

## Fair Trade and Sustainability in the British Textile Industry: An Evolution from Exploitation towards Global ‘Equality’

Natalia M<sup>1\*</sup>, Trevor BM<sup>2</sup> and Sabrina SA<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Brazilian Ministry of Education – CAPES, School of Materials, University of Manchester, UK

<sup>2</sup>Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK

<sup>3</sup>Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Sul (IFRS), Brazil

### Abstract

Organisations are currently adjusting their value chains to take account of consumer demand for sustainable development. They are also responding to new understandings of sustainability in textiles and branding for consumers in a globalised world. This paper analyses and discusses the evolution of a global textile pipeline into the concept of global citizenship, in which individuals evaluate the international consequences of their local behaviour. Aiming to analyse the awareness and general understanding of consumers in regards to sustainability within the apparel industry a systemic multi-worldview field research was carried out between 2014 and 2016. To do this, three sets of semi-structured interviews were developed: one for the members of the BAFTS (British Association for Fair Trade Shops and Suppliers), one for the Marketing and Membership Coordinator of this body, and a third one to a three sustainable companies not associated to BAFTS (establishing a control group). Confronted with Sachs' five sustainable dimensions framework the interview results were analysed, as well as future implications.

**Keywords:** Fair trade; Sustainability; Textiles; BAFTS; Environmental; Hypothesis

### Introduction

One of the oldest and most historically influenceable products in the history of humanity, textiles have evolved considerably from the pre-historical furs to wearable computing gear which can measure and control a person heart rate. It created roads between continents, was used as a currency, and was the initial motivation for the establishment of a mechanical production. On a daily basis, garments can be seen as the only universal product. The culture of nudity has been suppressed to pre-defined regions and became a taboo in many countries.

With the evolution of industry, environmental, social and economic issues grew and notions of sustainable development and environmental conservation started spreading and being imposed upon countries and industries. Textiles just like other industries which did not require highly qualified personnel, followed a what was seen as an economic evolutionary path, and instead of improving in accordance to regulation and laws in its original countries, migrated to less regulated regions.

This paper comes as an initial step towards understanding the different intensity of concern to textiles. To do so, it aims to analyse and discuss the evolution of the global textile pipeline towards the concept of fair trade, in which individuals evaluate the international consequences of their local behaviour. On a second stage comparing it to the chosen framework in order to evaluate the improvement hypothesis associated to fair trade: local development in rural isolated areas.

Beginning with the contextualisation of the British textile industry, creates an initial profile of fair traders, the evaluation of Sachs' five dimensions then is used to analyse 22 questionnaires and 12 interviews (with fair trade shops, suppliers, direct sourcing retailers, a fair trade organisation, and three fashion brands). As a contribution to the existing literature, the paper creates grounds for the development of further research on the issues pointed out by the interviewees and useful overview of the different stages of environmental, economic and social concern. Thus, the paper here presented is divided in four sections: contextualisation, methodology, results and discussion and conclusions.

### The Sustainability of Trading Fairly

#### Textiles: history and the industry

Older civilizations, in prehistoric times, are remembered for using the skin of game over their shoulder or as skirts for protection against elements or to symbolise status, as a sign of wealth and admiration, not only a mean to cover one's body [1,2].

Coastal countries have been historically famous for facilitating commerce and interaction between people, as can for instance be seen in the case of the Sumerians or the international market of Byblos [2]. Considered by Herodotus a nation greatly inclined to adopt foreign customs, the Persians were able to connect the Mediterranean to central Asia, then followed by Alexander the Great's expansion to the Himalayas and eventually China's expansion towards the west, creating what would eventually be known as the silk roads, material which ultimately became a reliable international currency [3,4].

Trade between nations, cultures, east and west happened for millennia, but it was never as expansive and controlled as it was during and after the crusades, what led to what is now known as the commercial revolution. Between the eleventh and twentieth centuries (AD) Europe was the geo-political centre of the world, expanding its influence into its colonies and bringing their wealth back to the motherland [5]. Britain was one of the countries which most benefited from its colonies, especially during its golden age, after destroying the

**\*Corresponding author:** Natalia M, Sackville Street Building, Oxford Road, Manchester, Lancashire M13 9PL UK, Tel: 447904011122; E-mail: [Natalia.moreira@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Natalia.moreira@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)

**Received** November 07, 2017; **Accepted** December 05, 2017; **Published** December 07, 2017

**Citation:** Natalia M, Trevor BM, Sabrina SA (2017) Fair Trade and Sustainability in the British Textile Industry: An Evolution from Exploitation towards Global 'Equality'. J Textile Sci Eng 7: 324. doi: [10.4172/2165-8064.1000324](https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-8064.1000324)

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Great Armada and establishing itself as the main world potency – until the end of World War II [6].

