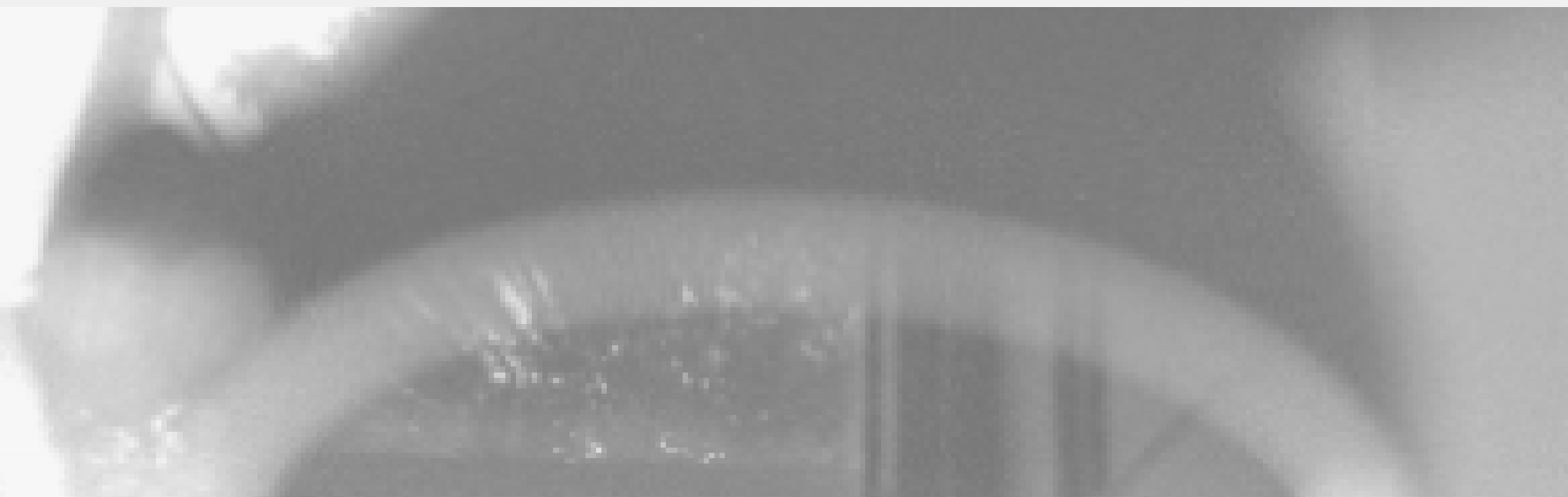


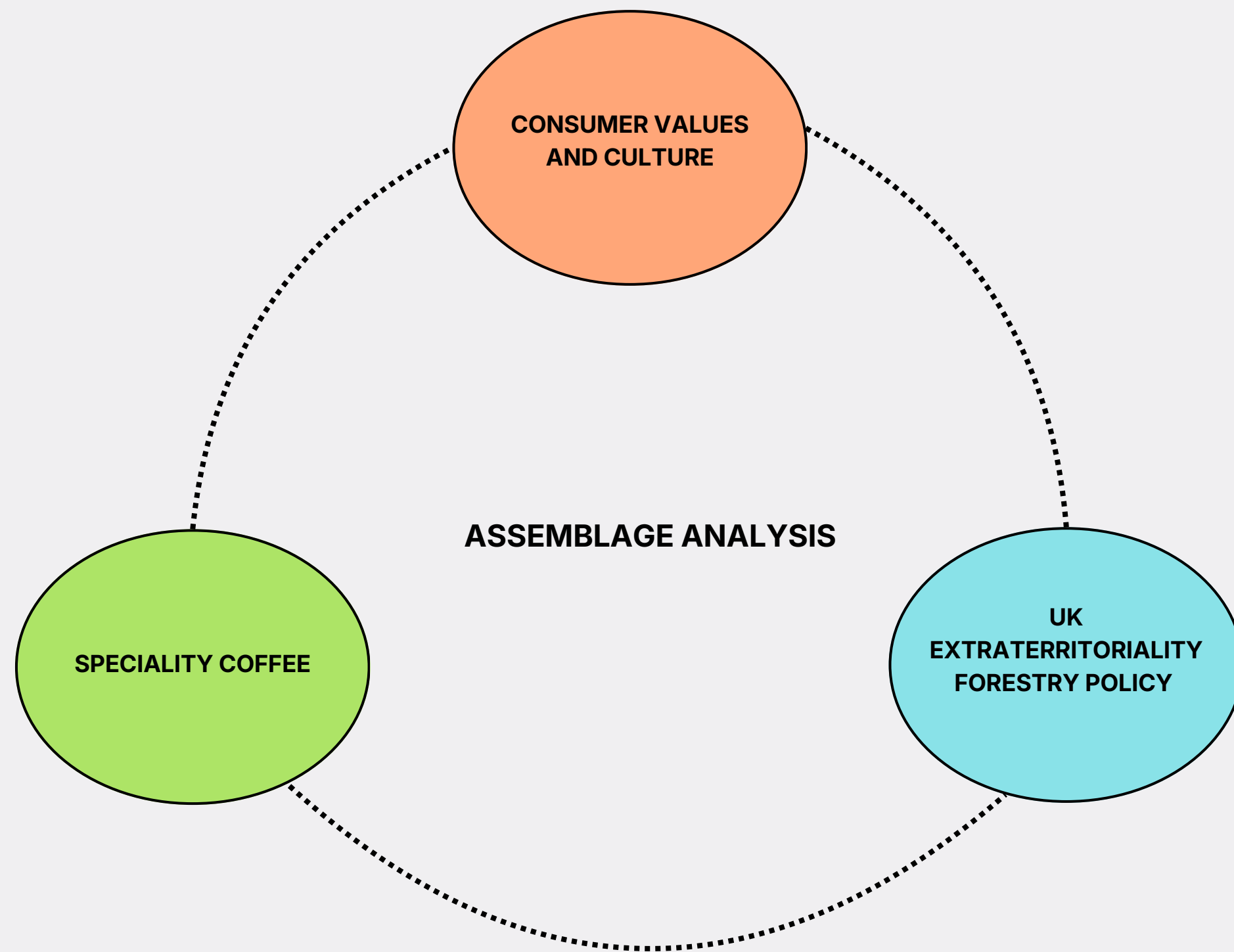


CONNECTING UK COFFEE CONSUMPTION WITH A PROPOSED ‘NO DEFORESTATION POLICY’

Dissertation for Msc degree in Environment, Culture and Society

ERIN MORAN AUGUST 2026





INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROJECT

Supervisor:

Iain McNicol

External collaborator:

