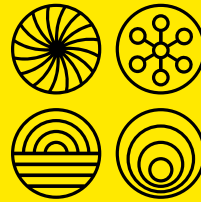


FINAL REPORT

RETHINKING FASHION
DESIGN ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL
CEEDR, Middlesex University
The Open University



FOSTERING
SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES



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"Until now, the UK's fashion design entrepreneurs have been delivering wildly innovative prototypes and collections which have fuelled the wider global fashion industries. They've taken high risks in an unrelenting manner in pursuit of providing greater knowledge of the power and practice of human imagination. When you add on top of this the world class research and thinking of Prof. Sandy Black and Prof. Dilys Williams and their team, that's not being done anywhere else in the world, you've got a genuinely potent mix for further progress and success. It is crucial that we do not underestimate the significance of this research - methodology, methods, mindset and network - in terms of quality, uniqueness, and value to the global communities of sustainable fashion design and higher education for fashion design entrepreneurship."

PROF. LOUISE VALENTINE

Kent State University, FSP Advisory Board



Image: Away To Mars

INTRODUCTION

"Micro and small independent fashion businesses have functioned as the 'research and development' for the wider fashion industry for many years, an engine of creativity. The Fostering Sustainable Practices project recognises these enterprises as key drivers for transformation of the fashion system, providing examples of sustainability in action through their work."

PROF. SANDY BLACK

FSP Principal Investigator, Centre for Sustainable Fashion

We are living in times of crisis – unmitigated climate emergency, social instability, fiscal crises and unemployment, all exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. It has long been evident that the current fashion system based on overproduction and overconsumption is not fit for purpose. However, efficiencies alone will not enable the sector to reach its net zero or social targets, and fundamental change is required. There is evidence that change is emerging through innovative micro and small fashion businesses, contributing to new paradigms for fashion.

The UK has a unique profile of design-led fashion micro and small enterprises (MSEs)¹, linked directly with the UK's internationally respected arts education system. These businesses, many based in London, are widely recognised as drivers of design innovation and inspiration for the global fashion industry, whose influence permeates wider cultural and economic domains. Increasingly in recent years, fashion MSEs are demonstrating alternative ways of doing business with sustainability mindsets and purpose that focus on more than economic goals for prosperity.

The project **Rethinking Fashion Design Entrepreneurship: Fostering Sustainable Practices (FSP)**, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is the first to research and identify the holistic approaches pioneering fashion MSEs bring to the concept of sustainable prosperity and the

potential for such practices to transform the fashion industry. This report provides an overview of the research and outputs from the FSP project, which ran from October 2018 to March 2021 with dissemination activities continuing into May 2021. It includes details of the project phases, and the research team's development of outputs relevant to diverse audiences, including a guidebook to business support for sustainability, a policy briefing to UK government, peer reviewed publications, a series of filmed events, and a series of thought pieces for public, educational and sector audiences.

This collaborative research is led by Centre for Sustainable Fashion (CSF), a University of the Arts London research, education and knowledge exchange centre, based at London College of Fashion. Academic project partners are based at London College of Fashion, The Open University and Middlesex University's Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research (CEEDR; a partner in Surrey University's Centre for Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity CUSP).

¹ Office for National Statistics and EU definition: micro businesses have 0-9 employees; small have 10-49; medium have 50-249.

RESEARCH SCOPE

"Business needs to rethink how it can become more sustainable and this project has been working with some of the most innovative sustainable fashion businesses who are showing what is possible. We can learn from these and see how we can scale up their positive impacts and bring about a transformational change in the fashion industry. This project provides insights for business and a set of policies that can help support this transformation."

PROF. FERGUS LYON

FSP Co-Investigator, Director of Middlesex University's Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research and Deputy Director of the [Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity, Surrey University](#).

The Fostering Sustainable Practices project raises the profile of fashion design research and brings a novel interdisciplinary approach to the academic study of sustainability in relation to design-led fashion enterprises. The project benefits business support and incubator organisations, policy makers, the creative industries, academia and the general public. The findings are also relevant to the wider fashion industry including manufacturers and retail. Collaboration across the project's partner universities and research centres has created a more informed knowledge exchange between research, education and creative enterprise.

Acknowledging the influence of the UK designer fashion sector, the project investigates creative and business practices in design-led fashion MSEs to generate evidence demonstrating that many of these MSEs are part of a dynamic, yet under-recognised, change towards a sustainable fashion industry. For two-and-a-half years the project has worked with 48 fashion MSEs, who demonstrate sustainable prosperity in and through fashion. The research investigates the environmental, social, cultural and economic value of creative practice in these design-led fashion MSEs, and the role of the fashion designer-entrepreneur as a driver for sustainable prosperity.

