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Music festivals: New arenas for sustainable food discourse?



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Left: festival visitors and food court at DGTL (2020a).

Introduction



Changing people's food choices is a crucial measure towards limiting human impacts on the climate, and the consumption of more sustainable diets may present "major opportunities" for reducing environmental impacts from food systems, especially GHG emissions (Arcari, 2017; Graham & Abrahamse, 2017; IPCC, 2019, p. 56). This calls for a transition of mainstreaming sustainable food choices through gradually stimulating consumers to experiment with conventional diets and transforming dishes, but also through normalizing the questioning of conventional, more harmful diets (Arcari, 2017; De Boer & Aiking, 2017). Some studies suggest that message framing might have a moderate effect on changing attitudes towards pro-environmental diets and behavioural intention, and could therefore pave the way for shaping food consumption patterns (e.g. De Boer & Aiking, 2017; Graham & Abrahamse, 2018; Vaino et al., 2018). It is therefore crucial to critically examine how information about sustainable diets is being communicated (Cheng et al., 2011; Kennedy et al., 2009), not only within common media spaces, but also other cultural avenues, such as music festivals.

Music festivals may shape festival visitors' attitudes because they provide a carnivalesque, relaxed atmosphere where attendees may be more receptive to new ideas (Laing & Frost, 2010; Sharpe, 2008). Contemporary music festivals can engage a large attendee population, comprised of both locals and tourists, in environmental messages and eco-political issues (Cummings, 2014; Mair & Laing, 2013). An essential aspect of a music festival, as opposed to sustainability-focused events, is that it attracts a broad audience, and thus not only those individuals who are already leading a highly sustainable lifestyle (Mair & Laing, 2012). Therefore, music festivals that promote alternative, environmentally friendly food choices can play an essential role in the societal

transformation towards more sustainable diets. Besides providing a useful frame to enable a discussion of persuasive messages, a festival may operate as a forum of the cultural public sphere, which may foster, among visitors, environmental awareness as well as 'green' practices and ideologies (Cummings et al., 2011; Frost & Laing, 2013; Ravenscroft & Matteucci, 2003).

Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: What are the dominant discourses concerning sustainable diets encountered on music festival websites? The following sub-questions support the main research question:

1. Through which positive and socially desirable aspects do music festival organizations seek to promote sustainable diets?
2. To what extent do music festival organizations provide practical information about the sustainable diets that they are referencing?
3. To what extent do music festival organizations include familiar, sensory-based associations?

The theoretical contributions of this research are threefold. First, exploring and analysing the messages, beliefs and images that music festivals provide on their website will establish an understanding of how cultural institutions utilize new media channels for mainstreaming and institutionalizing alternative, environmentally friendly diets. Second, this study contributes to bridging a substantial gap within the academic literature of the "emerging 'sustainable festival' phenomenon" (Zifkos, 2015, p.9). The number of studies on this phenomenon is still rather limited and only one of them (Andersson et al., 2013) places sustainable diets at the center. Third, this study adds to the literature on sustainable food discourse, by taking an alternative approach to this field of research.

Framing food, making music



Left: festival visitors at a foodcourt at Way Out West (n.d.)

Within this research, a broad definition of sustainable diets is employed, as it has been proposed by the FAO:

“Sustainable diets are those diets with low environmental impacts that contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable, nutritionally adequate, safe, and healthy, while optimizing natural and human resources.” (Burlingame & Dernini, 2012, p.7).

This study recognizes several distinct food-related options that are commonly associated with sustainable diets. These widespread food-options, hereafter referred to as food clusters, are 1) plant-based foods (aimed at reducing meat consumption through meat-free, vegetarian or vegan meals), 2) organic foods (aimed at increasing the amount of organically sourced products in a diet), 3) local foods (aimed at reducing food miles and increasing the amount of seasonal produce), and 4) Fairtrade foods (aimed at improving labour conditions in developing countries).