The wealth of its new colonies and, in many ways, the flow of new noble fabrics being brought to England generated a new passion for fashion and an increasing distinction between classes [7], what led to one of Britain's most important innovation: the industrial revolution. Created in an attempt to increase production, this revolution was grounded on the cotton and apparel industry, based in the north of England, where the conditions for its expansion seemed appropriate [8]. The suitability of the north, among other things was due to the abundance of able and impoverished people, willing to work under extremely precarious conditions [9,10].

Textiles became essential to trade, being one of the reigning forces of imperialist England. The migration from the sugar triangle (between sugar, slaves and guns/rum) into the cotton triangle (between cotton, slaves and manufactured goods) [11] showed how this power shift happened and the importance of colonies such as the United States of America and the Caribbean [12].

The importance of textiles can be seen in several historical scenarios, such as (i) in the United States of America's civil war between the wealthy cotton producer south and the intellectual and industrial north [13]; (ii) the delay to instigate manufacturing in Brazil, when in 1808, while escaping from Napoleon, the king John VI was encouraged to open the Brazilian market to friendly nations, what inhibited the development of the local manufacture (especially using cotton as raw material) dodging competition with the British [14]; and (iii) during his campaign to release India from the British Empire, when Mahatma Ghandi encouraged his followers to wear homespun cloth, thus avoiding British goods [15].

From the moment Britain started expanding its influence into an Empire, textiles had a considerable importance on how the country approached commercial partners and avoided enemies [16,17]. When eventually the mass production of textile goods was enabled, creating a very profitable flow of capital, cotton seized to be a commodity and became a crucial good, with a strong and political symbolism [13,18].

### **The quest for ethics, 'fairness' and sustainability**

Many researchers of the industrial revolution and the Victorian period argue that as an epoch of social struggles and considerable labour revolutions [8,9,18-20]. The reduction of child and women drastic labour conditions were positive consequences of the Industrial Revolution [10,20,21], as was unionisation and laws dedicated exclusively on labour conditions and worker's health and safety, which would eventually culminated in the British Welfare State [22]. This empowerment of the working classes led to the importance of the welfare state in the United Kingdom. Labour law reinforcement was crucial to the development of the country and for the near elimination of slave-like professions [23].

With the evolution towards welfare and worker's increased rights, the cost of the textile industry in the United Kingdom increased, with the abolishment of slavery in several colonies and the constant growth of the consuming market, the cost of the textile industry in the United Kingdom rose. It was then that the production moved overseas, along with its low wages, extended hours and precarious conditions [24]. 'Far from the consumer's eyes' however still generating capital in the former motherlands, this new phenomenon was profitable and used by most of the European countries (especially those which did not profit from the first wave of colonisation) [25].

Concomitantly, the sudden insurgence of industrial cities and the large concentration of people around factories, eventually led, in 1896, to J. W. Tutt's research into the evolution of lighter peppered moths to its newer and darker shades, what was seen as a response to the increasing rates of pollution in the British city of Manchester [26]. This new discovery was the milestone, seen by many as an awakening, about the length of human intervention over nature. However, its implications developed slowly due to the preconceived idea that it restricts progress and economic growth, with a considerable concern towards the environment [27].

Grounded on the concept of continuously developing in a manner that guarantees wealth, prosperity and longevity throughout, sustainability can be divided into five different spheres: social, economic, ecological, spatial and cultural [28]. Sachs focus on cultural, spatial and social sustainability is due to the human importance in development, especially in countries considered underdeveloped; the economic and environmental spheres, widely explored in the literature, focus on the viability and consequences of a sustainable environment or enterprise. Within the textile industry, social responsibility tends to be directly associated to scenarios involving sweatshops, the lack of enforcement of labour laws and dangerous working conditions which have been associated to the industry since the early 90s [23,29].