The research team's interdisciplinary approach brings a range of methods to the investigation, drawing on its expertise from within and outside fashion, which comprises practice-led fashion research, knowledge and experience of the designer fashion industry and fashion entrepreneurship, and fashion design for sustainability; business innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurial theory, business ethics and social enterprises; social and cultural studies in fashion; design theory and creative process modelling.

Working closely with fashion MSEs, the team has observed their business models, design and business operations and their working practices. They also examined the significance of the ecosystem around fashion MSEs, their small trusted networks, collaborators and co-creators.

The findings are applied in an open-access guidebook to business support for sustainability, **Fashion as Sustainability in Action**, to benefit incubators and business support organisations, also providing a reference point and evidence base for the wider national and global fashion sector. Alongside the guidebook, multiple academic papers are currently in progress. The project findings have also been disseminated in public facing seminars, student facing events and academic conference contributions. The outputs of the project seek to shape future research agendas, teaching practice, sector practices and, critically, open a conversation on how the value of fashion design is recognised, in professional, public and educational spheres.

To ensure industry relevance, the FSP project collaborated with London College of Fashion's incubator **Centre for Fashion Enterprise** and key industry partners: business support organisations **British Fashion Council**, **African Fashion Week London** and **Common Objective**; manufacturers' organisations **UK Fashion & Textile Association**, and **Textile Centre of Excellence**; and online fashion platform **Not Just A Label**. Five MSE partners supported the research from the beginning of the project - **RÆBURN**, **UNMADE**, **Riz Boardshorts**, **Michelle Lowe Holder** and **Martine Jarlgaard** – and together with a further 22 fashion MSEs, formed a core study group of 27 enterprises. These partners made an invaluable contribution to the research, enhancing validity and impact.

"There is no team or project better placed, at this point in time, to undertake the entrepreneurship leadership model for fostering sustainable fashion practices in a global context. This work is also needed because there is exigency to shape and deliver a new design policy that enables a transformation in higher education befitting the 21st Century. This work offers a rare opportunity to show how world class research and thinking can enable the foundational changes in higher education for fashion design and fashion design entrepreneurs."

PROF. LOUISE VALENTINE

Kent State University, FSP Advisory Board.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Sustainability-motivated designers and entrepreneurs in fashion MSEs are the focus of this study. Many aim to transform fashion's current business model away from the conventional norm that stimulates rampant consumerism. Instead, being in control of smaller enterprises, they avoid overproduction, encourage sufficiency and contribute to social justice and inclusion, achieved through the way they work as well as by what is made. The research also demonstrates how the traditional role of the fashion designer - as conceiver of aesthetic concepts and fashion products - is just one of many roles for a designer leading a sustainable fashion enterprise. These roles can include experimenting with new ways of working, facilitating networks and collaboration, advocacy, and strong engagement with customers and the public.

The project's in-depth study of both fashion design and service-based MSEs and their business trajectories identified key points of intervention, enabling the team to develop alternative business support mechanisms for sustainability to inform fashion businesses and support organisations, and to create recommendations for policy makers. The research has resulted in a range of final project outcomes comprising:

- Guidebook: 'Fashion as Sustainability in Action'
- Case studies
- Academic research papers
- Policy briefing note
- Presentations for public audiences
- Conference papers
- Final project report
- FSP Hub: online repository for open access resources

The guidebook, **Fashion as Sustainability in Action**, provides business support organisations with an understanding of sustainable prosperity and the needs of the designer fashion sector. It provides guidance on sustainable practices and alternative measures of success that support fashion MSEs' development and longer-term flourishing. Following a focused social media campaign with over 20,000 engagements across platforms, **Fashion as Sustainability in Action** was launched in June 2021 on the [FSP Hub](#) of the CSF website, and achieved 265 downloads globally in the first 24 hours.

Case studies provide examples of UK leadership in innovative business models for fashion and sustainability and an understanding of the designer fashion sector in the context

of the creative economy. Fifteen case studies are available on the FSP Hub, of which 12 are also included in the guidebook.

The **research papers** contribute to academic discourse amongst UK and international researchers, educators and practitioners in the areas of fashion design, design for sustainability, fashion studies, entrepreneurship and business studies. Eight papers are in progress.

A **policy briefing note** has been disseminated to UK government departments and policy makers, to highlight the environmental, social, cultural and economic value of sustainability-led fashion MSEs, generating a greater understanding of the designer fashion sector in the UK. The research team presented the policy note to a specially-convened meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion, chaired by Baroness Young, and continues to lobby policymakers.

FSP team members from CSF and Open University also submitted written evidence in November 2020 to the Environmental Audit Committee's follow up inquiry Fixing Fashion, the evidence highlighted the findings of FSP ².

Presentations of the project's key findings and outcomes have targeted a broad audience of industry organisations, fashion professionals and design practitioners, academics, students and public. Audiences have been accessed through three research centres, Centre for Sustainable Fashion, Centre for Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity, and Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research, plus our partners' and advisory board members' networks. The series of three final online events attracted 900 sign-ups to attend, from across Europe, India, North and South America.