The framing of sustainable diets has predominantly been investigated in a news media context (Almiron & Zoppeddu, 2015; Cahill et al., 2010; Edwards-Jones et al.,

2011; Friedlander et al., 2014; Iannetta et al., 2012; Kiesel, 2010; Lockie, 2006, p. 313; Meyers & Abrams, 2010; Mittal, 2013; Mittal & Brüggeman, 2019; Neff et al., 2008 - see Appendix 1 for an overview of recurring associations and news media discourses for plant-based, organic, local and fairtrade food). However, traditional news outlets no longer have a monopoly on informing and influencing the public. The concept of sustainability is becoming increasingly popular in the music festival industry.

Investments in environmentally friendly facilities and practices are now an integral feature of the sector, and festival organizations are gaining experience in sustainable management (Cumplings, 2014; Hall, 2012; Mair & Jago, 2010, Mair & Lang, 2012). Among the green initiatives

is the integration of more environmentally friendly diets into contemporary music festival management. Way out West in Gothenburg, for instance, an annual three-day rock, hip-hop and pop festival, changed over to an entirely vegetarian menu in 2012 to challenge the normativity of serving meat at an event (Andersson et al., 2013). Besides a major reduction of their environmental impact, the changes resulted in an enhanced brand image of the music festival, where the festival was perceived as authentic and acting without economic gain which, undoubtedly, adds to their brand value of being a truly ‘green’ festival. In like manner, large-scale music festivals such as Shambala in the United Kingdom and DGTL in the Netherlands have made the decision to provide only meat-free dishes in the festival area (Coldwell, 2016; Schreuder, 2019).

Others aim to reduce environmental impacts by sourcing mainly local and organic ingredients, such as Roskilde in Denmark (O’Connor, 2017).

Festival organizations are increasingly marketing their events with what Laing (2010) refers to as ‘green credentials’, and concerns have been raised about festival organizers competing with each other in demonstrating their environmental concerns for the mere purpose of gaining a brand advantage (Hitchings et al., 2018; Laing & Frost, 2010; Wong et al., 2015). One way of exhibiting such “green credentials” (Mair & Laing, 2012, p.686) is by overtly promoting sustainable lifestyles in a “fun, creative and experimental” way (Gibson & Wong, 2011, p. 98; Hitchings et al., 2018). Whether this is the case for the promotion of sustainable diets, however, remains to be seen. It has been argued that diet change communication may be most effective if messages relate to previous meal experiences (De Boer & Aiking, 2017; Vainio et al., 2018). Highlighting the taste and meal itself – instead of stereotypical beliefs about pro-environmental diets – circumvents concerns that environmental sustainability may not be a determining factor for everyone (Barr & Gilg, 2007; De Boer et

“Way out West in Gothenburg changed over to an entirely vegetarian menu in 2012 to challenge the normativity of serving meat at an event.”

al., 2016; Korzen & Lassen, 2010). If the goal was to reduce meat consumption, for example, a focus on “hot meals that are savory, flavorful and satisfying” with plant-based protein may be a feasible alternative approach, as they relate to the familiar culinary aspects of the meal (De Boer & Aiking, 2017, p.242; Schösler et al., 2012). Furthermore, instead of merely highlighting parts of a particular diet that should be limited (e.g., eating less meat), concrete frames are needed that stimulate the positive and desirable aspects of the alternative diet as well as practical recommendations about what to eat instead. This approach is believed to help consumers in making sensory-based, positive associations and subsequent interpretations of pro-environmental food options (De Boer & Aiking, 2017). These insights are crucial for examining the communication and promotion of pro-environmental consumption patterns.

Methodology

This study explored how seventeen European music festivals produce meaning and knowledge about sustainable food choices on their websites by means of a discourse analysis. This involves the examination of texts to trace the way in which lexical choices, grammatical constructions and rhetorical strategies are involved in the construction or mediation of specific events or subjectivities – and what the social, institutional and psychological consequences and practices of such discourses might be (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1983; Willig, 2013). The analytical approach to discourse analysis adopted here was informed by Carvalho’s (2000) detailed step-by-step framework for written media texts, which was extended by the interdisciplinary method of visual discourse analysis as proposed by Milman and Doerr (2014). This multimodal approach was useful as it allowed for the inclusion of multi-faceted art, images and other visual presentations provided on the promotional websites of music festivals, adding depth and context to the analysis.

