



clio padovani and paul whittaker

sustainability
and the
social fabric

Europe's New
Textile Industries

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SUSTAINABILITY AND THE SOCIAL FABRIC



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Europe's New Textile Industries

**CLIO PADOVANI AND
PAUL WHITTAKER**

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PREFACE

This book was written between 2014 and 2016. It aimed to present new models of industry within a critical commentary, underpinned by European Union funded research conducted between 2008 and 2016.

On June 23, 2016, the outcome of the UK referendum on membership of the European Union opened a new unexpected chapter in pan European academic research and knowledge sharing partnerships. In this new context, we offer this study as a snapshot in time, a record of a positive period, when industrial recovery and social well-being began to emerge through collaborative thinking necessitated by the 2008 financial crisis.

Our research shows that strong leadership and a commitment to a way of working that can add value are crucial to socially sustainable enterprise. It is human beings, however, individuals, and crucially, collectives, who properly decide the terms of economic and environmental well-being. For this reason, we trust that the commitment to innovate and share to the best advantage of a sustainable European textiles and fashion industry will continue to endure.

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This book would not have come about without the knowledge and insights gained through participation in international European Union funded projects that aimed to facilitate the competitiveness of the European textiles and fashion industry. These projects provided us with the opportunity to consider public policy, culture, and local enterprise, through the academic lens of Higher Education. The projects promoted new thinking about the economic and social impact of creativity, and enabled the establishment of long-term professional relationships between academics, local government partners, culture providers, and textile industry entrepreneurs. We would therefore like to acknowledge all the international partners of the Eurotex and Plustex projects, who generously hosted knowledge exchange meetings, and industry visits. Special thanks to Eulalia Morral i Romeu; Filippo Guarini and Laura Fiesoli, Fondazione Museo del Tessuto; Paolo Guarnieri and Nik Besnik, Municipality of Prato, Italy; José Machado and Gabriel Pontes, AMAVE, Associação de Municípios do Vale do Ave, Portugal; and John Hopkins, our research team colleague at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.

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We would also like to acknowledge the unstinting help of our friends and colleagues, in particular, Ruth and Chris Thornton, who patiently fed back on first drafts without alarm, and motivated us through some of the harder sections; Dr. Walter van Rijn, our image researcher, who helped us track down all of our chosen images; and Ally McCombe, who helped us through the long hours of style guide and formatting.

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INTRODUCTION

CLIO PADOVANI

Sustainability and the Social Fabric: Europe's New Textile Industries is an evidence-based inquiry into some of the transformations occurring in the textile and fashion sector. To set the context, the textile and clothing business is one of the main manufacturing sectors in Europe. Data reported by Euratex, the European Apparel and Textile Confederation, note that in 2014, the turnover of textiles and fashion manufacture amounted to €165 billion, with further additional investments worth around €4 billion. Due to a revival of production in the European Union, the 173,000 active textile and clothing companies employed over 1.6 million workers.¹ While these figures are impressive, our research indicates that the economic importance of the textiles and fashion sector and its tradition of manufacturing can be influenced by smaller numbers of specialist companies and individuals that maintain and develop the industry. *Sustainability and the Social Fabric* tells the story of some of those companies and how they have been able to sustain and renew some aspects of the industry by their innovative use of artisanal skills and generational knowledge embedded in their communities.

Drawing on a series of case studies from across Europe, this book presents key examples of textile and fashion companies that are successful by virtue of their links with a specific European community. Each example brings to attention the intriguing mix of leadership, collaboration, traditional values, and skills development in a context of public policy initiatives that aim to encourage renewed confidence in niche, small, and medium-sized textile enterprises. The objective of the book is to provide an evidence-based study on how harnessing the qualities of making through practice can influence new ways of considering social, economic, and political values. *Sustainability and the Social Fabric* analyzes a niche of the sustainability argument within the textile and fashion industry sector. It responds to the specific conditions created by the 2008 economic crisis, and should be seen in the context of the European Union's innovation and growth agenda. Key discussions that impact on the

theme of the book are social and economic policy, social enterprise, and its potential to influence innovation. Consideration of the material culture of cloth, its local production, and history informs discussion of the postcrisis textile and fashion industry sector, as well as the creative thinking underpinning the adoption of new sustainable practices. The case studies represent evidence of a growth in artisanal quality manufacturing and socially driven technological innovation, while presenting connections between business innovation and community sustainability. We suggest that the diverse models of practice represented in the case studies contribute to new growth in the sector, design innovation, and improved social cohesion.

