

Sustainable Fashion in Berlin

Practices & Perspectives

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Image 1.0 Neptunbrunnen at Alexanderplatz, during 'The Move' protest march organised by Fashion Revolution Germany on the 27th of May.

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Content Table

Introduction ~ written by Joëlle	6
Chapter 1: Theoretical background	11
Cultural meaning ~ written by Lonneke	11
<i>Meaning found within fashion</i>	12
Clothing as performer of identity ~ written by Joëlle	13
<i>Clothing as social skin, means of communication and resistance</i>	14
Globalisation and connection ~ written by Lonneke	15
Defining sustainability and sustainable clothing ~ written by Joëlle	16
<i>Sustainability, a concept hard to define</i>	16
<i>Sustainable clothing versus fast fashion</i>	17
A profile of designers and users	18
<i>Designing in a sustainable fashion community ~ written by Lonneke</i>	18
<i>Users of sustainable fashion ~ written by Joëlle</i>	19
Chapter 2: Berlin, a dynamic stage for performing sustainability	21
Creative class ~ written by Lonneke	21
Sustainable initiatives in a network of fashion ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle	21
Gentrification ~ written by Lonneke	22
Chapter 3: Unravelling designers ~ written by Lonneke	24
Story	25
<i>'People want to be inspired'</i>	25
<i>'You do what you want to do, but then sustainable.'</i>	27
<i>'Empowerment of everyone within the supply chain'</i>	28
Style	29
<i>'A piece that makes you think: Wow! There's love in this'</i>	29
<i>'You can't live without following some trend'</i>	31
Striving for change	32

Chapter 4: Sustainability through the eyes of the users ~ written by Joëlle	34
Defining second hand and vintage clothing as sustainable	35
<i>'Fast fashion is not free, somewhere someone is paying'</i>	37
Purchasing behaviour and ethics	37
<i>'Everything you buy is like a political statement, I always try to remember that'</i>	38
How do different sorts of sustainable clothing look?	39
Sustainable lifestyle	40
<i>Spreading 'the sustainable message'</i>	41
Chapter 5: Berlin as a sustainable hub	43
<i>'Berlin is like the Silicon Valley of Europe' ~ written by Joëlle</i>	43
<i>'Known for its freedom' ~ written by Lonneke</i>	44
<i>Prenzlauer Berg: 'a microcosmos of happy, artistic people' ~ written by Lonneke</i>	45
Gentrification ~ written by Lonneke	45
<i>Kreuzberg: to whom belongs this city? ~ written by Joëlle</i>	46
Strategies for a better world ~ written by Lonneke	47
<i>Local & global communities</i>	47
<i>Taking a walk through Neukölln ~ written by Joëlle</i>	49
<i>'There is no planet B' ~ written by Joëlle</i>	49
The city: a backdrop, a stage ~ written by Lonneke	51
Conclusion & discussion ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle	53
Authenticity ~ written by Lonneke	53
Users' experiences ~ written by Joëlle	55
Within Berlin ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle	55
The future ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle	56
Discussion	57
<i>Clothing as a research tool ~ written by Joëlle</i>	58
<i>The market ~ written by Joëlle</i>	58

<i>Minimalism & nature in fashion ~ written by Lonneke</i>	58
<i>Global and local dynamics in sustainable fashion activism ~ written by Lonneke</i>	59
Bibliography	60
Appendix 1: Popular summary	66

Introduction ~ written by Joëlle

On the 27th of April 2019, a group of around seventy people meet at Neptunbrunnen, in the midst of the business centre surrounding Alexanderplatz in Berlin. These people have gathered to walk in a protest march organised by Fashion Revolution Deutschland, against the (fast) fashion industry. As the music on a large truck gets turned on and the truck drives off towards the 'Brandenburger Tor', the protesters march and dance behind it. The crowd grows and grows as more people join the protest. When the protest is coming to an end at one of the most iconic places of Berlin, the crowd has grown into hundreds. After the mandatory pictures for social media are taken, the music stops and people start going their own way¹.

Fashion Revolution, the organisation who initiated the protest march, was formed after the Rana Plaza clothing factory collapsed on the 24th of April 2013². The collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh led to the deaths of more than 1100 people and destroyed the lives of thousands of people, making it a headliner on news channels worldwide (Siddiqi 2015, 167). For a lot of people, this day sparked the idea to do something against the current fashion industry, and to question issues such as transparency and workers' rights in the production processes of clothing (Siddiqi 2015, 168).

Globalization is one of the processes that made it possible to create brands that are popular almost all over the world, as their items have become easy to purchase all around the globe. 'Many styles and fashions can be consumed without having to wait to travel there' as John Urry states (2000, 129). Globalization contributes to the clothing market becoming more competitive, which makes that consumers can get more goods for less money. The speed and the low prices are what led to what is called fast fashion. This is fashion or clothing that is accessible, relatively cheap, and fashionable for a short amount of time (Levy and Weitz 2008). The world becoming more and more globalized sparked the feeling of disembeddedness and of losing insight in production processes (Eriksen 2014, 7-8), especially in the fast fashion industry.

This led to groups of people and individuals who started to oppose fast fashion and started seeing it as inherently negative. These clothes are perceived as unethical because they are causing harm to the environment and to the people working in the production and

¹ Based on fieldnotes about the protest march, 04.27.2019.

² For more information see: <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/>

distribution sector³. On the one hand, giant corporations dominate the landscape of the emerging global economy of fashion and dress (Acs et al. 1997, 7), but on the other hand there seems to be an upcoming sustainable fashion industry. The popularity rise of organic cotton, and it getting more accessible by the day is an example of growing interest in a material mainly used in the sustainable clothing industry⁴. Is organic cotton a new fashion trend, or does this mean that people believe that purchasing organic cotton is benefiting the organic agriculture and the environment (Hustvedt and Dickson 2009, 49-50)? Non-governmental organizations such as the Fair Wear Foundation⁵, and Global Organic Textile Standard⁶ try to get a hold of the clothing market and put logos on ethically produced clothing (socially or organically). This also makes it easier for consumers to see whether an item is produced sustainably.

In sum, there is a growing interest and attention for sustainably produced items, and clothing in particular (De Neve et al. 2008, 6). Some people argue that growth in interest for sustainable clothing means that people are getting more inclined to consider the environmental and social impacts certain choices will have for the global fashion industry⁷. The way clothing is designed and the way people purchase are changing, this causes that on a larger scale the cultural meaning of clothes within ‘Western’ societies is changing as well. It is no longer only fast fashion that is shaping the clothing market, but more and more sustainable clothing initiatives are on the rise.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the cultural meaning of sustainable clothes, and to fill in a ‘research gap’ in both theoretical and societal debates on sustainability and clothing. The relationship between consumers and market has been discussed in scientific research, and specifically anthropological research as well. However, when it comes to why users and designers choose sustainable produced clothes, and the cultural values ascribed to them, scientific research still lacks a broad area of study. This thesis contributes to broadening anthropological knowledge about users’ and designers’ norms and values (in short: cultural meaning) on sustainable clothing. We believe that by doing ethnographic research we

³ The following article is only one of the many that write about the scandals within one of the biggest fast fashion stores (Primark). De Volkskrant. “Kinderarbeid in bedrijf dat levert aan C&A en Primark”. April, 25th 2017. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/economie/kinderarbeid-in-bedrijf-dat-levert-aan-c-a-en-primark~b509b350/>

⁴ Documentary about the upcoming organic cotton market and its effects on the global (social) environment is by Rigaud, Sandrine. 2018. “Zembla Internationaal: ‘Het Prijskaartje van Katoen’”. The Premières Lignes, Dutch editorship: Nicolien Herblot

⁵ For more information see: www.fairwear.org

⁶ For more information see: www.global-standard.org

⁷ Documentary showing that recent years there is an upcoming trend of people considering the environmental and social impacts of buying certain clothing products have, by Morgan, Andrew. 2015. “The True Cost”. Documentary, 92 minutes.

contribute to this field of study. There is a general conception that the relations between users and designers are hierarchical, static and dichotomic, but we will focus on dynamic exchange within the industry as has already been proven by other anthropologists to be the most important asset of anthropological research in this industry (De Neve, 2008).

In order to be able to investigate norms and values contributed to sustainable clothes, we went to a city where creative and repurposed spaces, and sustainable initiatives are strongly present, which is in Berlin (Colomb 2012, 132). Berlin is the only city in Europe to host an annual ethical fashion week⁸, and has many GreenFashionTours⁹, and Berlins' fashion designers pioneering in embracing the concept of sustainable fashion, makes the breadth of Berlin's sustainable fashion enormous¹⁰. Therefore, we picked Berlin as the city to do research and formulated the following research question:

How do users and designers in Berlin's sustainable clothing industry express norms and values about sustainability?

In order to answer this research question, we organised the data collected during our fieldwork, and while doing so we noticed that the data formed itself around three main topics: sustainability, expression, and spatiality. Some of the important concepts that are used in answering our research question are: cultural meaning, social skin, authenticity, globalisation, gentrification, disembedding, creative class, and sustainability, sustainable clothing as opposed to fast fashion. While staying in Berlin from the second of February until the 27th of April, our research was carried out predominantly amongst women. Most of the people present in the sustainable clothing industry we researched are female, but it would not be true to state that men are not active in this sector¹¹. The women that became our informants are designers or users of sustainable clothing and around the age of twenty to thirty-five. We focused on the following three areas of Berlin: Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg and Neukölln. Prenzlauer Berg is a heavily gentrified area with many young families. Kreuzberg is 'old

⁸ For more information see: <https://www.messefrankfurt.com/frankfurt/en/press/press-releases/2018/neonyt-press.html> and <https://neonyt.messefrankfurt.com/berlin/en.html>

⁹ For more information see: <https://greenfashiontours.com/>

¹⁰ Brochure "Fashion Capital Berlin, Designers, Events, Networks" by Ludwig Erhard Haus, commissioned by the Berlin Senate Department for Economics, Technology and Research. Third edition, March 2013. Accessible through <https://www.businesslocationcenter.de/imperia/md/blc/broschueren/content/modestandort-berlin-en.pdf>

¹¹ Based on small talk with several informants.

Berliner’ territory, with many anarchistic and revolutionary themes on the streets. Neukölln is a crowded, ethnically diverse, up-and-coming area¹².

Over the course of ten weeks we have done a complementary study, by dividing the research population into users and designers. Lonneke has researched the experiences of designers and Joëlle the experiences of users. We used the method of spatial mapping intensively at the start of our research. It is a method of exploratory observation and allowed us to gain access to our research population as well as become familiar with our field site . Furthermore, we gained a lot of background and contextual data through this method. Participant observation was used in our research by attending many events organised by the activist sustainable fashion community. Our informants were not daily active in this community, which meant we could not participate with them on a daily basis. The data gained from events was very useful, though, because the sense of community felt heightened during these events. We used informal and semi-structured methods of interviewing our informants. The interviews were the most data-dense and valuable method to our research as they provided verifiable sources and we were able to provide depth to our research. During our research we made a sketch of the lifecycle of a garment (see image below), based on the information provided by our informants. Lonneke focused on designers of sustainable clothing, and thereby on the first part of the lifecycle which is the conversation, the ideas, the designing and production of the

clothing itself. Joëlle focused on users of sustainable clothing and the other parts of the life cycle, what happens with the clothing after it has been produced, the buying and selling, the using, throwing away and recycling of garments.

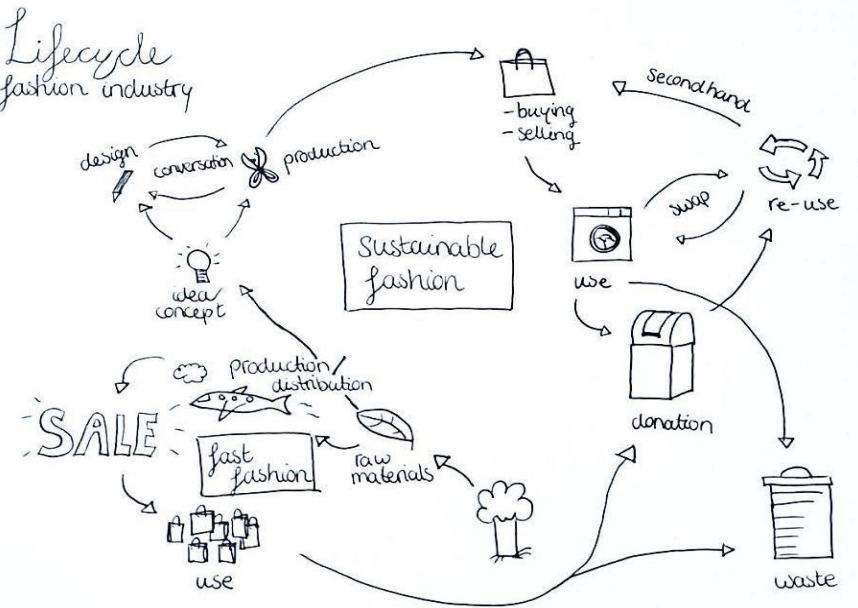


Image 1.1, lifecycle of garments in the fashion industry, created by Lonneke and Joëlle

¹² Information from interviews and based our own ‘spatial mapping’ field notes of these neighbourhoods.

The next part of this thesis will provide information on the theoretical concepts and context of our research, followed by chapter three, written by Lonneke, about the experiences of designers in the sustainable fashion industry and the impact this has on their business and lifestyle. Chapter four is written by Joëlle, and is about users' perception of sustainable clothing, what their definition entails, how different sorts of sustainable clothing look, and how purchasers of fast fashion treat clothing and consuming differently than users who try to live a sustainable lifestyle and do (or do not) try to spread 'the sustainable message'. Together we have written the fifth chapter, which discusses the concept of spatiality, the users' and designers' views on local and global processes, how they perceive Berlin as a sustainable city compared to other cities, and how these views of designers and users come together while they walk together in a protest march striving to achieve the same goal.

The conclusion and discussion of our research are combined in the last chapter of this thesis and they discuss how for designers the concept of authenticity is central, in their minimalist and more eccentric styles. They come up with authentic stories to communicate to the market, which get their authenticity from the intrinsic value the designer's stories hold, as highly motivated sustainable fashion practitioners. Users of sustainable clothing have a hard time defining sustainability, but defining sustainable clothing opposed to fast fashion seems easier. This chapter also discusses how users and designers do not always have similar ideas about sustainable clothing. This means that designers cannot sell their clothing to the users of sustainable fashion in Berlin, who often cannot afford their pieces. Both their views on Berlin as a sustainable city and their way of looking at the future are discussed in the conclusion. Both groups believe that Berlin can be seen as a hub for sustainability, and sustainable initiatives. Users tend to be more pessimistic about the future than designers. In the discussion of this thesis we state that researching sustainable clothing movements can give insight for scholars on e.g., the subject of sustainability. Further research on the communication between users and designers of sustainable clothing, global and local tensions on the clothing market, the connection between nature and minimalism in clothing and the significance of certifications can provide new information for scholars as for the market itself.