The research team have so far disseminated the research and activity of the project across 16 events, including seminars, conferences, lectures and forums, winning best paper at the Sustainable Innovation 2021 International Conference, *Accelerating Sustainability in the Fashion and Apparel Industry*.

The following sections give further details of the project's research activities, structural framework, and the key outputs and their development.

² committees.parliament.uk/work/654/fixing-fashion-follow-up/publications/written-evidence/

"The designers we worked with are aware of fashion's power to disrupt the status quo. As well as designing products, they also design shifts in what fashion can be, how it can be designed and made, and how it can be enjoyed. They play the game but change the rules along the way."

DR. MILA BURCIKOVA

FSP Post Doc Researcher, Centre for Sustainable Fashion.



Image: Birdsong

RESEARCH AREAS

"FSP provided an incredible opportunity to conduct applied, practice-focused research across disciplines that can make a real difference. It not only gives inspiring fashion MSEs/entrepreneurs a voice but allows us to systematically analyse their practices and how they can advance an industry which has suffered a lot due to the negative impact of fast fashion on people, planet and cultures."

DR. PATRICK ELF

FSP Post Doc Researcher, CEEDR and CUSP.

This study investigates the aims, values and working practices of fashion MSEs embedding sustainability within their enterprises, the networks in which they operate, and the ways fashion designers experience configurations of time and acceleration in the fashion industry.

The research with designers and founders in MSEs is structured around the following five key themes:

- visions and values, design processes and capabilities of the fashion designer-entrepreneur that can embed sustainability in MSEs,
- collaborative business networks and co-creative systems involved in the development of sustainable innovation by design-led fashion MSEs, and the possible tensions arising,
- working time-patterns and practices, multiple roles and trajectories of the fashion designer entrepreneur in design-led fashion MSEs and the implications for working with sustainability,
- business models for design-led fashion MSEs incorporating a vision of sustainable prosperity that can be scaled up and out to shape the broader fashion industry,
- how the fashion designer-entrepreneur manages the potentially conflicting demands of their creative, environmental, social, cultural and economic objectives, and their responses in times of change.

The research team's literature and contextual reviews cover the following areas aligned to the above research themes:

- design for sustainability and existing tools; creative design process, design capabilities, design for social change,
- creative labour and operations, temporal formations and working practices in relation to design-led fashion MSEs,
- networks of expertise, collaborative design innovation and organizational ecosystem (e.g manufacturers), surrounding design-led MSEs, design process models,
- innovation and entrepreneurship in small and micro businesses, sustainable business models and supply chains, virtue ethics, and the nature of niche markets.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

The following table outlines the structure of the project and its key activities:

WORKSTREAM	OVERVIEW OF WORK
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compiled and cross-referenced three contextual reviews, including a comparative analysis of existing tools for design and sustainability.• Identified research gaps through literature and practice review, forming the background to the study.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designed and delivered a survey gathering MSE data.• Created a matrix of MSEs with core MSE group identified through analysis of MSE open comments, research issues and knowledge of sustainability.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducted pilot interviews and initial interviews with 48 MSEs and identified a refined core group of 27 MSEs, 25% outside of London.• Conducted further follow-up interviews plus stakeholder interviews, totalling more than 100 interviews. Time period included the Covid-19 crisis and Brexit preparation.• Developed in depth case studies and summary findings from data analysis.• Creation of a network visualisation and a mapping of business models and ways of working.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducted interviews with 15 support organisations, as well as consulting with selection of support organisations on the guidebook development.• Developed a guidebook to business support for sustainability, created through a synthesis of research data and through collaboration with CSF knowledge exchange team, which includes 12 case studies.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Created final project outputs - guidebook, case studies, academic papers, policy briefing note, compilation of blog posts/ thought pieces, final report.• Organised final events and dissemination campaign.

RESEARCH PAPERS

Academic outputs across the research team are in progress, with a number of papers being developed by cross-disciplinary writing groups that will contribute knowledge of the design-led fashion sector's innovative practices when building towards sustainable prosperity. The first two journal articles mentioned below are under review.

Articles focus on:

- The role of networks in supporting sustainable fashion MSEs
- Agility, extended customer eco-engagement and the use of dynamic capabilities to advance circular economy
- Sustainable fashion entrepreneurs and virtue ethics
- Sustainable fashion entrepreneurs as activists
- Sustainable fashion enterprises' forms of growth and innovation
- The role of time in everyday practices of sustainable fashion designers
- The changing roles of support organisations
- Designer visions, values, capabilities and practices: new roles of fashion designers
- Transformative business models and case studies



"There's lots of interest in fashion, in relation to climate and social justice and equity, however it is at the large-scale end of fashion where the majority of attention is focused. Whilst action is needed across fashion, we identified that what was happening at a micro level could offer insight into what a de-carbonised, de-colonised fashion system might look like. The results are very exciting, as micro and small businesses make up over 99% of businesses in this country, the findings provide valuable insights which governments now have the opportunity to cement into policy."

