

Fair Trade, Alternative Business Models and the Future of Fashion

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Introduction

This publication was developed as part of the applied research project 'Fairfaktur', which explored opportunities to strengthen the Fair Trade and crafted fashion sector.¹ The project aimed to support artisan organisations in tapping into market potentials, reaching new target groups and expanding sales channels through dedicated capacity building initiatives². Adopting a multidisciplinary and action research-driven approach, the project combined qualitative and quantitative research methods and design prototyping in collaboration with Fair Trade enterprises across Bangladesh, Bolivia, Peru, Nepal and Ethiopia. Additionally, a consulting seminar enabled students to advise a Berlin-based *Weltladen*, fostering practical learning and real-world impact.

Moreover, the project sought to foster collaboration between the traditional Fair Trade actors and other emerging social business movements in the fashion sector. Building on the idea of fostering collaboration, this interdisciplinary edited volume explores Fair Trade in the context of wider sustainability discourses and other alternative economic or business models with a focus on the fashion and textiles industry. It also emphasises and critically examines the often disregarded dimension of cultural sustainability in this context. Through this exploration, the publication offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of sustainable fashion research pathways.

1 *Fairfaktur* run from October 2022 until December 2024 and was funded by the *Institut für angewandte Forschung Berlin* (IFAF) and realised by the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences and HTW Berlin, University of Applied Sciences, in cooperation with the World Fair Trade Organization, Folkdays, El Puente, Forum Fairer Handel and Studio MMO4. The editors of this book formed the research team. We extend our thanks to our student assistants – Lena Boderke, Carlotta Woyk and Marie Schorn – for their valuable contributions to the project outputs.

2 See: <https://www.ifaf-berlin.de/projekte/fairfaktur/#ergebnisse> for more information about the project and its results.

The book is aimed at professionals, practitioners, educators and researchers working at the intersection of sustainability and the fashion industry. With an interdisciplinary approach it integrates perspectives from designers, economists, fashion professionals, sustainability researchers, marketing experts in the creative industries, business founders and legal experts – making it relevant to a wide range of audiences in these fields. In addition, the collection appeals to interested members of the public, journalists, activists and organisations in the sustainable fashion industry, the Fair Trade movement and artisanal crafts.

Environmental and social awareness, alongside the commitment to more sustainable and ethical business practices, have gained significant importance in many industries worldwide (e.g., Pufé 2017; Todeschini et al. 2017; Doherty et al. 2020; Hezel/Scholle 2023). Practices in the fashion and textiles industry, however, often contradict these ethical imperatives. More even, fashion is widely associated with economic exploitation, disregard for human rights and cultural heritage, and an overall negative impact on nature, climate and the environment (e.g., Bick et al. 2018; Braumüller et al. 2020; European Parliament 2020). These issues demand an urgent shift towards a social, ecological, economic and cultural sustainability transformation.

Over the past five decades, social movements, such as Fair Trade and various other actors involved in grassroots activities, have made efforts to integrate social justice into business practices, including in the fashion and textile sector. However, despite the active engagement of global civil society, organisations and social entrepreneurs, the widespread market integration of Fair Trade and other sustainable practices remains limited. This challenge persists even in the face of increasing consumer awareness of sustainability-related issues. This ongoing gap, paired with the widespread exploitation of workers, particularly in the Global South³, highlights the difficulty of embedding truly equitable business models in an industry still driven by profit and Fast Fashion.

In the context of sustainable development, Fair Trade bears great potential for the fashion and textiles industry. Its value addition is primarily centred around ethical labour standards, traditional craftsmanship, focusing on values such as quality and durability and the preservation of cultural heritage. In addition, artisanal production widely aligns with the principles of the Circular Economy, emphasising the sustainable use of natural resources and applying environmentally friendly methods in production (The British Council/Fashion Revolution India 2023). Moreover, Fair

3 The term 'Global South' is not unproblematic, as it risks implying a homogeneity that does not reflect the diverse social, political and economic conditions across the various countries and regions in the world it seeks to describe. Nonetheless, given the constraints of language and for lack of a universally accepted alternative, we adopt this term with critical awareness, as do other chapters in this book.