Chapter 1: Theoretical background

Cultural meaning ~ written by Lonneke

The cultural importance of goods is a central part of our study. How people value and use material objects and which actors are found in a system of production and consumption will be explained here. Processes of meaning-making are almost always linked to performativity and this will be elaborated on further down.

Material culture and consumer culture have been a topic of discussion in academia for decades (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 871). One of the most influential authors in this area is McCracken. He stated that the significance of consumer goods is that they ‘carry and communicate cultural meaning’ (1986, 71). Unlike other scholars he found that this meaning has a dynamic nature and flows between the culturally constituted world, the consumable material good, and the individual, aided by agents of meaning transfer, such as advertisers (McCracken 1986, 77). However, he has also been criticized for not focussing enough on the structures that cultural ways of life are based on and the way they inspire dynamics of meaning attribution (Thompson and Haytko 1997, 38).

But what does this cultural meaning entail? Goods encode cultural principles such as gender by showing us the distinction between certain cultural categories (McCracken 1986, 74). For example, most of us will be able to see the difference between a man’s shirt and a woman’s shirt without that distinction explicitly stated on the shirt. When putting on a specifically female-looking shirt, a consumer takes possession of the meaning and uses it to highlight individual properties (McCracken 1986, 79). So McCracken does account for cultural principles becoming embodied through material goods, but a topic that has recently become very important to material culture studies is the process of globalisation and its impact on the experience of person-object relations. An important impact of globalisation is that consumers have started to feel disembedded from production processes and thus the goods that come out of these processes. This leads them to look for authenticity in the things they buy (Smelik 2011, 77). ‘Authentic’ products can help construct an identity that is embedded in any given context, because they transfer a feeling of ‘real’-ness to the consumer (Smelik 2011, 81). This has been found in many different areas of study related to consumer goods, such as sustainability (De Neve et al. 2008, 4).

As stated before, agents are responsible for meaning transfer within a particular system (McCracken 1986, 77). Bourdieu is one of the most important scholars on the topic of symbolic meaning transfer. He has been criticized for failing to account for mass culture in his theories, but Rocamora has found a way to apply his theory there as well (2002, 342). ‘Agents of legitimation’ as Bourdieu calls them are a vital part of a meaning transfer network, because they can explain and value objects for others (Rocamora 2002, 350). They usually have a special status in the cultural context in which the meaning transfer takes place. For example, a fashion model can be an agent of legitimation in the meaning transfer surrounding fashion, because their career gives them a special status in this context. They have the cultural competence to look beyond the materiality of an object to its symbolism (Bourdieu 1984, 2-3). McCracken looks beyond agents of legitimation and considers all consumers to be able to consciously see and manipulate cultural meaning found in objects. However he does note that consumers will often only recognize this meaning in specific circumstances. For example, when they lose the item, they will be more aware of its value (1986, 78).

The level of cultural competence required to understand an object is directly related to its value. An object with very specific or difficult to decipher symbolism is valued higher, because it is more restricted or elite (Bourdieu 1985, 24). Looking at it from the other way around, objects with restricted meaning can only be accessed by certain actors of a network. As Weller also mentions in relation to fashion, knowledge about commodities may be used to protect boundaries around niches (2007, 44), thereby at times creating or maintaining hierarchical relations in society.

Meaning found within fashion

Crane and Bovone (2006, 320) state that the meaning of clothing has a special character because of its intimate association to the self. In a similar vein Hansen (2004, 387) states that focussing on, and objectifying, garments to construct identity is how the meaning of dress is ‘implicated in life projects’. This is where the network as described by Bourdieu (1984, 2-3) and McCracken (1986, 77) can be repurposed to understand fashion. Different types of meaning all come together in local dress practices and tend to undergo many dynamic processes of meaning attribution when influenced by the external fashion knowledge of others (Weller 2007, 50).

As said before, the search for authenticity as part of an embedding process, is often a central part of attributing meaning to clothes. Besides globalisation, Smelik (2011, 78)

considers capitalism and the entertainment-focused form of consumerism it created, to have caused an alienation from consumer goods which has lead consumers to search for authenticity. Authenticity can be explained and expressed in many different ways depending on context, but will always be linked to aesthetics in some way (Weller 2007, 59). It is not an intrinsic value of objects, but is attributed by agents of meaning transfer. For example, a shirt can just be a shirt or it can symbolise authenticity when highlighting the traditional craftsmanship in the production. She considers cultural heritage in fashion design to be an important expression of authenticity (2011, 79). Weller finds the importance of ‘original’ design to be a highly important aspect to the authority of designs (2007, 57-58). In relation to sustainability, authenticity can be found in a trend of minimalism. Dopierala (2017, 78 -79) describes minimalism as relying on conscious consumption and being a form of resistance against dominant consumption patterns. Authenticity in this context can be considered a feeling in opposition to mass production (Pratt in De Neve et al. 2008, 13). Minimalism also focuses on local and indigenous manufacturing and a search for transparency in companies. All these aspects are closely aligned with sustainable efforts (De Neve et al. 2008). How this knowledge and meaning becomes embodied in identity construction, will be explained by using Butler’s theory of performativity (1988).

Clothing as performer of identity ~ written by Joëlle

Everyone makes clothing choices, even people who state that they do not care about clothes and outfits, and ‘just put something on’. With these sets of clothing people position themselves in society in a certain manner, as our clothing carries a cultural meaning as stated before. In other words, what we wear is part of the (unconscious) expression of the self, or part of a performance as Judith Butler (1988) would say, and Terence Turner in 1980 (Hansen 2004, 372) argues that our clothing becomes part of our social skin.

Butler stated that gender identity is ‘an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts’ (Butler 1988, 519). One’s gender is constituted through the way one person acts, moves, dresses, and uses adornments: through performativity. This definition was coined by Judith Butler as pointing towards gender being performed and a performance (Jagger 2008, 17). This statement and other of Butler’s writings made that she has had a great influence on e.g. contemporary feminist theory, and social sciences (Jagger 2008, 1-16). One of the definitions of gender could be, as Joan Scott defined ‘a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way

of signifying relationships of power' (2007, 1067). Performing one's gender 'wrong' or contesting it, as for example drag queens do, can mean someone is not going to be accepted by other people in society (Butler 1988, 522 and 528; Bakshi 2004).

Butler's term 'performativity' was mainly focused on gender, sex, and sexuality as cultural and socially constructed products that are performed daily. Gender is one aspect that constitutes a person's identity, but this aspect gets heavily influenced by other parts of someone's identity. So, it is therefore that not only gender gets performed daily, but also the other parts that cumulative make up someone's identity. This process is called 'intersectionality', meaning that people's identities are formed by the intersecting of different 'axes' of the self (Wekker 2004, 496). Axes of identity are for example: ethnicity, 'race', sexuality, economic status, and someone's political ideology.

Or as Lutz states gender, 'race'/ethnicity, class, sexuality and nation co-construct each other and possibly other factors should be considered (Lutz cited in Wekker 2004, 496). Julia Twigg (2009) adds age to this row of axes of significance in the shaping of one's identity, so clothing can also function as a medium of embodiment of age. In this thesis we argue that political ideologies (such as a sustainable ideology) should be added to 'the list of axes of identity', and can therefore be performed through wearing certain clothes (Niinimäki 2010, 150-151). Interesting questions then are: is wearing sustainable clothing a performance of a sustainable identity, amongst other expressions of the self, and how does a sustainable ideology influence the clothing people wear?

Clothing as social skin, means of communication and resistance

An alternative approach, or an approach that adds information to the idea of performativity of a sustainable identity, is the concept of social skin by Terence Turner. Wearing clothing has a duality in itself, because on the one hand the clothing is touching the skin of an individual, and on the other hand the clothing becomes 'the skin' individuals put on which is again seen by other people (Hansen 2004, 372). When put differently, the clothing on a dressed body becomes part of the social skin. Turner uses the term social skin to refer to the system of bodily adornment as a whole, which can be seen as the surface of the body, the common frontier of society, the social self, and 'the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted and bodily adornment ... becomes the language through which it is expressed' (Turner 2012, 486).

In other words, clothing can be seen as a means of social communication (McCracken and Roth 1989) and an embodied expression of the self. By wearing certain clothes people

position themselves and send a message to other people in society. In this sense clothing can be a means to differentiate between socio-cultural, or political, groups. Anthropologists have long been interested in finding out the symbolic and cultural meaning of clothes, mainly in order to conduct cross-cultural research (Hansen 2004, 370). As socio-cultural groups can define themselves by wearing the same clothes and be recognizable for other groups, this can provoke other people and lead to conflicts. Michel Foucault, who strongly influenced Judith Butler's theories, states that the dressed body can be a source of power, however, it should be added that the dressed body can be a means of resistance as well (Bordo 1993, 182). For example, by wearing a sustainable shirt with the text 'there is no planet B', people position themselves to others as caring for the future of the planet, and are in some way provoking others to think about this topic, sustainability, as well.

To summarize: a sustainable identity can be performed by wearing certain clothes, and clothing thus becomes part of the social skin. Wearing sustainable fashion as social skin is a manner of expressing oneself to the outside world, and showing resistance to the clothing industry which is currently dominated by fast fashion.

Globalisation and connection ~ written by Lonneke

Sustainability, as explained further down in the next paragraph, is a product of its time. The world becoming more and more globalised can be seen as one reason for upcoming sustainable (social) movements (De Neve et al. 2008). Globalisation has been defined by Kearney (1995, 548) as 'social, cultural, economic, and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them.' Because of these global processes local happenings are shaped by events outside of the local level. The sustainable fashion movement in Berlin is an example of this as local activism is influenced by a global, impersonal industry. Fashion knowledge can be considered tacit and local as it's often very important in establishing a 'place-identity' (Craik in Weller 2007, 42), like the way a certain head wrap is tied is local, cultural as well as fashion knowledge. Fashion knowledge however also exists among international knowledge communities established by networked actors (Weller 2007, 42). This makes it an interesting aspect of commodity culture, combining both the abstract process of transnationality as well as the lived social field in visualizing a cultural and hybrid economy (Crang et al. 2003, 451).

One of the aspects of globalisation very apparent in the fashion market is disembedding. Eriksen states that 'disembedding includes de-localisation, through

globalisation distance has become irrelevant, fashion can travel faster than ever' (Eriksen 2014, 8). Disembedding includes all ways through which socio-cultural life becomes disconnected from its local and spatial fixed context (Eriksen 2014, 8). It can be seen as causing the market to lose its transparency and locality, which disconnects consumers from production processes (De Neve et al. 2008, 6). As explained before, this feeling of disembeddedness will then lead consumers to attribute new meaning to commodities and look for authenticity in their consumption. In short, globalisation is creating 'a new world of dress' (Hansen 2004, 372). In the fashion industry, this can be seen in activist movements trying to re-establish a connection between consumers and producers. The 'Who made my clothes?' - campaign, which is featured on the front page, from Fashion Revolution is an example of this¹³. They use this question to force consumers to think about their relation to the fashion pieces they buy.

Defining sustainability and sustainable clothing ~ written by Joëlle

Sustainability, a concept hard to define

The concept sustainability, and the different ideas and expressions thereof, stands central to this thesis, but what does the concept of sustainability mean in itself, and how should it be defined? Here we will take a closer look at the concept of sustainability, as it has become a buzzword often used in different ways.

Defining sustainability poses different sorts of problems (Toman 2006). What is certain about the concept of sustainability is that it concerns the preservation of national environments and natural resources of the earth and the notion of leaving enough resources for future generations to come (Vos 2007; Basiago 1995; Toman 2006). Some examples of issues concern the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb greenhouse gasses, or the extent of biological diversity (Toman 2006, 231). What makes having an all-encompassing definition of sustainability difficult, is the disagreement on what is most important (Vos 2007, 334). Economists for example especially focus on the maintenance and improvement of human living standards, and other scientists on the preservation of the status and function of ecological systems (Toman 2006, 233). There are many different opinions on what it is exactly that needs to be sustained, which again makes defining sustainability hard. We believe that this research has a small role in this, by gaining more insight into everyday expressions

¹³ Information on the organisation and campaign, can be found on: <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/get-involved/>

and ideas concerning sustainability for the users and designers of sustainable clothing in Berlin.

The concept of sustainability should also be seen as two-sided. On the one hand is the ethical treatment of workers, and can be seen as something social. On the other hand sustainability focuses on the use of organic and local products, which is the ecological side of sustainability. Hudson and Hudson emphasize this two-sidedness, by concluding that one side points towards the need for visibility of the social and environmental conditions of production, while the other side refers to a changing view of the commodity. This view is focused on the product's final characteristics, and the production processes through which it is created (2003, 421).

Toman (2006, 233) believes that anthropologist can do a great deal for trying to improve the understanding of the concept of sustainability. Anthropologists tend to be critical when looking at definitions of sustainability already formulated, because is sustainability not a Western concept itself? The varying definitions of sustainability by scholars are often formulated within a 'Western' society and framework, and could be in-applicable to non-Western societies (Datta 2015, 103).

Sustainable clothing versus fast fashion

Where there are differences in formulating the right definition for the concept of sustainability within science, there is another sort of difficulty with the concept of sustainable clothing. Partly about when to exactly call clothing sustainable, as sustainability focuses on two aspects, the social and the environmental. Does qualifying for one of these aspects count as sustainable?

Sustainable clothing can be seen as the opposite of fast fashion, which is an easier to define concept. So, when trying to grasp the meaning of sustainable clothing, it is useful to start with looking at the definition of fast fashion. Fast fashion is fashion or clothing that is quickly made, in the cheapest manners possible, for the idea of providing users with clothes that are temporarily trendy to wear, but will also be out of fashion soon (Levy and Weitz 2008). It is made in countries where the wages are low, for example Bangladesh and Vietnam, and with cheap materials. Fast fashion can be clothing that has travelled far across the world, mostly to places where it is cheapest to produce, before it reaches 'Western' richer

countries¹⁴. When the clothes are not fashionable anymore, they get thrown away (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009), this makes Bhardwaj and Fairhurst define fast fashion as ‘throw away fashion’ (2010, 166).

