

Approaching Fashion Differently

Insights from the Fair Trade Model

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Introduction

The fashion industry has a significant impact on the environment, societies, economies and cultures. An economic juggernaut valued at \$1.7 trillion in 2023 (Statista 2024), fashion is considered one of the most polluting industries in the world. According to the European Parliament (2020a) it emits 10% of global carbon emissions, more than international flights and maritime shipping combined, and it is the second largest water user globally, responsible for 20% of global water waste (European Parliament 2020a). The concerning production and consumption patterns in the mainstream fashion industry are often subsumed under the term 'Fast Fashion'. Fast Fashion encourages overconsumption by promoting habitual buying and the quick disposal of outdated styles [see Sark and Gotthardsen's chapter in this volume]. It therefore represents an economic model that directly opposes the sustainability goals of the European Union and the broader international community as envisaged in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are increasingly being integrated into national strategies. The negative impacts of the Fast Fashion model undermine efforts to promote sustainability and responsible production, posing significant challenges to achieving global targets. To guide the fashion industry toward sustainability, it is essential to explore alternative models and approaches that offer transformative pathways, aligning the industry with global sustainability goals.

The chapter is structured as follows: it begins with an exploration of the background and impact of the dominant economic model of Fast Fashion. Following this, the chapter introduces various alternative approaches to the fashion industry, with a particular emphasis on Fair Trade¹. While other approaches such as Circular

1 The Fair Trade approach and its history, of course, extend beyond the fashion industry. In fact, the most significant markets for Fair Trade remain agricultural products such as coffee, cocoa, and bananas. However, as this book focuses on fashion, this chapter will concentrate solely on Fair Trade within the context of fashion.

and Slow Fashion predominantly address environmental concerns, the Fair Trade model traditionally prioritises economic, social and cultural sustainability dimensions, therefore offering a valuable complementary perspective [see Demandt and Gözet's as well as Anderson et al.'s chapter in this volume]. Additionally, the chapter investigates the role of craftsmanship, which is closely aligned with Fair Trade, and discusses how its ethos can contribute to the transformation toward a more sustainable fashion industry. By challenging the disposability of Fast Fashion products, Fair Trade and craftsmanship emphasize the value of durability (a long lifespan), high quality craft and ethical production. The chapter closes by discussing how integrating the principles of Circular Economy, Slow Fashion, and Fair Trade can provide a holistic approach to sustainability in fashion. It is important to note that the focus of this discussion lies primarily on the European context, drawing examples from this region. Moreover, it is clear that alternative approaches in fashion, while promising, still remain niche and require further development and research.

Fast Fashion Supply Chains and Working Conditions

Over the past fifty years, fashion supply chains have evolved into the current 'Fast Fashion' economic model, with many companies expanding and offshoring their operations, subcontracting unskilled labour, and prioritizing the mass production of disposable clothing [see Sark and Gotthardsen's as well as McRobbie's chapter in this volume]. As Todeschini et al. (2017: 761) explain, "manufacturing is so often dissociated from design, marketing, and consumption and relegated to faraway countries where regulation concerning working conditions is far from stringent". To optimise profit, Fast Fashion businesses generally rely on low-cost labour in low-income countries. This offshoring practice began decades ago with the decline of powerful labour unions in industrialized countries and the rise of globalization (McCosker 2023). Considering the supply chain of textile products bought by European households, "[o]nly 28 per cent of employment in the supply chain takes place in Europe, which is one of the smallest shares of all consumption categories" (Manshoven et al. 2019: 10). 56 per cent of employment is based in Asia and the Pacific (ibid.). Such globalized supply chains have resulted in severe exploitation of workers as well as ethical and accountability issues.