Andrew Weatherall

RSPB

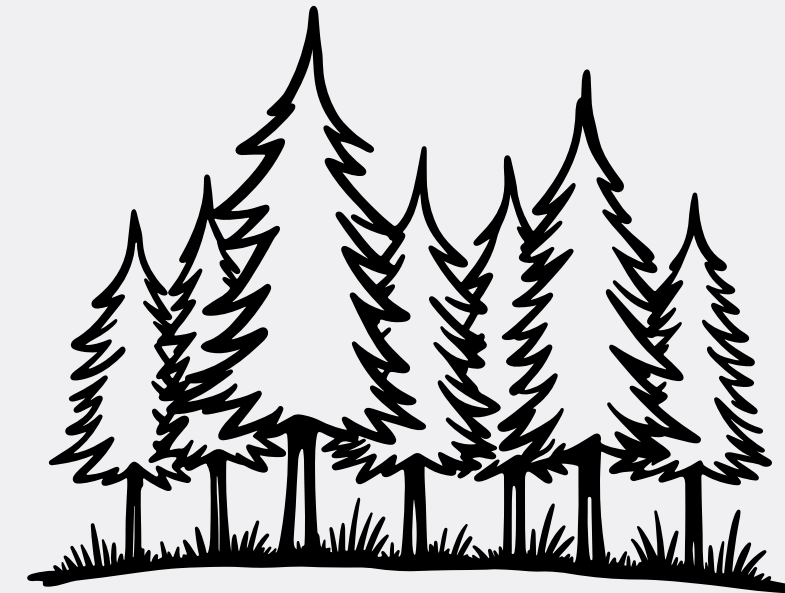
...THROUGH A FOLLOW THE THING METHODOLOGY APPROACH



POLICY IMPETUS: PARADOXICAL PROBLEMS IN FORESTRY

RELIANCE ON FORESTS FOR FOOD CONSUMPTION

UK national security report states the importance of forest ecosystems for sustaining a significant portion of the UK's food supply, 40% of which is imported from overseas.