The music festivals examined for the purpose of this study are all based in Europe: Amsterdam Open Air, Best Kept Secret, DGTL, Into the Great Wide Open and Lowlands in the Netherlands, Body and Soul in Ireland, Boomtown, Shambala, and Green Gathering in the United Kingdom, Couleur Café and Paradise City in Belgium, Greenman Festival in Wales, Northside and Roskilde in Denmark, Øya Festival in Norway, Way Out West in Sweden and We Love Green

in France (Appendix 2). This delineation is not necessarily a deliberate one, but rather based upon the availability of information with respect to sustainable diets on festival websites. There certainly are music festivals known for their sustainability initiatives in other parts of the world, for instance Burning Man and Lollapalooza in the United States, Splendor in the Grass and Rainbow Serpent in Australia or Echoes of Earth in India. However, the corresponding event websites did not entail a sustainable food strategy as of June 2020. Despite the geographically skewed distribution, the seventeen music festivals included within this study exemplify that the phenomenon of festival organizations promoting sustainable diets is no longer an incidental occurrence. The exact data sample examined included a total of 26 webpages across 17 festival organizations. The length of the messages per organization varied from 115 words to 4439, with an average of 1268 words, and 11 festival organizations included visual elements that were used in the visual analysis.

First, the data was processed and pre-analyzed in a structured manner of segmentation, categorisation and interpretation (Schreier, 2014). Then, the textual analysis was divided into five dimensions, which are assessed by a set of guiding questions (Carvalho, 2000). The dimensions are: Surface descriptors and structural organization (e.g. “Are there specific parts of the message that are made larger or presented in a different font to bring additional attention to specific content?”), Objects / themes (e.g. “Which specific issues are associated to sustainable diets and how are they linked?”), Actors (e.g. “How does the message represent certain individuals or institutions and who has the predominant framing power?”), Language and rhetoric (e.g. “Which words, phrases and metaphors

are used over others?”), Discursive strategies and processes (e.g. “From which angle or perspective does the message tackle the issue? Which facts are included, and how are they arranged to produce meaning?”), and Ideological standpoints (e.g. “What are the moral judgements and values behind the message?”).

The visual analysis as proposed by Doerr and Milman (2014) includes three steps: visual content analysis, iconographic interpretation, and the contextualization of images through the use of additional text-based methods. For each of these steps, the proposed set of questions (Doerr & Milman, 2014) were adjusted to fit the research (e.g., “How do images designed by the website quote widespread cultural symbols?” or “In what ways is the mainstream meaning of symbols questioned through the alternative image created by the music festival?”).

The final step of contextual analysis was adapted to fit the context of websites: the focus was not so much on the temporal dimension, but rather on looking beyond the units of analysis, at the overall coverage of sustainable diets across the websites. This was done through answering questions such as: How does a specific text compare to other representations of sustainable diets? How are representations of reality reproduced or contested on other websites? How do certain depictions of reality compare to previous research? What is the wider political, social and economic context of these depictions? Within this step, common and recurring themes were derived from the analysis that transcended the individual websites by means of comparing the findings from each individual text. Integrating the recurring themes within the coding frame from the preliminary analysis aided the process of identifying the dominant discourses, and thus allowed for answering the sub-questions and main research questions.

Results and discussion

Overall, the vast majority of festival organizations covered more than one food cluster in their descriptions of sustainable diets: only 5 out of 17 festival organizations were found to provide messages that focus on merely one of the clusters. Out of the five organizations with a distinct focus, four belong to the plant-based cluster, and one to the organic cluster. Thus, none of the festivals had an approach that focused merely on local or fair-trade food. The remaining twelve festival organizations chose to include descriptions of multiple aspects of sustainable diets. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the festivals and the corresponding food clusters.

Amsterdam Open Air	NL	✓			
Best Kept Secret	NL	✓			
Body & Soul	IE		✓	✓	✓
Boomtown	UK		✓	✓	✓
Couleur Café	BE	✓	✓		✓
DGTL	NL	✓			✓
Green Man Festival	WAL			✓	✓
Into the Great Wide Open	NL	✓			
Lowlands	NL		✓	✓	
Northside	DK		✓		✓
Øya Festival	NO	✓	✓		
Paradise City	BE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Roskilde	DK		✓		
Shambala	UK	✓	✓	✓	✓
Green Gathering	UK	✓	✓	✓	✓
Way Out West	SE	✓			
We Love Green	FR		✓		✓

Table 1: Overview of food choice per festival

The analysis revealed three dominant discourses: Sustainable diets as a matter of being a pioneer in festival sustainability, Sustainable diets as a political instrument in music festival activism, and Sustainable diets as trivial. Less prevailing discourses include: Sustainable diets as a community effort, Sustainable diets as a matter of economic progress, Plant-based diets as environmentally friendly, and Plant-based diets as an equally delicious alternative. These findings also enable a response to the three sub-questions.

