

A Fair Trade Approach to Craftsmanship, Technology and Sustainability

The Animaná and Hecho Por Nosotros' Toolkit

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Introduction

The fashion industry is a major contributor to sustainability issues, including environmental harm, cultural erosion, poor labour practices and complex supply chains, which often lack transparency and accountability (Gonzalez-Amarillo et al. 2018). Whilst there has been a push towards sustainability, greenwashing is widespread, and transparency remains a significant challenge [see Salter's as well as Trasciani et al.'s chapter in this volume]. Furthermore, according to Sadowski et al. (2021: 11), the fashion industry is the second-largest consumer of water and contributes heavily to global carbon emissions. Additionally, poor working conditions, low wages and gender discrimination are common, perpetuating social injustices (Santucci et al. 2023).

Beyond environmental and social concerns, cultural sustainability is also lacking [see Boğa-Moisin and Winkler's chapter in this volume]. For example, in Latin America, local artisans and Indigenous communities are often victims of the appropriation of cultural designs, which hinders economic growth due to limited local processing and development strategies (Fusi et al. 2024). Addressing these issues, the B-Corp¹ *Animaná* and NGO *Hecho Por Nosotros* (HxN) promote ethical fashion initiatives. HxN, with consultative status in the UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), advocates for a transparent textile value chain and seeks to protect Indigenous knowledge through fair production practices. In alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, HxN has partnered with over 80 organisations to support creative industries and foster sustainable production and consumption patterns (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2024).

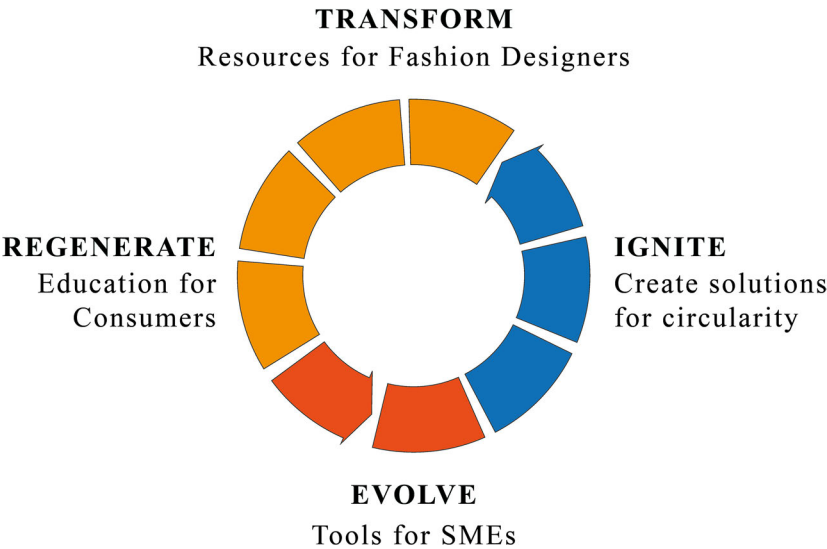
1 A 'B Corporation' (or 'B Corp') is a for-profit corporation certified for its social impact by B Lab, a non-profit organization. To be granted and to maintain the certification, companies are assessed on their social and environmental performance and commitment to stakeholders.

Together, HxN and *Animaná* provide tools to empower artisans and small businesses, promoting fair principles in trade and technology adoption. Their platform offers educational materials, traceability tools, and market access solutions to drive fair practices in trade. This chapter examines the theory of change as applied by HxN and *Animaná*, focusing on fair principles in trade and innovative methods, including a Toolkit and QR codes that enhance transparency by revealing the stories behind products, aiming for systemic transformation towards a sustainable fashion industry.

Hecho Por Nosotros & Animaná's Theory of Change

As the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) quotes, “A theory of change is a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, are expected to lead to a specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence” (United Nations Development Group 2018).

Figure 1: HxN Theory of change. Hecho por Nosotros, 2024.



HxN's theory of change is built on the exchange of wisdom between Indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices, as applied to global market strategies. This approach ensures that Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) have a voice, recognising their crucial role in the process of production. It fosters the de-

velopment of a sustainable value chain and promotes a two-way exchange of knowledge. According to Adriana Marina, CEO and founder of *Animaná* and HxN, these organisations are “genuinely focused on the appreciation of people, communities, and its richness” (Ethical Collection 2023).

Figure 2: The process of collecting camelids' fibres. Hecho Por Nosotros, 2023.