Trade practices can contribute to the economic inclusion of marginalised groups, especially women in the Global South, who constitute 80% of the workforce in the textiles sector (Moreno-Gavara/Jiménez-Zarco 2019; Khan 2019). Crafted fashion and textiles products in particular have great potential to promote sustainable income streams for Fair Trade producers, given that they require a higher level of expertise and ensure greater added value than the production and sale of raw materials (Weber 2018; Doherty et al. 2020; Forum Fairer Handel 2020).

This suggests that Fair Trade can play an important role in the ongoing and ever more needed debates and practices around social, ecological, economic and cultural sustainability in the fashion and textiles industry. But even though there seems to be potential for contributing to systemic change, the Fair Trade model remains a niche concept, even in sustainability-oriented business practices as well as in academic research. Recognising this limitation, this interdisciplinary book intends to expand the conversation surrounding Fair Trade and examine it from diverse perspectives. It seeks to anchor the subject more firmly both in an academic discourse and in business practice, while also identifying gaps, challenges and potential for improvement in Fair Trade approaches themselves. Furthermore, various chapters introduce and open a dialogue with other key concepts, such as sustainability, fairness, social fashion, Circular Economy, etc., broadening the horizon of the debate and, hopefully, inspiring new cross-pollinations not only between disciplines but also between different groups of actors in policymaking and practice.

We acknowledge criticism levelled against Fair Trade systems regarding their actual positive social and economic impact as well as concerns about cultural and ethical issues, particularly from the perspective of those at the beginning of the supply chain as well as Indigenous communities. Therefore, the goal of this book was to integrate different perspectives, some more affirmative and others more critical of the established Fair Trade system and others outside of it, in order to highlight potentials and synergies inherent to Fair Trade models, but also critically assess its limitations and areas in need for adaptation, especially with regard to social and cultural sustainability. While we would have welcomed to include more voices from academics and practitioners in the Global South—an omission we acknowledge as a limitation of this book⁴—we have brought together a diverse range of perspectives

4 Despite efforts to include perspectives from artisans and producers at the start of the Fair Trade supply chain, this book does not adequately represent these voices. Structural barriers, including the exclusivity of academia and the lack of access to funded publication opportunities, continue to limit the visibility and participation of those most affected by these discussions. As editors, we have tried to balance this gap by focusing on contributions from practitioners and contributors who work closely at the intersection of producers and artisan organisations, craftsmanship and local communities.

and stakeholders bridging theory and practice, as well as different disciplines and regions. The chapters are structured into three parts.

Conceptualising Fair / Sustainable / Social Fashion

Opening Part 1 of the book, 'Conceptualising Fair / Sustainable / Social Fashion', Katrina Sark and Tanja Gotthardsen's chapter 'Sustainability Paradoxes' acknowledges the relevance and magnitude of the current sustainability movement and the emergence of businesses that aim to act in a sustainable way. As analysts of both culture and industry, the authors investigate to what extent it is possible to be sustainable – environmentally, ethically, socially, economically and creatively. Businesses and practitioners have to navigate challenges, contradictions and paradoxes, especially in an industry dominated by corporations that control market value and the supply chains. Even brands celebrated for pioneering sustainability struggle with the reality of cost, labour equity, inclusivity, environmental justice, colonial history and cultural sustainability. Sark and Gotthardsen develop seven paradoxes of fashion sustainability using theories of paradoxes (by Niklas Luhmann and Elena Esposito) and contradictions within capitalism (David Harvey) to conduct a critical inquiry into the global fashion industry. This research reveals the vast pervasiveness of greenwashing. Until we have established the boundaries for a safe and just operating space for fashion production and consumption, and until a functional definition of sustainability pertaining to fashion is developed, we will keep projecting the deparadoxification of sustainable fashion into the future. What we currently have is a balancing act, a negotiation of the lesser of all evils in making sustainability work. They argue that paradoxicality and the power dynamics governing global fashion systems must be acknowledged. This framework of paradoxes provides insight into the challenges of sustainable fashion, and aims to bring more transparency into the sustainability discourse and practices, to assist educators, students, legislators and brands working towards solutions for fashion in the age of climate and humanitarian crises.