1. Through which positive and socially desirable aspects do music festival organizations seek to promote sustainable diets?

Sustainable diets are framed as a political endeavour, or as a matter of economic and societal progress. Festival organizations underlined their role in educating visitors about sustainable diets, and inspiring them to be an active part of this movement. By framing sustainable diets as a political instrument in music festival activism, music festival organizations repeatedly went beyond descriptions of sustainable diets as socially acceptable. Rather, they created a strong, positive image of sustainable diets as the new standard, where non-

sustainable diets have become less favourable. General discursive constructions of sustainable diets as a matter of community effort or economic progress supported this image: here, sustainable diets were either approached as a shared responsibility within the festival community, where everyone has an obligation to contribute; or as an innovative, bold approach to festival sustainability, where previous modes of operating are being ‘fundamentally redesigned’. Overall, sustainable diets were rendered not only desirable but necessary; and organizations were found to take a stance towards the role of sustainable diets in society, where eating responsibly was presented as an integral part of a sustainable lifestyle.



Depictions of meat-based dishes. Top: Best Kept Secret (2019), Left: Oya Festival (2020b), Top right: DGTL (2020a), Bottom right: Best Kept Secret (2019).

2. To what extent do music festival organizations provide practical information about the sustainable diets that they are referencing?

Two aspects were repeatedly absent from the descriptions of sustainable diets on music festival websites. First, the majority of festival organizations did not provide practical examples in terms of which dishes the visitors may expect. Green Gathering was one of the few festivals that gave an elaborate, written account on the types of sustainable dishes that would be available on the festival grounds. Just a few other festivals indirectly provided this through including photography of festival food.

Second, multiple festival organizations fell short of providing information about the environmental impacts of the sustainable diets. Many festivals were found to remain ambiguous about what the problems of conventional food systems are, and how the proposed sustainable diet might help to overcome these issues. Solutions to sustainability issues of current food systems were offered more frequently than statements that problematized the environmental aspects of food consumption, e.g., food waste, energy use, or GHG emissions. Notably, the environmental impacts of meat were completely absent from roughly half of the texts, with only eight festivals acknowledging this to be an issue.

3. To what extent do music festival organizations include familiar, sensory-based associations?

Of all the festivals that provided persuasive messages about sustainable diets on their websites, only a minority promoted these through making sensory-based associations. Literal claims of sustainable diets as 'tasty' or 'delicious' were only made in passing. Øya, for instance, stated that organic food "tastes

"Many festivals were found to remain ambiguous about what the problems of conventional food systems are, and meat retained a prominent role in sensory-based imagery."

so much better" (Øyafestivalen, 2020a), while Into The Great Wide Open underlined that "good food" should be a part of the festival experience. Green Gathering promoted the choice for local food by emphasizing that the bread is "freshly baked" by a local bakery. Other associations were predominantly made through visual aspects on the websites, i.e., photographs of festival food. Nevertheless, meat played a significant role in these sensory-based images. This was evident regardless of whether an organization decided to offer only vegetarian-food or provide vegetarian dishes alongside meat, and could be connected to the issue of familiarity.

The integration of familiar associations was especially relevant in descriptions and persuasive messages of plant-based food choices, where meat retained a prominent role through several distinct aspects. First, the term 'meat-free' was employed regularly, by DGTL, Paradise City, Shambala, Green Gathering and Øya. The term itself already hints at the stance that is being taken: the organization essentially defines their decision to opt for plant-based food through an 'anti-meat' discourse, instead of being 'pro-veggie'. While these two discourses do not differ in the course of action, namely being vegetarian, the way that they are communicated places the attention on the absence of meat and allows for discourses to revolve around 'what's missing' in plant-based diets. It would be interesting to see more music festivals approach this topic from a different angle, by creating an image of plant-based diets that have a lot to offer in a culinary sense; instead of an alternative, unfamiliar diet that is mainly defined by its 'lack of meat'. In essence, the descriptions of sustainable diets were predominantly disconnected from familiar, sensory-based associations.

