

## Sustainable Innovation 2025

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#### *Past, Present and Future*

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## Transparency in Care Labels: the Key Enabler for a Circular Fashion System.

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In a climate emergency, individuals, businesses and governments are urged to act to reverse the damage we have done. The fashion industry too is responsible for the current crisis and needs to change its processes and behaviours if it wants to survive. *Is it possible to produce something with a positive impact on the planet instead of a negative one? Is it possible to create garments that give more than they take from the Earth?* By using a Research through Design (RtD) strategy, the researcher explored the topics of regenerative and circular design and how the fashion industry could apply them to its practices. Through interviews with experts, the researcher was able to challenge and confirm theory, laying the foundations for the creation of the prototype of a recyclable and compostable sock. Highlighting issues around transparency in care labels, the sock positions itself as an original piece of work that challenges the outdated products of the hosiery industry.

Through interviews with experts in sock making, the researcher discovered that socks labelled as “100% cotton” can still contain other fibres (in most cases, synthetics). The issue around care labels can be traced back to two main causes. One has to do with the brands themselves: Circle Economy has analysed over 10,000 garments and found inaccurate composition claims on labels in 41% of the cases.

*For around ⅓ of the cotton-rich cotton-polyester garments analysed for this study, cotton content claimed was much higher than it actually was. These outcomes suggest that intentional exaggeration of cotton content is plausible.»* (Circle Economy, 2020).

The second cause originates at a much higher and wider level of influence. It is in fact part of the EU policy around care labels, that brands do not have to disclose *all* materials a garment is made of. For example, parts that are excluded are: «*visible and isolable fibres intended to produce a purely decorative effect, not exceeding 7% of the weight of the finished product*» and «*parts representing less than 30% of the total weight of the product, with the exception of main linings*». (Camera di Commercio Milano, 2006).

These, together with other rules, are the policies that generate the problem at the source.

The current recycling technologies require a clear understanding of the composition of the input material. How can we reach such comprehension if the mean which was designed and implemented to have this type of transparency, does not fully disclose all components of a garment? If we do not know the real composition of a garment, how can we make sure it is recycled and disposed of in the correct way? Solving issues around the current labelling system for fashion products, is a key enabler for the creation of a true circular fashion system. Will the Digital Product Passport effectively address the transparency challenges in care labels?