

# **Socialising Value Creation through Practices of Making Clothing Differently: A Case Study of a Makershop with Diverse Locals**

Anja-Lisa Hirscher

*Arts, Design and Architecture, Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland*

Postal address: Ulm University, Helmholtzstraße 18, 89081 Ulm, Germany; Phone: +49 160 99342312; Email: [anja.hirscher@aalto.fi](mailto:anja.hirscher@aalto.fi)

Anja-Lisa Hirscher is a doctoral candidate at Aalto University, currently working as a research assistant and workshop facilitator at Ulm University. She has explored the area of open and participatory design in fashion through different publications, research- and activist projects in Finland and Germany.

Francesco Mazzarella (Corresponding author)

*Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts London, London, UK*

Postal address: 20 John Prince's Street, W1G 0BJ, London, UK; Phone: +44 (0) 20 7514 7401; Email: [f.mazzarella@fashion.arts.ac.uk](mailto:f.mazzarella@fashion.arts.ac.uk)

Francesco Mazzarella pursued a PhD at Loughborough Design School, exploring how service design can be used to activate textile artisan communities to transition towards a sustainable future. Currently, Francesco is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion (CSF), sponsored by Neal's Yard Remedies, investigating ways in which design activism can create counter-narratives towards sustainability in fashion.

Alastair Fuad-Luke

*Design & Art, Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Bolzano, Italy*

Postal address: Piazza Università 1, Bolzano, BZ, 39100, Italy; Phone: +39 338 498 4950; Email: [alastair.luke@unibz.it](mailto:alastair.luke@unibz.it)

Alastair Fuad-Luke is Full Professor of Design Research at the Faculty of Design & Art, the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy. He is a design facilitator, educator and activist. His books include *Agents of Alternatives* (co-edited), *Design Activism* and *The Eco-design Handbook*. Present research includes dissonant design, designing agri-cultures, and the creation of new livelihoods within alternative economies.

# **Socialising Value Creation through Practices of Making Clothing Differently: A Case Study of a Makershop with Diverse Locals**

To counter the unsustainability of the current mainstream fashion system, an increasing number of designers are activating practices of social making aimed at empowering people through shared learning experiences. Within this context, the collaborative network *Mode Uncut* initiated *Make Yourself...*, a project focused on socialising value creation through making clothing differently. This article presents the project which took place in BITZ Unibz FabLab in Bolzano (Italy), as a case of social making of clothing in a ‘makershop’ (i.e. a makerspace combined with a pop-up shop where diverse locals make clothes using discarded textiles and second-hand garments). Through this participatory action research project, it emerged that the process of bringing together diverse locals in a makerspace can help generating different clothing concepts, and that these concepts can bring about different value propositions for local clothes production. As an outcome of the project, a framework for socialising value creation was corroborated and enriched; the framework is conceived for other designers to use and generate value for individuals, communities, societies, the environment and local economies. In conclusion, this article discusses how social making contributes to shaping alternative exchange economies of fashion.

Keywords: fashion makerspace; social making; value proposition; alternative exchange economies

## **1. Introduction: Alternative/Diverse Exchange Economies of Fashion**

We are living in an age of positive disruptions of the clothing industry, currently dominated by cheap and low-quality production of fast-changing collections (Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher and Grose, 2012), increasing consumption via planned obsolescence (Burns, 2010) and disposal of garments (Allwood et al., 2006). A reaction to mass production and economic growth, which does not lead to socio-economic equity emerged in the 1970s, shaping a nobler vision of economics inspired by cooperation, education and the ambition to elevate people. The theory proposed by economist Schumacher (1975) around the concept that ‘small is beautiful’ in relation to

‘economics as if people mattered’ showed the importance of retaining circulation of flows (in terms of people, resources, money) in a local economy. This was followed in the mid-1980s by an optimistic narrative on ‘new economics’ (Ekins, 1986). It was the global economic crisis in 2008 that revived the debate on what can be identified as ‘transitional and alternative exchange economies’ (Hirscher and Fuad-Luke, 2013), meaning alternatives to traditional or neo-liberal global economies, alongside the emergence of the ‘no growth’ economy (Jackson, 2009) and the ‘de-growth’ economy (Latouche, 2011). These alternative – or diverse – economies, put people – not only design and other professionals but also amateurs and citizens – at the centre of new modes of exchange of money, but also of intangible forms of value, such as time, skills, knowledge, and other types of resources (Arvidsson, Bauwens, and Peitersen, 2008). This is opening the horizon to an ‘ethical economy’ (Arvidsson, 2009), in which outputs are not ‘free’ or beyond value, but they follow another value logic, where “socially recognized self-expression is the main motivation and community contribution is the main measure of value” (Arvidsson, 2008, p. 326).