Sustainable fashion on the other hand is a form of resistance against the large scale on which fast fashion is produced, and the impact this has on the environment. In some cases, it is called slow fashion, a term given to retailers who produce clothes which are long-lasting and not mainly focused on being able to quickly respond to changing fashion trends (Watson and Yan 2013, 141). The same goes for second hand or vintage clothing, as putting it back on the market and reselling stretches the life cycle of the garments (Hansen 2004, 385). Eco-fashion (read: sustainable fashion) wants to contribute to the welfare of society, by for example reducing pollution, making no use of animal products, and making sure that workers receive fair treatment (Cervellon and Wernerfelt 2012, 177). Therefore, eco-fashion can also be called ‘ethical fashion’ (Joergens 2006). Peattie and Charter (1992) state that terms such as sustainable, green, organic, and ethical are all used to refer to ways of consuming and producing that seem to have the same goal: of not harming the environment or people in the production and retail of the clothes (Joergens 2006). In this thesis we choose to use sustainable fashion as our main concept, because it not only refers to the goal of eco-fashion but it is also a concept that puts emphasis on resistance towards the ‘current’ clothing (fast fashion) market, and leaves room for alternative options of purchasing (Watson and Yan 2013, 141). After having conducted several interviews with both our groups, we found out that the term sustainable clothing is most favoured and used.

Sustainable fashion is to be seen as the opposite of fast fashion, because it takes longer to produce, prefers local sources, is in most cases made out of organic materials, by people who get paid a fair wage, and does not stick to all the trends within the fast fashion industry.

A profile of designers and users

Designing in a sustainable fashion community ~ written by Lonneke

Designers are one of the actors in the meaning transfer process within the fashion industry, as described by McCracken (1986, 77). They are considered specifically interesting for the study of cultural production, because they have to continually innovate the symbolic values

¹⁴ As shown in the documentary: Rigaud, Sandrine. 2018. “Zembla Internationaal: “Het Prijskaartje van Katoen”. The Premières Lignes, Dutch editorship: Nicolien Herblot.

attached to clothing and do so while still resonating those values with their consumers (Crane and Bovone 2006, 321). Aside from the positioning of clothing as authentic and part of the sustainable movement, the aesthetics of clothing are a central part to meaning processes and very economically important (Aspers 2009, 189-190). Even though the largest part of the clothing industry operates on a global level, consumer markets still have local trends (Aspers 2009, 197). What is interesting to see is ‘green washing’ by larger firms. This is a marketing strategy that will communicate a green production process to consumers, without the company having to really invest in a sustainable business strategy, because sustainability has become a profitable market (Farrer and Fraser 2011, 6). However, when doing so, large corporations will often do damage while trying to do good (De Neve 2014, 187) as they devalue local traditions in their attempt at governance. This is why many small sustainable designer labels choose to work in community projects and use local production to prevent this mistake (McRobbie 2013, 998). Nonetheless all fashion brands have to balance their business needs with activist needs and find a proper narrative that will not alienate customers, but encourage them to change their behaviour (Beard 2008, 452).

Within sustainable fashion, commodity exchange is often given meaning by re-embedding production processes in local experiences by, for example, providing transparency (De Neve et al. 2008, 10). Designers within the slow fashion movement are designing based on a sustainable ideology. This makes them specifically interesting for our thesis, because as believed by Markussen (2013, 1-2) designs are not an act of protest, but used as elements of resistance by intervening in people’s lives. This means that design activism is not an overt protest, but this activism exists in a space ‘between aesthetics and politics’. As discussed previously in this chapter, designers can be considered agents of legitimation, because of their knowledge and network. They can be political actors in their personal lives and insofar as the meaning they bestow on their garments. Because of the ability of designers to connect to people’s behaviors and emotions, ‘...design activism makes the relationship between people’s doing and feelings malleable for renegotiations (Markussen 2013, 2)’.

Users of sustainable fashion ~ written by Joëlle

Carrier’s article shows that purchasing fast fashion can be seen as a global act and purchasing sustainable fashion as an act whereby one chooses to get a local product, but tries to act globally, as one hopes to send a message to the market (2008). Fast fashion, characterised by global mass production and trying to be part of a group, seems to be opposite of sustainable fashion, as sustainable clothing is often produced in smaller amounts, and locally (De Neve et

al. 2008). Consuming forms a basis for social integration, a source of pleasure, and identity forming processes (Twigg 2009, 10). It forms a relation between the social and the material, as wearing sustainable clothes is part of the social skin and can function as a performance of being an ethical human being (Klepp and Bjerck 2014). What makes the sustainable-fashion-user special is that these are people choosing to consume high quality clothing and create a wardrobe (or a store filled with sustainable clothing) based from the idea of care and consideration for the world, or in other words: sustainability (Watson and Yan 2013, 155). Second-hand clothing can be seen as a form of sustainable fashion, because second hand clothing practices implicate that consumers purchase consciously in efforts to change their lives for the better, by expanding the lifecycle of a garment by giving clothes a ‘second life’ (Hansen 2004, 385).

Little is known about how Western people purchase and why, and how they perceive images of ethical advertisements, what they are trying to achieve by purchasing certain products, or about quantity through which fetishizing the market secures them and attracts new business (De Neve et al. 2008). What is certain is that to be able to transform the market, it needs to go through actions made in the specific market itself, but the discussion is about who is responsible for this, and whether initiatives have the ability to retain their transformative capacities and ethical edge as they enter the mainstream market (Tallontire 2006).

Several scientists have pointed towards the gap in literature and studies about the users of sustainable clothing, and how they communicate to the larger market (producers and designers), and what their main motives are for certain (ethical) choices (Watson and Yan 2013; De Neve et al. 2008; Joergens 2006; Cervellon and Wernerfelt 2012). This thesis is meant to play a role in filling this gap, as not only is there little research and literature on the everyday expressions and ideas of users of sustainable fashion, we found that the same goes for designers.

Chapter 2: Berlin, a dynamic stage for performing sustainability

Creative class ~ written by Lonneke

In our research we have studied the experiences of two groups of people in Berlin, users and designers of sustainable fashion. As Wong (2017, 198) states, artists tend to occupy disused areas in cities which they then turn into productive and creative communities. Consumers and tourists interested in slow fashion as well as designers and social entrepreneurs are active in processes of place-making in Berlin. We have specifically looked at the neighbourhoods: Kreuzberg, Prenzlauer Berg and Neukölln, because they are often typified as creative with a very present creative class.²³

People within creative industries, like fashion designers, have thoroughly been studied. Graham and Gandini state that many people within the creative economy have begun searching for hybridity and collaboration as a reaction to market forces (2017a, 3). However, their search is not completely voluntary as the pressure on creative industries is high and collaboration is also directly linked to competition (Graham and Gandini 2017a, 6). Specifically in the fashion industry, this hybridity is found everywhere: labels, design teams and companies are constantly changing, appearing and disappearing (McRobbie 2013, 986). Creative actors in urban settings combine economic forces and political attitudes toward change in ‘aest-ethical’ action (Graham and Gandini 2017b, 16). This means that they are looking to make a living and work with the market, but at the same time their actions as new forms of entrepreneurship and collaboration help in re-embedding the economy ‘within the Social’. The reason for this new form of work is often found in two forms of ethics: striving for collective happiness, and a continual work on the self. These ethics constitute the identity of many social entrepreneurs and inspires their actions and positioning in the market (Graham and Gandini 2017b, 23).

Sustainable initiatives in a network of fashion ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle

Fashion is a massive part of the creative industry for the city of Berlin. The city has the most fashion enterprises of any other city in Germany and a total of 18,500 people in Berlin work for the fashion industry. Berlin has also been mentioned as a ‘hub’ for eco-fashion labels

and stores¹⁵. There are multiple events on green fashion being hosted in the city each year, the largest ones being the ‘Ethical Fashion Show Berlin’ and the ‘Greenshowroom’ who have merged this year to become ‘NEONYT’. Many different meetups¹⁶ around the topic of sustainable fashion are a part of this network as well, as they are organised by interested individuals and people working in the business¹⁷. When walking through the city or scanning it on any kind of shopping map¹⁸, the many different shops are not localised in one area, but found throughout many different kinds of neighbourhoods.

‘GreenFashionTours’ organises tours, for fashion students and other interested individuals, through the different neighbourhoods of Berlin visiting sustainable clothing boutiques and ateliers. The goal is to inform people about the topic of sustainability, and to bring clientele to the stores and ateliers¹⁹. The purchasing decisions of the people on tour might reach a higher political goal as they walk around in the clothing and inform others (Carrier 2008, 47). ‘GreenFashionTours’ is an example of a social business that works locally, while trying to do something about a global phenomenon. Local shops and ateliers in Berlin become centres of information about sustainable clothing for people from all around the world, as the tours and maps are open to everyone and attract lots of internationals. Reading about a subject is one thing, but this might not be enough to change people’s behaviour, the organisers of the tours believe that the human contact with people working in the sustainable clothing industry is what will inspire others to shop more sustainably. In the future the social business hopes to organise tours in other cities and countries as well, and that ‘green fashion’ will not stay Berlin specific²⁰.

Gentrification ~ written by Lonneke

Berlin is a city that has seen many changes in the last decade. It has been split in two, has had to undergo the repercussions of two wars in which it was one of the central points of conflict, and has had to rebuilt from that. Due to the split in the city and the financial toll this took on it, many spaces in Berlin are ‘vacant’. These are not only found on the outskirts of Berlin, but

¹⁵Berlin Partner für Wirtschaft und Technologie GmbH. “Fashion in Berlin.”

¹⁶Information on the organisation can be found on: <https://neonyt.messefrankfurt.com/berln/en.html>

¹⁷Examples are: Textilstammtisch Berlin: <https://future.fashion/project/modestammtisch> and Sustainable Fashion Matterz Network: <https://www.sustainablefashionmatterz.com/network/>

¹⁸Two such articles are: GreenmeBerlin. “Best of Guide 2018: Ethical fashion in Berlin.”

<http://www.greenmeberlin.com/ethical-fashion-berlin-best-of-guide/> Accessed on December 18th, 2018; Alice Dundon. “How Sustainable Fashion in Berlin is Giving Back.” Last modified August 1, 2018

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/how-sustainable-fashion-is-giving-back-in-berlin/>

¹⁹Information based on <https://greenfashiontours.com/home/learn-more/>, consulted at the 23rd of May 2019.

²⁰ See footnote 19.

all around, even in central areas there exists empty space, vacant buildings, and land without a destination (Colomb 2012, 132). This space is often not ‘dead’, though, but has been reclaimed or repurposed by Berlin’s residents. This process is called *Zwischennutzung*, meaning temporary use²¹. The repurposing of vacant spaces has mainly been instigated by young, creative, sometimes activist-minded people and has made Berlin into a ‘creative city’ (Colomb 2012, 135). It also became a marketable feature of the city with the notion of the ‘creative city’²² becoming popular worldwide, and seeing how many tourists were attracted to the repurposed spaces (Colomb 2012, 137-138). This process has partially paid off. Even though Berlin is still one of the poorest districts in Germany, with lower economic growth and higher unemployment rates than other cities, the fastest and most steadily growing sector in the city is that of cultural industries (Colomb 2012, 132-139). The city even got a UNESCO ‘City of Design’ designation in 2005²³.

Even though Berlin has been shaped by *Zwischennutzung*, nowadays it is, partly because of the growing creative sector, shaped by the process of gentrification. Gentrification originally meant a process of socioeconomic transition where a socially higher class would come to move into a low-income neighbourhood (Meltzer 2016, 59). Gentrification in Berlin has become an active topic in the city, however the different neighbourhoods experiences different types of this transition (Holm 2013, 73). Holm (2013, 73) considers Prenzlauer Berg as an area with family gentrification whereas Neukölln and Kreuzberg undergo a type of creative gentrification. Zukin (in Cameron and Coaffee 2005, 42) labels creative-focussed gentrification as ‘aesthetic conjuncture’, which means that artists have created a cultural model that has become appealing to the middle classes. As fashion can be considered a part of the creative sector, it is obvious that this population is part of the reason for a creative gentrification. However, they are also subject to gentrification processes, because business owners tend to be affected both positively, with a new crowd of customers, and negatively, with raised rents (Meltzer 2016, 59-60).

²¹ One such planning strategy for the neighbourhood Neukölln (in German): Matthias Brake. 2007. “Stadtumbau durch Kommunikation.” <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Stadtumbau-durch-Kommunikation-3410688.html> Accessed December 18th, 2018

²² Tanja Muehlhans. “Creative Cities Berlin.” <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/ber%C3%ADn> Accessed December 18th, 2018

²³ See footnote 22

Chapter 3: Unravelling designers ~ written by Lonneke

There are four tables with sewing machines, in the middle of the room is a big table where the patterns are drawn out and clothing items are checked, and there is a professional ironing board. The tables with sewing machines all have two lamps attached to them: one big desk lamp and a small lamp attached to the machine for precision work. High up on the wall hangs a shelf filled with books on fashion. Against one wall is a big clothing rack filled with pieces that are on different stages of the production process. Another clothing rack hangs above the door and is used to store the patterns. A big cupboard in the space is filled with rolls of many different colours of yarn. The rhythmic sound of a sewing machine fills the space whenever a new tag is put on. There are usually three people working in the studio. Antonia is an intern and will ask Mirja a question every once in a while: ‘What do we do when the pants are a little dusty?’ ‘Is this a mistake?’ Mirja will stop her work and help Antonia: ‘We have a dust roller.’ ‘Oh yes, you’ve made that seam too wide.’²⁴

The first location in the lifecycle of a garment: a designer’s studio. This space for creation and brainstorming is sometimes difficult to get access to. When given that access, though, ‘messy’ comes to my mind as a good description for these spaces. However, it is a creative and organised mess, with closets stocked to the brim with yarn, clothing and patterns. For the small labels researched in this thesis, their studios are not merely used for designing, they’re often also an office and production atelier. Surrounded by racks of clothing, designers tell us about the many different and important aspects of the environment to their work. Berlin is mentioned as a creative background with a lively sustainable fashion community, where small labels can find their place and many people will collaborate in their efforts towards a sustainable consumption system. When talking about their production methods, designers are quick to grab clothing to show the importance of crafts and sustainable innovation in their designs.