Angela McRobbie in 'Fashion as Creative Economy: Learning from London, Berlin and Milan' critiques the dominance of dress history and curatorial studies in fashion scholarship, arguing that sociological perspectives—especially on labour and social justice—remain marginal. This has contributed to fashion's exclusion from creative industry policy discussions, despite its political economy as a feminized sector shaped by self-exploitation, unpaid internships, and precarious work. Drawing on findings from the CREATE AHRC fashion study (2013–2018), the chapter examines the working conditions of independent fashion designers in London, Berlin and Milan. It critically interrogates the neoliberal push for self-entrepreneurship, which frames creativity as an individual responsibility while absolving capital of labor protections such as maternity leave, fair wages and em-

ployment security. McRobbie argues for fashion's re-imagining as a 'social fashion' economy, with local production networks, sustainability policies and fair labor practices. A social fashion framework could foster new labor markets through local government initiatives and university training programs. However, achieving this requires expanding fashion policy expertise and moving beyond the 'winner-takes-all' model that privileges elite institutions. The chapter concludes with a call to reform fashion education. Art and design schools should shift from fashion management to training graduates to advocate for equitable fashion policies. By fostering regionalized and socially embedded fashion ecosystems, policymakers and educators can help sustain independent designers, particularly women and those outside major fashion capitals, ensuring a more inclusive and sustainable future for the industry.

In 'Fair Purchasing Practices in Garment Supply Chains: Connecting Theory and Practice', Matthew Anderson, Tamsin Bradley and Sutirtha Sahariah examine how Fair Trade organisations implement responsible purchasing practices in textile supply chains. Focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises, it explores their role in fostering an enabling environment for fair purchasing within the garment sector. A central argument of the chapter is that previous studies have often overlooked the role of power in supply chain relationships. Drawing on John Gaventa's 'powercube' framework, the authors analyse how Fair Trade organisations navigate power asymmetries and translate Fair Trade principles into practice. The research focuses on three core areas: Equal Partnership, Collaborative Production Planning and Fair Payment Terms. By embedding social and economic empowerment into business models, Fair Trade enterprises demonstrate how responsible purchasing can move beyond voluntary corporate social responsibility initiatives towards meaningful structural change. The chapter also critiques 'transitory CSR' strategies in which multinational corporations obscure partial commitments to ethical sourcing. While industry frameworks like the Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices set important benchmarks, they often fall short of addressing systemic inequalities. In contrast, Fair Trade partnerships model sustainable pricing, ethical production planning and transparent payment structures that empower suppliers. However, barriers such as Fast Fashion competition, ethical consumer market limitations and global trade imbalances remain significant. The chapter concludes that Fair Trade organisations, if properly supported, have the potential to lead a shift towards scalable, equitable and sustainable purchasing practices. Achieving this requires stronger policy advocacy, an expansion of Fair Trade networks and the enforcement of fair labour standards across supply chains.