Among these transitional and alternative exchange economies – identified by Hirscher and Fuad-Luke (2013) and expanded upon below – there are conceptual economies which present, potentially, strong links to sustainable fashion (Figure 1). These conceptual economies include the circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014), which is focused on closing the loop of resources through practices of waste minimisation, modular design, repair, reuse, upcycling, transparency and traceability throughout the supply chain. Besides many multinational companies approaching the circular economy with a technological focus on eco-efficiency, we are also witnessing an overall increased interest in artisanship as a more meaningful and sustainable approach to design, production and consumption. From this perspective, a

new craft economy is rising (Micelli, 2011), perceived not as a nostalgic return to anachronistic craftsmanship, but as a timely opportunity to set up resilient and redistributed micro-productions, for instance reinterpreting heritage textiles into slow fashion practices addressed to mindful consumers with increased appreciation for the quality and origin of clothes (Vuletich, 2009; Neuberg, 2010). Artisanship is also linked to the shaping of a distributed economy (Stewart and Tooze, 2015), which is re-localising production thanks to the emergence of small, networked and less hierarchical micro-factories (Maffei, 2011). From a social standpoint, the maker's movement (Anderson, 2012) has activated an on-going revolution of the manufacturing sector. Within this context, the co-making economy (Gauntlett, 2011) is driven by the pleasure of making things by hand (Sennett, 2008), and is enabled by democratised access to interactive and digital fabrication technologies, while enhancing individual and community wellbeing (Thomas et al., 2011).

Overall, we can characterise the above-mentioned different types of transitional and alternative exchange economies as an overlapping landscape of potentiality where different combinations of value creation are implicit and may involve monetary, non-monetary or both kinds of exchanges (Figure 2).

### ***1.1. Alternative/Diverse Fashion Practices of Exchange and Value Creation***

Sustainable fashion designers and researchers have dealt extensively with making and using clothes in more sustainable ways (Fletcher, 2008; Gwilt and Rissanen, 2011), and have explored making as a joyful and convivial activity (Gauntlett, 2011; Hirscher, 2015). Worldwide movements such as craftivism – operating at the intersection between craft and activism (Greer, 2014; Corbett, 2017) – and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) are marking a shift from passive consumption to a participatory democracy made by interventionists, makers, hackers and tinkerers (Ratto and Boler, 2014). We are also witnessing an

increased number of practices of open and collaborative design taking place in FabLabs, makerspaces and through individual projects (Fuad-Luke, Hirscher, and Moebus, 2015). Fab Labs (i.e. fabrication laboratories) and makerspaces are alternative sites of production, set up *by* and *for* participants to use tools, equipment and facilities in order to design and produce their own artefacts. They offer means of *personal fabrication* in a social and collaborative set-up (Kohtala, 2016). Fab Labs are considered the most organized type of such sites, as they have a rather clear identity, held together by an international network ([www.fablabs.io](http://www.fablabs.io)) fostering also production innovation and closer collaboration with business-partners. Makerspaces, in comparison, refer to any kind of collaborative workshop space (Kohtala, 2016), not necessarily emphasizing technology and innovation. Henceforth, the term makerspace is preferred in this article, as it implies the possibility for a more diversified program of making activities.