Even though hazardous working conditions, low wages and child labour exploitation have been heavily associated to the textile pipeline since the industrial revolution, the idea of consumption being associated to the extreme conditions of the industry has only recently been seen as a decision making factor on consumer behaviour [30]. The environmental development concerns of the industry is seen as important, but not crucial, and several companies started improving their environmental footprint and corporate social responsibility. Nevertheless, unlike other industries, the informality of the garment pipeline created an increased focus on social implications of this industry in developing countries with feeble labour laws and reinforcement. Thus leading to the conception of 'fairness' [31].

Besides Sachs' five dimensions, the most accepted concept of sustainable development is based on a tripod between social, environmental and economic dimensions [32]. The first (social dimension) is commonly approached directly through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which aims at judging immediate culprits or more suitable alternatives for the surrounding communities, employees, and other actors involved in the products/service supply chain [33-35]. The second dimension (environmental), tends to focus on the more tangible actions regarding sustainability. And finally, the third - economic dimension, is oriented towards the actual likelihood of implementation, financial success and acceptance, values which define, in many ways, the wealth distribution and actor's empowerment [36-39]. The combination of these three dimensions implies that profit, the strongest business motivation, can aim equality between the actors within the value chain, especially as consumers are used to 'disconnecting' themselves from the negatives points of the supply chain once it happened mainly in foreign "third world" countries.

As a consequence, Fair Trade was proposed as an alternative to the average products, focusing its concerns on ensuring fair prices and decent working conditions for producers and suppliers, promoting equitable trading agreements [30]. According to these authors, the growth of fair trade models/experiences has been significantly aided by labelling certification, especially for the food sector. Being linked to pollution, poor air quality, waste and health issues tend to be the main avoidance of several industries. However the global aspect of the

textile industry ensures localised “visibility” of the industry’s hazards. Incidents involving poor working conditions or the personnel usually are of importance when it reaches main media channels, a favourable scenario for the Fair Trade movement to prevail.

As a complex global system, the textile industry is currently looking into fair trade as a tool to improve its image, consumer’s behaviour, the company’s profile and its positioning in an increasingly environmentally-aware world (in addition to its competitiveness), differentiating itself from more hazardous business models such as those recurrent in ‘fast fashion’ [40]. Consumer awareness allied with the world wide web meant considerable changes in how companies behave and how much information consumers can gather in order to make a conscious buying decision [41].

### Accessing the Shift into Sustainability

Once a massive coloniser, Britain has seen its powerful empire reduce drastically after World War II [42]. After spending decades reconstructing its territory and negotiating peaceful independences, the former realm developed, in 1959, into an alliance with its former subjects: the commonwealth of nations (52 associated independent

states). Considering this amicable partnership and approaching ethical and fairness issues, this paper evolved the historical analyses into the progress and establishment of sustainability and fair trade notions [43,44].

Expanding the ‘Sustainability tripod’ [32]: Social, Economic and Environmental (Figure 1), into Sachs’ five dimensions [28] (Figure 2), the authors proposed a framework to be explored in order to link historical choices into the current purchase scenario, regarding not only environmental issues but also social problems imposed by cultural and spatial extents.

To support the information gathered, a partnership was established with the British Association for Fair Trade Shops and Suppliers (BAFTS), through which questionnaires were sent to its members: suppliers, shop owners and direct sourcing retailers. It is, however, important to emphasize that BAFTS, as an organisation, covers a wide range of products, not exclusively garments. The questionnaire, formed of 14 questions, embraced the characterisation of the companies and its financial profiles, consumer and range of products provided, managerial issues (market barriers and key success factors), as well as governmental support.

Subsequently, as a consequence of the questionnaires being sent online, eleven companies were visited and interviewed between September 2014 and September 2016, lasting about two hours each. To do so, three sets of semi-structured interviews were developed: (i) shop owners and suppliers were asked about their choice of suppliers, insurances in regards to the levels of fairness, concerns with sustainability and relationship with their consumers; (ii) the BAFTS representative was asked about her experience, functioning as a membership organisation which checks for transparency regarding the WFTO (World Fair Trade organisation) 10 Principles of fair Trade and the organisation’s success in Britain, and finally (iii) non-associated, but sustainable, fashion brands were enquired about their understanding of sustainability and fair trade, how they approached it and how it affected the decision making process when developing a new line or collection.