Fast Fashion brands regularly face widespread criticism for their treatment of workers (Denton 2023). Key concerns include (un)fair working conditions, human rights and gender (in)equality. Having outsourced production to low- and middle-income countries, the political economy of Fast Fashion is characterized by exploitation of cheap labour, low salaries, long working hours and unsafe working conditions (Braumüller et al. 2020; European Parliament 2020b). Despite generating substantial revenues, the fashion industry continues to fall short in

ensuring living wages for its workers; low wages remain prevalent in the industry, compounded by a lack of transparency and accountability. While some of the world's wealthiest individuals have accumulated fortunes through fashion retail, from high-street brands to luxury labels, millions of garment workers struggle to meet their basic needs (Fashion Revolution 2023). Workers endure long hours with inadequate compensation and are subjected to subpar safety standards (Sutor 2020).

In addition, garment workers endure tremendous pressure to remain employed, as many families depend on this sole regular income, and managers often take advantage of these power imbalances (Fairtrade International n.d.). Against poor conditions, workers often have to choose between their health and a minimal income. In various countries, it is common for workers to put in excessively long hours to boost their daily or monthly earnings. This economic dependency has also led to the prevalent use of child labour, particularly in Asia (Manshoven et al. 2019).

At the same time, fashion is a labour-dependent industry, employing millions of garment workers around the world, underscoring the significant economic and social impact of the industry (McCosker 2013). Over 80 per cent of employees in the garment sector are women (Fairtrade International n.d.), which highlights issues of gender (in)equality within the political economy of fashion [see McRobbie's chapter in this volume]. Most of these women are employed in lower-tier positions in the supply chain, where opportunities for advancement are scarce. In contrast, higher-skilled managerial and formal roles are predominantly filled by men. Research by Manshoven et al. (2019) indicates that textile supply chains in both Asia and Europe exhibit poor performance in fostering gender equality and promoting economic self-sufficiency for women.

Furthermore, current production structures pose challenges in accountability, as many companies utilize international subcontractors, which leaves both workers and brands with limited legal options. Two important factors sustain these structures: minimal liability of Fast Fashion brands and consumer indifference. The limited liability of Fast Fashion brands allows poor working conditions and unethical treatment of workers to persist. Typically, design companies are legally responsible for their suppliers only if directly employed. However, many companies engage with external manufacturers or intermediaries, which does not establish enough legal accountability for the design company (Sutor 2020) and can lead to disasters with severe social impacts, as we were reminded by the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh (Manshoven et al. 2019). The other factor is that the sector as a whole is consumer-driven. Consumers are used to purchasing from popular Fast Fashion brands, and they are often unaware of the consequences of their shopping behaviour (Daniel et al. 2021). According to Rzyczycki (2023), most fashion companies lack transparency when it comes to the sources of their fibres and fabrics, their environmental impact and their adherence to ethical business practices. The Fast Fashion

ion industry is infamous for numerous violations, including worker abuse, unsafe working conditions and exploitation of child labour (Rzeczycki 2023).

Moreover, Fast Fashion operates on a linear model with significant environmental impacts, as garments are designed for limited use before disposal. The industry predominantly follows a linear trajectory from design to disposal, culminating in substantial waste and pollution. Notably, 87 percent of clothing ends up in landfills or is incinerated, and 30 percent of production is discarded without ever being sold or worn.

Considering the significant impacts of Fast Fashion, it is not surprising that there is increasing interest in alternative economic and business models, particularly as sustainability becomes a greater concern. Some of these models have recently emerged, while others have a longstanding history. The following section will introduce some of these innovative and alternative approaches to fashion, including Circular Economy, Slow Fashion, and Fair Trade, with a specific focus on the latter.

Approaching Fashion Differently

Globally, the severe repercussions of Fast Fashion have sparked a growing interest in alternative economic and business models within the fashion industry. This includes the application of models traditionally associated with other sectors, such as Fair Trade, which initially focused mainly on agricultural products but has since been adapted to promote ethical and sustainable practices in fashion. These alternative models aim to ensure not only fair wages and working conditions within the supply chain but also environmental sustainability (Todeschini et al. 2017). The aim of this chapter is to show how these alternative models can complement each other to obtain a more sustainable fashion industry, with a particular focus on Fair Trade and craftsmanship.