In particular, here we focus on practices of *making clothing differently*, as alternative forms of exchange, within and beyond the market, offering a counter narrative to how clothes are predominantly made in the neo-liberal economy. These practices can be pursued, for instance in makerspaces, which enable community members to design, prototype and make clothes that might not be possible to create with the resources available to individuals working alone. We consider such practices as forms of *social making*, grounded on new forms of multicultural and multigenerational exchange and value creation among diverse locals who design and produce unique clothes based on sharing patterns. In this article, we define *diverse locals* as citizens living locally for a long time, or economic migrants and refugees recently arrived in a locale. This article is concerned with the re-combination of existing actors with new ones as a way to contribute different kinds of human (social and cultural) capital to making processes, using local resources and skills wisely and shortening the value chain

(Fuad-Luke, 2011). Moreover, the term *social manufacturing* is referred to as a democratic approach to opening the design and manufacturing phase to everyone (Shang et al., 2013) and it has mainly been used so far in relation to digitally-enabled personal fabrication, or mass customisation and distributed manufacturing (Leng, Ding, Gu, and Koren, 2016; Hämäläinen and Karjalainen, 2017). Instead, in this article we prefer using the term *social making* to emphasise the ‘social’ aspect of collaboration and interaction at a local level, through alternative design strategies based on analogical, small-scale and local production systems. This way of making enables the joy of doing and learning together, creating value in terms of happiness and wellbeing beyond the physical object (Gauntlett, 2011). Such alternative practices activate people to get involved in the making of their own clothes, contributing to increased awareness of the authorship, origins and processes behind the garments, while overcoming the need and desire to consume with more creative personal and social experiences (Chapman, 2005). Such an approach disrupts the traditional passive role of the user (using a ready-made garment), with an open, collaborative and active role as value creator (Niinimäki, 2011). In this regard, research has shown that user involvement in the process of designing and making clothing will increase emotional attachment through embedding a story in the resulting garment (Mugge, 2007) and consequently enhances personal and emotional value and satisfaction (Niinimäki, 2010, 2011; Twigger-Holroyd, 2017). Nevertheless, it seems that most of the current sustainable fashion approaches do not question the current system radically enough. As a consequence, the age of the *prosumer* (Toffler, 1970), *Pro-Am* (Leadbetter and Miller, 2004), *user-maker* or *fashion maker-designer* seems not to have emerged yet.

Taking up these challenges, *Mode Uncut* ([www.modeuncut.com](http://www.modeuncut.com)) was created as a collaborative network and platform for exploring and disrupting fashion practices, by

reconfiguring the *designer-producer-consumer* (DPC) relationship (Hirscher and Fuad-Luke, 2013; Mode Uncut, 2017). With this in mind, members of *Mode Uncut* have facilitated over twenty participatory design and sewing workshops in Finland, Germany, Italy and the UK, challenging the way in which we make our clothes, individually and together.

## **2. Socialising Value Creation**

Within this context, we encourage a reflection on the contributors and beneficiaries of alternative fashion practices and new ways of making, in relation to different types of value created beyond monetary benefits. In general, value can be “defined as a 'socially recognized importance': the weight that a society gives to an object or an issue” (Arvidsson, 2009, p. 16). In the economic system, value is mostly referred to as being measurable in monetary terms. However, when looking beyond this context, there are a range of different understandings of value in relation to, for instance, the socio-cultural setting and the theoretical approaches these are grounded in (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014). In regard to the fashion sector, the consumer has been considered as a ‘value user’ (user of the product), purchasing ready-made garments where value is created by wearing garments. However, in the context of this article we emphasise that through social making the consumer is enabled to take an increasingly active role in the design and manufacturing processes and becomes a ‘value creator’ in the system (Niinimäki, 2011 & Hirscher, Niinimäki, Armstrong, 2018).

### ***2.1. Types of Value Generated Through Practices of Social Making***

A key issue taken into consideration in this article is the fact that the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social) are underpinned by different value theories for economics, sustainable development and the social sciences. For the

purpose of this article, we reframed *social making* by looking at these theories in light of the piece of clothing and the process beyond the object, as well as the individual, the community, the society, the environment and the economics that enable clothes production.

We analysed the concept of *social making* in relation to intrinsic, instrumental and extrinsic types of value. According to Plato, intrinsic value is worth having for itself, not as a means to something else; instead, instrumental value is worth having as a means to get something else that is good. Furthermore, we propose that the concept of value is a social construct, and as such is defined by the culture adopting the concept. In line with axiological theory (which studies the notion of value and value judgements), clothes embed intrinsic properties (properties that an item has in itself, independently of other things) and extrinsic (relational) properties (which depend upon a piece's relationship with other things). The *social making* practices discussed in this article emphasise a strong degree of user involvement in clothes making activities. Thus, the type of value generated is co-created between users, designers and other actors involved in the process. The types of value co-created through *social making* practices will be analysed in the next section.