Calypso Hock and Philipp Kenel's chapter 'Approaching Fashion Differently: Insights from the Fair Trade Model' explores business models that challenge Fast Fashion. While Circular and Slow Fashion primarily focus on sustainability in production and consumption, this chapter highlights the Fair Trade model's emphasis on eco-

conomic, social and cultural dimensions. It argues that integrating Fair Trade principles with Circular and Slow Fashion can provide a more holistic approach to sustainability in the fashion industry. The chapter first examines the exploitative structures of Fast Fashion, including low wages, unsafe working conditions and supply chain opacity. It then introduces Fair Trade as a model that prioritises fair wages, ethical production and long-term partnerships with artisans and small producers. The authors also highlight the role of craftsmanship in fostering sustainability, arguing that artisanal production challenges the disposability of Fast Fashion by emphasising quality, durability and cultural heritage. Despite its potential, Fair Trade fashion remains a niche sector, constrained by limited consumer adoption, high certification costs and competition from mainstream brands. However, the authors argue that combining Fair Trade principles with broader sustainability initiatives can strengthen its impact. They call for greater policy support, research and collaboration between Fair Trade, Circular and Slow Fashion movements to drive systemic change in the industry. The chapter concludes that while Fast Fashion dominates the global market, alternative models provide viable pathways for a more ethical and sustainable future. By prioritising fair labour conditions, responsible sourcing and environmental sustainability, Fair Trade and craftsmanship can help reshape the fashion industry into one that values both people and the planet.

In 'Fair Trade and Fairness in the Artisan Sector', Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo examines the artisan sector, a critical source of rural employment globally. While this sector offers flexibility, low start-up costs and the potential for self-employment, it is also marked by systemic inequities, precarious livelihoods and limited market access. Fair Trade initiatives aim to address these challenges by promoting fairness, transparency and sustainable income for artisans. However, Lawson Jaramillo argues, existing Fair Trade models fail to deliver significant benefits due to inadequacies in living wages, supply chain transparency and long-term brand collaborations. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and surveys conducted by Parsons School of Design's DEED Lab between 2008 and 2019, the chapter examines the efficacy of Fair Trade certifications and explores alternative frameworks to ensure fairness within the artisan sector. It critiques the prevalent 'Made By' model, where artisans primarily serve as low-wage manufacturers with minimal agency and highlights the limitations of current pricing structures that rely on local market rates rather than ensuring a living wage. The findings suggest that systemic change is essential for a truly equitable artisan sector. Proposed reforms include requiring proof of living wages, fostering long-term brand-artisan partnerships, promoting supply chain transparency and integrating artisans into decision-making processes. Additionally, a reimagined Fair Trade model should prioritize education and collaboration to empower artisans and address the structural barriers to their sustainable economic development. By rethinking fairness and implementing these changes, Fair Trade

models can help ensure the artisan sector evolves into a space of empowerment, preserving traditional crafts while ensuring fair compensation and social equity.

Closing Part 1 with their chapter ‘Can Fair Trade be Culturally Sustainable?’, Monica Boça-Moisin and Fredericke Winkler critically examine the Fair Trade system through the lens of Cultural Sustainability. While Fair Trade seeks to improve economic and social conditions for producers, it remains embedded in a Eurocentric, development-aid framework that reinforces colonial power structures. Cultural Sustainability, in contrast, prioritises the rights of craft custodians, self-determination and equitable knowledge-sharing, challenging the inherent hierarchies within Fair Trade. Boça-Moisin and Winkler argue that Fair Trade’s universal standards impose external definitions of fairness that may not align with the worldviews of Indigenous and local communities. Producers are often subordinated to contractual conditions they did not co-create, reducing their agency in defining what is fair. Moreover, Fair Trade’s marketing narratives commodify traditional crafts, detaching them from their cultural context. Through the Cultural Sustainability Matrix, the authors explore how Fair Trade might evolve beyond its colonial logic. Fair Trade must undergo structural change, shifting towards a model where cultural products are traded on terms mutually defined by producers. The chapter concludes that the Fair Trade system, in its current form, is not culturally sustainable. However, by embracing anti-colonial perspectives, rebalancing power dynamics and embedding Cultural Sustainability principles into its foundations, Fair Trade has the potential to transform into a truly equitable system that respects both economic justice and cultural integrity.