A popular and fairly recent approach is that of the 'Circular Economy', which aims to base economic production on intentional restoration and regeneration. Designed to be restorative, a Circular Economy seeks to maintain the highest utility and value of products, components, and materials at all times. This model endeavours to decouple economic growth from the consumption of finite resources by distinguishing between technical and biological materials and focusing on the effective design and use of materials to optimise their flow, thereby preserving or enhancing technical and natural resource stocks. Circular Economy encourages innovation in product design, services and business models, creating a foundation for a long-term, resilient system (Webster 2015). Consequently, Circular Economy reveals to be a logical ally of the 'Slow Fashion' model, which has emerged as a viable alternative to Fast Fashion. 'Slow Fashion' aims to reduce the overall environmental and social

impact of the value chain. This business model is grounded in Circular Economy principles, low consumption and Fair Trade (Centobelli et al. 2022).

Circular and Slow business principles such as reuse, redistribution, second-hand retail, repair and product-as-a-service have become part of the fashion landscape [see Salter's as well as Demandt and Gözet's chapter in this volume]. Circular Fashion aims to minimize waste and keep materials within the consumption and manufacturing cycle for as long as possible (Centobelli et al. 2022). The Slow Fashion movement promotes a production philosophy that considers the needs of all stakeholders—designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers—while addressing the impact of fashion production on workers, consumers and ecosystems. Slow Fashion focuses on reducing resource consumption, such as water and energy, and emphasizes quality and value over disposable fashion. The concept envisages that consumers purchase fewer but higher-quality items. The movement supports innovative business models, small local firms, artisanal and vintage production, recycling, reuse, second-hand shopping and waste reduction. Extending the lifespan of textile items is a key strategy in Slow Fashion, significantly reducing the environmental and climatic impact of garments (Centobelli et al. 2022).

While Circular and Slow Fashion prioritize environmental aspects, a holistic understanding of sustainability requires a broader focus, including economic, social and cultural aspects. Therefore, it is relevant to explore the Fair Trade concept next, which traditionally prioritizes these other dimensions, while more recently also increasingly incorporating environmental concerns [see Anderson et al.'s chapter in this volume]. The following section then discusses the ethos of craftsmanship, which plays an important role in Fair Trade fashion.

The 'Fair Trade' movement dates back to the period after World War II and has multiple origin stories depending on the regional perspective. In other words, there is no consensus on the exact start date of the Fair Trade movement (Bondarenko 2024). In the US, the early Fair Trade movement is linked to Edna Ruth Byler, who began selling handcrafted textiles made by women artisans she encountered during her travels to Puerto Rico in the late 1940s. Her efforts led to the establishment of the NGO *Ten Thousand Villages*, which played a significant role in fostering the global Fair Trade movement (Fair Trade USA n.d.).

The European Fair Trade movement emerged in the late 1950s, with *Oxfam* in the UK, which sold crafts made by Chinese refugees and later included products from other countries. In the Netherlands, *Fair Trade Original* began in 1967 by importing wood carvings from Haiti, eventually expanding into West Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium. The 'Trade not aid' philosophy, which emerged during the 1968 UNCTAD conference, advocated for equitable trade relationships and played a crucial role in promoting global Fair Trade practices. The first World Shop opened in the Netherlands in 1969, offering a variety of Fair Trade products, starting with coffee from Guatemala and growing to include a diverse range of items,

inspiring the launch of numerous Fair Trade shops globally (Bondarenko 2024). In Germany, the movement gained traction in 1970 when around 30,000 people participated in 'hunger marches' to protest the inequalities faced by producers from the Global South in the global market. The 'Third World Trade Campaign', established under the slogan 'Learning through Action', sought to increase political awareness. This period also saw the founding of the first Fair Trade companies, such as *GEPA*, *GLOBO*, and *El Puente* (Forum Fairer Handel n.d.a).