A distinction can be made between two production models used by our informants. Some designers work locally with a small team, or by themselves, and they tend to have a bigger focus on the environmental impact of fashion production than the other group, designers producing in foreign countries. These designers tend to focus heavily on the social sustainability of their brand. An overall agreement about what sustainability entails is difficult to find because of its many different aspects, as Vos also mentions, there is still no consensus on which issues are the most important (2007, 334). However, in all everyday definitions of

²⁴ Participant observation at Wesen, 10.04.2019

sustainability, designers mention both environmental and social aspects. Some choose to create a hierarchy between these different fields, but many, if not all, designers consider both aspects in their everyday lives. Two distinct themes I have found are: (1) the importance of a story to tell about their brand, sustainable fashion, and design; (2) as well as the importance of the style of these designs and within sustainable fashion in general.

Story

The story behind a clothing item is often highlighted in marketing strategies, motivations, and business strategies, because as Crane and Bovone (2006, 320) state, the meaning of clothing has a special character because of its intimate association to the self. For the sustainable fashion designers in Berlin communicating their story is done through social media, where especially Instagram is important to reach customers, but more importantly, through direct conversations with customers. Most companies are very small which allows them to offer a connection and level of service to their customers most large companies are not able to²⁵.

When speaking of a story, designers attribute a specific meaning to it. Namely the story is used to talk about all different sustainable efforts and social projects the brand engages in. However, the story is more than that. When talking to designers it becomes apparent that the story is also a sensation to them. It is not a mere marketing tool, but a way to connect themselves to their pieces. The story creates authenticity for the commodity product that clothing is. Smelik (2011, 81) states that authenticity can be found in many different ways, but it is always used as a method to create products that feel 'real', and through them identities associated with these products will feel real. This is done to counteract the disconnection between customers and the production process, caused by globalising commodity markets (De Neve et al. 2008, 6). Another aspect that is often highlighted is the sustainable innovation behind the garment. Recycled materials, like plastic, or new types of dye are the focus when communicating environmental sustainability to customers.

'People want to be inspired'²⁶

Many sustainable fashion brands have social projects linked to their production and an important marketing strategy for these brands is to highlight this story to their customers. They do so not just for marketing purposes, but again to convey the garment as more than just

²⁵ Personal conversation Bahhareh 23.04.2019; personal conversation Kathrin 01.03.2019

²⁶ Personal conversation Anja 26.03.2019

clothing, but a symbol of a movement. As De Neve and colleagues (2008, 5) have said, sustainable movements seek to re-establish a link between consumers and producers. Many fashion brands do so by highlighting their producers on their websites and using indigenous crafts in their designs. These crafts help tell the story behind the clothing item as well as support the sense of uniqueness designers want to strive for. As Jeanne says: '[my clothing] is a celebration of life and cultures and stories.' By this, she means that she considers crafts to be special because of the love within the practice. She says this adds to the idea of really buying something unique and it will connect you to the origin of the garment²⁷. This idea can be linked to Turner's idea about the social skin. Wearing clothing that tells a story, through a specific style or origin, designers and customers communicate their perspective on production and sustainability to the rest of the world. Virág explains her perspective: 'Respect is one word, but behind it is to be satisfied with what we have or to be in alignment with the world, not to change, not to throw it [*sic.* away], not to destroy, not to always want something new and different²⁸'. It is interesting to see that the marketing story and the deep story behind sustainable activism often overlap. Many designers are intrinsically motivated to work towards a fairer, more sustainable fashion industry, and even world, and their marketing message comes forth from this resignation. Caecilia, when asked, tells me that the team at Moeon discussed their own Instagram content thoroughly. They are all politically engaged and wondered whether 'it would be good to be political on Instagram'. They now feature political content, because they feel their store should be about who they are and this will feel authentic to their customers²⁹.

Connecting the consumer to the producer through a story of social sustainability is vital to the success of a sustainable brand. Even though the brands try to stand out in style as well, a big part of their clientele is focussed on their underlying message of development and sustainability. Crane and Bovone (2006, 321) explain that designers have to constantly work at the symbolic values they attach to their clothing, to resonate with their customer base. The narrative most designers choose to go with is one based on positivity instead of judgement. We see that designers feel the need to convert customers from fast fashion to sustainable fashion by emphasizing the quality, uniqueness, and sustainability of their products. The message seems to be that crafts and their producers need to be protected, which is communicated by highlighting the added value of these production processes as they make the

²⁷ Personal conversation Jeanne 26.02.2019

²⁸ Personal conversation Virág 20.03.2019

²⁹ Personal conversation Caecilia 01.03.2019

clothing unique. The story conveyed has to be focussed on ‘celebration’ and not be a demeaning approach to the customer’s shortcomings in terms of social sustainability. It serves as a positive reinforcement behind the purchase. As Bahhareh, owner and designer of Iimaïma, puts it: ‘And this is how you have to show the customers: it’s okay if you buy a last season piece. You know, you can still wear it, you don’t need to buy a new one³⁰’.

‘You do what you want to do, but then sustainable.’³¹

A short look around in any sustainable fashion shop will show you that most designers design more, or exclusively, for women. A very important reason many informants give for this is that the sustainable fashion market is very small and women are an easier client base to market towards³². Another interesting difference between men and women is that they focus on different elements of sustainability. Women are seen by the owner of Homage store to focus more on style and social sustainability whereas men are interested in innovation and techniques³³.

Weller (2007, 44) considers one type of fashion knowledge to be the symbolism found in different designs. The knowledge given to the customer is the background of a certain craft and its connection to a process of sustainable development. The story does not necessarily have to be about social sustainability, though, as many designers also tell a story about the technical aspects of their garments. Sustainability is found in many different innovative techniques, such as re/upcycling and different ways of dyeing. As Bourdieu (1985, 24) has stated, an object with difficult to decipher symbolism is valued higher in society, and innovative techniques could be seen as such a symbolism. Normally the general public would not be able to understand many techniques around the making of clothing, but in the sustainable fashion community a demystifying of this process is a very important story many brands are telling. For example, Kathrin teaches workshops natural dyeing to help customers understand the process and get them excited about it³⁴. Also, showing processes of innovative techniques, as well as more basic techniques of sewing and pattern-making, are a method of connecting to the consumer. Many designers consider the lack of education of consumers to be one of the reasons sustainable fashion is not a bigger topic in society, so broadening the

³⁰ Personal conversation Bahhareh 19.02.2019

³¹ Personal conversation Anja 26.03.2019

³² Personal conversation Kathrin 01.03.2019; small talk in Homage store 13.02.2019; personal conversation Caecilia 01.03.2019

³³ Small talk Homage store 13.02.2019

³⁴ Personal conversation Kathrin 01.03.2019

cultural competence of their consumers is a direct resistance against fast fashion. This more activist approach to education is found in workshops like ‘Re/upcycling textiles’ by ‘hands.on.matter’, where the premise of the workshop was to teach people easy at-home methods of working with textiles to be able to question the general methods of re/upcycling in the fashion industry³⁵.

‘Empowerment of everyone within the supply chain’³⁶

Not all actors within the sustainable fashion community in Berlin, let alone the whole global fashion industry have the same access to fashion knowledge. Craik (in Weller 2007, 42) explains that fashion knowledge is tacit and local, thereby making it restricted to certain groups. However, this knowledge can be shared when networked actors use their expertise to set up an international knowledge community (Weller 2007, 42). Designers in Berlin take an active part in this process, as they teach customers and activists their insider knowledge, making them able to question the fashion industry. On the other side of the production process, designers also try to actively engage producers through their network.

As Lisa explains, she wanted to find a business approach that: ‘...wasn’t demeaning and would pretty much build up on the strength of people and not the weaknesses³⁷’. The most obvious method of doing this, which is a cornerstone of social sustainability, is paying producers a fair wage. However, many designers highlight their personal relationships with their producers when talking about their business. The producers are not merely used as outsourced labour, but often take an active part in the designs they end up producing. Many of these companies use traditional crafts and rely on the expertise of the craftsmen for the designs as well, thereby engaging and empowering them. Bahhareh explains that equality is the main point of sustainability to her: ‘...I think being sustainable is that the people want to work for you. To make them happy to work for you and you can only reach that by being human³⁸’.

This narrative of equality is also, again, used in the story designers connect to their clothing items. Even though many scholars consider the fashion industry to be a good example of customers becoming disembedded from production processes (Eriksen 2014; De Neve et al. 2008), through this engagement of producers and customers, sustainable fashion

³⁵ ‘Re/upcycling textiles’ event by ‘hands.on.matter’ 18.02.2019

³⁶ Translated from Dutch, personal conversation Jeanne 26.02.2019

³⁷ Personal conversation Lisa 21.02.2019

³⁸ Personal conversation Bahhareh 19.02.2019

designers embed all the different actors in the process. Through the use of activist slogans like ‘Who made my clothes?’ and sharing the stories of producers, the producers are embedded in localised transactions. Whereas disembedding is defined as a loss of transparency and locality (Eriksen 2014, 8), in sustainable fashion transparency and locality are at the centre of the story.

Style

Fashion designers all have a different personal perspective on the fashion industry and how to run a sustainable business. Many designers use business strategies to stay away from trends or fashion seasons. They instead choose to work without collections that follow ‘the wheel of the fashion industry’, as put by Eilis, owner and designer at Kemp Gadegaard³⁹. They opt to make collections a few times per year or only make collections when their stock runs out. They do so to promote the idea of timelessness in fashion. Items should not be considered disposable, according to them, and promoting longevity is key to sustainability. Not all designers choose to work like this, but there is always an aspect of timelessness found in the designs and marketing.

*‘A piece that makes you think: Wow! There’s love in this’*⁴⁰

The style of a fashion designer shows an interesting expression of sustainability. Style-wise two groups can be found within the population. One group is interested in practical, minimalistic clothing items. Here the need for timelessness has found a solution in the classics and the use of little to no colour, as well as the use of one plain colour per clothing item. It is also found in many other design choices, like: the limit to different fabrics used within one garment, a need for clear supply chains, and a small colour spectrum used on the clothes. This colour spectrum can be typified by pastel, black and either quite light or quite dark collections with few patterns. Minimalism is described to be very useful and is heralded for helping the clothes last longer, as they are outside of any trend. As Dopierala (2017, 69) describes, minimalism is a method to attribute meaning to consumer goods.

It seems as though this is not limited to minimalism in the sustainable fashion community as some designers choose to use mindfulness to describe their style, to indicate a

³⁹ Personal conversation Eilis 22.02.2019

⁴⁰ Personal conversation Jeanne 26.02.2019

consciousness and connection to the world around them⁴¹. The idea of a personal attachment to clothing and the environment they exist in is very central for fashion designers and can be typified as a sort of authenticity. Authenticity comes from the ‘real’ connection to the clothing when produced and used mindfully⁴². In minimalism authenticity is found as well, through the lack of excess, the ‘real’ is found⁴³. Especially within the sustainable fashion community, a part of civic society where re-embedding is central to many processes (De Neve et al. 2008, 5), minimalism and mindfulness help designers achieve this.

The other group of designers does not look for minimalism in their designs, but does the opposite and strives to create colourful, expressionistic clothing. The goal behind it is the same as with the minimalistic designs, through the use of unique designs they try to foster a connection between the customer and their clothing. Here, the narrative of clothing as an investment is often used. In combination with a sense of uniqueness in these eccentric outfits, authenticity is achieved as well. The use of organic cotton is very common amongst all sustainable fashion designers, but within this more eccentric style recycled fabric or upcycled pieces take up an important place. Upcycled fashion is made from second hand or disregarded clothing items and allows the designer to use many different colours, shapes, and patterns within one piece.

Here, a very loving connection to fashion can be found. As many of the more eccentric designers mention, their love for patterns, colours and fabrics is a big reason for wanting to treat fashion sustainably. In the words of Virág: ‘There are fabrics that are good, and new, and exciting and they make for new combinations with spontaneous and surrealistic things. I think it's good for the environment, because we don't throw it out and it's also respect for the people that made it [in the first place]’. In this unique and more eccentric style, we can again find a connection to the social skin as well. As Bahhareh explains, she uses Middle-Eastern crafts to show a different side of Middle-Eastern culture to Western Europeans. At the same time, she's also protecting the craft by employing traditional craftsmen and she finds a unique style for her customers.

⁴¹ Central theme in personal conversation Jeanne 26.02.2019

⁴² Personal conversation Jeanne 26.02.2019

⁴³ Personal conversation Suzie 04.03.2019

'You can't live without following some trend' ⁴⁴

Both minimalism and eccentricity have something in common, namely the lack of a use of trends. Many fashion designers consider trends to be something from fast fashion and stay away from it. They consider trends to promote the disposability of clothing and consider the longevity of clothing to be a central goal to their endeavours. It seems that the disregard of trends is one of the main differences style-wise between the sustainable fashion industry and the fast fashion industry. As Eilis explains, the main idea of producing mindfully is so vastly different from the fast fashion industry that she feels there is not even a competition⁴⁵. Some designers do acknowledge that trends are such a vital part of a society, that even when you try to stay away from them, they can still influence their designs⁴⁶.

However, whether it is through minimalism or eccentricity, both styles create a sense of authenticity and connection that should help to make the garment indispensable. There are many different motivations behind this need for longevity, that can be categorized as both social and environmental factors. Longevity means that a garment will be worn, used, and deemed worthy for as long as possible and it is thus the exact opposite of disposability. It will decrease production, which will decrease the ecological footprint of a company and its customers. It will also substantiate the idea of garments as an investment, as many sustainable companies struggle with explaining their higher price-point to customers. Furthermore, it is a change in perspective on the idea of consuming, which is the eventual goal of the sustainable fashion movement.

Here, the idea of designs intervening in the status quo as a form of activism, can be clearly seen (Markussen 2013, 1-2). The longevity achieved through designs offers a renegotiation of the status quo of trends, fast fashion, and disposability. However, these designs are not mere 'elements of resistance', as put by Markussen (2013, 2), but are the main feature of this resistance. Markussen discusses design activism as an element of larger activist endeavours, however in the sustainable fashion community, the design and clothing are at the centre of the protest. The business strategies, stories and styles are all designed as part of a larger whole, resisting fast fashion and offering a beautiful alternative. As the designs hold the resistance intrinsically within them, they are not mere tools used by designers as political actors, but the ideological end-product. They can however still be used as elements of

⁴⁴ Personal conversation Anja 26.03.2019

⁴⁵ Personal conversation Eilis 22.02.2019

⁴⁶ Personal conversation Anja 26.03.2019; personal conversation Lisa 21.02.2019; personal conversation Bahhahah 19.02.2019

resistance to other actors in the movement, such as discussed in the coming chapter about users.

