**Journal of Fashion Practice**

**Special Issue on Fashion Localism**

**Note from the editors of Fashion Practice**

The general editors of Fashion Practice, Sandy Black and Marilyn Delong, would like to thank our guest editors Kate Fletcher and Ingun Klepp for their work in developing this Special Issue on Localism in fashion. With its focus on localism as a movement concerned with generating knowledge for change, we see an emerging concept for fashion. This reaches beyond a more familiar territory, where the notion of localism may be concentrated on marketing a place, country or region through the fibre and garments made there - for example see the previous special issue ‘Fashion Made in Italy’ (2014, Volume 6 Issue 2). We view this current edition as the beginning of a stimulating debate on the topic of localism in fashion, and warmly invite readers to contribute to the conversation by submitting research articles or commentary in response, especially on the concept of localism in relation the wider fashion industry.

**Editorial**

The global fashion sector is contested. The environmental crisis – a creeping mega crisis that includes mass extinction of species, climate change, myriad pollution dangers, social inequity, resource depletion – acts as a formidable critique of the fashion sector status-quo. The dominant fashion industry model of low cost, large volume, standardised clothing products, marked by temporality and created through a process of intensive commercialisation and long-distance trade is increasingly exposed as a system in need of systemic change. But what form will alternatives take? This Special Issue explores the frameworks, dynamics and practice of localism as one route to radical sustainability change.

Localism is a process that subordinates economic decisions to communities and nature. It shapes activity by a region’s natural factors and by what is intriguing and vibrant in a place to ensure its long-term prosperity. It is typically small scale; characterised by self-reliance, practices shaped by traditions, necessity, climate and a distributed form of authority, leadership and political power. Whereas the forces of globalisation act centrifugally, moving away from the distinction of a specific ecosystem or place; localism is a centripetal movement, concentrating economic and political power inside communities. Seen in the fashion context, it describes a highly-decentralised textile and clothing system reflecting ecological conditions, changed economic priorities, community empowerment, heterogeneous products, local stories, myriad dress practices and fewer goods. Root and branch, it is different to the prevailing global fashion industry story; a transformation of the sectors underlying organising structures and the garments it creates. The implications of such changes for the system are many and varied. It may, for example, catalyse new knowledge about products and their production within the people who buy them, as consumers’ proximity to sites of manufacture changes understanding and respect for goods. At smaller scales of activity, raw materials may be adapted to the finished product or the other way around – the finished products may enhance the qualities of the raw materials. Geographical closeness may reduce misunderstandings within a value chain and increase cooperation. It may even lead to less waste.

It is into the space that this Special Issue steps. It is at least somewhat true that ‘local’ is part of the contemporary textiles and clothing vernacular; consider for example heritage fibres, traditional cloth construction techniques, the highly skilled techniques of hand-finishing which are only practicable at small scales. Further, clothing manufacturing activity is increasingly moving ‘home’, that is relocating production near high value markets to reduce lead times and cut costs. Indeed all of these features can be seen to be have been adopted within fashion brands in various configurations and at different scales as part of conventional business practices. Yet as a coherent conceptual framework and explicit set of practices for sustainability change, localism is little explored in the fashion context. To address this gap and catalyse action in this area, we set about editing this volume. It is said that capacity for change and social action is based in language (Klepp et al., 2017). And so our idea was that in order to facilitate activism in this area, we needed to write about it, and encourage others to do the same. It is a fact that the economic world order sees fashion dictated from and worn in the Global North while it is produced in the Global South. Economic surplus ends up in the former, while the manufacturing nations are left with environmental problems and, increasingly, with waste. A common point of discussion within these flows of resource and activity are the working conditions in producer countries and the loss of manufacturing jobs in consumer ones. However, just as much of a problem from the perspective of the Global North, is loss of knowledge. Knowledge of fibre, cloth and garment is sustained by historical memory, but moves with production and is today increasingly held in the Global South.

Our aim in this issue is to explore localism as a process of transformation towards sustainability. Our desire in creating the call was to be open to heterogeneous fashion activity rooted in place that captures something of the politics and practices of another type of fashion system, including things not yet nailed into concepts and conventions. It was the case that several of the contributions which we liked very much and which fully shared our ambition, did not have the form of a research paper. They lacked clear demonstration of research proposition and presentation of methods, data, discussion and conclusion, and were therefore rejected. Yet just because they did not fit the research paper format is not to say that they are without value – more that they belong elsewhere. We look forward to seeing them published in other contexts soon.

The editing of this Special Issue has formed part of work done within the KRUS research project (Enhancing local wool value chains in Norway), led by Ingun Grimstad Klepp and supported by the Norwegian Research Council. The primary objective of KRUS is to increase the value creation from Norwegian wool and redefine sustainability practice in fashion through re-establishing the understanding of where clothes come from. Connecting place and garment; tying knowledge of one together with the other; can make garments better understood. Arguably, it is making garments intelligible that is the first step in taking responsibility for them.