The term 'Fair Trade' is not exclusively linked to any single organization or certifying body. It represents a global movement consisting of a diverse network of producers, companies, consumers, advocates, and organizations collaborating to create a more equitable trade model (Fair Trade USA n.d.). There is no current EU-wide government or legal definition of Fair Trade, nevertheless European institutions have converged over the definition laid down in the Charter of Fair Trade Principles (European Union 2015), which was launched in 2009 and updated in 2018.

It is also important to note that there are two complementary channels for Fair Trade marketing: the 'integrated-supply route', mainly under the *World Fair Trade Organisation* (WFTO) and the 'product-certification route', mainly promoted through *Fairtrade International* (FLO) (European Union 2015). The integrated-supply route certifies entire companies, while the product-certification route focuses on specific products. This means a company could sell a limited range of Fair Trade-certified products while continuing conventional practices for the rest of its offerings and supply chains (Forum Fairer Handel n.d.b). The WFTO has established a guarantee system that assesses companies comprehensively, covering environmental and social sustainability. Their verification process not only evaluates the company's operational methods, including production processes and stakeholder relationships but also signifies a commitment to high standards of sustainability. Their holistic approach allows for a thorough assessment of a company's business model, principles and practices across the entire value chain. A Guaranteed WFTO member adheres to all 10 Fair Trade Principles (WFTO Europe n.d.), including:

- Principle 1: Creating Opportunities for Economically Disadvantaged Producers,
- Principle 2: Transparency and Accountability,
- Principle 3: Fair Trading Practices,
- Principle 4: Payment of a Fair Price,
- Principle 5: Ensuring no Child Labour and Forced Labour,
- Principle 6: Commitment to Non Discrimination, Gender Equity and Women's Economic Empowerment and Freedom of Association,
- Principle 7: Ensuring Good Working Conditions,
- Principle 8: Providing Capacity Building,

- Principle 9: Promoting Fair Trade,
- Principle 10: Respect for the Environment.

With regards to the different dimensions of sustainability, Fair Trade places a particular emphasis on social aspects, as these 10 Fair Trade principles reflect as well. Principle 4 addresses a key contribution of the Fair Trade movement; Fair Trade aims to provide fair wages for all workers in the supply chain, to ensure healthy workplace environments, and to invest in community welfare (Todeschini et al. 2017). An important distinction is made between a minimum wage and a (local) 'living wage':

"A Local Living Wage is remuneration received for a standard working week (no more than 48 hours) by a Worker in a particular place, sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the Worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, health care, transport, clothing, and other essential needs, including provision for unexpected events" (WFTO n.d.b).

Whereas a minimum wage is set by the government and varies depending on the country and even region. It is subject to political decisions and aims at protecting workers from poverty. In fact, there is a significant gap between the minimum wage and the living wage. For example, in India, the minimum wage was 94 Euros in 2018, while the living wage was calculated at 297 Euros. In Bulgaria, the disparity is even greater, with a minimum wage of 204 Euros and a living wage of 1,112 Euros (Braumüller et al. 2020: 10). Fair Trade sets the bar at the local living wage to make sure that workers can afford a decent standard of living.

Fair wages can only be put in place if the opportunities for disadvantaged producers are taken into account in the first place. That is why the WFTO supports marginalized small producers, such as independent family businesses, associations or cooperatives through Principle 1 (WFTO Europe n.d.). This also aims at counteracting the power imbalances that often disadvantage garment workers. When workers face delays or demand higher wages, they risk losing orders from Western fashion brands, which may then turn to cheaper producers in politically unstable countries (Braumüller et al. 2020). In recent years, e.g., Western fashion brands have been moving from Indonesia and Pakistan to Myanmar. Such instability benefits large fashion brands by enhancing their negotiating leverage, further exploiting vulnerable workers (Braumüller et al. 2020). Fair Trade establishes collaborations on equal terms with all stakeholders of the supply chain and shows that the quality of trading relationships has a direct impact on sustainability and helps avoid non-respect of contract terms and abuse of market power in price negotiations (Molenaar et al. 2016). These principles are reinforced by Principle 3, which emphasizes that Fair Trade organizations prioritize the well-being of marginalized small producers

over profit. They fulfil their commitments responsibly, ensuring that suppliers deliver on time and meet quality standards. Fair Trade buyers, recognizing the financial difficulties faced by producers, ensure payment is made as agreed. They also consult with suppliers before cancelling orders and provide compensation for work already completed if cancellations are not the producers' fault. The organizations foster long-term relationships based on trust and solidarity, aim to expand trade and avoid unfair competition. They also respect and protect the cultural identity and traditional skills of small producers (WFTO Europe n.d.).