The challenges of a socially sustainable textiles and fashion industry

Current scholarship into environmental and ecological sustainability underpins the premise of this study. The topic emphasizes the value of socially sustainable business practices for a competitive textiles and fashion industry, particularly for the knowledge-driven, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We offer an opportunity for reflection on the culture of material and craft skills and how this culture can be exploited. By foregrounding creative thinking and skills, we explore the proposition that the tacit knowledge and capabilities inherent in manufacturing communities represent an opportunity for innovation.

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, social challenges and sustainable communities have emerged as one of the key concerns in European policy. Stable and self-sustaining communities matter to international industrial policies that focus on competitiveness and the knowledge economy, to the political agendas of growth and the development of local jobs, and to the individuals who contribute to and develop communities. The challenge of refugee migration and displaced communities places great importance on policy and strategies that provide practical road maps to social integration, as well as transition into new ways of living and working. The creative thinking that we have found in some of the specialist textile and fashion companies in this book can perhaps come to influence better, more widespread understanding of the benefits of socially aware entrepreneurship. We propose that, when sustainability is a matter of community engagement, social benefit is not divorced from creative innovation and economic success.

In this book, we focus on business innovation with a strong emphasis on industrial and artisanal skills embedded in the community. The European textile and clothing sector aims to distinguish itself through a knowledge-based economy that increasingly relies on collaborative relationships with the social,

cultural, and technical skills capital rooted in its local communities. Of primary importance to us, while investigating areas of activity often associated with the social sciences, is to maintain a frame of reference that prioritizes the creative industries, the narratives of making, and the evolution of skills and material knowledge that are particular to communities and their people. This is consistent with what Richard Sennett, in *The Craftsman*, 2008, describes as “what the process of making concrete things reveals to us about ourselves.”² Material history and the history of made objects, which include the fabrics and garments that comprise our field of study, can convey to others the narratives of making, of what is made, and its significance. Sennett observes that these stories, in turn, might generate “religious, social, and political values.”³

As practitioners and academics with backgrounds in Textiles and Fine Art, we have, over time, developed a shared interest in the material histories of objects and images and their ability to capture and transmit significant values through their social narratives. Working in a research-led institution that spans business and the creative arts has provided a rich environment for researching the contexts of creativity and innovation. Considering the values of community, creativity, and engagement, we seek to offer an opportunity for students to acquire knowledge of creativity in innovation, and prompt thinking that might lead to more responsible, socially sustainable practices in globalized industries.

Plustex: An evidence-based approach

The evidence-based approach taken in this book is mainly grounded on knowledge acquired through research conducted as part of Plustex, a three-year European Union Interreg IVC project.⁴ Between 2011 and 2014, Plustex brought together nine international partners based in well-known European textile-producing regions, to collect and evidence the impact of regional public policy on improving the competitiveness of the textile and fashion industry. The research was limited to six areas of policy (themes) identified by regional industrialists as the most significant in affecting their economic future. Evaluation of the transferability of each partner's research was one of the criteria that enabled our reflection on the strategic impact of policy on industry. Knowledge sharing meetings included industry visits that enabled further understanding of what the 2008 financial crisis meant for regional textile producers.

The Plustex project introduced our research team to debates that focused on public policies that prioritized support for the creative industries. By researching the themes of the project, we found that the UK and mainland Europe have distinctly different arts and business policies, particularly with regard to the support of young entrepreneurs. This separation in thinking was found to have

profound effects on the development of design-led start-ups and, conversely, in exploiting the use of creativity as a business advantage.