Most IPLCs live below the poverty line, surviving on less than \$2.15 per day, according to the World Bank (World Bank n.d.). This economic hardship is exacerbated by ecosystem degradation, directly impacting their traditional livelihoods and cultural practices. For instance, the ancient method of ‘chaku’, a communal practice of shearing and herding camelids, is at risk (Bonacic et al. 2006). Furthermore, IPLCs have honed specific breeding techniques crucial to the survival of camelids, such as vicuñas. Without this Indigenous knowledge, these species could be at risk, alongside the communities' economic independence. Protecting camelids like vicuñas and integrating local artisans into both local and global value chains is vital for preserving biodiversity and empowering these communities economically and culturally (Marina et al. 2018).

Animaná's emphasis on camelid products underscores the preservation of Indigenous practices while addressing systemic corruption. By safeguarding breeding traditions and integrating local artisans into economic systems, these initiatives protect camelid populations and support IPLCs. Rooted in a theory of change that bridges cultural heritage and contemporary practices, *Animaná* and HxN ensure an-

cestral knowledge is incorporated into designs through traditional iconography and methods, fostering a connection between heritage and modern fashion.

However, implementing HxN's theory of change faces challenges in balancing traditional values with the demands of global markets. Market pressures for scalability and efficiency often conflict with the slower, sustainable methods of IPLCs. Additionally, unequal power dynamics in global value chains hinder artisans' control over intellectual property and production processes, complicating efforts to align cultural preservation with modern economic participation [see Lawson Jaramillo's as well as Boça-Moisin and Winkler's chapter in this volume].

Figure 3: An Indigenous artisan, supported by HxN and Animanà, weaving camelid fibres. Hecho Por Nosotros, 2023.



Currently, a significant debate around the theory of change in similar projects centres on the balance between scalability and the preservation of traditional knowledge. Critics argue that scaling up initiatives in the fashion industry can lead to a dilution of cultural authenticity, as global markets prioritise speed and cost-effectiveness over sustainability and cultural preservation (Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative 2020). There is also ongoing discourse about the extent to which local communities benefit economically from integration into global markets, with concerns about exploitation and inequitable profit-sharing structures (Seier 2019).

HxN believes that systemic change can begin with Circular Economy models, which form the foundation for fair practices in trade and sustainable development. HxN and *Animanà* define the Circular Economy as an economic system focused

on micro-, meso-, and macro-levels to achieve sustainable development, improve environmental quality, generate economic prosperity and ensure social equity for present and future generations. By collaborating and co-creating with Indigenous communities in both local and global markets, HxN aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable economic system. Their longstanding partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has reinforced this vision, as UNECE advocates for the Circular Economy to minimise environmental impact through strategies such as reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering materials (Suarez-Visbal et al. 2022).

A crucial aspect of this systemic change is empowering local artisans with the tools and knowledge needed to thrive in the system, such as accessing new markets. *Animaná* and HxN developed user-friendly resources for artisans and textile value chain stakeholders, all available through their Toolkit. This Toolkit provides support for SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) by enhancing access to business knowledge and addressing technological, financial and gender disparities. According to Adriana Marina, the organisations “not only aim to raise consumer awareness about the injustices, processes, and impacts of the fashion industry but also collaborate to implement change and provide concrete solutions to the problem” (Rocca 2020).

Fair Trade and the Fault of Certifications

The premise in favour of implementing Fair Trade certifications is that they provide small producers with access to broader markets, supporting business development and empowering them through educated consumers who value these certified products and are willing to pay a premium (Hou et al. 2019) [see Anderson et al.’s chapter in this volume]. However, while such certifications offer market access, they also present barriers. Producers must meet strict standards to qualify, which can marginalise those who fall short (Hou et al. 2019). Even when producers succeed, their products often lose their unique identity, becoming standardised for mass markets in the Global North, thus disconnecting them from their origins and stories (Marston 2013). This homogenisation undermines meaningful buyer-producer interactions, erasing historical and geographical ties [see Lawson Jaramillo’s as well as Boşa-Moisin and Winkler’s chapter in this volume]. Additionally, Davenport and Low (2012) argue that labels often create stereotypes of artisans, failing to reflect the true production conditions, which are frequently marked by economic inequality, diverse skill sets and gender imbalances. These issues arise from Fair Trade systems being shaped by market and consumer demands (Getz/Shreck 2006), ultimately perpetuating relationships based on commodities rather than human connection.

