

Sustainable Innovation 2010

Green growth: radical systemic change towards a more resilient future

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Over recent years fashion has become a global industry dominated by large multinational supply chains encouraged by free market globalisation and driven by cost cutting. Jade Smith and Lizzie Harrison will weave together experience of local fashion projects with ideas on how local systems could work towards a new paradigm for a more resilient industry. Defining a local fashion system as one where waste textiles feed back into garment generation, local skills are utilised in all aspects of manufacture, and reuse possibilities are integrated into production.

Consumers currently lack a general knowledge of production; experiencing local fashion systems can provide them with an understanding of the value of clothing. This has the potential to impact on a global scale; no longer able to ignore the implications of fast cheap fashion consumers now become active participants in fashion; aware, informed and able to get involved. This discussion comes at a time of not only increasing awareness of sustainable issues but also against a backdrop of economic depression as our growth driven economy is questioned.

Jade Smith will examine how regional approaches to up-cycled knitwear in the UK may vary. Historically local variations on the styles of the period were common, but with the mass globalisation of the fashion industry differentiation has been lost and style has been homogenised. If clothing is a non verbal communicator why could it not communicate something of where you live, where you have been and where you aspire to go?

The UK's knitwear industry is still relatively diverse and this would be reflected in regional variation for example fine knit cashmeres in South West Scotland to hand knit chunky Aran sweaters. Fashion consumers may find in these garments a luxury that comes from understanding and engagement and this further offers a chance to support the safe guarding of employment for skilled workers in the sector.

Lizzie Harrison will discuss The ReMade in Leeds Project her forward thinking design concept working from grassroots level within a community to draw on local skills and resources to create an innovative collection. This has the potential to recognise the diversity of local skills, create local employment, add value to local waste clothing and bring people together through a shared passion. The very principles of this project hope to encourage re-learning of skills, repairing techniques and the collective reuse of clothing through swapping to promote an inclusive system open to everyone.

ReMade in Leeds explores a blueprint for this new local fashion system, a brand which approaches fashion in a holistic way to create, share and reuse clothing within a local creative space. The template created through the project can then be replicated across other communities creating a global network.

Jade Smith and Lizzie Harrison will focus on the decentralization of fashion into a diverse currency that can be exchanged between communities providing employment for marginalized groups. This new vision for green growth is much richer and more powerful than economic growth as it offers community empowerment both locally and globally.