Striving for change

A few concepts keep coming back throughout the two themes discussed above. One of these concepts is authenticity. As we have seen, authenticity can be constituted in many different ways by the designers in the sustainable fashion community. It is a big part of the two styles thoroughly described. In minimalism authenticity can be found in the connection to mindfulness and the focus on the practical worth of clothing. In more eccentric styles authenticity can instead be found in the uniqueness of traditional crafts and colour combinations. Both of these expressions of authenticity foster a meaningful connection between the designer and their garment, as well as the customer and their new piece of clothing. Authenticity can also be found in the stories communicated by the designers. Transparency, accountability, and reliability are at the center of the sustainable business strategies and they are explained within the stories told by designers. These stories help connect both the designer and its customer to the bigger sustainable fashion philosophy. As Smelik (2011, 81) explains, authenticity helps constitute an identity that feels ‘real’. This realness is found in the sustainable fashion community in the embeddedness that comes out of these expressions of authenticity. Respect for garments and the production process is a cornerstone of the designers’ practices and it helps embed the actors within a globalized industry.

As said before, the practices that help constitute authenticity and embeddedness may vary between designers, but there are some aspects designers generally agree upon even though the methods might vary widely. Garments should be made to last and a big aspect of longevity is a respect for the production process, skill, and design in the garment. More subconsciously, all designers use methods of embedding producers and consumers through the use of transparency, story and style. As Crane and Bovone (2006, 320) state, fashion has an intimate association to the self, which seems to be the reason why ‘connecting’ is such an important theme running through all practices. Connection between the different actors allows for a strong activist message, because there is a compassion for everyone within the industry. Also, connection to clothing items helps in solidifying sustainable practices, because a personal relationship has been constituted with an otherwise ordinary commodity. Connection is the main method of achieving longevity, because of all the reasons mentioned above and it

helps people to understand the main message of all sustainable fashion designers: the worth of clothing needs to be reconstituted.

Chapter 4: Sustainability through the eyes of the users ~ written by Joëlle

Sustainability is nothing defined yet, I think we are not there yet to really know what is sustainability. It can mean anything to so many different people, it allows us to think together⁴⁷.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis this chapter focuses on ‘the second part’ of the lifecycle of garments, which is made up of the using, selling and recycling of clothing. These are all activities that are carried out by users of sustainable clothing. Before taking a better look at these activities and what having a sustainable lifestyle entails, it is of importance to understand how users would define sustainability and sustainable clothing. Defining sustainability as a concept in itself has proven to be difficult as scholars like Vos (2007) and Toman (2006) illustrate, but finding the right definition is also hard for the users of sustainable clothing in Berlin. There is no all-compassing definition of what sustainability ‘truly’ is, even though throughout our fieldwork research it became clear that most users believe that sustainability consists of (at least) two main aspects. These are the environmental or ecological part, and the social part. These two parts come back when defining sustainable clothing, which has proven to be easier to define than sustainability itself. Though there are alternatives for the concept, like ethical, eco or fair fashion, the term sustainable clothing is preferred by most informants, mainly because all other definitions focus on only one aspect of what sustainability is according to them⁴⁸.

When trying to determine whether clothing is sustainable or not, Nele from ‘GreenFashionTours’ Berlin states that users should ask themselves the following questions; how was this made, who made it, how were these people treated, and what were the circumstances in which they had to make this product for you⁴⁹? The first question is directed at the environmental aspect of sustainable clothing. Users believe that during the production of sustainable clothing, it is necessary that nature and environment are not harmed, and that the limited natural resources of this planet are used as little as possible⁵⁰, and that using

⁴⁷ Nora Vehling from Fashion Revolution Germany, personal conversation, 03.05.2019.

⁴⁸ Information confirmed by among others: Nele Henkel, Lina Zuppke, Selina Pube, Nora Vehling, and the owner of Moeon Berlin.

⁴⁹ Personal conversation, Nele Henkel, 03.17.2019.

⁵⁰ Personal conversation with Franzi Fischer, 02.28.2019, and filled in questionnaire through email by Marion Riedel from BerlinVintageClothing, 03.14.2019.

organic materials is an option to do so. There are many certificates producers can obtain. A few examples of certificates are Global Organic Textile Standard, Naturtextil IVN, and Fair Wear Foundation⁵¹, producers put them on their clothing tags to prove to users that their items are organic or fairly produced.

The social or fair aspect is looked at when answering the following questions formulated earlier in this chapter: who made my clothes and how were these people treated? Lea Schindler⁵² explains the social aspect by stating that ‘everyone involved in the making of the piece of clothing is paid a fair wage ... , and that there is some kind of social security for them ... , and I would expect everyone that would be involved in the making process of ethically produced clothes to be taken care of as a human being’.

Lina Zuppke, who is a co-worker of LOVECO, a sustainable clothing and shoe shop that only sells vegan and fair items, states that: we need to add a third aspect to the definition of sustainable clothing⁵³, concerning animal welfare. No animals should be harmed in the production process of (sustainable) clothing. This is more complex than it seems, because contrarily, animal products, like leather, can harm the environment. Lina gave the example of the production process of leather, whereby chemicals are being used that will wash out into the ocean, thereby polluting it. This example shows what Zuppke and Cherie Birkner⁵⁴ both argue, humans and animals are as much a part of the social as of the environmental part of sustainability, meaning that all the aspects of sustainability cannot be set apart, but are intertwined.

Defining second hand and vintage clothing as sustainable

So far this chapter concerned defining clothing from sustainable boutiques, but there are more sorts of clothing purchases that are to be perceived sustainable: second hand, vintage clothing, and clothing that has been upcycled. Second hand clothing is clothing that is being re-used or resold after someone else made use of it. This could be former fast fashion clothing, and in some rare cases it is clothing from discarded outlets that is being resold⁵⁵.

Second hand clothing is sustainable, because there are no resources used to produce it. People make use of something that is already there instead of buying a newly produced

⁵¹ Information provided on small talk with one of the co-workers of Maas Natur in Prenzlauer Berg, 02.07.2019.

⁵² Based on personal conversation, 03.08.2019.

⁵³ Information from personal conversation with Lina on the 15th of February 2019.

⁵⁴ Based on data from interviews with Lina Zuppke (02/15/2019) and Cherie Birkner, founder of Sustainable Fashion Matterz on the 19th of March 2019.

⁵⁵ Data from personal conversation with Mariana from Berliner Stadtmission and GreenFashionTours, on the 9th of April 2019.

product⁵⁶ (see also: Hansen 2004, 385). During my fieldwork I volunteered at Berliner Stadtmission. This organisation collects clothing in clothing bins (see image below)⁵⁷ with the goal of providing homeless people with clothing that is still usable, and to provide housing to them with the money gained from clothing sold in one of their second hand shops, and clothing sold as raw materials. While I was sorting clothing with other volunteers, I was shocked by the amount of clothing that comes in. Most of the clothing is former fast fashion ending up in the bin, simply because people are overconsuming clothing⁵⁸. At least fifteen racks of collected clothing gets sorted every day at Berliner Stadtmission, and they are not the only organisation in Berlin collecting clothing⁵⁹.



Image 1.2 Clothing bins, outside Berliner Stadtmission. Picture taken by Mariana.

Vintage clothing is clothing of a certain age, at least ten years old⁶⁰. Vintage clothing is seen as sustainable, because it has proven to last long. ‘Isn’t it astonishing that the piece of garment is still alive in this throwaway society?’⁶¹. Vintage shop owners of LeMagass and Blackbird Vintage⁶² said that the quality of vintage must be higher than the quality of fast fashion produced nowadays, because it is clothing still good to wear after a period of time, while fast fashion is not made with the intention to last long.

⁵⁶ Cherie Birkner during an interview on the 29th of March.

⁵⁷ Clothing bins outside Berliner Stadtmission. Picture taken by Mariana, and send to Joëlle.

⁵⁸ Small talk with volunteers and managers at the Berliner Stadtmission, 03.12.2019.

⁵⁹ See note 27.

⁶⁰ Mariana during an interview, 04.09.2019.

⁶¹ Question asked by Marion Riedel in an email to me, 04.14.2019.

⁶² Based on small talk in the area Neukölln on the 18th of February and the second of May 2019.

'Fast fashion is not free, somewhere someone is paying'

Fast fashion is in some sense 'the opponent' of sustainable clothing. The characteristics of fast fashion are that it is clothing made for one clothing season, which makes it cheap, and seen as disposable (Levy and Weitz 2008). 'The only cycle or part that is really thought about is buying, wearing it a couple times, and then it ends, the thought process of it'⁶³. During an evening full with lectures and workshops organised by 'hands.on.matter'⁶⁴, Stefanie and Sarah from Berliner Stadtmission defined fast fashion by using the word instant fashion instead, where you buy, wear, and throw away instantly. Fast fashion needs to be produced as cheaply as possible, in order to be sold for low prices in fast fashion shops all over the world, but 'if we (consumers⁶⁵) are not paying the price, someone else does, and it is either the environment or the poor human on the other side of the world, or animals or something else'⁶⁶.

Purchasing behaviour and ethics

During conversations with the users of sustainable clothing, I asked them what they believe to be people's motives towards buying fast fashion, instead of sustainable clothing. A 'shop-shop-shop' mentality⁶⁷ is said to be created by a capitalist system, and fed by clothing that is sold too cheap. This makes it so that people start to care more about quantity instead of quality⁶⁸.

Some people simply do not care about the negative impact fast fashion has on the lives of the producers and the environment, and other people do not know about this impact yet⁶⁹. These people have not been informed, because the school system does not pay attention to sustainable topics⁷⁰, or people have other more pressing issues in their lives. Being able to invest time in researching sustainable topics, is a luxurious position and one a lot of people cannot afford⁷¹. Individuals, and for example Fashion Revolution are working on educating people about the repercussions on a social and environmental level, a topic which is discussed later on.

⁶³ Quote during personal conversation with Cherie Birkner, 03.29.2019, based on a quote by Lucy Siegle.

⁶⁴ Workshop and lecture by hands.on.matter in the area Neukölln, Berlin, 02.18.2019.

⁶⁵ Added by me, to emphasize the subject of the quote.

⁶⁶ Quote by Selina Pube during an interview, 02.23.2019.

⁶⁷ Term used by Katja Trescher during an personal conversation, 03.07.2019.

⁶⁸ Small talk, Philippe from Kollateralschaden, 02.18.2019.

⁶⁹ Cherie Birkner from Sustainable Fashion Mattered, 03.29.2019.

⁷⁰ Nele Henkel from Greenfashiontours Berlin during an interview, 03.17.2019.

⁷¹ Personal conversations with Selina Pube, 02.23.2019, and Mariana, 04.09.2019.

‘Everything you buy is like a political statement, I always try to remember that⁷²,

One of the reasons mentioned why fast fashion users would not prefer buying sustainable fashion, next to it being a time-extensive act, is because of pricing. Purchasing new sustainable clothing is more expensive than fast fashion. Users of sustainable fashion believe buying sustainable clothing new is expensive and pricey, but not for the fact that these are organic and fairly produced items⁷³, or as Nora Vehling from Fashion Revolution put it ‘in a capitalistic system price gets seen as equal to a product’s value, but it is not’⁷⁴.

Even though the pricing of sustainable clothing is seen as decent, there are users that cannot afford to buy all their clothing new at sustainable clothing shops. This leads people to look for alternatives, such as buying clothing second hand, vintage clothing, or going to clothing swaps; where people come together and exchange clothing, they themselves do not want anymore. The purchasing behaviour of the different types of sustainable clothing is generally speaking, based on the income and age of the users. Women with a stable income, who are on average thirty and up, are more often users of new sustainable clothing. Students are more likely to purchase at second hand or vintage shops. This does not mean that the ‘older’ people with a more stable income do not go to second hand or vintage shops⁷⁵.

The term ‘shopping’ has another connotation for the group of users of sustainable clothing, the emic definition would be that buying new (fast) fashion products is shopping, but buying small amounts of second hand clothing does not count as shopping. Purchasing clothing items happens preferably offline, as trying the clothing on is easier and quicker, and there is no wrapping or transport use; which is more sustainable⁷⁶.

Men make up a part of the users group, but not as clearly. The owner of the shop Moeon said that women go shopping more often than men, and that men do differently. Men are more interested in the materials and textile, and how clothing is produced, and the longevity of products. You would have to convince them to buy at your shop, but once they are a customer, they will come back to your store⁷⁷. During the ‘The Move’, the protest march of Fashion Revolution, it became clear that there is a market for male sustainable clothing, as

⁷² Quote from Selina Pube, interview together with Lonneke, 02.23.2019.

⁷³ Information that came up in several interviews, among which Ana, Lea Schindler and Kim Boshoven mentioned this specifically.

⁷⁴ Quote from interview, 03.05.2019.

⁷⁵ Reoccurring data during interviews with Kim Boshoven, Franzi Fischer, Ana and Lina Zuppke.

⁷⁶ Based on interview with Lea Schindler, Ana, and Nora Vehling.

⁷⁷ Data based on small talk with the owner of Moeon, 02.11.2019.

the amount of men and women was almost equal⁷⁸. Surprising is that in the sustainable clothing shops, the amount of male and female clothing are not equal, there is far more women's wear on display and sold⁷⁹. Though, there are brands that only produce unisex clothing, like EDOgoods and Yvette en Vogue⁸⁰.

How do different sorts of sustainable clothing look?

What does sustainable clothing look like? Does it in any way look different from fast fashion? To answer these questions, it is of importance to first look at what some people call 'the Berlin Style'. The Berlin style would be clothing in darker colours, or grey and white⁸¹, with no prints or patterns⁸², and 'to dress down rather than dressing up'⁸³. Not everyone agrees that there is something like a style for a whole city, that stays the same long enough to even get defined⁸⁴, and it is not just groups of people who are in some way connected that dress alike. In vintage shops 'the Berlin Style' is not visibly present. Vintage clothing is unique, and colourful⁸⁵. 'Vintage shops are for the people who dare to be creative'⁸⁶. Some vintage shops, like LeMagass, also sell upcycled clothing. This is clothing whereby designers have to be creative in which pieces to use and combine to make a new clothing piece⁸⁷, as explained in chapter three.

Circular Fashion is an activist organisation which tries to stretch the lifecycle of garments. First by putting QR-codes in clothing so consumers can check how they can repair/re-dye their clothing and where to recycle it, and secondly by teaching brands how to make their clothing fit better in a circular clothing system⁸⁸. This would mean that these clothing items might look a bit different, because they are made of recyclable materials⁸⁹. The idea of creating circular garments is not new, some sustainable shops are already selling items that fit in a circular clothing system, and can be fully recycled into new clothing pieces.

⁷⁸ Based on fieldnotes by Joëlle and Lonneke.

