



Zweisimmen receives acknowledgement as a Fair Trade town.

Fair trade emissary from Switzerland

Bexhill is a Fair Trade town but Hastings has not yet achieved that status. So when Claire Torricelli from Switzerland was passing through recently, she asked to speak to HOT to tell us how the Fair Trade Town movement is progressing in her home country. Nick Terdre reports.

There are currently two Fair Trade towns in Switzerland, Glarus Nord and Zweissimen, both in the German-speaking part of this multi-lingual nation. But several more are in the pipeline – Bern the capital, looks like becoming one in early 2017, while Frutigen and Capriasca, both in the Italian-speaking part where Claire comes from, are following close behind, she says. Lausanne and Delémont in French-speaking Switzerland are also on the way.

While secret bank accounts may be the first thing that springs to British minds when Switzerland is mentioned, what is less well known here is that the Alpine country has long played a leading role in the fair trade movement. According to Claire, it is the Swiss who on average spend most on fairly traded goods – 63 Swiss francs per person in 2015, equivalent to about £43.



Drumming up support for Fair Trade towns in Switzerland.

The movement got going in the late 1960s, when people wondered how it was that imported bananas were cheaper to buy than domestic apples. The answer of course was that banana producers got a terrible deal from the big companies which dominate world trade. So consumers voluntarily decided to pay more, and channelled the extra money to the producers to help improve their income and living conditions.

There was plenty of potential for cooperating with producers in developing countries. In the early days Claire, who now works for Fairtrade's umbrella association in Switzerland, was involved in a campaign to help develop the cultivation of fair trade organic cotton in Mali. Cotton growers had become dependent on using fertilisers, so it took an effort to persuade them to go organic. In addition to providing technical assistance, the groundwork also included encouraging producers to band together in cooperatives, and making space for women who, although the pivot of the family, are often excluded from the local community's decision-making.

The campaign proved successful and, along with the organic cotton traded for a fair price, came other benefits – the young people who used to travel to Spain to seek seasonal employment were able to stay at home and help with the crops. Educational opportunities arose, and not just for the youngsters – Claire also found that many of the women were unable to read and write but keen to learn.

1,800 plus Fair Trade towns

The Fair Trade Town movement originated in the UK 16 years ago and has really taken off – there are now more than 1,800 such towns in 28 countries, including more than 600 in the UK. Achieving this status isn't easy – it needs the support of the local government, healthy sales of fairly traded products in retail and catering outlets, the involvement of local workplaces and community organisations, coverage of fair trade matters in the local media and the establishment of a steering group to promote fair trade's continuing growth.

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The Fair Trade Town movement has now spread to developing countries. In 2015 a Fair Trade Towns and Villages campaign was launched in Latin America, and Fair Trade towns have been recognised in Nicaragua, Ecuador and Brazil; in Africa there are such towns in Ghana and Cameroon, while in India two towns are close to joining them. Nine Lebanese villages have also gained this status, and this year Lebanon also became the first developing country to host the Fair Trade Town conference.



Discussing fair trade matters – Claire Torricelli on the left.

Fair trade is not a panacea and it doesn't work miracles, says Claire, who is also the president of **Botteghe del Mondo**, an association of 15 fair trade shops in the Italian-speaking part. But with a lot of hard work people can become aware of their possibilities for improving their lives. "It's not enough to introduce fair trade and everything will be well, we have to work at constructing the fair trade value chain," she says. And that's why consumers in developed countries need to continue working with producers in developing countries.

Successful businesses can be built on fair trade foundations – she mentions Divine chocolate as an example. The scope of fairly traded goods is constantly increasing – UK-based Fairtrade International is trying to build a fair trade value chain for gold, another consumer item whose producers are commonly badly paid and badly treated. Fair trade footballs have made their entry onto the sports field.

"Become a Fairtrade Town," she urges Hastings. "Do it because it's showing solidarity with people who need a helping hand, it helps to end child labour. It's also good for the town's image – it will appeal to visitors from countries like Germany with a strong fair trade tradition."

All photos from the **Swiss Fair Trade Town** website.