Empirical Insights, Business Practices and Case Studies

The first chapter of Part 2, ‘Empirical Insights, Business Practices and Case Studies’ explores the jewellery side of fashion with ‘Does responsible gold certification enhance transparency? The knowledge and communication of jewellers’ by Erwin Lefoll, Antoinette van der Merwe and Isabel Günther. Since the 1990s, the ‘blood diamond’ scandal has heightened scrutiny of diamond sourcing, leading to similar concerns about gold sourcing. While voluntary standards for responsible gold sourcing have emerged, the effectiveness of these standards in making the supply chain more transparent to consumers about the environmental and social impacts of gold mining remains unclear. Given the inability of consumers to directly assess the ethical and environmental impact of gold jewellery, the role of retailers in communicating the source of gold and the meaning of different labels is paramount. Using a mystery shopper methodology in 82 jewellery stores in Switzerland, Lefoll, van der Merwe and Günther investigate jewellers’ knowledge of gold sourcing, certification and the meaning of responsible gold, as well as the extent to which retailers

proactively share this information with consumers. Their findings show that while 79% of jewellers claimed their products were ethical or sustainable, only 13% could communicate the origin of the gold, and this was limited to stores selling *Fairtrade* or *Fairmined* gold. The majority of jewellers affiliated to the Responsible Jewellery Council showed significant gaps in their knowledge of responsible gold sourcing, with less than 10% of them even able to state their certification status. In addition, almost all jewellers would only discuss gold sourcing if asked directly by the mystery shopper, rather than on their own initiative. These findings suggest that, at least to date, voluntary certification schemes have had limited effectiveness in promoting transparency across the entire supply chain.

Jette Ladiges in 'Strength-Based Design in the Textile and Fashion Industry' introduces the Strength-Based Design (SBD) approach and discusses its transformative potential within the textile and fashion industry. SBD highlights artisans' unique skills and cultural knowledge, integrating traditional techniques into modern design processes. By prioritizing sustainable practices, such as using natural, locally-sourced materials and manual production methods, SBD aligns with ecological principles while supporting biodiversity and reducing carbon footprints. This approach enables artisans to become full participants in design processes, creating durable and culturally significant products that resonate with contemporary consumers. Case studies, including initiatives such as UNHCR's *MADE51* and Tanzanian social enterprise *Womencraft*, illustrate the potential of SBD to empower artisans economically, socially and creatively. These initiatives highlight the importance of market access, capacity-building and fostering innovation while retaining cultural integrity. Through such partnerships, artisans gain income stability, increased recognition and opportunities for community development. The chapter also examines the limitations of SBD in terms of achieving systemic impact. Challenges include ensuring scalability and addressing power imbalances that may inadvertently replicate historical inequities. Furthermore, the integration of traditional techniques into market-driven contexts requires careful collaboration to preserve cultural authenticity without commodifying heritage. Nonetheless, SBD offers an interesting model for creating a more sustainable and equitable fashion industry. By centring artisans' voices, valuing their traditions and addressing systemic barriers, SBD offers a pathway toward fostering social, cultural and environmental transformation in the global textile sector.

Olivia Hofmann and Özlem Yildiz's chapter 'Between Lack of Cooperation and Funding Gaps: An Exploratory Study of Business Insolvencies in the Sustainable Fashion Industry' analyses the factors driving financial distress and insolvencies among sustainable fashion companies in Germany. So far, investigating business insolvencies qualitatively has been challenging due to the limited availability of case studies and interview partners. Many labour market studies, relying on quantitative data such as self-employment rates, unemployment figures and business closures,

offer only surface-level insights without uncovering the underlying causes. This exploratory study investigates why companies in this industry cease operations and the strategies they adopt to avoid insolvency. Drawing on interviews with former and current CEOs of sustainable fashion brands, Hofmann and Yildiz apply Porter's Five Forces framework to analyse industry dynamics. Key findings highlight the financial pressures of high innovation costs, marketing investments and the need for continuous product development. Limited cost reduction potential, unpredictable market conditions and the strong bargaining power of suppliers further exacerbate financial instability. A critical challenge is the lack of institutional support, as sustainable fashion brands often struggle to secure funding from banks, stakeholders and industry partners. The impact of Covid-19 also becomes evident, revealing how the pandemic intensified existing vulnerabilities. By identifying structural weaknesses and proposing solutions, the authors underscore the need for stronger industry cooperation, financial resilience strategies and policy interventions to support sustainable fashion businesses.