The Ambiguous Sustainable and Fair Fashion Landscape: Progress and Challenges

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important to consumers, who now consider ethical, environmental and social factors in their purchasing decisions. Sustainable and Fair Fashion often comes with higher prices due to more elaborated manufacturing processes and the payment of fair wages. Some consumers are increasingly willing to pay more for ethically produced clothing. In general, this segment is prepared to spend up to ten percent more for sustainable garments (Hezel/Scholle 2023: 25).

According to Imsirovic (2023), Sustainable and Fair Fashion businesses have made significant progress in recent years and were able to capture an increasing share of the clothing market. Sustainable and Fair Fashion business models address the increasing consumer sustainability awareness, prompting the need for innovative customer relationship practices. Todeschini et al. (2017) go further, arguing that these pioneering businesses also influence other actors in the field and their business models, compelling fashion brands to rethink and frequently adopt new supply chain management strategies for selecting, monitoring and rewarding their partners.

Braumüller et al. (2020) introduce and discuss examples of such innovative Sustainable and Fair Fashion businesses (mainly focusing on examples from Europe). For example, the label *Lovjoi* places high value on producing with sustainable textiles as well as establishing a socially responsible supply chain. Most of their production happens locally in Germany and parts of the collections are imported from Turkey. Their team also proves to be socially diverse as *Lovjoi* employs sewers who had to flee the war in Syria (Braumüller et al. 2020). Another example is the label *Folkdays*, which was founded to contribute to systemic change, using fashion as a vehicle to address deep-rooted power imbalances in the industry. It aims to establish long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships with its suppliers. *Folkdays* collaborates with textile artisans, valuing traditional techniques and artifacts created by indigenous

and marginalized groups. Their approach blends centuries-old methods with modern, innovative designs to appeal to young consumers (Braumüller et al. 2020).

The WFTO label	In addition to meeting the 10 Fair Trade Principles, organizations that aim to be part of the Guarantee System of the WFTO have to undergo a three-step control procedure: 1. 'Self-Assessment Report': Self-evaluation by the member regarding the implementation of the ten WFTO principles and monitoring along the value chain. 2. 'Peer Visit': The purpose of the peer visit is to review Fair Trade practices as well as to facilitate mutual learning. 3. 'Monitoring Audit': External review of compliance with the ten WFTO principles by social auditors recognised by the WFTO. As an additional component of the guarantee system, the WFTO has established a complaint procedure ('Fair Trade Accountability Watch') that allows all members, affected stakeholders, or the public to raise questions or concerns regarding a WFTO member's adherence to the WFTO standards (Forum Fairer Handel 2020).
The GOTS label	Another internationally recognised certification is the 'Global Organic Textile Standard' (GOTS). The International Association of Natural Textile Industry (IVN), the Soil Association, the Organic Trade Association and the Japan Organic Cotton Association joined forces to establish GOTS in 2008 with the intention of creating a uniform global social and ecological standard for the entire textile production chain. The GOTS label and licensing procedure ensure that textiles made from certified natural fibres meet sustainability requirements from raw fibre extraction to product labelling. The standard covers processing, manufacturing, packaging, trading, and distribution, but does not address raw fibre production (e.g., cotton, wool). GOTS-certified products include fibre products, fabrics, clothing, fashion accessories, home textiles, toys and bedding (Forum Fairer Handel 2020).
The Fairtrade Textile label	Since 2016, the Fairtrade Textile Standard allows for the certification of the entire textile production process under Fairtrade conditions. This standard aims to improve social and environmental conditions across the textile supply chain. It builds on the Fairtrade Standard for 'Hired Labour' and goes beyond ILO core labour standards. A key element is the payment of living wages to all workers involved in textile production within six years. A product can only carry the 'Fairtrade Textile Production' label if the entire supply chain is certified. Social and environmental requirements include: - Strengthening worker participation - Training in production techniques, workplace safety, labour rights, and Fair Trade principles - Adherence to ILO core labour standards - Payment of living wages - Provision of social benefits (Forum Fairer Handel 2020).