Local studies on Fair Trade highlight weaknesses in the management of local producers and cooperatives affiliated with the label, particularly concerning the

local production chain (Zhang et al. 2020). Busshaus and Zillich (2020) identify the “paradox of sustainable fashion brands”, where consumers express a preference for sustainability but continue to purchase fast, disposable fashion [see Sark and Gotthardsen’s chapter in this volume]. In this context, traceability is insufficiently incentivised, compelling companies to make the difficult choice of catering to mass demand and perpetuating the cycle of disposable garments (Connell, cited in Busshaus/Zillich, 2020). To fully grasp these criticisms, it is essential to examine the Fair Trade labelling system, which, despite its aim of fostering equity, operates through a hierarchical and unidirectional supply chain model.

Figure 4: World Fair Trade Organization [WFTO] Supply Chain Model. Adapted from Zhang et al. 2020.

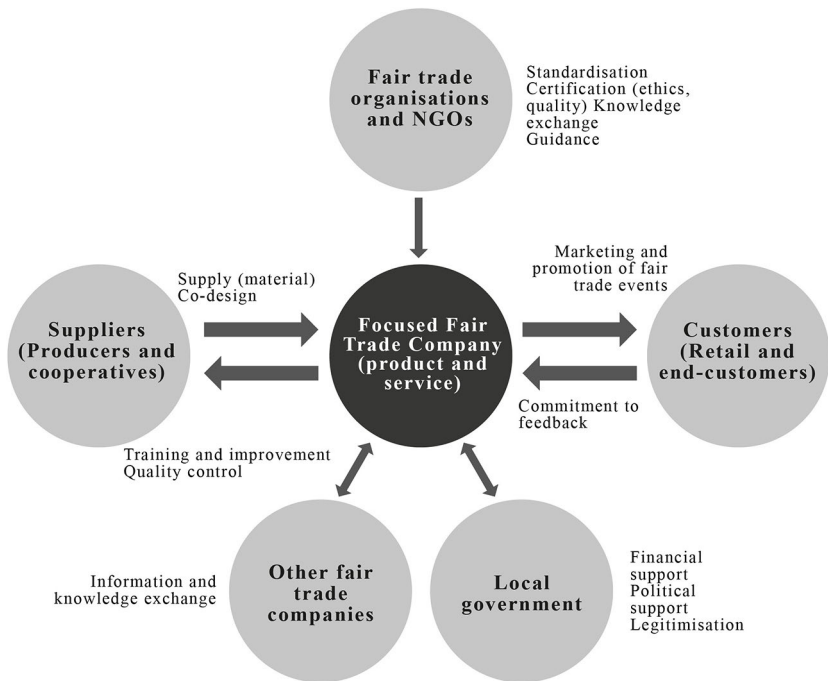
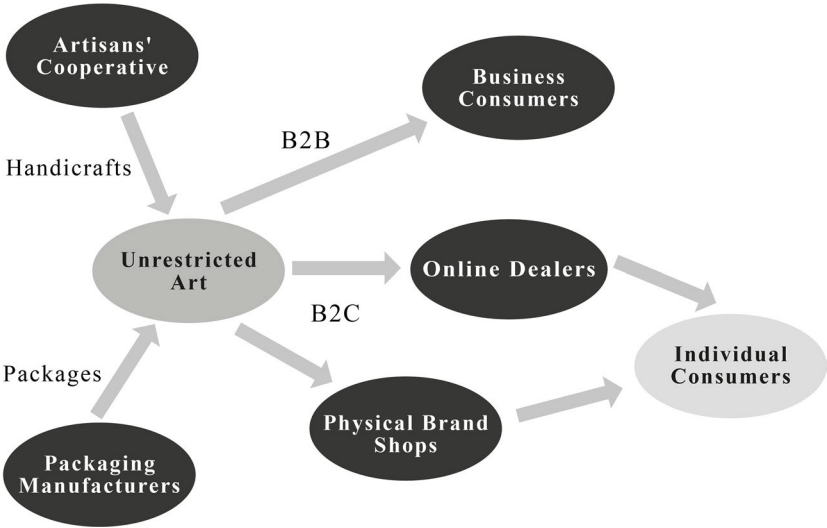


Figure 4 illustrates the hierarchical structure of the Fair Trade supply chain flow model, with partner companies and the WFTO positioned at the top. While there is nominally a bidirectional exchange of knowledge between the lower levels of the hierarchy and local producers, this interaction is often inconsistent, as shown in Figure 5. In many instances, artisans are limited to supplying textiles, which then pass through distributors to reach buyers, with no direct flow of information. Con-

sequently, this model fails to address the needs of artisans, who occupy the most vulnerable position within the value chain. Furthermore, as observed in some Fair Trade certified companies, achieving full integration across all links in the value chain remains a significant challenge.

Figure 5: Supply Chain Model of a Fair Trade Labelling Partner Company. Adapted from Zhang et al. 2020.