In 'A Fair Trade Approach to Craftsmanship, Technology and Sustainability: The *Animaná* and Hecho Por Nosotros' Toolkit', Adriana Marina, Camilla Tettoni and Edison Benites Leiva introduce an interesting case discussing how Fair Trade principles may drive systemic change in fashion. Through educational resources, traceability tools and market access solutions, the sustainable fashion brand *Animaná* and the NGO Hecho Por Nosotros (HxN) empower artisans, small businesses and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in Latin America, prioritising Fair Trade, sustainability and the preservation of traditional craftsmanship. The chapter examines HxN's theory of change, which fosters a reciprocal exchange between Indigenous knowledge and global market strategies, ensuring economic empowerment while preserving cultural heritage. Central to this initiative is the HxN Toolkit, a digital platform offering educational resources and business development tools. By leveraging QR code technology, the Toolkit enhances traceability, allowing consumers to connect with the artisans behind the products and reinforcing accountability beyond conventional certification schemes. Marina, Tettoni and Benites Leiva critique the limitations of traditional Fair Trade certifications, arguing that while they provide market access, they often impose external standards that fail to reflect the realities of IPLCs. Instead, *Animaná* and HxN advocate for a model rooted in co-creation, inclusive economic systems and Circular Economy principles. Their work highlights the importance of alternative frameworks that prioritise recognition, equitable benefit-sharing and Indigenous-led decision-making. The chapter concludes that while mainstream sustainability efforts in fashion often focus on environmental concerns, a truly fair system must integrate cultural sustainability and producer agency.

Expanding the Discourse: New Directions and Sustainability Pathways in Fashion

In Part 3 'Expanding the Discourse: New Directions and Sustainability Pathways in Fashion', Maike Demandt and Burcu Gözet examine how Fair Trade principles can enhance the justice dimension of circular textile policies in their chapter 'The Role of Fair Trade Principles and Justice within the Transformation to a Circular Textile Economy'. While the transition to a circular textile economy is essential for addressing the environmental harms of Fast Fashion, current policies often prioritise sustainability over social equity. The chapter analyses the European Union's Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, and the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation to assess their integration of fairness, social justice and ethical trade practices. Using qualitative content analysis, Demandt and Gözet find that while some social considerations are included, significant gaps remain in tackling exploitative labour conditions, unfair trade practices and the socio-economic impacts of circularity on producer countries. The chapter also explores the role of key Fair Trade organisations, such as the *World Fair Trade Organization* and *Fairtrade International*, in the Circular Economy discourse. The findings highlight the need for a more balanced approach that ensures the transition to circularity does not reinforce global inequalities. By integrating Fair Trade principles into Circular Economy policies, the industry can move towards a model that promotes both environmental sustainability and social justice, fostering a truly equitable and responsible textile economy.

In 'Fair Trade Foundations and Regenerative Futures: Building a Systemic Approach to Ethical Fashion', Jo Salter examines the evolving relationship between Fair Trade and the concept of 'regenerative' fashion as key drivers of systemic change. While Fair Trade focuses on trade justice, social equity and environmental stewardship, regenerative fashion expands this vision by restoring ecosystems, fostering circularity and strengthening community resilience. The chapter traces the history and impact of Fair Trade in textiles, detailing its principles, certifications and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It explores how traditional Fair Trade approaches are adapting to an evolving fashion landscape, alongside the rise of regenerative models that prioritise holistic, system-level solutions. Salter presents practical examples and cases, including the preservation of khadi as a heritage textile, the Circular Khadi initiative that integrates textile waste recycling and *Sanja Stories*, a brand embedding regenerative principles into its business model. These examples illustrate the synergies and challenges of balancing established Fair Trade standards with innovative regenerative practices. The chapter concludes that Fair Trade and regenerative fashion are complementary, with Fair Trade providing a structured foundation and regeneration offering adaptive, future-focused solutions. Salter advocates for an integrated approach that merges these frameworks,

ensuring long-term environmental and social impact within the global fashion industry.