PROF. DILYS WILLIAMS

FSP Co-Investigator, Director of Centre for Sustainable Fashion.



Image: Elvis & Kresse

DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDEBOOK TO BUSINESS SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABILITY



Download the Guidebook [here](#)

The guidebook, **Fashion as Sustainability in Action**, enhances existing business support programmes by providing an understanding of how to support sustainability-led MSEs' incubation and development. Fashion professionals and creative businesses more broadly benefit from the guidebook, which is publicly available, in learning from tested models and practices that support implementation of sustainability goals.

Underpinned by the findings of the MSE interviews, the research team's knowledge and expertise, the guidebook is also informed by a needs analysis based on interviews with 15 support organisations who deliver a range of programmes and resources to fashion MSEs, including British Fashion Council, Common Objective, Africa Fashion Week London, UK Fashion and Textiles, Centre for Fashion Enterprise, The Trampery and Cockpit Arts, among others.

The guidebook is designed to enable organisations who offer business support to design-led fashion MSEs to:

- **better understand** definitions of sustainable prosperity for the fashion industry across environmental, social, cultural and economic agendas,
- **redefine** success, growth and business models,
- **redevelop** the type of support they offer in line with sustainable prosperity measures of success,
- **redefine** their selection criteria for businesses they support.

"It's about people, sharing the message of what is in the guidebook, it's about creating a community. That's the biggest impact, when things are shared and information gets shared, people start to talk about it, sharing tips.

This is just the beginning. The research has been done, where can this make the change for these businesses? There is a need to do more than just disseminate their (MSEs) stories. The MSEs create impact to people!"

JUDITH TOLLEY

Centre for Fashion Enterprise, UAL, FSP Advisory Board.

"The guidebook is a trigger to action and connection. A great educational and inspirational piece, especially considering the circumstances we have all been living with, to bring it all together and create something so impressive.

We need to demonstrate and quantify the social and cultural benefits that will accrue from supporting these businesses."

BILL MACBETH

Textile Centre for Excellence, Huddersfield,
FSP Advisory Board.



Image: Petit Pli

POLICY BRIEFING NOTE

"The MSEs are enormously creative and resilient, but need support from government, professional organisations and their customers to remain the creative force in the UK fashion industry."

PROF. CLAUDIA ECKERT

FSP Co-Investigator, The Open University



Download the Policy Briefing Note [here](#)

The points and recommendations raised below are taken from the project's policy note, which has been shared with, and well received by, a number of key parliamentarians.

- Sustainable fashion MSEs have a core role in the fashion industry transition towards net-zero emissions, biodiversity and other climate justice and Sustainable Development Goals by demonstrating how highly innovative, creative practices can value materials, products, people and cultures. This relates to increasing resourcefulness and ensuring fair labour practices, addressing concerns highlighted in the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) report Fixing Fashion³.
- Sustainable fashion MSEs have a critical role to play in creating 'good' jobs for a wide range of people in local economies, creating positive social and cultural impact.
- The transformational role of sustainable fashion MSEs comes from organisational growth, helping new firms to find new niches, and through the replication of good and innovative practice across the industry.
- Measures of success for small sustainable fashion enterprises should be holistic, integrating social, cultural and environmental impact measures with more conventional business performance indicators.
- There is a need for effective policy and business support to maintain and grow sustainability initiatives that go beyond economic value.
- There is a need to support collective initiatives for and among MSEs to help overcome their individual 'liability of smallness'.
- Finance and support offerings including tax incentives should be tailored to the varying development needs of micro and small fashion businesses.
- Support from the public sector is needed for research and development grants aimed at developing sustainable practices within small fashion design businesses.
- There is a need for lifelong, in-work learning and opportunities beyond the traditional education points for design entrepreneurs wishing to engage in sustainable fashion.

³ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (2019 (16)). [Fixing Fashion: Clothing consumption and sustainability.](#)

DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT

A dedicated [FSP Hub](#) on the CSF website acts as an open access repository for all project outcomes and impact; with project blog posts, recordings of events, case studies and access to download the guidebook. This will be maintained by CSF as an ongoing repository for project work.

Below are listed FSP dissemination events to date for public, academic and policymaking audiences. In addition, seminars and lectures including the FSP project have taken place for students and academic staff within University of the Arts London and Kent State University, USA given by Dr Mila Burcikova and Prof Sandy Black.

SEPTEMBER 2019

Design History Society Annual Conference 2019: The Cost of Design

Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK.
Beyond Money: The Meta-Economics of Fashion, paper presentation by Prof. Agnes Rocamora.