In summary, the Fair Trade certifications facilitate access to global markets, but exclude some producers. Those who gain access face challenges such as high demands and the homogenisation of identities (Marston 2013). This hierarchical dynamic hampers artisans’ growth (Getz/Shreck 2006) and disrupts the social relationship between consumers and producers.

HxN observed that producer communities often forfeit the ability to independently apply their ancestral sustainable practices when conforming to certification requirements². This externally imposed approach fails to address the challenges faced by producers excluded from the system, leaving them in a vulnerable position (Suárez-Visbal et al. 2023). In response, HxN developed the Toolkit—a platform designed to foster traceability and transparency while adopting an inclusive approach that encourages active participation from all actors within the value chain.

2 This occurs because their products are combined with other local producers, causing the diverse stories and cultures to be subsumed into a collective whole represented by the company responsible for processing and distribution.

The Toolkit

HxN and *Animaná* have developed a 'Toolkit' to address the limitations of traditional textile certifications. The Toolkit seeks to enhance business, design and innovation knowledge for design professionals and artisan producers, bridging technological, financial and gender gaps that disproportionately affect entrepreneurs in the Global South.

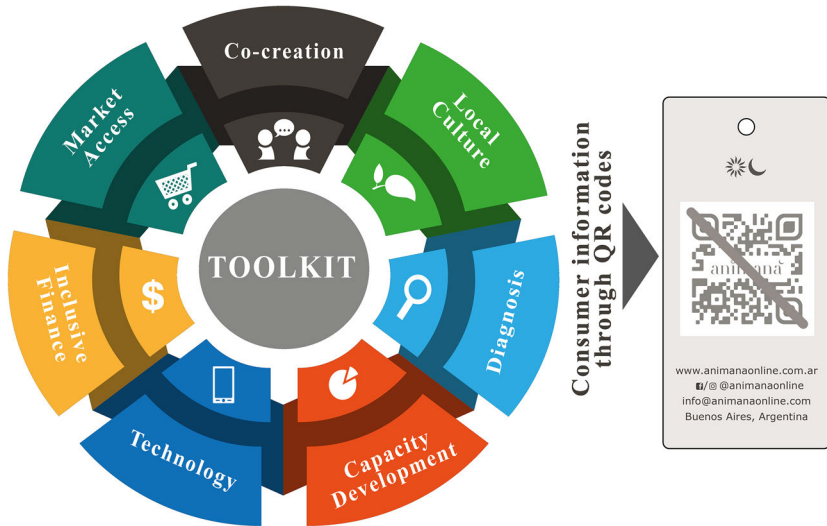
By integrating educational tools with a focus on sustainable business models, innovation, and regenerative practices, the Toolkit fosters business and design literacy while embedding sustainability into business models from the outset. It also includes traceability tools and training on their application in global markets, offering a low-cost alternative to traditional certifications. Central to the Toolkit is a digital platform that functions as both an educational resource and a marketplace, leveraging QR code technology to track supply chains and promote transparency, thereby creating an inclusive ecosystem for artisans, designers and entrepreneurs.

QR codes on each product's tag encapsulate the ecosystem, providing consumers with detailed information. Traceability through QR technology has been shown to enhance purchase intent and is a valuable factor for consumers (Luz 2016; Kim/Woo 2016; Bradford et al. 2022). These codes trace the product's journey from seed cultivation to finished garments, emphasising value creation through quality management and enhancing competitiveness in global markets. The Toolkit is structured in seven dimensions: four sequential (diagnosis, capacity building, inclusive financing, and market access) and three transversal (co-creation, local culture, and technology) (Ahumada et al. 2023).

The transversal elements are the pillars of the HxN ecosystem and its network of collaborators. They are based on: (1) Co-creation: fostering collaboration, empathy and dialogue between global professionals and textile artisans from Latin America for mutual learning and respect for cultural identities; (2) Local culture: valuing local culture, in collaboration with B-Corp *Animaná*, focusing on preserving sustainable and traditional techniques³ to reduce environmental impact, promoting a horizontal structure where each artisan is considered a master; and (3) Technology: leveraging emerging technologies to empower SMEs and artisans, enhancing access to information, local and global markets. By exploring blockchain, artificial intelligence and QR code integration, the initiative promotes transparency and traceability within the value chain. Additionally, online training platforms and the potential use of cryptocurrencies broaden the scope of HxN and its collaborative network, driving innovation within its ecosystem.

3 The case of Tambogan highlights the importance of understanding and acknowledging ancestral processes, such as puchka, mantay, and the use of kallwa, in the creation of the white cloak (Ahumada et al. 2023).

