

Ethical consumption: what place does it have in a new economy?

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The current global economic, industrial and financial system has given developed countries abundances of food, clothing and other goods. However, this comes at increasing environmental and social costs, which are often 'externalised' and hidden from consumers. The growth imperative and affluenza are driving unprecedented environmental degradation. Moreover, producers in developing countries are often subject to social injustices such as forced labour and poor working conditions. In response, ethical consumption is gaining traction, where consumers 'vote with their money' and demand products of higher environmental and social standards. The increasing awareness of injustices in production is largely due to the marketing of fair trade. Fair trade aims to help producers and facilitate community development, while giving consumers guarantees of product standards through certification and labelling. However, the effectiveness of ethical consumption is diminished due to its practice within the current system being difficult, causing intention-behaviour gaps among aware consumers. Moreover, ethical consumption often leaves unsustainable consumption unchallenged. There is a rebound effect risk, where consumers forget about reducing consumption while buying ethical products. Based on this situation, I make the following proposals. Firstly, I emphasise the importance of a two-tiered approach to consumption: sustainable consumption and ethical consumption, and in that order. Secondly, I assert that society should embrace a shift in cultural values to that of sufficiency and care, which should weaken affluenza and encourage better consumption. Thirdly, I propose some ways that governments could facilitate these shifts, so that sustainable and ethical practices become the norm. I plan to give a short talk to introduce ethical consumption, present its benefits and limitations, and connect it with ideas of a new economy. After that, I intend to start an open discussion in the room.

Conference Themes: care, money

Bio:

Koji strives to practise and encourage action towards ethical consumption and sustainable living. He is passionate about working towards sustainable consumption and production for people and planet, and is exploring how this can be achieved through a new economy and alternative ways of living. As volunteer coordinator of Moral Fairground, he works to hold various events around Melbourne to raise public awareness of ethical lifestyles and ethical business.