OCTOBER 2019

Better Lives: Fostering Sustainable Practices in Small Fashion Business

Town Hall Hotel, London, UK.
A presentation and panel discussion hosted by the project team and CSF, chaired by Prof. Sandy Black with introduction by Prof Dilys Williams and contributions from project partners RÆBURN, Riz Boardshorts, Sabinna, Martine Jarlgaard, Patterntity and Cute Circuit.

DECEMBER 2019

Westminster Business Forum: The value of values-led design

London, UK.
Keynote presentation by Prof. Dilys Williams based on the Fostering Sustainable Practices research questions, aims and objectives.

MARCH 2020

Dress in Protest

CUSP/CEEDR Seminar in Recife Brazil.
A half-day event led by project partners CUSP, fostered knowledge exchange across the Atlantic between Brazil and UK by exploring how sustainable fashion can become a force for good. Guest speakers included Dr Patrick Elf, Middlesex University and FSP Post Doc Researcher.

MARCH 2021

Sustainable Innovation 2021 International Conference: Accelerating Sustainability in Fashion, Clothing, Sportswear and Accessories

The Centre for Sustainable Design, University for the Creative Arts, UK.
Fostering Sustainable Practices: The Case of Micro & Small Designer Fashion Enterprises, paper presented by Prof. Sandy Black - awarded best paper.

How Micro and Small Fashion Businesses Revolutionise Fashion

University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion, UK.
Prof. Sandy Black, Dr. Mila Burcikova and Zoe Norton in conversation with researcher and acting course leader of MA Fashion Futures at London College of Fashion, Katelyn Toth-Fejel.

Fostering Sustainable Practices: The pioneering visions of fashion's MSEs

University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion, UK.
Prof. Sandy Black and Prof. Dilys Williams in conversation with researcher, author, Director and Professor of Fashion Design and Merchandising at Kent State University, Dr. Louise Valentine.

Alternative Enterprise Models for Sustainable Fashion Seminar

Middlesex University, UK.
Led by CEEDR researchers at Middlesex University Business School, Dr Andrea Werner, Prof Fergus Lyon, Dr Patrick Elf and Dr Ian Vickers.

The Cultural and Creative Industries: Pathways Beyond Economic Growth

Annual International Royal Geographical Society Seminar Series, London, UK.
'The purpose of fashion: How sustainable design entrepreneurs challenge economic growth paradigms' paper presented by Dr. Andrea Werner, Prof. Fergus Lyon and Dr. Patrick Elf, CEEDR, Middlesex University Business School.

Westminster Business Forum: Four dimensions of sustainable prosperity

London, UK.
Keynote presentation by Prof. Dilys Williams, interim findings from the FSP research.

APRIL 2021

Fostering Sustainable Practices – part of LCB Depot Fashion Season

LCB Depot, Leicester, UK.
Prof Claudia Eckert and Dr Philippa Crommentuijn-Marsh of the Open University presented the research and findings of FSP.

Sustainable Fashion and the Circular Economy symposium

PUC Minas Gerais, run by NUPEGS research cluster, Brazil.
Paper presented on the dynamic capabilities of fashion MSEs by Dr. Patrick Elf.

CONTINUED >

MAY 2021

Can Micro and Small Fashion Businesses Revolutionise Fashion?

University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion, London, UK.

A series of 3 panel discussions exploring the creative practices of design-led fashion MSEs working toward a more sustainable fashion industry. Delivered by the research team, and joined by a selection of our MSEs.

1. Visions, values, capabilities and the design practices of fashion designer-entrepreneurs

Explored how design-led fashion MSEs create distinction and energy in their work when practising four dimensions of prosperity; social, cultural, economic and environmental. Prof. Sandy Black, Prof. Dilys Williams, Prof. Agnes Rocamora, Dr. Andrea Werner, Dr. Mila Burcikova, Little Black Pants Club, Birdsong and Soboye.

2. Business models and networks of fashion MSEs

Explored the business models and networks of fashion MSEs incorporating their vision of sustainable prosperity, and how these visions might be scaled out to impact and transform the wider fashion industry. Prof. Fergus Lyon, Prof. Sandy Black, Prof. Claudia Eckert, Dr. Andrea Werner, Riz Boardshorts and Finisterre.

3. The role of support organisations in the development of sustainable innovation in fashion MSEs

Explored what more can be done to support fashion design and service-based entrepreneurs in embedding social, cultural, economic and environmental prosperity in their practice. With an introduction to the guidebook 'Fashion as Sustainability in Action'. Prof. Dilys Williams, Prof. Sandy Black, Dr. Mila Burcikova, Dr. Philippa Crommentuijn-Marsh, Monica Buchanan, Judith Tolley (Centre for Fashion Enterprise), Sabinna and Away to Mars.

**APPG for Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion
Fostering Sustainable Fashion Practices: Supporting sustainable prosperity**

Chaired by Baroness Lola Young, a meeting between APPGESF members and Centre for Sustainable Fashion. Researchers from the Fostering Sustainable Practices project Prof. Dilys Williams, Prof. Sandy Black, Prof. Fergus Lyon, Dr. Mila Burcikova and Prof. Claudia Eckert presented the policy briefing note and its key issues and recommendations.