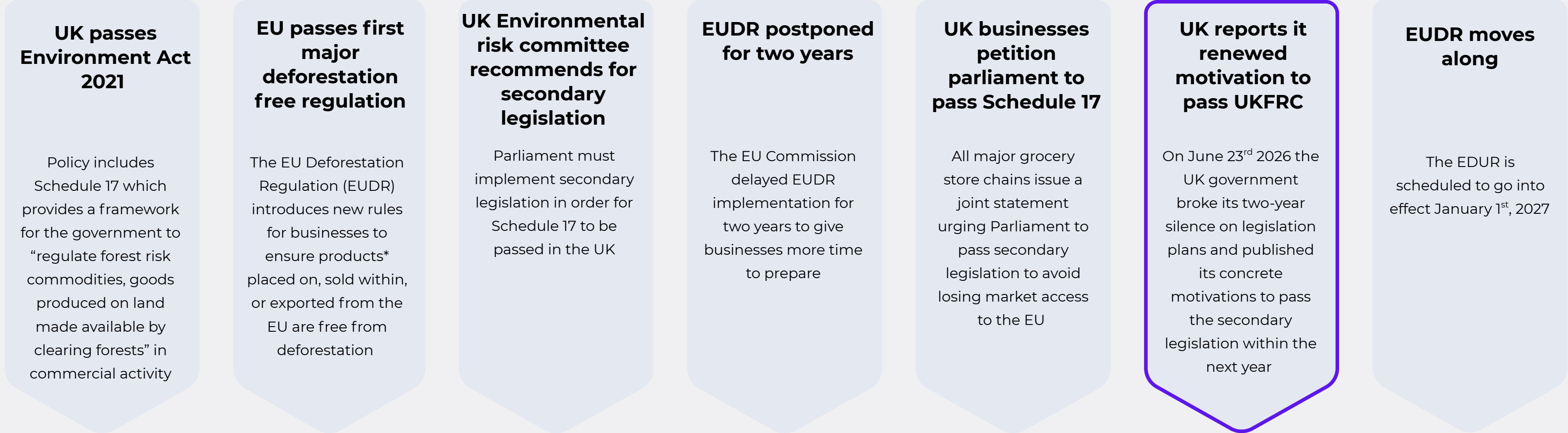


UK DEMAND FOR AGRI-FOOD COMMODITIES CONTRIBUTES TO DEFORESTATION ABROAD

The UK was responsible for 13,500ha deforested land in 2024, over 45% of those hectares were a result of embodied deforestation - that linked to the imports of goods such as cattle products, soy, oil palm, cocoa, coffee and rubber.

INTRODUCING THE
UK FOREST RISK
COMMODITY
LEGISLATION(UKFRC)

POLICY TIMELINE



*These include cattle, cocoa, **coffee**, palm oil, rubber, soy, wood, and certain products made from these.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH GAPS IDENTIFIED

Research has largely remained focused on potential negative impacts for producers

An in depth look at how consumer demand will change in response to the policy had not been completed