⁷⁹ See footnote 78.

⁸⁰ Informal conversation with Elisa from EDOgoods, 02.18.2019, and Angelina, 27.02.2019.

⁸¹ Reoccurring data in conversations with Ana, the owner of Moeon, 02.11.2019, Virag from Kék Lo, 02.13.2019

⁸² Reoccurring date in interviews or small talk with Ana, 02.20.2019, the owner of Moeon, 02.11.2019.

⁸³ Cherie Birkner during an interview, 03.29.2019.

⁸⁴ Based on personal conversation with Mariana, 04.09.2019, small talk with Marvin LeMagass, 04.02.2019.

⁸⁵ Information from small talk with Virag, 02.13.19, and email contact with Marion Riedel, 03.14.19.

⁸⁶ Data from small talk with Marvin LeMagass, 04.02.2019.

⁸⁷ Personal conversation, Mariana, 04.09.2019

⁸⁸ Personal conversation, Kim Boshoven from Circular Fashion, 03.20.2019, and her lecture at the Community Stammtisch, organised by The Social Impact Lab Berlin, 02.27.2019.

⁸⁹ See footnote 88.

The minimalist style of new sustainable clothing described in chapter three fits in with the Berlin style. Though this might not be connected to Berlin as much, it is connected to the mentality of minimalism and timelessness as described earlier. ‘Sustainable fashion shops have a minimalist line, because they want things to last. So they don’t want to create a trend, that they know is going to be out in like one month, and no one is going to wear anymore. So everything is more clean, which is very practical’⁹⁰. ‘It is timeless, you can use it all throughout the year, like every year’⁹¹. The dark, white and grey colours all contribute to making it easier to combine outfits and making the clothing fit in every trend throughout each year⁹².

Sustainable clothing is in some cases easy to recognize by the certificates mentioned earlier in this chapter, but these certificates or brand names are often not on the outer layer of the clothing. This goes against the idea of performativity by Judith Butler (1988) or the social skin by Terence Turner (1980), whereby people are (un)aware that they wear items that are socially associated with a part of their identity, which would be the user’s sustainable identity. Remarkable is that this is often not the case with new sustainable clothing, as the brand names are hidden in the back of the clothing. Users believe that it is not necessary to show your sustainable ideology through the way your clothing looks, or the name of the brand on your shirt for example. Their clothing does not function as ‘a layer of skin’ (read: social skin) to the outside world, performing their sustainable identity. Users’ sustainable identity is formed by the choices they make, within their (sustainable) lifestyle. Cherie Birkner⁹³ explained this by stating that ‘once you take those steps into sustainability and start being more critical about things, you also start knowing yourself a lot of better ... You can define yourself, and I think that could be like a mind-set from people who care about where they buy their stuff from, that they ... don’t feel this necessity to brand themselves with pre-made images’.

Sustainable lifestyle

The first step of creating your own sustainable lifestyle starts by changing your food habits, where you buy and what you eat, states designer Philippe from Kollateralschaden. Eating vegetarian or vegan is often part of the lifestyle of users of sustainable clothing. Some of them believe that ‘the sustainable clothing trend’, and ‘the vegan trend’, are somewhat equal. ‘A lot

⁹⁰ Quote from Mariana during an interview, 09.04.2019.

⁹¹ Personal conversation with Kim Boshoven, 04.20.2019.

⁹² Personal conversation with Nele Henkel, 04.17.2019.

⁹³ Quote from Cherie Birkner during an interview, 03.29.2019.

of people are vegan, because it is ‘in’, and they do not really care about what the people are in it for. But that is just one part of the people, a lot more are doing it because they are thinking about it ... It is the same with fashion, some people do it because it is cool, but it is still an up-going line⁹⁴. Both are upcoming lifestyles, often combined, and users of sustainable clothing believe that these lifestyles might become less visible in the future but ‘every rational person, once you know, you cannot un-know. And every decision you make after that, you have that thought in mind’⁹⁵.

Other steps into sustainability or a sustainable lifestyle are thinking about means of transportation, going by bike or train, instead of using an airplane while travelling⁹⁶. Other examples are thinking about alternative and more sustainable cleaning products⁹⁷, bringing your own bag while shopping, so no plastic bags are wasted⁹⁸.

Spreading ‘the sustainable message’

According to Mariana and Nora there is no way to live a hundred percent sustainable lifestyle in Berlin because that would mean to not consume at all, but one should at least try⁹⁹. During this fieldwork I asked whether trying to spread ideas about the necessity of living sustainably is part of people’s lifestyle. On one hand ‘missionaring’¹⁰⁰, a term often used by informants referring to trying to impose your opinions on others, is seen as a bad thing because trying to reach people that are not interested in the topic of sustainability can have a negative effect and push them further away from it.

On the other hand there are interesting movements, online as well as offline. On the outside of sustainable clothing shop ECOALF, you can read their slogan ‘because there is no planet B’ clearly. Wertvoll is another example of a sustainable clothing shop in Berlin that uses slogans in their shop for decoration, but also to make customers more aware and inspire them to think about sustainability¹⁰¹. These slogans are taken into the ‘online world’, by organisations such as Fashion Revolution, but also by stores, and individuals. In the first interview Lonneke and I conducted during our fieldwork, Instagram as an online platform for sustainable clothing was mentioned, and throughout our fieldwork Instagram as a platform for

⁹⁴ Personal conversation, Hannah Korb, 02.24.2019.

⁹⁵ Personal conversation, Kim Boshoven, 04.20.2019.

⁹⁶ Reoccurring theme in conversation with Selina Pube, Lina Zuppke, and Nora Vehling.

⁹⁷ Reoccurring theme in conversation with Kim Boshoven, Lina Zuppke, Mariana.

⁹⁸ Reoccurring theme in conversation with Selina Pube, Hannah Korb, and Lea Schindler.

⁹⁹ Personal conversation with Mariana, 04.09.2019, and Nora Vehling, 05.03.2019.

¹⁰⁰ Emic term returning in multiple conversation, such as with Ana, Hannah, Nora.

¹⁰¹ Information based on fieldnotes made during spatial mapping.

promoting sustainable clothing was a reoccurring theme. Users argue that more and more happens online, and that Instagram as an online platform mainly focused on images, goes well together with fashion. Pictures, slogans, information about sustainable clothing and meetings are shared, but there are also discussions online. One of the bigger discussions is about intersectionality. As explained in chapter one of this thesis, intersectionality is a term used to refer to the different parts or axes of someone's identity, that interact, and together shape a person's identity. The 'intersectionality' discussion for users of sustainable clothing concerns the statement that one cannot be a feminist and not pro sustainable clothing¹⁰², and that one cannot be promoting sustainable clothing and not consider feminist and equality issues¹⁰³. This year's Fashion Revolution focused on women specifically, as the fashion industry exist mostly of female workers (see image 1.3).



Image 1.3- A post by Fashion Revolution Deutschland on Instagram, promoting their #whomademyclothes campaign, 02.07.2019.

Fashion Revolution fights for among other things more transparency in the clothing industry, better working conditions for producers, and with their #whomademyclothes campaign they focus on the social aspect of sustainability. Users defined sustainable clothing as consisting of a social and environment aspect, and some users want to add the animal aspect to this definition. New sustainable clothing fits in the minimalist style and strives for

¹⁰² Personal conversation with Lina Zuppke, 04.12.2019.

¹⁰³ Personal conversation with Mariana, 04.09.2019.

longevity and timelessness, and because of its pricing it is mostly people from thirty and up that are users. Students, and people with a lower income tend to choose for vintage or second hand clothing, that is cheaper and often more colourful. Fast fashion, as somewhat the opponent of sustainable fashion, is cheap, only fits within one fashion season, and therefore not made to last long. Fast fashion is recognizable as it follows the clothing trends, and often shows the brand of the clothing on the outer layer. New sustainable clothing does in most cases not show the brand, or that it is produced sustainable on the outer layer, forming a counterargument to the idea of performativity or social skin, as users do not show with the appearance of their clothing that they have sustainable lifestyle, or their resistance against the current fast fashion industry. Their resistance rather surfaces online on social platforms as Instagram. Users don't see sustainable lifestyles and veganism as trends, but the question stays whether using Instagram excessively might be.

Chapter 5: Berlin as a sustainable hub

'Berlin is like the Silicon Valley of Europe'¹⁰⁴, ~ written by Joëlle

The users of sustainable clothing see Berlin as a city that attracts expats and creative, young, dynamic people. If you want to set up a sustainable business, 'every other city would be more difficult than Berlin, so I think it is good to start in Berlin and then build something and move ... because of the community here. They have so many meetings, and events where you can build your network. You can just explore everything and build up your brand ... or agency'¹⁰⁵. Berlin is seen as very liberal and open-minded¹⁰⁶.

It is also relatively cheap to live in Berlin, in terms of housing and food, and you can easily find your way around if you cannot speak German¹⁰⁷. Though this statement must be slightly adjusted, as housing costs rise, and there are anti-gentrification movements in Berlin, and I observed that not everyone is as happy with people that do not speak German¹⁰⁸. Berlin is a city of movements and also active in the sense that there are demonstrations for different

¹⁰⁴ Personal conversation, Kim Boshoven, 03.20.2019.

¹⁰⁵ Quote by Selina Pube, 03.23.2019.

¹⁰⁶ Personal conversation, Nora Vehling, 03.05.2019

¹⁰⁷ Personal conversation, Lina Zuppke, 02.15.2019, and Nele Henkel, 03.17.2019.

¹⁰⁸ Based on field notes by Joëlle.

causes every week¹⁰⁹. For example, the ‘Fridays for Future’ demonstrations organised by the ‘BUNDjugend’ Berlin, that take place every single Friday¹¹⁰.

All the activities and the speed of the city made it so that most users of sustainable fashion were attracted to Berlin, but also that they do not see themselves growing old in this city, and will move in the future. ‘I am not like this is the best, and I will stay forever, but Berlin is definitely a city where anything is possible’¹¹¹.

‘Known for its freedom’¹¹², ~ written by Lonneke

One of the main words people will use to describe Berlin is ‘open-minded’. Next to words like creative, sustainable, and young, it is clear that Berlin is typified by the large amount of young, activist people living in the city. It is one of the reasons why Berlin’s creative class is still growing even though many of the other sectors have stagnated the last couple of years, and the reason why it has one of the fastest growing populations of all cities in Europe (Holm, 2013). However, some designers also critique this attitude of open-mindedness and feel it is more of a facade. For example, both Anja and Angelina consider the sustainable fashion community to be less open-minded and creative than they let on¹¹³ and Virág mentions that even though a lot of people claim to ‘have their own style’, everyone still wants to belong to a group¹¹⁴.

However, according to Virág, living sustainably is a big thing in Berlin¹¹⁵. When speaking to other designers, this sentiment is repeated. Many designers acknowledge an interesting balance they have to maintain in their company. As Berlin is one of the poorest cities in Germany and sustainable fashion can be quite expensive, many designers rely on the wealthy population in the city and tourists to get by. However, when asked why Berlin is the city where they wanted to start their company, they all agree that the sustainable community in Berlin is so big and well developed that it has created a great nursery for their business. Even though not everyone can afford their clothes, they are welcomed in the community because they are contributing to a sustainable city.

¹⁰⁹ Personal conversation with Selina, 02.06.2019, and Nora Vehling, 03.05.2019

¹¹⁰ Based on field notes of the demonstrations and small talk.

¹¹¹ Quote by Nele Henkel, 03.17.2019.

¹¹² Personal conversation Angelina 14.03.2019

¹¹³ Personal conversation Anja 26.03.2019; Personal conversation Angelina 14.03.2019.

¹¹⁴ Personal conversation Virág 20.03.2019

¹¹⁵ Personal conversation Virág 20.03.2019

When looking specifically at the sustainable fashion community, an interesting distinction can be made. Even though Berlin is a big city for sustainability, most designers agree that it is not a big fashion city. As Caecilia mentions, their customers are never very fashionable and ‘Berlin will never be a Milan or a London¹¹⁶’. This puts designers in a difficult spot, as they can benefit from the sustainable community in the city, but sometimes have to compromise in their designs. They tend to have to ‘play it safe¹¹⁷’, by designing basics and casual wear instead of high-end fashion.

Prenzlauer Berg: ‘a microcosmos of happy, artistic people¹¹⁸’, ~ written by Lonneke

Prenzlauer Berg is known for being a picture-perfect example of gentrification. An area that used to be typified by a large amount of buildings being occupied by artists as part of *Zwischennutzung*, it started to draw many young families attracted to the easy going, green, artistic vibe in the streets. When walking around, you can understand why someone would want to raise a family here. The buildings are tall and colourful. The neighbourhood feels dynamic, with many people on bikes, or walking with dogs or prams and all the parks make the area feel very idyllic. However, some remnants of the artistic past can still be seen when looking at lanterns covered with anarchistic stickers and every couple of houses a bar or shop has some strong worded political message on the windows.

Image 1.4 Poster about protesting rents in Berlin



Gentrification ~ written by Lonneke

As is well known, many cities with a large creative sector tend to draw in wealthy, young urbanites, because artistry is an attractive cultural model (Zukin in Cameron & Coaffee 2005, 42). Since the last decade the growth of the city has been quite steady, but the last few years have seen an exponential boom in population. This has led to many residential protests against rents being raised and original inhabitants being pushed out of their neighbourhoods. Many sustainable fashion labels are right in the middle of this process, because they are a part of the

¹¹⁶ Personal conversation Caecilia 01.03.2019

¹¹⁷ Personal conversation Caecilia 01.03.2019

¹¹⁸ Personal conversation Kathrin 01.03.2019

reason gentrification is happening, many of them having moved to Berlin for its creative community, as well as their businesses drawing in more like-minded people. However, these fashion designers also need the creative, sustainable community in Berlin, because it has created the environment for their business to thrive in and it functions as a great sounding board for them.

As Holm (2013, 73) describes, not every neighbourhood undergoes the same process of gentrification. Prenzlauer Berg can be seen to undergo family-gentrification, whereas Neukölln and Kreuzberg are in a process of creative gentrification. What this means for our informants, no matter the type of gentrification, is that many notice rents going up and friends having a difficult time finding a nice apartment. Kathrin has been in her shop in Prenzlauer Berg for ten years already and has seen her neighbourhood change, she specifically mentioned the rents going up, which has meant that a lot of small businesses have been replaced by larger companies. She thinks ‘it’s a shame’¹¹⁹. About Kreuzberg, Caecilia tells us that she feels the neighbourhood is changing, but that she is ‘happy that people take action to try and keep it diverse’¹²⁰.

