

Macro to Micro, Mature to Emergent – the Information Flow from Innovators in Fashion Hubs from Northern Cities to Southern Cities. Can Micro Entrepreneurial Innovators in Sustainability Hubs Inform Bite Sized Sustainability Solutions in Globalised Fashion Industry Supply Chains?

Mo Tomaney

Fashion & Business, University for the Creative Arts, UK

Fashion design and branding is, by its nature, usually top down, led by markets and consumers. Traditional and governmental approaches to developing sustainability within supply chain “chunks” have largely been focused on bottom up, often directed towards the empowerment of producers who are extremely remote from notions of consumption or the end (fashion) product. There are many examples of disruptive innovation within the sector, often emerging from recognised smart sustainable cities and regions, however, the macro enterprise suppliers who comprise 99% of the value chain for global branded fashion brands, have found it challenging to embrace the outcomes of micro designers’ disruptive innovation with any degree of impact. The scale of production and logistics within rather clunky business models can inhibit scaled adoption of innovation that sustainably works within existing systems, thus engagement with design and product led innovation in fashion supply has often been short lived.

Two decades ago, the industry began tentatively to debate the un-sustainability of apparel sourcing systems. Leading to the first mapping and dissemination of the complexity of issues within the industry (key markers include the founding of the ETI in 1998 & the Global Compact in 2000, Levi’s Code of Conduct for Apparel in 1991). Designers were largely disengaged from the debate, being engaged at the top end of the value map and often separated from sourcing within brand structures.

Alongside a maturing of sustainable fashion agitators whose disruptive creative endeavors have been stimulated by economic recession in mature northern economies, in vibrant first and second wave emergent economies, fast evolving consumer markets have pushed embryonic fashion hubs, with actors making a rapid slide from fixer economics to luxury and super consumption to sustainable luxury and fashion, a circular cycle of consumption patterns that has been enacted in a very short timespan. The connectedness of both sustainable hubs and fashion hubs is underpinned by social networks, linking communities, enabling information and ideas exchange. The proximity of embryonic fashion hubs to historic apparel production, and to raw material sourcing regions, acts as a satellite for the sustainable innovator from the mature northern economy to creative innovators in BRIC & MINT economies who by dint of geography can influence production and sourcing systems.

This paper will describe how creative and innovative fashion and textile designers, marketers and retailers have become important players in driving the sustainable fashion story toward a tipping point, with the macro adopting micro within supply chain “chunks” that can thus be manipulated to add value as well as delivering sustainability, with the potential for integrity and longevity. New systems emerging out of fashion hubs within key recognised smart sustainable cities and regions, offer solutions that are driven both by business models (such as making circular economics work within the greedy fashion brand model) and creative innovation that is able to influence within the supply chain, thus adapting itself into a tight Mo

Mo Biography

Mo Tomaney is Subject Leader, Post Graduate Fashion and Business at University for the Creative Arts. She holds a BA Fashion from St Martins, an MSc Social Anthropology from UCL. With vast international experience in the fashion industry, over a long fashion career she has worked in creative and sourcing roles with many iconic luxury & mainstream international fashion brands(including Valentino, Chloe, Benetton & Levi’s). She held in house roles at Levi’s and the Body Shop, has supported sustainable innovation of textiles in manufacturing, and has acted as an advisor to the Fair Trade Foundation, Better Cotton Initiative, Dfid, Unep and Unctad.

Driven by a conviction that the private sector (through the fashion industry and enterprise) can be a driver for sustainable development, Mo has been working towards transparency in fashion supply chains since 1995, applying her pragmatic understanding of supply chains & the drive for fashion innovation, to a consultancy in responsible sourcing & academia.

A key research and consultancy interest is the convergence of the creative and the technical to offer a catalyst for change within holistic fashion supply systems. Research scrutinizes the impact of creative initiatives in

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sustainable fashion by examining the business efficacy different approaches to sustainable innovation, from the perspective of the creative communities, the technical and the consumer.