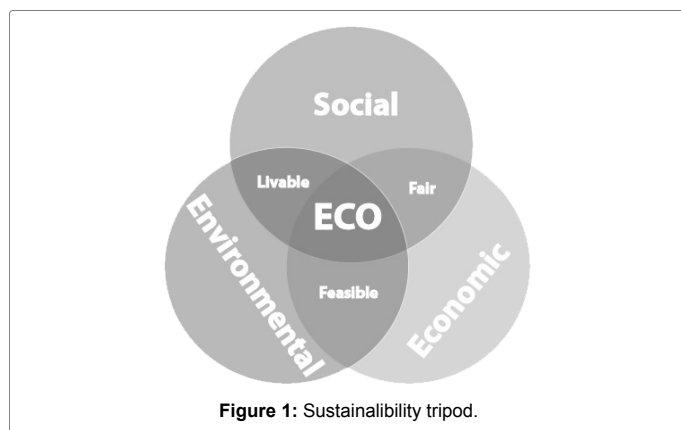


Figure 1: Sustainability tripod.

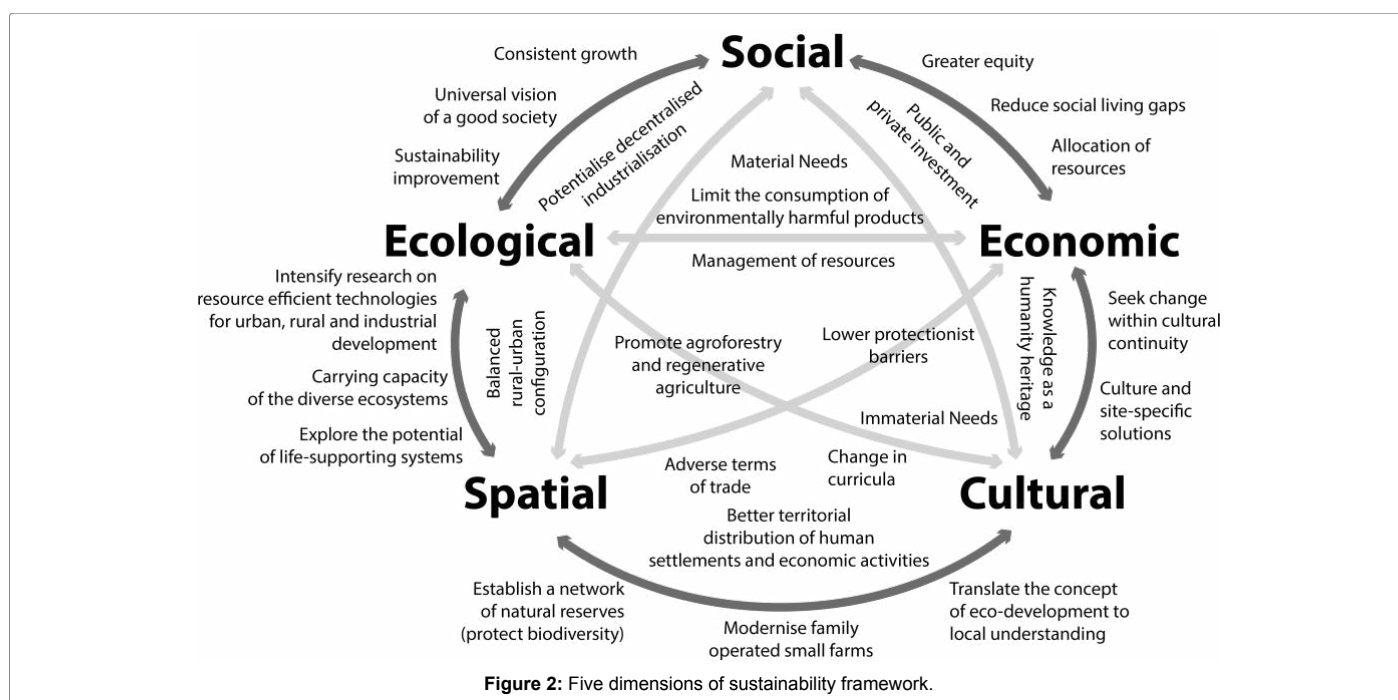


Figure 2: Five dimensions of sustainability framework.