Taking a more macro perspective on the market, it needs to be highlighted that several certifications and labels for Sustainable and Fair Fashion have been developed over the past decades and are a central tool to implement and maintain more ethical business practices. These certifications and labels for Sustainable and Fair Fashion indicate a trend towards differentiation and professionalization within the sector. Certifications can play a crucial role in guiding consumers toward more responsible purchasing decisions (Centobelli et al. 2022) [see Lefoll et al.'s chapter in this volume]. Some of them are introduced in the table above.

What is more, Sustainable and Fair Fashion businesses have managed to obtain a larger share of the market over the past years.² In Germany, about 15.2 million Fairtrade textiles were sold in 2022. Fairtrade-certified garments begin with Fairtrade cotton, ensuring minimum prices for producers without market fluctuations. In 2021, *Hess Natur* achieved record sales of over 106 million euros, approximately 20 million more than in 2020 (Hezel/Scholle 2023: 12). The sales of textiles with the *Fairtrade* label increased from 41.95 million euros in 2012 to 180.38 million euros in 2022 (TransFair 2024). An intriguing development in the Fair Trade movement is the involvement of discount retailers. Chains like *Aldi*, *Lidl*, and *Penny* have recently added *Fairtrade*-certified products to their ranges. For example, *Aldi* and *Lidl* now offer Fairtrade textiles such as towels and T-shirts. This shift makes *Fairtrade* items more accessible to a broader audience but also creates challenges for specialized Fair Trade stores because discounters, with their extensive reach and lower prices, intensify competition for niche Fair Trade textile vendors (Imsirovic 2023).

However, despite this notable development, it is important to remember that Sustainable and Fair Fashion remains to be a niche. Only about 1.4% of clothing available in Germany in 2020 had an environmental label (Umweltbundesamt 2020). This highlights the gap between consumer interest and market availability [see Hofmann and Yildiz's chapter in this volume]. Furthermore, the fashion industry exhibits a bias where environmental concerns about clothing production are more prominent, while social and economic impacts are often overlooked (Centobelli et al. 2022).

In addressing the future of sustainable fashion in a holistic way, it is helpful to focus on Fair Trade and craftsmanship, which help to expand the perspective beyond environmental concerns as they not only promote ethical production but also support skilled artisans. Particularly, the ethos of craftsmanship deserves attention for its role in enhancing the quality and cultural value of fashion products. Highlighting this aspect is essential for acknowledging the intricate balance between sustainability, ethical practices and the preservation of traditional skills in the fashion sector.

2 The numbers here should be taken with caution. The lack of a standardized definition of what is 'fair' complicates efforts to determine the exact size and growth of the 'Fair Fashion' market. This difficulty is exacerbated by a shortage of data (Imsirovic 2023).

Rethinking the Fashion Industry through the Lens of Craftsmanship

There is a significant connection between sustainable production, Fair Trade and craftsmanship. By focusing on craftsmanship, the industry can foster a deeper connection to artisanal values, ensuring that fashion not only appeals aesthetically but also contributes positively to both communities and the environment. This is due to the fact that producing by hand generates a different view on the value of fashion and clothing (Owen 2017; WCCE/Ohayo 2023). Craftsmanship requires specific manufacturing skills, a wide knowledge about materials, as well as techniques (Sennett 2009).