Activism and Branding

Our study finds two dominant, but competing, discourses around sustainable diets on music festival websites.

First, music festival organizations predominantly approached sustainable diets as a political endeavour, or as a matter of societal progress. Through the coalescence of a sense of urgency with an optimistic tone of voice, sustainable diets were rendered not only desirable but necessary. Here, organizations positioned themselves as a key player in bringing about social change; utilizing and celebrating sustainable diets as an instrument in music festival activism that has the power to unite a compassionate community. This discourse reflects the connection to political agendas, through emancipatory imagery and ideals of the counterculture, that are still part of widespread cultural readings of certain music festivals (Anderton, 2008).

Second, music festival organizations were found to take advantage of sustainable diets as a convenient instrument in marketing their events with what Laing (2010) refers to as 'green credentials'. This discourse becomes disturbingly apparent when we turn our attention to the lack of factual information about any given food cluster. While a majority of the organizations have taken upon the



Left: foodcourt at The Green Gathering (2020)

role of the knowledgeable pioneer in the field of festival sustainability, eight out of seventeen festivals were found to remain ambiguous in their communications, and promoted sustainable diets through vague, dialogic and emotive language. Even more festivals refrained from including environmental aspects in their messages about sustainable diets, and thus disconnected plant-based, organic, local or Fairtrade food choices from considerations of their climate change mitigation potentials. This discourse pertains to corporate sustainability, where organizations legitimize their own behaviour to correspond with growing societal demands for sustainable action

(Genc, 2017). Accordingly, it substantiates previous concerns about festival organizers competing with each other in demonstrating their environmental concerns for the mere purpose of gaining a brand advantage (Hitchings et al., 2018; Laing & Frost, 2010; Wong et al., 2015).

The research findings also indicate that the music festival organizations reinforce some recently identified media discourses on sustainable diets. In line with recent findings, where media frame plant-based as a new, fashionable trend for aesthetic and health reasons (Lundahl, 2017), festival websites too promote the availability of plant-based dishes. In addition, five

out of seventeen festivals were found to communicate persuasive messages about their vegetarian strategy, in so doing contesting the "normativity" of serving meat at an event (Andersson et al., 2013). These five 'vegetarian music festivals' were found to make sensory-based associations to showcase the taste of plant-based dishes, either in a visual or textual manner, similar to how recent newspaper coverage of plant-based food was found to be driven by discursive constructions of taste (Mittal & Brüggeman, 2019). At the same time, meat retains a prominent role, especially through imagery, and some organizations stated that they strive to provide "as much vegetarian food as possible" (e.g., ITGWO, 2020a). Messages of this kind, along with notions that vegetarian food is offered 'for the record', indicate that several festival organizations do not deem it possible to opt for an entirely vegetarian menu. This discourse is problematic because it reinforces constructions of meat as necessary to human survival through downplaying the viability of plant-based diets (Arcari, 2017), and thus positioning plant-based diets as impractical (Mittal, 2013).

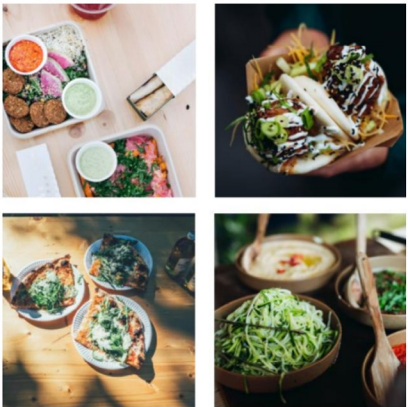
Organic food production was positioned as better than non-organic foods in terms of absences: it does not use artificial additives, pesticides and industrial livestock and is therefore positioned as cleaner, healthier, tastier and more environmentally friendly (Øyafestivalen, 2020a). This reflects previously identified news media frames, where organic food is represented as superior (Meyers & Abrams, 2010), and generally an easily comprehensible, all-round solution that is safe, natural, healthy and nutritious instead of artificial or untrustworthy (Cahill et al., 2010; Lockie, 2006). Whereas local food has been linked to environmental sustainability and social justice in food activist discourse (Dupuis & Goodman, 2005), our findings indicated that music

festivals only sporadically build upon this notion. The exceptions were incidental, remarks about reduced carbon due to food miles, or ethical food sourcing from trusted, local producers; however, this was not a recurring trend. Similarly, the association between local produce and taste, naturalness and nutritional value (Edwards-Jones et al., 2011) was only made once.