In KRUS, among other things, the creation and use of clothing in some local communities was surveyed and how garments with a local connection function in people’s wardrobes was surveyed. Important questions arose about the relationship between the global and the local; and between production, the market and use, as well as questions further related to topics such as value and price. Yet in investigating such questions it soon became apparent that the research tools available were inadequate: we needed new methods. So as part of the work on KRUS, researchers set about collating an overview of the methodological repertoire that clothing research has at its disposal and developing new methods and concepts along the way. The result was the publication of the edited book *Opening Up the Wardrobe* (Fletcher and Klepp, 2017) comprising 50 different research methods. Kate's Fletcher’s paper *The Fashion Land Ethic: localism, clothing activity and Macclesfield* in this issue shows some of the development work and methods, including those inspired by ecology, art practice and soft systems methodologies in order to better understand the relationships between place and clothes. Her paper also sets out a novel approach to framing fashion localism, as a total system of clothing-related action and relationships in a place, including the production and consumption of clothes but also the activity of the informal economy, maintenance and use behaviours, community networks and domestic micro practices. Seen thus, localism is a movement concerned with cultivating a balance of fashion activity (‘above and below ground’) in order to sustain varied communities and ecosystems. And in so doing fashion can begin to contribute to the process by which places are made.

While frameworks and practices of localism are somewhat undeveloped in the fashion context, the same cannot be said for the food sector. Research in food development has for a long time focused on developing new product niches and alternative distribution systems, such as direct sales (farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture local delivery systems, among others) and marketing food in combination with tourism and leisure activities has long been part of sustainable development strategies in rural areas (Vittersø, 2012). Besides economic support, the establishing of labelling schemes for local and organic food, has been one important support measures for these types of niche products both on national and EU levels (Morgan et al., 2006). The lack of similar discourse, knowledge and policies related to textiles and clothing has resulted in few opportunities to compare the value chains for food and fibre – and we feel this is an omission. As a first foray into this territory, Kate Fletcher and Gunnar Vittersø combine their fashion and food expertise to contribute a commentary to start a discussion about how knowledge about local food can be utilized in a fashion context. But such work is just a beginning – so please readers and writers, weavers and cooks, dressers and eaters – continue! And if the ‘food people’ view the developments in local fibre rather dismissively, just ask them to try a week without both. And then see which they miss the most.

When wardrobes are surveyed in different countries, many differences are revealed (Hebrok et al., 2013 & 2016). Ingun Grimstad Klepp’s paper *Nisseluelandet - The Impact of Local Clothes for the Survival of a Textile Industry in Norway* discusses the distinctive clothing habits in Norway, which includes a lot of use of national costumes and home-knitted sweaters, and moreover what this has meant for the maintenance of a local Norwegian industry. For years, Norway’s textile and clothing industry was seen as old fashioned and on route to being closed down or out-sourced. Today, on the other hand, the interest in the textile industry is increasing, partly due to a revitalisation of artisan- and craft-based activity, based on local raw materials and clothing culture. Her paper suggests that clothing can support improved ecological practices for land use and rich and unique cultural expression; framing fashion localism as a restorative force for environment and people.

As mentioned above, the fashion industry today has different expression in the Global North and South. We are therefore particularly pleased that we have ideas and experience from other regions than the North in this issue. In their contribution centered on Uruguay *Manos del Uruguay: Exploring the Inherent Tensions between Localism and the Global Craft Economy*, Berea Antaki and Katalin Medvedev explore some of the tensions and opportunities between global markets and local products, including between tradition, resource depletion, the production of goods not considered authentic by producer communities and the development opportunities afforded by global markets to artisans involved with craft production. The authors examine the notion of ‘a rooted sense of place’ and draw from the Sumak Kawsay cosmology to suggest alternative, non-market-based solutions to achieving rootedness. Sumak Kawsay acts as an ethical framework where local knowledge informs environmentally adaptive behaviours, reinforces ethical considerations of nature and preserves localised craft traditions.

With work on localism, as with many areas, it is perhaps easy to fall into dichotomies. ‘Small-scale’ versus ‘large-scale’; ‘global’ contra ‘local’; ‘before’ and ‘now’. However, textiles have long been a globally traded commodity dating back to the Vikings and the Silk Road. Emily Taylor’s contribution to the discussion of localism is through a historical analysis of garments from eighteenth-century Scotland. Her paper *Personality in Fashion: Case Studies of Localism in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* reminds us that fashion choices result from a complex mixture of personal, local-social and international influences. She concludes that the dresses’ value consists both of the materials, and the personal investment, from both maker and wearer. With today's new interest in the relationship between value, production, use and reuse, such studies of the past are important and contribute to a more total view of fashion localism as relating to system as a whole.

In contemporary discourse, the loss of biodiversity receives warranted significant attention. Yet few people have so far begun to look at the eradication of cultural diversity with the same systematic seriousness. This may explain at least in part why we get excited about the unknown and uncommon paper-clothes from Japan, for it belies a deeper disquiet: the loss of variety of ways of dressing, of material types and production processes. In *People and Placelessness: Paper clothing in Japan* Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran explores the ways in which a local paper-making tradition and an unusual material for clothing construction, has, almost by chance, been saved for the future. She takes us into local material flows and community structures and shows ways towards adversarial design strategies for alternative fashion production and consumption. Her paper introduces ideas of critical regionalism, place and its symmetrical concept placelessness to better understand the dynamics of localism and engage with a ‘material-making system that places value on local idiosyncrasies’. Further, she suggests the need for a textiles and clothing equivalent of a seed bank, to preserve and showcase genetic diversity as the basis for new, creative solutions to how and with what we dress in. In the exploration of localism it seems again that we turn to the field of ecology for words and methods with which to affect change.

Perhaps this is fitting. The etymology of the word ecology is from the Greek *oikos* meaning ‘house’. Ecology is the study of relations in and to home. The places we live in and our actions there – including our fashion actions – define our lives. Localism is a movement that cuts fashion in the cloth of nature and community. It is a radical force for sustainability change.

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