While there is no international consensus on what is to be considered as 'craft' (WCCE/Ohayo 2023), certain common characteristics can be found across the literature. Crafts are more than physical products; they embody both tangible and intangible heritage, acting as a bridge from the past to the present and serving as a communication tool. Beyond preserving techniques, crafts maintain narratives that help people find their identity (Ejaz n.d.). Owen (2017) defines crafts as follows:

"(...) using the term 'craft' is intended to mean deploying skilled labour to shape physical materials creating a unique item. Craft here is 'creative' in that applying those skills to achieve a desired outcome requires innovation and problem solving. Equally, craft is 'technical' in that materials must be handled in specific ways in order to function as required in the crafted object. Craft activities operate along a gradient from fully professional to hobbyists" (Owen 2017: 2).

Crafts represent traditions and cultures. They are closely linked to people's lifestyles, history and conventions. For many countries around the globe, crafted products play a vital role for exports, household income and employment, displaying a significant cultural and economic importance (Lee/Zhao 2024).

On the one hand, crafted production has lost importance in the global economy due to industrialization and automatization. Crafted products were overtaken by mass production and consumerism, modern trends and counterfeit goods. On the other hand, in recent years there is a growing appreciation for handmade and artisanal products, with many customers willing to pay a premium for them, i.e., there is a certain resurgence of the ethos of craftsmanship. Reviving traditional crafts is seen as an essential aspect, as they form the foundation of a community or society's cultural tapestry (Lee/Zhao 2024). Interestingly, certain techniques have re-emerged, with knitting and crochet reclaimed as fashionable activities (Luckman 2015). Online platforms now connect a geographically dispersed community of enthusiasts, opening up a new niche for micro-enterprises (Luckman 2015). As an example, *Love-Crafts*, a British company with offices in Germany, the Ukraine and the US reports a 166% jump in orders year-on-year as people turned to sewing and knitting during

repeated lockdowns. The woolly trend has spurred growth for smaller fashion businesses (Silver 2021). However, there are also concerns about the decline of traditional crafts, as younger generations show less interest in learning traditional skills. Additionally, many craft jobs are low-paying and lack the stability and benefits of other professions (WCCE/Ohayo 2023).

In the context of sustainability and Fair Trade, certain aspects about craftsmanship are particularly relevant. Sennett (2009) observes that craftsmanship can answer consumer's demand for Sustainable and Fair goods, because it inherently involves an ethical commitment to producing goods responsibly and sustainably. He noted that craftspeople often place a high value on materials and methods that minimise environmental impact, demonstrating a keen awareness of the broader social and environmental consequences of their work. This translates in craftspeople being committed to the quality and durability of their artifacts. Skilled craftsmanship frequently produces items that are valued and preserved for long periods, helping to reduce waste and support sustainability. Crafting leads to the efficient and thoughtful use of resources, fostering innovative practices that enhance sustainability, such as recycling, upcycling and the use of renewable resources. Hand-knitting, for example, allows to use the exact amount of required yarn; possible left overs can be reused in a variety of ways and in case a garment should not fit anymore or be pleasant to individual taste, it can be frogged and the yarn can be reknitted into a new piece of clothing. In addition, craftsmanship is often locally rooted, which reduces the carbon footprint and engages local communities in the production process. The preservation and transmission of traditional skills through craftsmanship contribute to sustainable development. Valuing and maintaining these skills help sustain cultural heritage and promote time-tested, sustainable practices. Craftspeople typically focus on creating durable products, in contrast to the culture of disposal driven by mass production. The problem-solving nature of craftsmanship fosters innovative solutions for sustainability, adapting traditional techniques to modern challenges and integrating new technologies (Sennett 2009).

According to the World Crafts Council Europe (WCCE) and Ohayo (2023), crafts can be sustainable when kept on a small scale, using local materials, and when supporting changing production chains. Craftspeople emphasise the importance of creating quality items that people will take care of, indirectly benefiting the environment. Overall, crafts have the potential to support sustainable consumption, social innovation, social cohesion and individual well-being, including mental health (WCCE/Ohayo 2023). Interest in crafts is growing, driven by increasing consumer concerns about sustainability. This trend presents an opportunity for many crafts, as they are often produced locally and seen as beneficial to the local economy (WCCE/Ohayo 2023). According to findings by WCCE and Ohayo (2023), the primary motivations for purchasing crafts include a desire to preserve traditional craftsmanship and an appreciation for the uniqueness of handmade items. Additional reasons cited

were a personal connection to craft pieces, a preference for natural and authentic materials, support for the local economy, the superior quality of crafts compared to industrial products, and viewing them as long-term investments.