JUNE 2021

British Fashion Council Institute for Positive Fashion: Fashion and Biodiversity

London, UK

A panel discussion between Dr Helen Crowley, Professor Dilys Williams and Michael Wessley facilitated by Bandana Tewari, including discussion of Fostering Sustainable Practices research.



REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

"Our research has shown how fashion design entrepreneurs use business creatively to drive forward their visions of a more sustainable and inclusive fashion industry that has true human flourishing and well-being at its core."

DR. ANDREA WERNER

FSP Co-Investigator, Middlesex University.

Fashion is fundamentally changing, and fashion designers are becoming less affiliated with the conventional fashion industry than ever before. The conventions of fashion appear less and less relevant in a world disrupted by climate, social and personal change. The transformation of communication, production, energy and transport technologies is also fundamentally changing what we make and wear, and how we live. While many fashion designers are already attuned to what the world and its citizens need in response to these changes, they are far less recognised and supported than many of those who follow (outmoded) conventional practices.

The **Fostering Sustainable Practices** project has been privileged to work closely with a varied group of 48 small and micro fashion and fashion-related businesses, that are purpose-led, sustainability-motivated and offer alternative approaches and visions for success. They aim to transform fashion's current paradigms of overproduction and overconsumption, and contribute to climate and social justice as well as creating products that people will cherish, or providing valuable services that encourage sufficiency.

Many MSE's business models create new ways of doing business in fashion, a new philosophy, and sustainability mindsets, taking innovation beyond the creation of products, whilst still providing delight and rewarding experiences. Some MSEs set out as a social enterprise from the start, utilising fashion as a tool for social change, providing decent work and donating a share of profits to charitable organisations. (eg. Birdsong, Elvis & Kresse).

Although economic growth is not the most significant goal for the MSEs in the study, and by no means their only measure of success, it is important for an enterprise to maintain a viable

business in order to realise its social and ecological aims. The question many seek to answer is what is sufficient to maintain the business and grow their impact?

Some of the more disruptive business models for sustainability involve the integration of different forms of technology, from innovative apps for sharing and swapping of clothes (Nuw) or managing your wardrobe (Save Your Wardrobe), to software or online systems for designing and producing small batch production runs (Unmade, Away to Mars).

Particularly in response to the Covid-19 crisis, many MSEs increased their direct-to-consumer online engagement activities. These activities help develop knowledge such as repair and craft skills, demystify creative process and enhance appreciation of fashion's intrinsic and cultural value, thereby fostering more sustainable behaviours (e.g. RÆBURN, Cute Circuit, Phoebe English).

As the Covid-19 crisis has catalysed a wider discourse and a re-assessment of business values, fashion MSEs can provide exemplars of future prosperity that balance human and environmental well-being, value diversity and benefit both local and global communities.

The Fostering Sustainable Practices project shows that a new kind of fashion, one that expands its role beyond products to focus on places, people, nature and celebrating life, already exists in fashion MSEs. However, for them and their good work to fulfil its potential, they need greater recognition for what they do well; greater visibility to encourage others to learn from, and with them; and greater clout, so that they themselves can be sustained. In this way, the fashion system can be fundamentally changed.

"The networks that were studied within this research provided a rich tapestry of data giving a fascinating overall picture of firstly, their organic growth and secondly, the multitude of ways in which networks provide support and collaboration that facilitate small sustainable fashion businesses to flourish and prosper."

DR. PHILIPPA CROMMENTUIJN-MARSH
FSP Post Doc Researcher, The Open University.



Image: Rejina Pyo

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

"To consolidate the pioneering principles and practices of the FSP project it requires a continued commitment to the roll-out of the new knowledge in an equally ground-breaking manner."

PROF. LOUISE VALENTINE

Kent State University, FSP Advisory Board.



The vast majority of discourse in relation to social and environmental prosperity, relating to the fashion sector, focuses on large scale industry, missing out on the importance, relevance and potential of MSEs to sustainable prosperity.

The work of the Fostering Sustainable Practices project provides evidence of the contribution and distinction of innovative fashion MSEs working towards sustainable prosperity. There is clear potential and need identified for further research, in collaboration with academic and industry partners, to extend this work further beyond the London area across regions of the UK, embracing a more diverse range of actors. Previous work investigating opportunities for sustainable fashion enterprises across the EU indicates a similar requirement in countries beyond the UK.⁴ This research can inform plans relating to COP 26 objectives, the UK Industrial Strategy, the work of the DCMS, BEIS and Defra. Critically, it would further demonstrate the contribution of art and design research to a just transition to a de-carbonised society.