Kreuzberg: to whom belongs this city? ~ written by Joëlle

When walking in the area you see tall apartment buildings, some old with balconies and decorations along the walls, and some more modern and industrial looking¹²¹. There are different religious buildings in the area, like mosques and churches. Some supermarkets advertise ‘world food’, and there are many eating establishments serving food from non-German cuisines, this speaks to the ethnic diversity of the area. Food wise there are also eating establishments focused on vegetarian and vegan food, and bio supermarkets advertising their ecological and vegan sensibilities¹²². These places stand out in Kreuzberg, but also the amount of graffiti and street art. Streetlights are adorned with an array of stickers for different events and with different protest slogans. Most of these protests could be placed into five main topics; welcoming refugees, thinking about reclaiming the area and thereby protesting against the building of new hotels, anarchism, pro veganism, and supporting homeless people. The mural with the text ‘to whom belongs this city’, depicts the main question within all these discussions and protests¹²³.

¹¹⁹ Personal conversation Kathrin 01.03.2019

¹²⁰ Personal conversation Caecilia 02.04.2019

¹²¹ Spatial mapping, 02.11.2019.

¹²² Spatial mapping, 02.11.2019.

¹²³ Spatial mapping, 02.13.2019.



Image 1.5 Street art in Kreuzberg at a Firefighter center

Strategies for a better world ~ written by Lonneke

‘With every purchase you make, you’re casting a vote on the type of world that you want to live in¹²⁴.’ Eilis quotes this to explain her view on being an actor in the large system of a globalized fashion industry. She believes that every purchase can make a difference and create a change. Many other designers agree with her, some calling themselves ‘drops on a wave¹²⁵,’ or seeing fashion as a medium to contribute to change¹²⁶. Thus, designers consider themselves to be active actors in the system, they use their own lifestyle choices and business strategies to contribute to a ‘better world’. Even though some are pessimistic about their odds, many see possibilities in the growing numbers in the global sustainable fashion community and all are willing to struggle to get to a certain goal.

Local & global communities

As explained in chapter 3, sustainable fashion labels use different methods to create a sense of authenticity and thus re-embed a purchaser’s relationship to the production process. Not previously discussed is the importance of localised production in the sustainable fashion community. Many fashion designers work by themselves or with a small team, making their items in a shop or studio in Berlin. They often use this localised production as a marketing

¹²⁴ Personal conversation Eilis 22.02.2019

¹²⁵ Personal conversation Virág 20.03.2019

¹²⁶ Personal conversation Lisa 21.02.2019; personal conversation Jeanne 26/02; personal conversation Angelina 14.03.2019

tool, noting that local production limits transportation costs and is thus sustainable. Local designers also play into the idea of supporting them as they are a part of the important creative community in Berlin. Furthermore, making and selling in one place is a very clear method of embedding the purchaser and designer within the production process and within Berlin.

Whereas large and ‘unauthentic’ companies face hate from Berlin’s residents, small designer-owned boutiques do not as much, because they include Berlin in their production process. De Neve et al. (2008, 5) claim that sustainable movements ‘seek to re-embed consumption in the social relations of production and exchange’. Using the language of ‘supporting a local designer’ in the marketing of a local sustainable fashion label provides a role for the purchasers and embeds them in a social relation with the designer and the product. Many local fashion designers use the slogan ‘I made my clothes’, as part of the ‘Who made my clothes’ campaign¹²⁷ as a response to indicate the transparency and fair conditions they work under. In doing so, they situate themselves as local actors and creative individuals within a largely impersonal and commercialised industry.

Graham and Gandini (2017b, 16) explain that creative actors combine their economic force and political attitude to change through ‘aest-ethical’ action. They use the market as any economic actor has to, but through the creation of community and new forms of business, they re-embed the economy in social relations. This method of collaboration to instigate change can find a very clear example in Berlin’s sustainable fashion community. Activist networks collaborate both directly and indirectly with sustainable fashion businesses. As the network gains members, the business will also gain customers. At the same time the fashion businesses provide capital and the connection to the market to help these activist networks organise change. As Lisa, the owner of Folkdays, explains, collaboration is the only way she thinks change will be possible¹²⁸. Graham and Gandini (2017a, 6) do point out, though, that collaboration is also directly linked to competition, as the pressure on creative industries is high.

This can be found in this context as well, as both the activist networks and the businesses criticize each other’s methods. Many activists are against capitalism, whereas most fashion designers try to organise change through the use of commercialisation. Fashion designers face criticism amongst one another as well. The discussion about the definition of sustainability and methods used to reach it is ongoing. As Angelina points out, some

¹²⁷ Information on the organisation and campaign, can be found on:

<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/get-involved/>

¹²⁸ Personal conversation Lisa 21.02.2019

sustainable communities can be highly critical and can cause tunnel vision¹²⁹. Because of these discussions, sustainable fashion labels might lose the connection with the global market as well as local sustainability efforts. Sustainable fashion designers do not want to be included in the general market, but through the use of business strategies they also partly exclude themselves from anti-capitalistic activist efforts. This is an effect of navigating the different levels on which the fashion industry exists. As found throughout this thesis, connection within the community is subject to many different factors, which shows the nuance of a concept like disembeddedness. Eriksen (2014, 8) defines disembeddedness as a disconnection from a ‘local and spatial fixed context’, but we see here that in the case of the designers there is not a set measurement for this disconnection. Designers navigate their environment, community and industry, but doing so does not automatically disembed them when a connection is lost. They actively use their spatial context to practice change, which is the exact opposite of being disembedded.

Taking a walk through Neukölln ~ written by Joëlle

Neukölln, just as Kreuzberg, is an area in which larger crowded streets with lots of multicultural food establishments and (bio)supermarkets, connect smaller more quiet streets¹³⁰. In the smaller streets is where the protests seem to happen, in the anarchist cafes and communes, or on the street itself written in tags or portrayed with street art. ‘We have no place for Nazi’s’, and ‘Nazi’s Raus!’ is written on a flag hanging out of a window. Within the anti-Nazi protests you can spot stickers stating ‘love yourself’, and the rainbow colours on pride flags within an LGBT+ bar¹³¹. We have been walking into sustainable clothing shops and take a break at a vegan bakery. A small boy walks in and greets the owner. They joke around and the boy gets a croissant. Later that week we end up at a burger restaurant in this area, and while we sit down outside, people walk in to greet the people working inside the restaurant. This is no coincidence, as during conversations with informants we talk about this familiarity of people within Neukölln. People know each other here.

‘There is no planet B’ ~ written by Joëlle

Users of sustainable clothing in Berlin are looking for local products and products with sustainable certificates. Reasons why locally produced products are preferred is because it

¹²⁹ Personal conversation Angelina 14.03.2019

¹³⁰ Spatial mapping, 02.26.2019

¹³¹ Spatial mapping, 04.02.2019.

means that they did not have to travel far to get to the retailer, and because it is easier to get insight in the production process of a local business. With the certifications it is more difficult. The owner of Moeon pointed out a problem with certifications by stating that sustainable clothing stores in Europe are stricter about the two sides of sustainability, the social and ecological part, before giving a product or producer a sustainable certificate than for example in the United States. There they have other certificates and standards, that do not fit with the idea of what sustainability entails for users in Germany. If there is such a thing as ‘the West’, then in the case of defining sustainability, and what standards sustainable clothing must meet, there is no united front.

Users of sustainable clothing in Berlin believe that if everyone in ‘the West’ would consume more sustainably and be less materialistic that would be great, but it would not be enough to save the planet. Choices people in Berlin make do affect other people living in other countries, but only on the long term. Mariana and Lea state that there will be a point where other countries like India and Brazil will be able to catch up with the current ways of (over)consuming in ‘the West’. Even though this is seen as their right, this will destroy the planet¹³². All the people on the planet would have to live more sustainably and consider that ‘there is no Planet B’¹³³. These examples show that in order to understand how users see the connection between local and global processes, it is needed to take a better look at how they see the future.

Most users are not optimistic about the future, but having a pessimistic mind set is not doing any good, is what they believe. In order to stay positive, people can surround themselves with people who also live a sustainable lifestyle and influence and support each other¹³⁴, and think about every small decision you make, and see the impact of it¹³⁵. For example considering that ‘if you don’t put your vegetables in plastic bags, think about how many plastic bags you have not used in a year, that is insane’¹³⁶. For the future to have a positive outcome it is not only the consumer that needs to change their ways of consuming, companies and politics need to focus and implement more sustainable ways in their policies. Consumerism, capitalism and maybe even democracy have had their best times, it is time to try something new is what some users of sustainable clothing believe. What these new ways are, is what further research should investigate. For the users, talking about spatiality is

¹³² Personal conversation with Lea Schindler 03.08.2019, and Mariana, 04.09.2019.

¹³³ Slogan of sustainable fashion store ECOALF in Berlin, and rephrased in several interviews, and Instagram.

¹³⁴ Personal conversation, Franzi Fischer, 02.28.2019.

¹³⁵ Personal conversation, Lina Zuppke, 02.15.2019.

¹³⁶ Personal conversation, Lea Schindler, 03.08.2019.

talking about the future and vice versa, and big topics that are closely connected to concepts as consumerism, capitalism, materialism and democracy should not be left out of this discussion.

The city: a backdrop, a stage ~ written by Lonneke

Both users and designers believe that Berlin is an open minded city and a hub for sustainability. The sustainable fashion community is large and considered, by both users and designers, to be a vital part of their endeavours to live sustainably. Designers interact with the community in many different ways. Even though the sustainable fashion community is a global network, it is clear that the local community is most important to businesses. They collaborate with activist activities, gain customers from the community, and are often active contributors to the cause. It can be argued that the community also helps the businesses to appear authentic to their users. Contributing to local efforts helps in embedding the relationship between the customer and brand. Even though designers have an ambivalent position within the community, both needing to provide alternative business strategies and succeeding as a business in a capitalist system, their connection to Berlin plays an important role for them.

Users believe that for anyone who wants to set up a sustainable business, Berlin is ‘the place to be’. Berlin is seen as a city that is always active and never stands still. This is good for entrepreneurs and interesting for young and creative people, but this also means that users do not see themselves grow old in this city. All these activities pulled them to the city, but now it pushes them out and makes them want to leave. The rise of living costs, as a result of gentrification, also plays a part in this. The future is uncertain, which frightens many users. They believe that if people keep on living the way they do now, the planet will get destroyed eventually. However, users also think that people should not sit still and be pessimistic. People should surround themselves with others that live sustainably and make small gestures useful within a global context. Users think globally, in the sense of thinking about the future of the whole planet, but try to achieve change on a local level, while seeing themselves as an actor within ‘the West’.

As has been explained in this thesis so far, users and designers use different methods to achieve sustainability in the fashion industry. Both groups are very aware of their position in society and what means they have to change the world. Designers tend to have a more positive view on the future, possibly because they are in a very well networked position and

can thus play an instigative role in the movement. Users tend to be more pessimistic, as they are aware that their position is less active, but one of influencing and being influenced by. However, when looking at these two large groups of actors within the community it is clear that the theme throughout all their efforts is collaboration amongst each other. The sustainable fashion community is a small, but loud, group of people and they need their numbers to instigate real change. Seeing designers, activists, and consumers shouting: ‘Hey hey, ho ho! Fast fashion has got to go!’, during The move on Fashion Revolution day, you don’t see anything of the pessimism, criticism or fear of the future¹³⁷. Instead, the community can be seen as active, conscious actors claiming the streets of their city and showing bystanders on ‘Unter der Linden’ that no matter the challenge, they are there to stay.

¹³⁷ Participant observation on 27.04.2019

Conclusion & discussion ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle

For three months we conducted fieldwork in Berlin and spoke to users and designers, from small talk to formal interviews, did participant observation, and enjoyed the hospitality of shop and atelier owners. We dove into the pile of literature and data collected to find answers to our sub questions, all in order to answer our main research question: *how do users and designers in Berlin's sustainable clothing industry express norms and values about sustainability?* This chapter will take a better look at all the findings together and reflect on possible gaps in our research.

Authenticity ~ written by Lonneke

Designers are a very heterogeneous group of people when it comes to business organisation, focus and styles of design. However, they all strive to tell a story about their sustainable practices that will strike their customers as authentic and will help connect the customer to their brand as well as the larger sustainable fashion community. The stories they tell focus on their social engagements and technological innovations. Offering a positive alternative to the fast fashion industry is their prerogative and they all see this as a combined effort. They try to engage their clientele, with an overlapping theme of longevity as a focus. They think garments should be made to last and a big aspect of longevity is a respect for the production process, skill, and design in the garment. More subconsciously, all designers use methods of embedding producers and consumers through the use of transparency, story and style.

One of the concepts that keeps coming back here is authenticity. As Smelik (2011, 81) explains, authenticity helps constitute an identity that feels 'real'. This realness is found in the sustainable fashion community in the styles and stories. Authenticity can be constituted in many different ways by the designers in the sustainable fashion community. In minimalism authenticity can be found in the connection to mindfulness and the focus on the practical worth of clothing. For users, new sustainable clothing often fits in the minimalist style, is timeless and strives for longevity. The clothing is often dark, white or grey. Most users of designer clothing are women above thirty, mainly because others can't afford the clothing. Herein lies a problem for the sustainable designer. They cannot make their clothing cheaper if they want to make a profit. Students or people with a lower income tend to choose for vintage or second hand clothing, which is often more colourful, and costs less. Users would buy fast fashion when found in a second hand shop, but never new. In these more eccentric styles

authenticity can be found in the uniqueness of traditional crafts and colour combinations. Some designers also choose to make eccentric clothing, but, again, only for a limited clientele. Both styles foster a meaningful connection between the designer and their garment, as well as the customer and their new piece of clothing. This connection can also be found in the stories communicated by designers. Transparency, accountability, and reliability are at the centre of the sustainable business strategies and foster a sense of ‘authentic’ business practices. These stories help connect both the designer and its customer to the bigger sustainable fashion philosophy.