Within this context, it is important to note that practices of *social making* seem to be driven by personal values and beliefs (i.e. people's judgements of what is important in life) based on a strong sense of communality. This could possibly also be referred to what Benkler (2006) describes as the social production phenomenon, yet at a small-scale and local level. Such practices share a similar values-led approach, driven by people's beliefs being "self-organized, emergent, bottom-up" and "not primarily motivated by monetary concerns" (Arvidsson, 2008, p. 329). In social production, the types of value generated are not resulting from the directly owned resources of the

company, but more grounded on ‘collaborative forms of wealth production’ based on attracting and appropriating contributions from diverse stakeholders such as consumers who create intangible value through their creative input and tacit knowledge (Arvidsson, 2011). Here, we question whether the type of value thereby generated is also shared among all actors. This way of creating different types of value is, according to Arvidsson (2011), particularly true in projects found outside corporate boundaries, where community members receive meaning and purpose through a shared vision (and hence shared values) and a set of personal values, beliefs or principles of behaviour. In fact, *social making* encourages user participation and exchange between cultures, and thus is able to offer “more socialised processes of value creation” (Arvidsson, 2011, p. 262) beyond monetary benefits. Following a similar value logic as that of the ‘ethical economy’ (Arvidsson, 2011), we refer to *socialising value creation* as an open, creative and collaborative process, which aims at socialising value creation through the process of making together.

## **2.2. Value Framework**

In this article we consider how local and social practices of making clothing enable the creation of alternative types of value, such as: individual, community, societal, environmental and economic. For this purpose, we propose a conceptual framework of ‘value’, built upon previous research on different types of value (Hirscher, Niinimäki, and Armstrong, 2018) and which informed the development of a value proposition (VP) tool that was then applied in this project (Figure 3). The following sections explain the different types of value which the conceptual framework for *socialising value creation* entails, integrating Value, Sustainability and Needs theories around wellbeing.

### *2.2.1. Individual Value*

With individual value, we refer to the value gained by a single person to increase his/her personal wellbeing, or the individual's ability to develop skills and knowledge through collaborative learning experiences. The knowledge and skills acquired through making enable a person to distinguish the quality of manufactured clothes (Wolf and McQuitty, 2011), but also add emotional value to the garments created, as these inherit the story of making (Mugge, 2009; Niinimäki, 2011).

### *2.2.2. Community Value*

This category refers to the added value, which is generated by members of a community to benefit the community itself, for instance, by strengthening community cohesion while embracing a joint vision. In social production, for example, the greatest source of value is the ability to create relations between peers and the experience of a community who share similar beliefs (Arvidsson, 2011). Being able to contribute to achieving a common goal creates positive experiential value for the individual, who feels appreciated for his/her contribution, recognized by his/her peers, but also generates exchange of knowledge and skills among like-minded people. This type of value is created through the collective tacit knowledge embodied in social processes (Arvidsson, 2009).

### *2.2.3. Societal Value*

Within this framework, societal value refers to the type of value, which contributes to society as a whole. Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2011) discuss the added value of individual and collective happiness and wellbeing to a well-functioning society. Societal value creation in the context of this article is found in enabling individual and collective wellbeing through social interaction and integration (e.g. shared experiences and

learning, as well as getting to know diverse locals) facilitated through face-to-face workshops where people make clothes together.

#### *2.2.4. Environmental Value*

According to Paehike (2000), the core principles in environmentalism are the protection of biodiversity and ecological systems, consideration of negative impacts on human health and the sustainable use of resources. With this in mind, we consider environmental value as the contribution to reducing unnecessary consumption and giving value to underestimated materials, tools and skills, by enabling local production models.

#### *2.2.5. Economic Value*

Here we refer to economic value as the value generated through diverse forms of exchange (e.g. time, skill, knowledge), which may or may not be measured in monetary terms. In this context, economic value is framed within the ‘ethical economy’ (Arvidsson, 2009) and the transitional and alternative exchange economies defined in Figure 1.