As the guidebook Fashion as Sustainability in Action is disseminated, its uptake and integration into practice by businesses support organisations and MSEs will be monitored, supported and evaluated by Centre for Sustainable Fashion. Further research would enable a co-inquiry between academia and support organisations, to develop, adapt and apply this work in multiple locations.

Provision and mechanisms to encourage and implement a supportive infrastructure and incentives for MSEs working towards sustainable prosperity, are required at government level. These would enable sustainable fashion enterprises to be scaled out across communities and scaled up to grow their social and environmental impact, whilst maintaining a viable business functioning at an optimal size that balances all aspects of sustainable prosperity – social, environmental, cultural and economic.

⁴ COSME report 'Mapping sustainable fashion opportunities for SMEs' https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/study-mapping-sustainable-fashion-opportunities-smes_en

"To understand sustainable prosperity, we need to look at what we value as individuals, as society and as businesses. What we value affects what we do, it defines our conversations and everyday decisions. Where profit is the only measure of value, business practices that harm the environment, exploit people, and perpetuate homogenous fashion cultures, can still lead the conversation. The businesses we worked with evidence that profit does not need to be the only measure of value in fashion. They do not only design products, they also design shifts in what fashion can be when it values culture, society and environment alongside offering sustainable livelihoods."

DR. MILA BURCIKOVA

FSP Post Doc Researcher, Centre for Sustainable Fashion.



Image: Bethany Williams

APPENDIX

SURVEY

To provide baseline data and develop a matrix of fashion MSEs for the empirical study, the research team developed survey questions reflecting the findings from the contextual reviews. The survey collected business data plus attitudes and actions towards environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability through both multiple choice and open questions.

The project team aimed to target 400 MSEs and ensure coverage of:

- a variety of fashion areas: womenswear, menswear, accessories, footwear etc.
- a diverse range of business factors including: years in business, turnover, business size, aspects of sustainability practice.

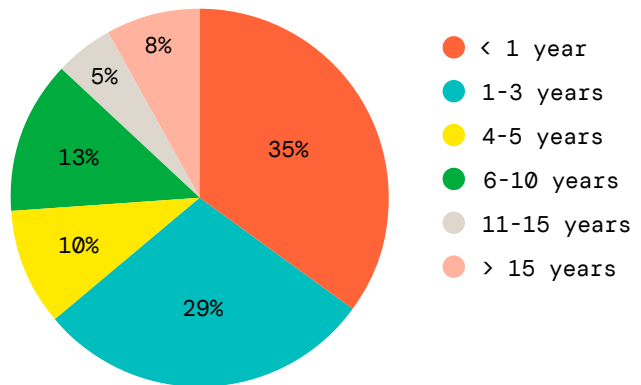
The survey was disseminated to fashion MSEs using partners' databases and beyond, including via British Fashion Council, Centre for Fashion Enterprise, Common Objective, Centre for Sustainable Fashion, Africa Fashion Week London, Not Just a Label and UK Fashion and Textiles Association. This ensured a broad matrix of enterprises across different specialisms, geographic area, length of time in business, business model etc. The survey ran from April to June 2019, at which point 50 MSEs were selected for the empirical phase of interviews.

The survey results are as follows:

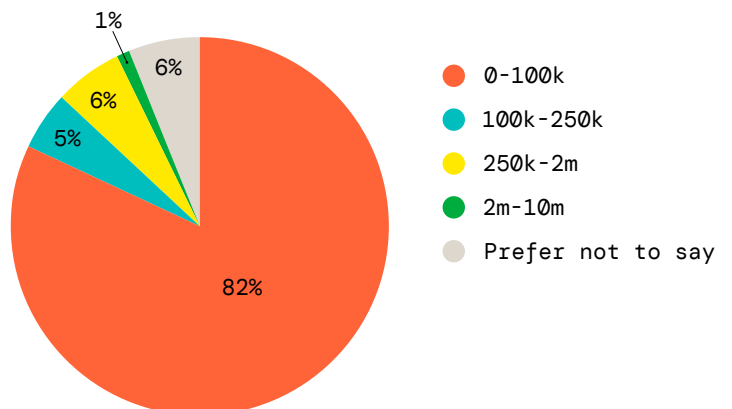
- received 614 responses, 292 full responses from MSEs, with 178 of those being UK MSEs
- responses from a breadth of MSEs covering 0-15+ years in business
- 32% of UK responses from outside of London

PROFILE OF BUSINESSES FROM SURVEY RESPONSES

Length of time in business



Business Turnover



CONTINUED >

"We issued a manifesto [in response to COVID-19] - around the idea of resetting the business and completely taking stock of everything we're doing. Dropping bad habits and inefficiencies and looking at new ways and new business models, new ways of creating, using it as an experimental space to test ideas. Trying out new ways of communicating. Lots of ideas we were having have been catalysed."