The first set of interviews was carried out with shop owners, a supplier and a direct sourcing retailer (members of BAFTS or introduced to the researchers by them), in September 2014, located mainly in the UK (in Brighton, Birmingham, Durham, Buxton and Kent) with the exception of the supplier (based in Rwanda - Africa). This first stage provided an overview of the acceptance of their consumers, as well as the levels of personal interest from the interviewees in joining the fair trade movement.

The second set, carried out in Northern England, was exclusively about the organisation and its reach. Initially, the BAFTS Marketing and Membership Coordinator was interviewed in December 2014, to understand the organisational perspective in regards to fair trade in the UK, growth and also, the acceptance of the sector. Secondly, other members of the board were approached as it was essential to understand a bigger picture of fair trade, as BAFTS is part of a much larger effort – being related to other worldwide fair trade associations.

Finally, to ensure the lack of bias and to have a control group – and create grounds for comparison, the third set of interviews was undertaken. The researchers decided to approach sustainable brands without a fair trade focus. At this stage, 84 ethical and sustainable companies were found during a thorough database research. Once more, after an initial contact and understanding the need for an active (and possibly multiple) participation, three companies were chosen, two based in London and one in Richmond (north Yorkshire), between October 2014 and May 2015. This third set focused on the development and manufacture of products in the UK using sustainable and traceable raw materials, along with fair labour conditions, but not grounded on the fair trade movement – only on sustainable fashion and personal values.

## Industry, Government and Consumer's View of the Evolution of the Market

### Questionnaires

The questionnaire, forwarded by BAFTS to its members, was available between November 2014 and February 2015. From the 130 members associated to BAFTS, 16.9% (22 members) answered the questionnaire within said period, nine shop owners, nine suppliers and four direct sourcing retailers (DSR). Additionally, eight members responded some of the questions. However, their questionnaires were excluded as they were incomplete.

According to the definitions established by the European Commission [43], all the participating companies can be classified under Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE), since none of them have more than 50 employees nor earn more than €10 m. Accordingly, out of the respondents, 79% belong in the micro category, 21% are small.

In regards to market experience and consumer fidelity, only two of the responding companies have been in the market for less than six

years, the remainder being active for a longer period. Within these, 22.7% are suppliers to other companies also considered sustainable fashion brand. It was noticed however that none of the participants have environmental certifications (such as ISO 14001, ecolabel, etc.) nor memberships in other NGOs.

Considering their range of provided products, detailed on Table 1, the number of businesses focussed on fashion accessories (86.3%), crafts and homeware (72.7%) and clothing (45.4%) are the highest, consequently suggesting the market and business interest in fair textile and fashion products.

In regards to consumer profile (Table 2), there is a clear female majority, with a distinction between the general public and environmentally concerned women. Business-to-business interactions (with other SMEs) were also recurrent between the participants, as were relationships with churches and schools. The link with 'fashion trends' was also highlighted by the members; however it was not strongly express as was the environmentally aware consumers.

In view of the details provided about products and consumers, the length of presence in the market and location of the companies, there were impediments which were point as important obstacles to growth and dissemination. Table 3 presents the main market barriers: the difficulty to compete (in price) with other main street brands which are neither sustainable nor fairly traded (77.2%) of the respondents; the lack of understanding noticed on consumers when it comes to dealing with this line of products (54.5%); and the struggle to reach out to the end-consumer (40.9%).

Listed as key success factor, the consumers were seen by 86.4% of the respondents as fundamental, and the remainder, the support of organisations such as BAFTS. Even though, only 3 companies (13.6%) declared their relationship with governmental agencies, they all consider a direct intervention important for their survival, as seen on Table 4. From the participants, 81.8% would appreciate educational projects regarding sustainability, 63.6% financial and/or organisational support and 27% contemplate tax reduction.

Additionally, two of the participants declared their personal intention of starting an educational project of their own and one company believes it would be extremely important to teach business owners about the profitability of fair trade and the consumers about not buying disposable products of questionable origin.