The content of *Sustainability and the Social Fabric* is underpinned by reference to some key concepts and thoughts. First, the author Richard Sennett, mentioned above, suggests that craftsmanship is “the desire to do a job well for its own sake,” and argues that the qualities of skill, commitment, and judgment, brought together in thoughtful labor, produce “viable proposals about how to conduct a life with skill.”⁵ In our case studies, and based on our research of other businesses not covered within this book, a version of this concept helps underpin the missions of businesses that put people at their center. This can be demonstrated internationally in the work of the American company Alabama Chanin, described in Chapter 2, so as to provide a context for the Spanish company Teixidors. Alabama Chanin has prospered through the recovery of local and historical textile production skills. The personal narratives of Alabama quilters are one of the compelling stories that have emerged from an enterprise that has a community focus. Everywhere, when researching this book, we have found evidence of how personal histories influence both social activity and business practice, be it an individual’s success in finding work, a first-generation company looking out for its workers, or a multigenerational business searching its archived past to ensure a prosperous future.

In thinking about the account of making and the made object, we consider narrative to be a personal and social history construction. In this, we reference the cultural historical approach of Simon Schama who, in *Citizens*, observes that “narrative...weaves between the private and public lives of the citizens.”⁶ The stories we evidence bring into light both the importance of individual contributions and their achievements, as well as the added value narrative associated with artisan-made objects. In Australia, expressions of hybrid culture and the personal histories of refugee and migrant communities are finding a voice through the fashion social enterprises set up in Sydney and Melbourne. Organizations like The Social Outfit, referenced in Chapter 5, seek to ensure the sustainability of migrant communities by training them to design and produce fashion influenced by their diaspora. This compelling product narrative has a heritage, by virtue of the individual designers and makers, that spans centuries and expands the notion of storytelling. Increasingly, the voices of individuals—citizens, to recall Schama—provide an authentic account of the way businesses promote their creativity, integrity, or longevity. Narratives can create new bonds with consumers and develop new markets among those customers who desire to participate in authentic and responsible lifestyles.

Finally, we acknowledge the wide-ranging discussion on crafts that has been central to the continued success of the UK creative industries. In *The Invention of Craft*, Glenn Adamson focuses his study on “today’s climate of postdisciplinary flux.” In his view, “The stark dichotomies suggested by the

pairing of craft/industry no longer hold.”⁷ While we share Adamson’s conviction, our interviews with industry and associated professionals based in the UK and mainland Europe suggest that this conviction is only partially established. For the purposes of this book, we have adopted Adamson’s definition of craft as “making something well through hand skill” and adapted our thinking through reflection on his understanding of the word “artisan” as a skilled worker that might be defined best by the French and Italian dictionary definitions.⁸ We use the words industrial artisan where we want to indicate working in a manufacture context that benefits from the qualities associated with the handmade, the production of small runs of manufactured goods that are informed by time-honed skills, tacit knowledge of processes and materials, and tradition usually associated with a craft maker.

Chapter structure

The chapters and case studies each differently engage with the theme of sustainability. They constitute reflections on observations made in situ and responses to real business or social challenges. Their format is a mix of description of the complex reality of the entrepreneur in the textile and fashion sector and engagement with relevant literature. They open, for nonspecialists, insights into academic discourse, the creation of value, communities of practice, collaboration, social sustainability, and public policy initiatives. Where possible, we have included a structured interview with a professional linked to the relevant case study.

In Chapter 1, “Museums and the Knowledge Economy: Developing Competitive Advantage for the Future,” we address the theme of social sustainability by focusing on how culture and heritage can help maintain communities that are closely linked to local textile industries. We present a view of how textile organizations, previously thought to work discretely, are gradually becoming more interconnected. The chapter demonstrates how, in some European Union regions with long-standing traditions of textile manufacturing, specialist clustering activities are served by the efforts of regionally based textile museums. Increasingly integrated within their local social, political, and manufacturing communities, whose culture and interests they represent, museums can offer leadership and stimulus in transnational knowledge transfer projects, and in the development of the networks that can aid business innovation.

Chapter 2, “Weaving a Social Structure: Achieving Specialist Distinction,” foregrounds the theme of social sustainability from the perspective of cooperation and mutual benefit. It demonstrates how a Spanish textile cooperative, Teixidors, creates a sense of authenticity in its products, not through technological means,

but by offering a different experience of material and emotional relationships. The chapter references the academic and literary thinking of Walter Benjamin to frame a discussion around authenticity in the production of, and engagement with, material objects. A comparison is offered by way of the authentic traditions of textile production maintained by the sustainable community model of the American company Alabama Chanin. The chapter exposes how industries can create an experience of value through highly specialized products that benefit from social difference. The forty-five weavers and finishers at Teixidors, a social group that could have been marginalized by their learning difficulties, offer a model of textile enterprise in which consumers contribute to the creation of the authentic. This genuine cooperative project has enabled both better integration of the local community and the strong international development of the Teixidors brand.