RÆBURN

INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

Using the survey results, including designer/founder responses to open questions, 50 MSEs were identified for the study, and 48 interviewed initially. A core study group of 27 MSEs were then selected for second round interviews, including initial partners RÆBURN, Michelle Lowe Holder, UNMADE, Martine Jarlgaard and Riz Boardshorts. The core MSE group comprised: 11 womenswear and/or menswear, 1 lingerie, 2 childrenswear, 3 accessories, 1 footwear, 6 service-based, 3 consultancies; 22 micro size, 4 small and 1 medium.

Two rounds of interviews with designers/founders were conducted between June 2019 and November 2020, spanning both pre-pandemic and pandemic periods, identifying business models and working practices that supported the development of case studies.

Second round interviews explored practices and issues in greater depth, identifying product, services and systems innovations as well as working practices that support business models for sustainability, beyond conventional efficiency approaches. Four businesses were also interviewed in March 2021 following the final Brexit negotiation to investigate its early impact.

Activities completed:

- 5 pilot interviews conducted, followed by initial interviews conducted with 48 MSEs - interviewed by two researchers from different disciplines to exchange expertise and offer different perspectives.
- Emerging themes identified, including barriers and enablers, tensions and trade-offs arising when reconciling/ connecting creativity with environmental, social, cultural and economic objectives.
- 16 interviews with employees and key external stakeholders in the MSE's networks were conducted with several businesses to develop a broader understanding of their ecosystem and inform case studies and academic papers.
- Over 117 hour's worth of interviews conducted
- Analysis of interviews and data gathered
- Mapping of MSE support eco-system
- 12 individual MSE case studies developed providing examples of UK leadership in creative business models for sustainable prosperity
- 3 in-depth case studies, including thematic studies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"As a species we need to decouple growth and prosperity. For Elvis & Kresse this means we can only grow if in doing so we are solving more problems, rescuing more materials, donating more funds to our charity partners, and crucially while we are eliminating our use of fossil fuels."

ELVIS & KRESSE

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Stefan Siegal, [Not Just a Label](#)
Vanessa Swann, Arts and Social Enterprise Consultant
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The research team are also very grateful to the **48 MSEs** who gave so generously of their time in participating with the research.

Alexander White
alexander-white.com

Hush
hush-uk.com

Save Your Wardrobe
saveyourwardrobe.com

Away to Mars
awaytomars.com

Little Black Pants
lbclub.co.uk

Soboye
soboye.co.uk/shop

Bethany Williams
bethany-williams.com

Love White Rabbit
lovewhiterabbit.co.uk

Steven Harkin
stevenharkin.com

Bill Amberg
billamberg.com

Lowie
ilowelowie.com

The Sustainable Sequin Co.
thesustainablesequincompany.com

Birdsong
birdsong.london

Martine Jarlgaard
martinejarlgaard.com

Toast
toa.st

Black Horse Lane Ateliers
blackhorselane.com

Michelle Lowe-Holder
lowe-holder.com

Unmade
unmade.com

Boy Wonder
boywonderland.com

Nuw
thenuwardrobe.com

Vin + Omi
vinandomi.com

Cleverstein
cleverstein.co.uk

Patternity
patternity.org

Wagland Textiles
waglandtextiles.com

Cute Circuit
cutecircuit.com

Paynter Jacket Co
paynterjacket.com

Zakee Sharriff
zakeesharriff.com

Elvis and Kresse
elvisandkresse.com

Petit Pli
shop.petitpli.com

Zola Amour
zolaamour.com

Fabric For Freedom (now Fanfare)
fanfarelabel.com

Philip Delamore
instagram.com/philipdelamore

Fazane Fox
fazanefox.co.uk

Phoebe English
phoebeenglish.com

We also extend our thanks to our partner organisations, incubator [Centre for Fashion Enterprise](#) and key industry partners: business support organisations [British Fashion Council](#), [African Fashion Week London](#) and [Common Objective](#); manufacturers' organisations [UK Fashion & Textile Association](#), and [Textile Centre of Excellence](#); online fashion platform [Not Just A Label](#).

Fieldplay
fieldplay.co.uk

Pips Wonderland
pippajaynestudio.co.uk

Finisterre
finisterre.com

RÆBURN
RÆBURNdesign.co.uk

Fydor Golan
fydorgolan.co.uk

Readorn London
readorn.london

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Girfgang
girfgang.co.uk

Rejina Pyo
rejinapyo.com

Gresham Blake
greshamblake.com

Riz Boardshorts
rizboardshorts.com

Helen Howe Atelier
helenhoweatelier.co.uk

Sabinna
sabinna.com

FSP publications designed by [Studio LP](#).

Here Today Here Tomorrow
heretoday-heretomorrow.com

Sara Arnold
fashionactnow.org

Illustrations by [Megan St Clair](#).

"It's about using business as a force for good for the people who make our clothes, for the people who sell our clothes, for the people who work in our head office through to the people who buy our stuff."

FINISTERRE



Image: Finisterre

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