### Fair trading shops, direct sourcing supplier and supplier interviews

Considering the interest shown by seven companies, after the questionnaire was sent out, the second stage of the data collection was carried out by contacting the ones with a fashion and textiles background. Considering availability and response time, nine

Product provided	Company																					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Clothing	x	x			x			x		x	x							x		x	x	x
Fashion accessories	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Crafts and homeware	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Alimentary goods	x	x		x				x							x							
Raw materials	x																					x
Services	x																					
Others		x																				

Table 1: Products provided per responding company.

	Company																					
Consumer profile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Other bigger companies																						
Other small and medium companies			x							x		x	x			x			x		x	x
Environmentally concerned female consumer		x		x	x	x		x	x			x			x		x	x		x	x	x
Environmentally concerned male consumer		x		x		x		x	x			x			x		x	x	x			
Trendy male consumers (fashion followers)							x															
Trendy male consumers (fashion followers)							x	x		x											x	x
Female general public (no environmental concern)		x	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Male general public (no environmental concern)		x		x				x	x			x			x		x	x				
I don't have information about my consumers														x		x						
Other																						

Table 2: Fair trade consumer profile.

	Company																					
Main market barriers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Lack of government incentives					x											x			x			x
Companies aiming lower prices instead of sustainability and fair trade				xxxxxx						xxxxxx				x				x	x	x		x
The fact that sustainable companies are too small to be representative												x										
Lack of communication with different actors of the supply chain																						
Lack of interest from the final consumer			x		x	x													x			
Hard to access the final consumer			x	x	x		x				x	x			x		x					
The final consumer doesn't understand the value of your products					xxxx							x		x	x		x	x			x	x
Other													x							x		

Table 3: Declared market barriers.

companies were interviewed personally (4 from the original group and 5 who were introduced during the data collection period).

With the purpose of providing an easier flow to the information, the respondents were organised by relationship: (i) Shop Owners, (ii) Direct Sourcing Retailers, and (iii) Secondary Supplier (providing products to one of the organisation's members).

Between December 2014 and May 2015, seven shop owners were interviewed: five members of BAFTS (Brighton, Reading, Durham, Birmingham and Buxton) and two independent shop owners suggested by the members as interesting projects to be studied, both located in London and motivated in organising events to promote sustainability within a fashion environment. The in-loco semi-structured interviews were developed to answer questions revolving around four predicaments: (i) reasons to join this industry, (ii) perceptions of the sustainable market, (iii) the importance and relationship with the supply and value chain, and (iv) usage of certifying associations/labels.

The first consensus found when the interviews were analysed was the common personal interest in 'doing good'. All the shop owners declared to come from a background in which respecting nature and other humans was an obligation, using this as a business model was mainly the next possible alternative. The shop owner located in Brighton added that the selection of the store's location was also critical as citizens are highly educated (due to the number of schools, colleges and universities in the region) and the concept of sustainability highly spread throughout the city and county.

BAFTS members, who were interviewed, were in a consensus about the importance of the organisation as a mean to ensure consumers about the integrity of their business and to avoid being linked to the idea of charity. The non-associated interviewees chose this option due to their focus on organising events – the shops being an additional activity but not the core business. However, even when not associated to any certifying agency, the owners understand it is a way to facilitate direct competition with 'fast fashion' brands.

	Company																					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
<b>Government incentives</b>																						
<b>Tax reduction</b>		x	x			x					x						:			x		
<b>Loan facility</b>			x									x				x						x
<b>Educational projects on the importance of sustainability</b>				xxxxxx						xxxxx				x			x	x	x		x	x
<b>Financial and or organisational support</b>		x	x				xxxx			x		x		x	x	x			x		x	x
<b>A combined database between the different actors of the supply chain</b>			x			x		x									x					x
<b>Free and tailored consultancy</b>				x	x							x				x	x					
<b>Other</b>					x								x									

Table 4: Preferred incentives.

When asked about their consumers, all the interviewees agreed sustainable garments started being popular along with the idea of environmental improvements throughout the globe – especially after the dissemination of the principles behind sustainable development. With time, the frequency of customers would rely more on their perception of the product’s design, the social considerations becoming a secondary or tertiary decision making factor. High-end products for instance are increasingly being designed to compete with other high-street brands and to avoid what the Buxton shop owner called ‘pity purchase’: ‘buying a product just because you will be “helping” some poor villager somewhere poor around the globe’.