"Five out of seventeen festivals opted for a fully vegetarian menu and showcased the taste of plant-based dishes either in a visual or textual manner."

Right: food being prepared at Way Out West (n.d.)





Left: circular foodcourt at DGTl (2020b); top right: various depictions of vegetarian meals at Way Out West (n.d.); bottom right: food stand at Shambala (2020c).

Relevance and implications

A significant number of music festivals appear to have cultivated an entirely positive, though information-poor portrayal of sustainable diets. It has been argued that messages of fear about the detrimental consequences associated with current food chains are likely to be less effective than messages that reinforce the positive emotions about the nutritional or environmental benefits of consuming sustainably produced food (Organ et al., 2015). Consequently, contemporary music festivals may play an essential role in delivering green messages and enabling a discussion about sustainable consumption: not only by

offering environmentally friendly dishes, but also through normalizing and celebrating sustainable diets. This is especially the case for the vegetarian music festivals that showcased the favourable aspects of plant-based dishes. In this sense, the emerging phenomenon of vegetarian music festivals could further contribute to the mainstreaming of plant-based diets. However, it should be noted here that the impact of persuasive messages may be limited, particularly due to the increasing commodification of festivals (Frost & Laing, 2013). The prevalence of commercial aspects can diminish a festival's potential for providing a space for dissent, as well as their role as an agent of social change (Sharpe, 2008).

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Appendix 1

Food cluster	Recurring themes of the cluster’s portrayal in the media
Plant-based	• Message not in line with available scientific evidence (e.g. Almiron & Zoppeddu, 2015; Kiesel, 2010; Neff et al., 2008) • Focus on animal welfare, economic issues or culinary associations rather than climate change or environmental impacts (Friedlander et al., 2014) • Limited media coverage, mostly oppositional (Mittal, 2013) • Animal-welfare as dependant on consumer responsibility (Buddle & Bray, 2019) • Discrediting, marginalizing veganism (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Mittal, 2013) • Objectifying non-human animals as natural human resource (Packwood Freeman, 2009) • Meat as necessary to human survival (Arcari, 2017) • Plant-based options as impractical (Mittal, 2013) • Veganism as new, fashionable trend for aesthetic / health reasons (Lundahl, 2017)
Organic	• Defined in terms of what organic food is not, rather than what it is (Cahill et al., 2010; Lockie,2006) • Trustworthy and easily understood solution (Cahill et al., 2010) • Safe, natural, healthy, nutritious instead of artificial and untrustworthy (Lockie, 2006) • Fashionable, high quality, tasty, increasingly popular (Lockie, 2006) • Organic food as superior (Meyers & Abrams, 2010) • Elitist narratives (Meyers & Abrams, 2010; Mittal, 2013) • Idealist organic farmers vs. big business (Meyers & Abrams, 2010) • Poetic, vague, dialogic, narrative, emotive language (Cook et al., 2009)
Local	• Linked to environmental sustainability and social justice (Dupuis & Goodman, 2005) • Traditional, earth-bound and pastoral values (Mittal, 2013) • Stereotypical depiction of farmers, community/home gardeners and chefs (Mittal, 2013) • Emotive logic of interconnectedness between humans and their food (Mittal, 2013) • Freshness, nutritional value and taste (Edwards-Jones et al., 2011)
Fairtrade	• Semiotic reconnection between producers and consumers (Goodman, 2004) • Use of stereotypes: peasant farmers and empowered decision makers (Davenport & Low, 2012). • Focus on personal stories and quality of the product (Wright & McCrea, 2007) • Focus on fair prices instead of acts of solidarity (Low & Davenport, 2006)

Appendix 2

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