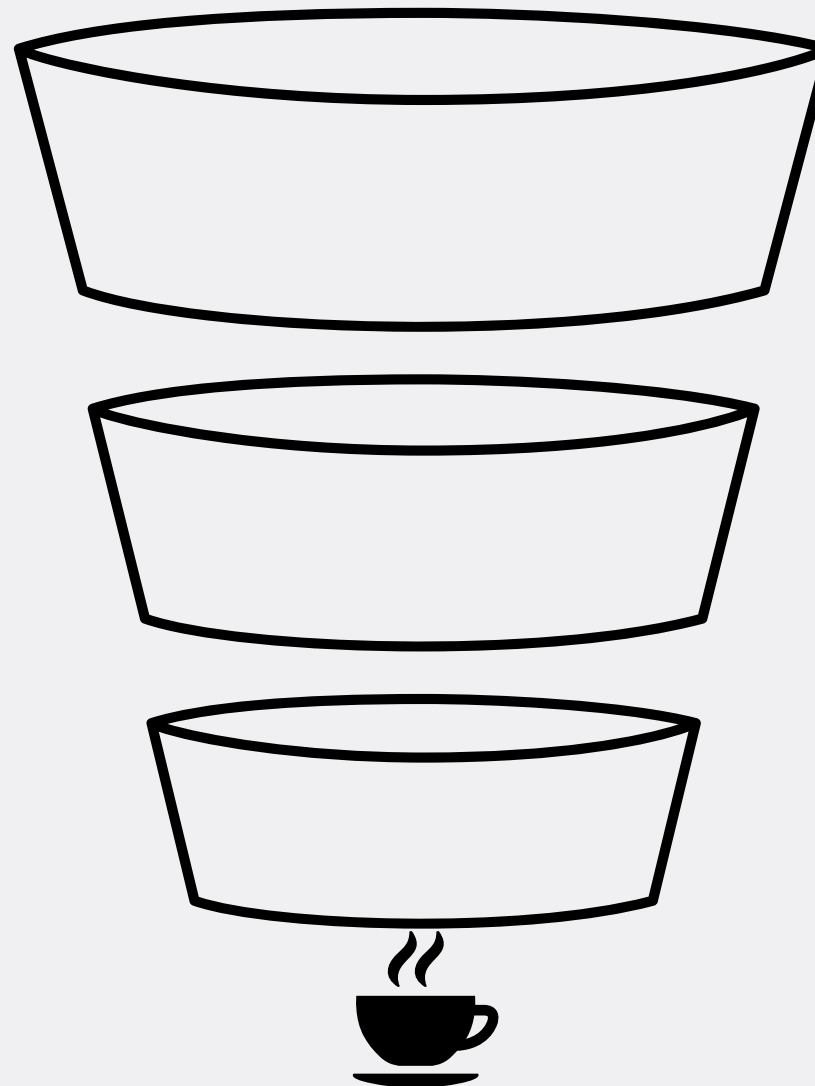
Policy documents do not address the constitution of consumer demand as an input to the problem

ACADEMIC INTERESTS

Anthropology theories in assemblage theory and economic anthropology

Shifting cultural paradigms to solve environmental problems

Selection of core commodity covered under UKFRC: speciality coffee



RQ1: What are the changing consumer values and interpretations of speciality coffee within the wake of the UKFRC?

RQ2: What tensions arise from these value changes within the assemblage of speciality coffee consumer demand and the UKFRC?

THREE CORE LITERATURE REVIEW THEMES

UNEQUAL EXCHANGE THEORY DEBATE

- Many scholars have argued that the legislation could reinforce pre-existing structural imbalances within agri-food commodity supply chains through its due diligence requirements

ARJUN APPADURAI'S SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS

- Objects acquire value and meaning dynamically through human transactions, motivations and the specific ways in which things are circulated giving them what Appadurai calls a “social life”

THREE PHASES OF COFFEE CONSUMER VALUE CREATION

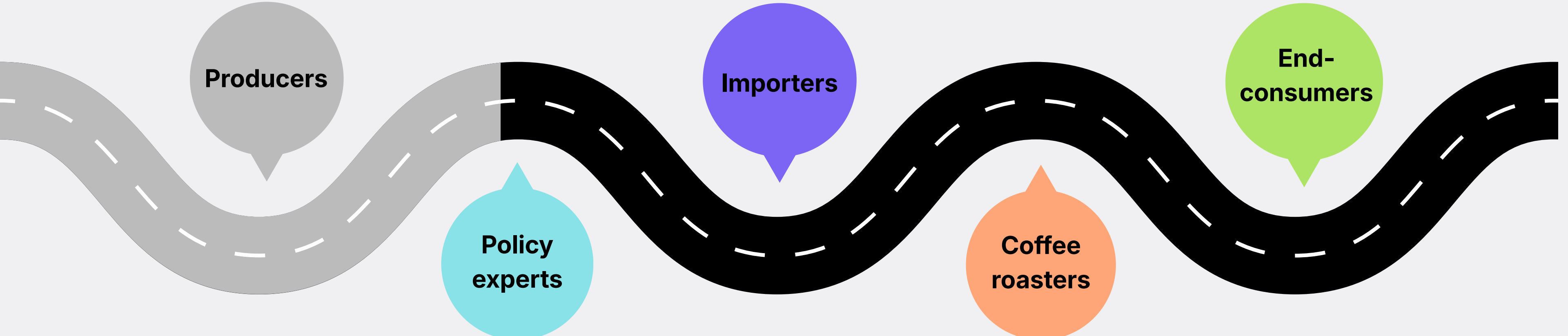
- Three waves of coffee consumption based on fetishised and de-fetishised consumer relations and a split between specialised and commodity coffee markets
- Now we are moving into new wave of sustainability regulated