From the Direct Sourcing Fair Trader and Retailer (DRS), only one interview was carried out. Based in Kent, the DRS provided a considerably different account. The owner chose not to acquire a fair trade label because they do not believe it to be a trustworthy mean to certify the standards to which the products are made. Instead, the DRS prefer to personally work with local crafts people in India – travelling the country with an interpreter and designing the products with locals. This way, they believe to be fully aware of the labour and living conditions of all the parties involved in the supply chain.

Finally, the supplier interviewed – based in Brighton and responsible for a line of products sold in one of the BAFTS shop-owner’s shop, provided a third perspective on the topic. Developed as a charity in Rwanda (Africa), the main purpose of selling the products is to re-invest the revenue in the company through educational projects (alphabetisation, training and providing better health services to the workers and their families). Differently from the shops and the DSR, this supplier in specific does profit from the charitable, social and political associations of the brand, appealing to the moral aspect of consumption and showing how the project has helped small communities and the local environment.

In general, this set of interviews provided an overview of the companies and consumers involved with fair trade, creating a portrait of this industry’s daily basis and important interactions between the parties. Aiming to expand this analysis, the next stage of the interviews was carried out with the BAFTS managerial team, mainly its Marketing and Membership Coordinator, carried out individually in December 2014 and, in a much more informal and faster interview, with more members of the board in February 2015.

### British association for fair trade shops and suppliers: BAFTS

Contrarily to what had been asked to the shops, the interview with the manager focused on the need for the creation of an ‘umbrella’ corporation to check for transparency and support fair traders (considering there are multiple associations of the sort across the UK), their analysis of the British market and governmental agencies, and the standards and principles followed by BAFTS.

Founded in 1995, the organisation was created as an attempt to connect the consumer to the producer and create a generalised sense of awareness. With a fuller view of its members, the interviewee highlighted the main differences between the apparel brands members of the organisation, their focus and advantages. In regards to the different markets for instance. Contrary to the Brighton member (shop owner), there is a general consensus that the North of the UK has a higher concern and interest in fair trade. The administrator believes that is in parts due to the history of exploitation in the North, and for a stronger sense of thoughtfulness and the diversity offered by the brands.

Adding to the supportive aspect of BAFTS, the interview explained about the selection and advertisement of trade events, participation in research and supportive side activities to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of its member. Eventually adding that the government could be a stronger part of the movement incentivising the trade justice movement, for instance providing incentives to increase fair trader’s competitiveness, however, not being used as a tool to gather more votes.

Finally, in regards to the guidelines to become a member, and the particularities of the organisation in confrontation to other similar organs in the UK, the interviewee vehemently stated that the organisation functions as a ‘surveillance entity’. In order to join BAFTS shops and suppliers are expected to satisfy ten principles: 1. The creation of opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers; 2. Transparency and Accountability; 3. Fair trading practices; 4. Fair payments; 5. No child or forced labour; 6. Commit not to discriminate; 7. Ensure good working conditions; 8. Provide capacity building; 9. Promote fair trade; 10. Protect the environment. These will then be reinforced throughout the membership, and any irregularity could lead to cessation of membership.

Even though the organisation does not physically reinforce the

inspections in the producing countries, the amount of information and documents required should be enough to ensure its origins and support successful fair trade retailing, highly valued for its differential and the 'story behind the product'.

### Sustainable British fashion brands

Similarly to the interviews with shop owners, DSR and suppliers, this final set of interviews, carried out with non-associated brands, revolved around their reasons for developing a sustainable brand, their perception of the British market, relationship with their supply chain, and finally the need for external/governmental support. Thus, creating a foundation for a control group analyses of the full scenario.

Created from different initiatives the brand owners and managers interviewed were mainly focussed on the origin of their material and their participation in the production cycle, two of them actively sponsoring a fully in Britain production line: from obtaining the raw material to treating it in the historical textile areas in the north of the country and producing the final collection using less privileged and elderly labour inside the country; and the third concentrating on the product's life cycle and ability to become another upcycled product – never being disposed of. Even though the three brands were based in the UK their main consumption markets were either in: continental Europe, North America or in Asia, markets interested in made in the UK products and the higher quality associated to them. Once more the design was the main criteria for acquisition, but for the three cases, the price tag was justifiable once the product's background history was stated – also giving the brands a considerable exposure in varied media channels.