Authenticity also helps connect the user and designer to the global industry and its production processes. We have explained that globalisation can cause disembeddedness, because the market loses its transparency and locality (Eriksen 2014,8; De Neve et al. 2008,6). We can now conclude that the sustainable fashion community is actively seeking to re-embed itself in production processes as its sustainable message is critiquing these exact processes. Disembeddedness should be used as a nuanced concept, though, because it is not a mere description of disconnection. The informants spoken to for this thesis might often feel disconnected, but we can conclude that they are far from disembedded as they actively question their own connection to locality and use their local as well as global context in their sustainable practices. As Crane and Bovone (2006, 320) state, fashion has an intimate association to the self, which seems to be the reason why ‘connecting’ is such an important theme running through all practices. We agree with Hansen’s theory that globalisation has created a ‘new world of dress’(2004). Globalisation has created a fast fashion industry, disembedding our relationships to commodities and worsening environmental and labour conditions. The sustainable fashion community in Berlin might be considered a response to this new world, as for example the Fashion Revolution Campaign ‘Who made my clothes?’, featured on the front of this thesis, is focussed on re-establishing a connection between users and producers. Connection between the different actors leads to a compassion for everyone within the industry, which fosters a strong activist message. Also, a connection to garments helps in solidifying sustainable practices, because a personal relationship has been constituted with an otherwise ordinary commodity.

Users' experiences ~ written by Joëlle

Users are the people that sell, purchase, swap, or recycle (sustainable) clothing. These are all the activities that fit in the second part of the lifecycle of garments¹³⁸. In the users' opinion, sustainability consists of a social and environmental aspect, this resembles what scholars like Hudson and Hudson (2003) state about the concept. Though some users would like to add a third aspect to the definition of sustainability, which is animal welfare. New sustainable clothing has these two (or three) aspect implemented. The clothing is produced fair and ethical, and with organic materials. Although some shops focus more on one aspect than the other. Second hand and vintage clothing is sustainable because there are no extra resources used to make the clothing, and the clothing has proven to last long.

Fast fashion consumers are in their opinion only rarely people that honestly do not care about sustainability. Users believe fast fashion purchasers are often people that have not been informed about the topic of sustainability yet, and users state that people perceive having the time and means to inform yourself as a luxury. Fast fashion itself is seen as somewhat the opponent of sustainable fashion, as it is cheap, only fits within one fashion season, and is therefore not made to last long. Like what Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), Levy and Weitz (2008) said to be part of the definition of fast fashion, users of sustainable clothing believe that fast fashion is recognizable as it follows the clothing trends, but add that it often shows the brand of the clothing on the outer layer .

New sustainable clothing does in most cases not show the brand, or that it is produced sustainable on the outer layer. This goes against the idea of performativity by Judith Butler (1988) or the concept of social skin by Terence Turner (1980), because users do not show with the appearance of their clothing that they live sustainably, or their resistance against the current fast fashion industry. Their resistance is mostly online on social platforms as Instagram, though Fashion Revolution got a lot of people together protesting on the streets of Berlin. During the march people were holding signs, and wore the slogan #whomademyclothes printed on their shirts, but on a daily basis users believe that they can define themselves and create their own styles, and do not need clothing brands to do so.

Within Berlin ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle

Both users and designers believe that Berlin is an open-minded city and a hub for sustainability. The sustainable fashion community is large and considered by both users and

¹³⁸ Lifecycle as portrayed on image 1.1 in the introduction of this thesis.

designers, to be a vital part of their endeavours to live sustainably. Designers interact with the community in many different ways. Even though the sustainable fashion community is a global network, it is clear that the local community is most important to its businesses. They collaborate in activities, gain customers from the community, and are often active contributors to the cause. It can be argued that the community also helps the businesses to appear authentic to their users. Contributing to local efforts helps in embedding the relationship between the customer and brand. Even though designers have an ambivalent position within the community, both needing to provide alternative business strategies and succeeding as a business in a capitalist system, their connection to Berlin plays an important role for them.

Users believe that for anyone who wants to set up a sustainable business, Berlin is ‘the place to be’. Berlin is seen as a city that is always active and never stands still. This is good for entrepreneurs and interesting for young and creative people, but this also means that users do not see themselves grow old in this city. All these activities pulled them to the city, but now it pushes them out and makes them want to leave. The rise of living costs, as a result of gentrification, also plays a part in this. The future is uncertain, which frightens many users. They believe that if people keep on living the way they do now, the planet will get destroyed eventually. However, users also think that people should not sit still and be pessimistic. People should surround themselves with others that live sustainably and make small gestures useful within a global context. Users think globally, in the sense of thinking about the future of the whole planet, but try to achieve change on a local level, while seeing themselves as an agent within ‘the West’.

The future ~ written by Lonneke and Joëlle

Users and designers use different methods to achieve sustainability in the fashion industry. Both groups are very aware of their position in society and what means they have to change the world. Designers tend to have a more positive view on the future, possibly because they are in a very well networked position and can thus play an instigative role in the movement. Users tend to be more pessimistic, as they are aware that their position is less active, but one of influencing and being influenced by. However, when looking at these two large groups of actors within the community it is clear that the theme throughout all their efforts is collaboration amongst each other. The sustainable fashion community is a small but loud, group of people and they need their numbers to instigate real change.

The future can be seen as a challenge for both users as designers. How to deal with climate change, changing markets and gentrification in Berlin, to mention a few hurdles to overcome. There are also more positive challenges, such as upcoming innovative clothing production techniques, the rise of circular fashion, and more and more clothing brands that try to obtain certifications for fairly and sustainably produced clothing. Especially this last one might be considered a positive development as it will allow users to get insight in production processes. It also shows the slow but steady transformation of the fashion industry. We believe that certifications could add value and transparency to the industry, and will have benefits for both users as designers, but we also know that with the amount of nuance needed when discussing sustainable fashion strategies, we wish this community *viel Glück* in finding consensus.

Discussion

Berlin has proven to be a very interesting city to conduct research about sustainable topics. In fact there were too many people with clear opinions about sustainability to talk to within the timespan of three months. The population of users and designers was too large for our short research period, even after focusing on three areas instead of all of Berlin. Focusing on multiple areas can be very useful for researchers as the neighbourhoods in Berlin are all very different, almost as small cities in themselves¹³⁹, but it also poses an obstacle to researchers who have not put in the time and effort to find out more about these neighbourhoods, and instead treat them as similar. We found our informant populations through contacting them via social media, contact information on their websites and, most importantly, by our research method of spatial mapping. We found out quickly that this population, although later found to be quite diverse in perspectives on sustainability, is very homogeneous. While men play a part in this community, we predominantly have female informants. Furthermore, even though we value inclusivity highly, our population, especially the designers, mainly consists of Western Europeans. We however do think our populations are representative of the larger sustainable fashion community as we often member checked our data and found consensus in most answers.

¹³⁹ Personal conversation with Lea Schindler, 03.08.2019.

Clothing as a research tool ~ written by Joëlle

Hansen (2004) emphasizes in her article the importance of doing anthropological research on people's motives to wear certain kinds of clothing. Not only is clothing important for the expression of sustainability for designers and users of sustainable clothing in Berlin, it is also needed in trying to understand their way of looking at sustainability in itself. Users and designers both believe that wearing sustainable clothing is inevitable when someone wants to live a sustainable lifestyle, one simply cannot overlook what they wear if they strive for a more sustainable world. The clothing industry has too much of an impact on pollution of waters, climate change, workers lives etc. to be overlooked when trying to understand sustainability. Scholars have not yet been able to find an all-compassing definition of sustainability, and we believe that looking at sustainable lifestyles of individuals as of groups whereby wearing sustainable clothing is believed to be mandatory, can push research further in understanding the phenomenon that is sustainability.

The market ~ written by Joëlle

The actual buyers and designers of sustainable clothing in Berlin seldom come together to discuss what they all think sustainable clothing should look like and how it should be priced. There is a miscommunication within the market between the designers and users. Designers have the feeling that the users in Berlin do not dare to be creative enough or outspoken in their clothing choices, while users admire what designers create but simply cannot afford to buy their clothing and have to choose for cheaper options. Another example of this miscommunication is directed at men's clothing, during the protest march we noticed that almost fifty percent of the people protesting were men. Why are there so many sustainable clothing shops that have only a small corner of their shops dedicated to men's clothing, or in some cases sell no clothing for men at all? We believe that research focused on the relation between designers and users (male and female), could be useful for filling in research gaps for scholars, and provide information for designers and users themselves. They might get more insight in each other's expressions and values of sustainability and would be more capable of finding a way to serve their common (sustainable) goals.

Minimalism & nature in fashion ~ written by Lonneke

When walking through neighbourhoods with many sustainable shops, scouring social media, or attending events within the community, it is striking how often sustainable items are

associated with elements of nature¹⁴⁰. It is known in many different scientific disciplines that the draw of nature is often found in sustainable endeavours (van den Berg et al, 2007). As we have found in our research that the search for embeddedness and authenticity is a large aspect of the sustainable fashion community, the interest in ‘natural’ labels could be another part of this. However, this trend can be found in a much broader sustainable discourse than just fashion and could be an interesting topic for research for many different disciplines.

The same goes for minimalism. As briefly discussed in this thesis, minimalism in style and material is an expression of sustainability within the sustainable fashion community in Berlin. As Dopierala (2017, 69) mentions a big part of minimalistic ideologies features similar ideas about nature as in sustainable ideologies. She even mentions that many people will practice sustainability alongside minimalism. During our research we happened upon this ideology by accident, especially because the link between minimalism and sustainability has not been broadly discussed or researched yet. Within the short period of time we had to investigate this subject matter, it became apparent that these two ideologies share an interesting dynamic that is well worth further, and longer, research.

Global and local dynamics in sustainable fashion activism ~ written by Lonneke

What this research topic has shown us is the nuance of concepts like local and global dynamics, specifically related to activist movements. We were not able to deeply focus on the activism within the sustainable fashion community, as it was one of many topics we researched during our time, it did become clear to us that notions of grassroots movement or top-down structure did not completely fit. The movement showed us an interesting dynamic between companies and citizens working together, both using a capitalist, set system, as well as using quite horizontal structures in their movements. This had lead us to believe that new research is needed about activism in our time. The sustainable fashion movement is growing globally and is a part of many other sustainable movements gaining numbers throughout the world. If these movements function similarly to Berlin, a new theoretical analysis is needed about the way these movements function in relation to the world.

¹⁴⁰ Spatial mapping in all three neighbourhoods

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Appendix 1: Popular summary

For three months we conducted research in Berlin, spoke to many users and designers of sustainable fashion, and enjoyed the hospitality of shop -and boutique owners. We dove into the pile of literature and data collected to find answers to our main research question: *how do users and designers in Berlin's sustainable clothing industry express norms and values about sustainability?* During our research we explored three main themes: sustainability, expression and spatiality. Lonneke focused on designers and Joëlle on users of sustainable fashion.

One of the concepts that kept coming back was authenticity, by which we mean a sense of 'realness' found in materials, such as clothing. The reason why authenticity is so important, is because clothing is closely associated with people's identity. Authenticity contributes to a relationship between designers, users, and clothing items. It is expressed by designers in many different ways. Through a minimalistic style, authenticity can be found in the connection to mindfulness and the focus on the practical worth of clothing. There is also a more eccentric style, through which designers use the uniqueness of traditional crafts and colour combinations to make their designs feel authentic. These expressions of authenticity foster a meaningful connection between the designer and their garment, as well as the customer and their new piece of clothing. For users, new sustainable clothing often fits in the minimalist style, as it is timeless and strives for longevity. The clothing is often dark, white or grey. Students or people with a lower income tend to choose vintage or second hand clothing, which is more eccentric and costs less. Users would buy fast fashion if it is in a second hand shop, but never new.

Authenticity can also be found in the stories communicated by designers. Transparency, accountability, and reliability are central to sustainable business strategies and they are explained within the stories told by designers. Respect for garments and the production process is a cornerstone of the designers' practices and it helps connect them to their environment and clientele as well as to a bigger sustainable fashion philosophy. This connection provides a strong backbone to sustainable practices, such as a search for longevity or clothing swaps.

Users are the people that sell, purchase, swap, or recycle (sustainable) clothing. In the users' opinion sustainability consist of a social and environmental aspect. Some users would like to add a third aspect to the definition of sustainability, which is animal welfare. New sustainable clothing has these two (or three) aspect implemented. The clothing is produced

fair and ethical, and with organic materials. Although some shops focus more on one aspect than the other. Second hand and vintage clothing is sustainable because there are no extra resources used to make the clothing, and the clothing has proven to last long. Users believe fast fashion purchasers are often people that have not been informed about the topic of sustainability yet, and people should look at having the time and means to inform yourself as a luxury. Fast fashion itself is seen as somewhat the opponent of sustainable fashion, as it is cheap, only fits within one fashion season, and is therefore made as disposable. Fast fashion can be recognized as it follows the clothing trends, and often clearly shows a brand name.

New sustainable clothing does in most cases not show the brand or its sustainable production on the outer layer. Users believe that they can define themselves and create their own styles, and do not need clothing brands to do so. This is interesting as it goes against literature about this subject stating that people wear clothing that would explicitly show that they live a sustainable lifestyle, or their resistance against the current fast fashion industry. Their resistance is mostly online on social platforms like Instagram, but they also come together like when Fashion Revolution organised a protest march.

Both users and designers believe that Berlin is an open minded city and a hub for sustainability. The sustainable fashion community is large and considered to be a vital part of their endeavours to live sustainably. Users believe that for anyone who wants to set up a sustainable business, Berlin is 'the place to be'. Berlin is seen as a city that is always active and never stands still. This is good for entrepreneurs and interesting for young and creative people. Designers interact with the community in many different ways. Even though the sustainable fashion community is a global network, it is clear that the local community is most important to businesses. They collaborate in activities, gain customers from the community, and are often active contributors to the cause. It can be argued that the community also helps the businesses to appear authentic to their users. Contributing to local efforts helps customers connect to a brand, because they will see the brand as part of the activist community. Even though designers have an ambivalent position within the community, both needing to provide alternative business strategies and succeeding as a business in a capitalist system, their connection to Berlin plays an important role for them.

Users do not see themselves grow old in the city, where once all the events happening in the city attracted them, this now pushes them away. The rise of living costs, as a result of gentrification, also plays a part in this. The future is uncertain, which frightens many users. They believe that if people keep on living the way they do now, the planet will get destroyed

eventually. However, users also think that people should not sit still and be pessimistic, but should surround themselves with others that live sustainably and use their lifestyle to impact on a global level. Users think globally, in the sense of thinking about the future of the whole planet, but try to achieve change on a local level, while seeing themselves as agents within 'the West'.

Designers tend to have a more positive view on the future, possibly because they are in a very well networked position and can thus play an instigative role in the movement. Users tend to be more pessimistic, as they are aware that their position is less active, but one of influencing and being influenced by. However, when looking at these two large groups within the community it is clear that the theme throughout all their efforts is collaboration amongst each other. The sustainable fashion community is a small, but loud, group of people and they need their numbers to instigate real change.