The theme of social sustainability is developed in Chapter 3, “Collaborative Leadership, Provenance, and the Power of Place,” by assessing the importance of leadership, the value of local networks, and the mutual recognition of shared benefits arising from cooperation. The focus of this chapter is on the Harris Tweed producers in the Outer Hebrides, a craft-based cluster that until 2006 was facing terminal decline. The geographical place and protected brand of Harris Tweed both enabled the product’s iconic premium quality and, in equal measure, disabled its manufacturing community. While the story of the recovery and development of Harris Tweed is referenced to provide context, the focus of the chapter is located in the clustering and networking activities needed to ensure the survival of what was officially designated a fragile community. The recovery of a manufacturing community in crisis offers a model through which to consider planning and cooperation as fundamental prerequisites when facing the challenges faced by today’s artisanal textile producers. The chapter identifies future skills development and the smart specialization strategies endorsed by the European Commission as tools for the empowerment of socially and economically fragmented textile production clusters. The case study is not supported by an interview, but has been extensively informed by conversations held with Kristina Macleod, of the Harris Tweed Authority, during the spring of 2016.

Chapter 4, “Enterprise and Social Value: Responsible Innovation in the Denim Industry,” engages with issues of environmental sustainability by weaving it into the broader context of social innovation. The chapter engages with the theme of entrepreneurial innovation and technological discovery. Considering the ethical and well-being issues for the workforce as a springboard for innovation, we explore the idea of key enabling technologies (KETs) and the goods and services the European Commission believes will help address the societal challenges of the future. The case study of the family-owned, Portuguese company Pizarro provides the focus for observing the entrepreneurial process and the

commitment to innovate informed by social responsibility. Originally a textile dyeing company, Pizarro is a very large employer in the region, finishing garments for global companies like Inditex and its subsidiaries. Mindful of designer trends for worn and softer looks in the use of denim, and the industrial accidents in underregulated outsourced textile factories, Pizarro has innovated to promote new, nontoxic processes. The company maximizes the long-term capabilities of its community and the high added value of its proposition, while maintaining a long-standing familial character.

Chapter 5, “Social Enterprise, Creative Arts and Community Development for Marginal or Migrant Populations,” tests the premise that knowledge exchange promoted by universities, government, and private stakeholders can foster the conditions by which communities can become more socially inclusive, more cohesive, and self-sufficient. Social sustainability is investigated from the perspective that business enterprise can promote a story of individual and community empowerment in environments that might otherwise have low expectations for future achievement. The very diverse experiences of refugee populations and inner-city youth unemployment are referenced through the initiatives of two Australian companies, The Social Outfit and The Social Studio, as well as, in the UK, the training and manufacturing company Fashion Enter. In Australia, the cultural heritage of refugees informs the designs and garments produced by these social enterprises that have created self-sustaining training and business development networks. The London-based case study shows how challenges arising from unemployment in young people have been transformed by a social enterprise that offers recruits new routes to qualifications and manufacturing apprenticeships, while promoting the recovery and retention of fashion technology skills.

Chapter 6, “Made in Italy: Reclaiming Social Heritage and Artisan Know-How,” completes the thematic exploration of social sustainability by calling attention to the value and mutual benefit to the textile industry of unique, time-honed skill sets within artisanal communities. The specialization of artisanal manufacture and pride in its quality is captured in the case study of the Italian woolen mill, Faliero Sarti. Faliero Sarti’s extensive industrial archive charts a history of design and technological progress based on the craftsmanship of its workers. The success of this company remains conditional on specialized knowledge embedded in its community. The regional district, active in wool production since the Middle Ages, is a reservoir of tacit knowledge employed to facilitate problem-based innovation and very high quality standards. Consistent with this historical trajectory, the company compares its business evolution to the progressive postwar identification of Italy as a nation of world-class industrial artisans. The case study provides an opportunity to review contemporary points of view around the role of knowledge-driven craftsmanship in ensuring competitive advantage and community sustainability.