FOLLOW THE THING METHODOLOGY

Smallholder farmers were not interviewed as part of this project; however, their perspective was considered throughout the literature review

I interviewed a speciality coffee importers with over 30 years of coffee sector experience based in the EU

Five sets of Cult cafe consumers present in the cafe on July 10th, 2026 were interviewed in exchange for one choice cup of coffee



Producers

Importers

**End-
consumers**

**Policy
experts**

**Coffee
roasters**

Two policy experts were interviewed and EUDR / UKFRC available policy documents were reviewed

Cult Coffee Roasters is a speciality coffee roastery and cafe in Edinburgh that was selected as the case study focus

A FOCUS ON RELATIONAL VALUES AND ASSEMBLAGE THEORY



ASSEMBLAGE THEORY

- Coffee exists within people-coffee assemblage where consumers regularly make and recreate meaning through their consumption patterns

RELATIONAL VALUES

- I identified relational values as a core emerging feature of the speciality coffee market and consider relational value attributes such as sense of duty or belonging, trust, collaboration, and reciprocity within my analysis of changing consumer values

RQ₁: CHANGING RELATIONAL VALUES ACROSS 3 MARKET SCALES

SPECIALITY COFFEE IMPORTERS

- Important role in negotiation of commodity supply and demand
- Reliance on trust in regular market players and indicators such as the 'futures' (expected future coffee supply)
- Striking signs of market uncertainty due to the new EDUR / UKFRC mandates

SPECIALITY COFFEE CAFÉS

- Cult's procurement strategy is based on moral responsibility toward the coffee farmer and land through a trusted relationship with importers
- Sharing of farmer stories helps ensure farmers are practicing sustainably whilst bypassing the label system
- Policy could reduce the diversity of suppliers Cult is able to work with

SPECIALITY COFFEE CONSUMERS

- Consumers' relationship to coffee was evenly split between its practical value and its social value
- Cult cafe environment cultivated trusted relationships with consumers that helped to funnel sustainable coffee information down to consumers
- An increase in coffee prices could act as a barrier to current coffee consumptive behaviours

RQ₂: THREE MAJOR TENSIONS PRODUCED WITHIN ASSEMBLAGE

POWER CONCENTRATED INTO HANDS OF IMPORTERS

- Informational asymmetries may lead buyers and sellers to depend more on import traders to navigate the new compliance requirements

LOSS OF VALUE ADD FOR SPECIALITY COFFEE

- Sharing of farmers stories such as Sidney Kibet (a Kenyan farmer who reinvested his profits into his community) helped produce the singularity of Cult's beans which sets them apart from other cafes

OBFUSCATION OF DEFORESTATION-FREE FOR CONSUMERS

- The accumulation of trust along Cult's value chain altogether closes the gap in relationships between farmer and consumer
- The definition of 'deforestation-free' coffee could be based on a compliance label whereas before consumer notion of sustainable coffee was formed through dialogues originating from farmers themselves

KEY LEARNINGS AND OVERALL IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

**Flattening of
differences between
speciality and
commodity coffee
due to limited subset
of producers to now
potentially work with**

**Further evidence to
support the
argument from
Muradian et al. that
the UKFRC benefits
economies of scale**

**Potential setbacks
into promised
sustainable
transformation that
the policy
objectives state**

**Return to a
fetishised consumer
relationship to
coffee commodity**



THE POWER OF SPECIALITY COFFEE





THANK YOU

PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO REACH OUT WITH ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS
E.MORAN-7@ED.AC.UK