In regards to their understanding of a need for external, governmental, financial or managerial support, the three companies were unanimous in agreeing to the need for help, especially the ones which used cruelty-free wool (gathered from animals bred exclusively for their wool and not their meat). These companies struggle with the wool label, which imposes the prices for wool, and the impossibility for them to be label as the wool cost a lot more to be produced – and the animals to be cared for.

Differently from the fair traders interviewed, the issues discussed with the brand owners were considerably different. The three brands did not have a store front, two of them were highly seasonal and none of the owners or managers had previous experiences managing a fashion company. As a consequence, after working with these brands between March 2014 and October 2016, two of them (both based in London) were closed due to managerial and consumer related issues, and the only surviving brand does so due to other profitable brands owned by the same person.

### Discussion and Final Remarks

Using the five dimensions framework, the results portray the relationship between each dimension and the fair trade and sustainable industries:

- I. Social: higher development in socially and politically isolate areas, local empowerment and increased community pride;
- II. Economic: without an exploitive intermediary business, a higher percentage of the revenue is returned to the producing workers, which will then be more likely to expand and improve their business, also generating more jobs and benefits to locals;
- III. Spatial: in most of the countries supported by fair traders,

capital and bigger cities attract villagers seeking better opportunities. Fair trade is one strong incentive for them to stay in the country side and improve spatial balance;

- IV. Cultural: unlike 'fast fashion', fair trade empowers local habits and appreciates cultural diversity, not imposing western standards abroad;
- V. Ecological: once a community is empowered, financed, protected and supported, it is more likely for it to intensify their caring capacity towards their surroundings.

The parallel between colonial reach and its reflection on sustainability created an interesting perspective on the reasons why fair trade is being warmly embraced by the consumers. With the advances in communication, less advantaged areas of the globe are now displayed to consuming masses in the wealthy countries. Access to information promoted by the internet and branding organisations have enabled consumers to improve their decision making process over sustainable acquisitions, thus avoiding 'unfair' brands.

Simultaneously, businesses are increasing their interest in providing consumers with fair, sustainable products – tested, certified and with extra added value (its environmental footprint for instance). However, what is it to be fair? Are the families and communities involved in fair trade creating another social gap between themselves and other local communities? Should the industry then return to developed, wealthy country which have not yet extinguished poverty, hunger, illiteracy?

'Fast Fashion' trends and cheaper price tags are still extremely influential in the textile industry. The distant consequences of a quick and profitable collection tend to stay far from the consumer's sight. From all the companies which took part in this research, the overall consent is not only that there needs to be more space for this line of products to operate, but also external support as environmental guidelines are in vigour in the world.

Fair trade tends to reinforce the three of Sachs' dimension: social, economic and spatial (due to its rural orientation). By providing better wages, work condition and knowledge to isolated communities, fair traders provide material solutions to immaterial needs. However, if well managed, this can lead to better spatial improvement, increasing the generation of public measures like housing, health care and education. An educated and well fed community is more likely to care for their environment and invest in long lasting measures to ensure exponential improvement, also embracing the next generations.

The production shift could also be re-established in the United Kingdom, as it was in the past. The UK, as a member of the European Union, and as a developed rich country, has to comply with complex and highly reinforced environmental regulations. Unlike several European countries which target equity across their citizens, the UK has one of the highest social gaps in the continent, with several citizens living of its welfare state. So why not empower these citizens? Why share the wealth if there are Britons starving?

The non-fair trading, but sustainable, fashion brands interviewed brought this into perspective: the need to fix the country internally, before assisting its former and impoverished colonies. Should the sense of moral be exclusive to those far away people?

The historical argumentation used in this paper, in a way, aims at portraying the history of colonial exploitation and its consequences. However it ignores the closer, local analysis of British social gap and the environmental issues present within its islands. As a response for this

series of questions, the researchers have started two additional projects: the first dealing with education and the 'laymen's' understanding of sustainability in the UK; and the second on the current consumer and their acquisition behaviour towards fashion, sustainability and fair trade; ultimately assessing the best tools to enable a system which would support internally and externally sustainability as an important cultural notion within the United Kingdom, aiming at balancing the five dimensions.

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