The standardisation and quality management of crafts can be advanced through initiatives such as Fair Trade campaigns, which enhance the branding and support of artisanal crafts. Fair Trade campaigns promote fair pricing and ethical production practices, increasing the visibility and appeal of genuine crafts. Consumer trust is enhanced by ensuring adherence to Fair Trade practices (Lee/Zhao 2024). In another study, Owen (2017) has found that micro yarn-related businesses tend to contribute to sustainability. The case studies in Owen's (2017) paper illustrate that the craft sector supports economic sustainability and, indirectly, environmental sustainability. Micro-enterprises in the craft sector also uniquely contribute to social sustainability and are not driven by growth.

Yet, there also seems to be economic potential on a larger scale. The value of European knitwear imports is estimated at €25.8 billion, placing it at a top position as apparel sub-segment. Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands are the largest importers of knitwear in the EU and also among the top importers from low- and middle-income countries. Knitwear aligns perfectly with the Slow Fashion trend, as high-quality knitted garments are both durable and timeless. The popularity of knitwear made from natural or sustainable fibres is rising among environmentally conscious consumers (CBI 2023). This presents a compelling case for engaging with the trend and embarking on a crafting journey, as advocated e.g., by the Fair Trade yarn brand *Manos del Uruguay*. As a non-profit organization with a social mission, *Manos del Uruguay* operates through 12 cooperatives, each serving as a workshop located in a small village in Uruguay's countryside. The brand not only adheres to rigorous environmental and social standards but also supports women through its cooperative structure, further enhancing its commitment to ethical practices (Manos del Uruguay n.d.) and being a live example of Sennett's (2009) take on craftsmanship.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current fashion industry is vast, thriving on rapid product turnover and low prices, which come with far-reaching consequences. Its profit-driven model poses severe societal, human and environmental challenges. Far from enhancing societal well-being, the industry often fails to provide safe, high-quality and affordable textile products, to create inclusive jobs with fair wages, or to minimize its negative social and environmental impacts. However, there are alternative approaches to fashion that offer hope for change, including Circular Fashion, Slow Fashion, Fair Trade and the ethos of craftsmanship, which were discussed in this chapter.

While these models are promising, they remain niche and require further development. The Fair Trade model, which was the main focus of this chapter, despite promoting ethical practices, has its limitations [see Lawson Jaramillo's chapter in this volume]. Fair Trade pricing often fails to fully cover production costs, meaning financial benefits for producers may be limited. Additionally, producers may become overly reliant on the Fair Trade market, which is relatively small, limiting opportunities for growth or diversification. The certification process itself can be prohibitively expensive and administratively burdensome, preventing smaller producers from participating. Moreover, Fair Trade impacts only a small fraction of global trade, reducing its ability to address systemic issues like poverty and exploitation on a larger scale.

Beyond these limitations, there is a general lack of research and data on sustainable businesses in the fashion industry, which are often small and thus do not have the resources to engage in research, as well as insufficient policy support. Although some initiatives, such as the state-supported 'Grüner Knopf' label in Germany that imply collaborations between NGOs and governments, hold promise for the future, have emerged recently, more needs to be done. Another promising approach lies in the integration of different models, such as Circular Fashion, Slow Fashion, and Fair Trade [see Demandt and Gözet's, Trasciani et al.'s as well as Salter's chapter in this volume]. Each model has its strengths, with some focusing more on environmental aspects and others on social, economic, or cultural dimensions of sustainability. By working together, these movements stand a greater chance of delivering large-scale solutions that can truly help transform the mainstream fashion industry into a more sustainable and ethical sector.

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