Figure 6: The HxN's Toolkit and its application through Animaná's QR codes. Hecho Por Nosotros, 2024.



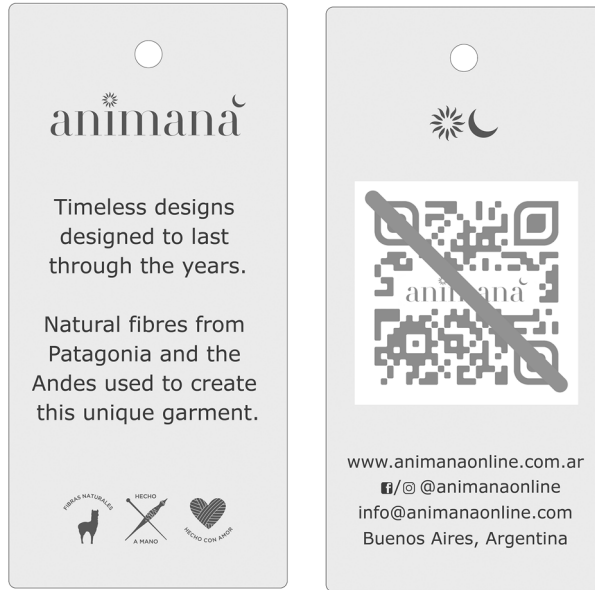
The elements of the HxN model ecosystem are developed in the following sequential phases: (1) Diagnosis: adaptation of the Toolkit to the needs of SMEs, artisans and textile producers through studies that identify social, economic and environmental challenges, designing tailored training, and defining impact indicators; (2) Capacity building: strengthening textile design, formalisation, business management, marketing and circular economy through tailored training, stored on our open platform; (3) Inclusive financing⁴: access to microcredits and working capital through cryptocurrencies and financial partnerships, reducing dependence on informal credit; (4) Market access: connecting artisans with local and global markets, highlighting the sale of products in *Animaná* stores across Europe.

This structured approach aligns seamlessly with *Animaná*'s innovative use of QR codes, which provide consumers with in-depth insights into the supply chain. By revealing the origins of products, including their materials, artisanal production processes, and the fair remuneration of producers, these QR codes foster a deeper connection between consumers and the communities behind each garment. In doing so, they promote transparency and ethical practices and elevate the consumer

4 The case of Tambogan demonstrates how decentralised banking can provide working capital to individuals who do not meet the criteria for traditional loans. Offering crypto loans helps bridge the financial gap while avoiding reliance on informal loans with exorbitant interest rates.

experience by offering a richer understanding of the values and craftsmanship embedded in sustainable fashion.

Figure 7: *Animaná's QR codes. Animaná, 2024.*



The learnings from the ecosystem are systematised and shared in the Toolkit, available to artisans, SMEs and designers in Latin America and around the world. This set of tools facilitates collaboration, the creation of partnerships, the initiation of new businesses and problem-solving, accelerating the global shift towards sustainability.

Conclusion

HxN and *Animaná* are committed to preserving Indigenous breeding techniques while integrating local artisans into the textile value chain, with the dual aim of protecting camelid populations and supporting communities both economically and culturally. In contrast to Fair Trade certifications, which often impose top-down solutions and restrict the autonomy of ancestral practices, HxN and *Animaná* adopt a more inclusive approach. Through capacity-building initiatives, such as the HxN Toolkit, they empower Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities to pursue self-directed, sustainable growth.

Figure 8: Fashion products are entirely crafted in adherence to fair trade principles, with a focus on sustainability, inclusive Toolkit use, and the integration of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) within the value chain, as discussed in this chapter. Animaná, 2024.



The HxN Toolkit enhances transparency and traceability within trade by employing technologies such as QR codes, which connect traditional artisan craftsmanship to global markets. Over the past decade, HxN and *Animaná* have collaborated with over 3,000 artisans, 364 artisan groups, and 27 fibre producers, facilitating their access to global markets and driving revenue growth. These efforts have also contributed to the creation of a business network comprising 7,500 artisans and the training of 1,500 student designers in sustainable fashion practices (United Nations Environment Programme 2023). These initiatives foster the sustainable production of high-value fibres, including alpaca and llama wool, while simultaneously preserving cultural heritage and enhancing livelihoods.

By promoting equitable trade and engaging consumers through QR codes, HxN and *Animaná* address both social and environmental challenges. These initiatives attract consumers who are committed to sustainability, offering them a deeper understanding of the production process and the cultural narratives behind the craftsmanship. In doing so, HxN and *Animaná* elevate ancestral practices and support a more responsible fashion industry.

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