and management. In this way, work consistent with the *raison d'être* of a university can be done, which must respond to the imperatives of a community which is both, local and global. It is important to recognize the work that other universities are doing around the world, creating the conditions so that responsible consumption is known and promoted, as well as its parallel: local fair trade.

Regarding cafeterias and food in universities, it is desirable to consider organic or agroecological foods, as mentioned by the members of the evaluated sample, through local markets and university cafeterias, otherwise we are bringing poisons to our universities and to the tables of our homes.

We need the involvement of all the University figures, the substantive transformation requires political will and discipline, in order for the didactic strategies to work, and as the arrangements are made, it will be necessary to make adjustments, that should be a task of sustained co-creation, which will allow in the future the transformation of a predatory paradigm to one of care and connection with the Earth.

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Appendix I

Food Consumption Habits Questionnaire in University Student Population

Instructions:

Knowing the daily consumption practices of students in the university, will help us to provide educational responses to those areas and habits of purchase and intake that are damaging personal, community and environmental health, so we ask you to respond with the utmost sincerity. Our ultimate goal is to form a profile of the consumer (a) university student, from an ethical, responsible and supportive approach. You are presented with questions where you will choose an answer of the possible options, in some cases it will be valid to choose more than one option and therefore, it will be indicated thus in the question, there will be other open response reagents. It is also very important that you answer the last section that is focused on rescuing your free vision of the subject and your proposals.

		1	2	3	4	5
		Strongly disagree	In disagreement	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	In my purchase decision, I take into account the environmental damage caused by the product's packaging or wrapping					
2	I am looking for organic or agroecological options for my consumption					
3	It is desirable that the University promote organic consumption within the cafeterias of the University					
4	I am in favor of a zero disposable campaigns of plastic and polystyrene at the University					
5	I would commit to bring my plate, glass and spoon to support the campaign					
6	Promote the use of disposable eco products					
7	I consider it important to incorporate to the university (without replacing the current cafeterias), local Fair Trade suppliers that take to the academic spaces: fruits, snacks, nutritious homemade meals					
8	If your answer was in favor: I suggest be daily					
9	If your answer was in favor: I suggest once a week					
10	If your answer was in favor: I suggest once a month					
11	Suggestions to design an awareness campaign for university students on ethical, responsible and solidarity consumption					

Appendix II

Example Poster Promoting Local Fair Trade Markets