### **3. *Make Yourself...*: A Fashion Makershop with Diverse Locals**

The *Make Yourself...* project was initiated in November 2016 at the BITZ Unibz FabLab in Bolzano, Italy. The aim of the project was to engage locals and newly arrived locals in making clothing together, and to investigate the potential of such a process to generate new design concepts and value propositions. The project entailed a fashion makerspace and pop-up shop (hereafter referred as *makershop*) engaging diverse locals to explore how their skills and cultures could contribute to *making clothing differently* to satisfying their needs. *Make Yourself...* was initiated during the festive time of December, when many artisanal products are sold at the local Christmas market.

Bolzano, near the Dolomites mountains, attracts tourists and locals alike but is also the destination of newly arrived and displaced citizens (visitors, migrants and refugees), the latter from Northern and Western Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as many tourists. We aimed at bringing together the talents, skills and creativity of local designers, students and artisans with those of the citizens in order to generate different kinds of clothes and exchanges. With this in mind, the branding of the project was a word pun around *Make Yourself...* a hat, a gift, a scarf, a new look... warm, happy, busy, a friend.

Through this project we intended to answer the following research questions regarding practices of *making clothing differently* as a means for *socialising value creation*:

- To what extent does the process of bringing together diverse locals in a *makershop* help generating different clothing concepts?
- In what ways do these concepts generate different value propositions (VPs) for local clothes production?

The *Make yourself...* project started with a kick-off co-design workshop, attracting staff from Associazione Volontarius (an association helping migrants and refugees in Bolzano) as well as students and staff from the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Unibz). This was followed by the *makershop* set up, and two follow-up workshops to reflect on the activities and generate further concepts and value propositions, as illustrated in the timeline in Figure 4.

At the scoping workshop the collective decision was to have a particular clothing theme (i.e. bags, socks and mittens, shirts, dresses and ponchos, toys and kids' clothing, hats and accessories) every day and a free making time at the end of each day, while the last day was set aside for an exhibition. Local sewing machines were provided

free of charge by J. Mohr, a local sewing equipment shop, and by participants who brought in their own machines. A local haberdashery shop donated accessories and equipment for setting up the exhibition. The project organisers provided local resources, including sewing machines and equipment, pre-consumer textile waste and second-hand clothes. Some of the *makershop* participants brought in an ironing board and a desktop handloom later in the week. All these tangible resources came to life through the individual resources, imagination and professional or semi-professional cutting and sewing skills of the diverse locals participating in the project. Newly produced garments were added every day to the large street level shop window façade (i.e. the pop-up shop) of BITZ the Unibz FabLab in the centre of Bolzano.

### ***3.1. Methodology: Participatory Action Research***

For this project, we adopted Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a qualitative methodology linking theory to practice and involving *in situ* collection of socially and culturally rich data, leading to a flexible and reflective process of learning by doing (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003). PAR consists of the close collaboration between the researcher and the individuals who are the focus of the investigation (i.e. co-researchers) to influence or change an aspect of the intervention, innovation, policy, practice or service that is the focus of research (ibid.). Throughout the timeline of the project, we acted as organisers of events, conducted co-design workshops, and facilitated participatory design processes giving those affected by a design a say in the final outcome (Ehn, 2008; Bjögvisson et al., 2012). We encouraged the participants – who learned, designed and created together through ‘mutual learning’ – to gain a sense of ownership of the project. We involved participants in scoping and directing the *makershop* activities; however, as design researchers, we did set the research questions reflecting on the participants’ interests, but not directly involving them.

Under the overarching PAR methodology, we conducted participant observations (Creswell, 2007) consisting in the investigation and interpretation into the behaviour of the project participants and their social interactions within the *makershop*. Finally, for the purpose of the co-creation workshops that we conducted as an act of collective creativity (Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011), we adopted a value proposition (VP) tool with the aim to facilitate the participants in developing propositions for local clothes production, as explained further in the following sub-section.