In ‘Rethinking Fashion: Can Local Initiatives Drive Systemic and Sustainable Change?’, Giorgia Trasciani, Carolina De Nicolò and Maryline Filippi examine the transformative potential of local, purpose-driven initiatives in reshaping the fashion industry. While globalisation and Fast Fashion have democratised clothing access, they have also generated severe environmental, social and cultural consequences. Despite growing awareness and efforts to mitigate harm, systemic change remains to be seen. This chapter explores how territorial embeddedness and local collaboration can foster sustainability, artistic innovation and community engagement. Through an in-depth case study of *XNOVO*, an Italian social fashion start-up, the chapter illustrates how Circular Economy principles, when rooted in local ecosystems, can drive meaningful transformation. *XNOVO* integrates sustainable craftsmanship, environmental responsibility and inclusive decision-making, creating a business model that aligns with community needs while promoting transparency and trust among stakeholders. The analysis highlights how territorial approaches to circular supply chains can reduce environmental impact while re-establishing social connections often lost in globalised, depersonalised systems. Trasciani, De Nicolò and Filippi argue that an essential component of circular models should be the integration of Corporate Territorial Responsibility, ensuring that businesses actively contribute to local economic and social well-being. While the case study underscores the potential of local initiatives in driving sustainable change, it also raises critical questions about their scalability. Nonetheless, the chapter contributes to broader discussions on sustainable fashion by offering insights into the intersection of local engagement, systemic transformation and alternative business practices.

Thanks to the diversity of these chapters, our collection provides a comprehensive analysis of sustainable and alternative economic models in the fashion and textiles industry. By identifying intersections and gaps, addressing critical aspects and highlighting both challenges and opportunities, it presents innovative solutions from practice while emphasising the need for further adaptation. The contributions explore how Fair Trade, Circular Economy principles and cultural sustainability can intersect to reshape notions of fairness, power and the role of artisans in the global fashion system.

However, we acknowledge that more contributions from diverse perspectives are essential for a holistic understanding of these issues. Particularly, the voices of those practically engaged in the production and supply chains of sustainable fashion must be better integrated into both academic and industry discussions. We hope this publication serves as a starting point for an ongoing conversation—one that continues to develop productively in the coming years around fundamental questions such as: What is fair, social and sustainable fashion? How can ethical business

models evolve to drive systemic change? And what role should artisans, producers and local communities play in shaping this transformation?

The economic magnitude of fashion is enormous, carrying vast potential for reshaping economies, societies and livelihoods. Yet, to fully harness this transformative power, a stronger sociological and political-economic perspective is needed—one that critically examines global value chains, labour conditions and the distribution of power within the industry. Particularly in a post-COVID world, where sustainable businesses face mounting pressures, it is crucial to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration between different movements, ensuring that alternative business models receive the support they need to thrive.

With this book, we also sought to encourage cross-sector and inter-disciplinary dialogue, believing that by sharing different perspectives and voices, the debate on sustainable fashion can be enriched and expanded. Fair Trade remains an evolving framework—one that, despite its limitations, has the potential to contribute meaningfully to a more just and sustainable future. Expanding its scope to incorporate cultural sustainability, circularity and recalibrated notions of fairness and power could further strengthen its relevance. Ultimately, this is not just about fashion—it is about broader questions of equity, sustainability and the future of global trade. We hope that this publication will inspire continued engagement and critical reflection in the years to come, bringing new impulses to both research and practice while contributing to a more sustainable future—in fashion and beyond.

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