

## **Sustainable Innovation 2021**

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## **Fostering Sustainable Practices: Case Studies of Micro and Small Designer Fashion Enterprises Building Back Better.**

**S Black, M Burcikovaa, D Williamsa, A Rocamora, University of the Arts London, UK, F Lyonb, P Elfba, A Wernerba, I Vickersb, Middlesex University, UK & C Eckertc, P Crommentuijn-Marshc, Open University, UK**

Fashion's high speed, high throughput and high waste model is no longer sustainable. The long-overdue reset of the fashion industry system has accelerated in response to the Covid-19 crisis, and transition to sustainability is now imperative for the laggards in social and environmental responsibility. The distinction of the UK fashion sector lies in the creativity of its designer fashion micro and small enterprises (MSEs), widely recognized as creative influencers on the world stage, together with the innovative practices of retail brands and the diversity of UK fashion audiences.

Whilst the fashion industry has been severely affected by the pandemic, there is evidence of fashion design entrepreneurs showing exceptional resilience, driven by a strong sense of values and purpose, to contribute to community alongside financial viability. As the Covid-19 crisis triggers a re-assessment of values, foregrounding green renewal, new quality-of-life indicators and well-being economy fashion MSEs can provide exemplars of future prosperity that value diversity, balance human and environmental well-being and benefit both local and global communities.

This paper presents findings and case studies, spanning both pre- and post-pandemic periods, from the current AHRC-funded project Rethinking Fashion Design Entrepreneurship: Fostering Sustainable Practices<sup>1</sup>. The project has interviewed 30 design-led fashion MSEs in a longitudinal study investigating their visions, values, practices, and business models for sustainable fashion, underpinned by creative practice. Innovative fashion MSEs, often ahead of the curve, provide examples of best practice and a significant contribution to future scenario building for green recovery. Such agile enterprises exemplify a redefinition of what fashion business is and what it can be in future, presenting viable pathways to recovery and building back better.

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