### *3.1.1. Value Proposition (VP) Tool*

Given the disruptive fashion practices emerging within the alternative/diverse exchange economies landscape, it is crucial to understand how to generate a Value Proposition (VP), which enables the development of sustainable business models based on participation and openness among the stakeholders. Building on a former simplified version (Pekkola, Hirscher, and Fuad-Luke, 2013) of the original Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010) based around a central ‘value proposition’, a new version was created for the purpose of this project (Figure 3). The tool was conceived as a ‘canvas’, a visual and textual representation of a business model, unpacking all the elements, which are required to bring a business to life and to sustain it. It can be used both in a diagnostic and reflective way (to assess an existing project), or in a speculative way (to generate new concepts, i.e. new ideas that need further prototyping to become actual designs of clothes).

The VP tool was used in a reflective mode in the *Make Yourself...* workshops following up on the *makershop* held in December 2016. The aim was to collectively explore how different design concepts made by diverse locals generated value for different components of the proposition. The participants were asked to define their

value proposition, that is to say a product, a service, or an experience that could be offered to customers in order to satisfy their needs, create satisfaction and generate value. The middle circle was used to map out the value (as outlined in the conceptual framework in Section 2.2) generated to individuals (both the maker-designer and the customer), the community, society, the environment and local economy. In the outer circle, clockwise, the participants were asked to brainstorm around the key resources required (in terms of physical, intellectual, human, financial or other assets), the key daily activities required to sustain an enterprise, the key channels to reach out to customers and the key partners to collaborate with in order to deliver the proposition. The workshop facilitator provided an example to enable the participants to understand the use of the tool. Hence, using a filled VP model as a guide, the participants were asked to collectively sketch out the VP for a particular item of clothing they made during the *makershop*. Starting from the centre and progressively filling out all the parts, the actual types of value created, the resources, activities, partners and channels were added to an A2 blank template hung on the workshop wall.

#### **4. Results and Findings**

Throughout the *Make Yourself...* project, all the participants took ownership of the makerspace and contributed to the organization of the pop-up shop and its activities, which were conducted with a prevailing spirit of conviviality. The event received a full-page coverage in one of the key local newspapers, the *Dolomitten*, which generated a sense of pride among the participants. The upcycled clothes were often highly customised and aesthetically creative, although some improvements were needed in terms of fitting (e.g. size) and finishing. Furthermore, we saw potential in developing some design concepts to further test their viability in the market.

#### ***4.1. Types of Value Generated Through Making Differently***

Based on our observations during the *Make Yourself...* project and on further reflections, we were able to draw insights on the overall feelings, atmosphere and types of value generated in the process of making clothes together, differently, as discussed in the following sections, structured according to the types of value defined in the framework introduced before.

##### *4.1.1. Individual Value*

Through the working environment which we set up for the *makershop*, the *social making* activities generated personal value providing the participants with opportunities to work individually, in pairs or collectively. When problems arose, people helped each other or turned to more skilful participants for advice, generating individual value through gaining new skills and knowledge as well as making new friendships. Migrants from Afghanistan and Pakistan with tailoring experience brought traditional detailing and know-how for conventional garments such as shirts and trousers; their design solutions for the various themes – bags, hats, shirts etc. – were made with pragmatism and executed with pride (Figure 5). Design and making happened side-by-side, leading to interesting outputs. For instance, when one participant cut her own pattern, it triggered others to adopt the concept but also to subtly change or evolve it. This was evident when four women decided to upcycle woollen jumpers into multiple new garments, i.e. hat, stole, and gloves (Figure 6). Nobody worked with paper patterns but chalked or folded and cut the second-hand clothes or fabrics directly.

Throughout the week, we documented everything that was made by photographing the maker with her/his garment or accessory. This concept proved very popular and led to the photographs of the makers being displayed with the actual

garment or accessory in a final exhibition coinciding with the last day of the pop-up shop, as an act of empowerment through recognition of the maker (Figure 7).

#### *4.1.2. Community Value*

The *social making* activities led to a positive atmosphere through mutual engagement in the process, evidencing the community value generated for the group of makers.

Although every day a different group of participants was making garments, a strong sense of community was established already during the first day, as shown by the group photo in Figure 8, which captures the majority of the participants. There was a core group of six to eight people (locals and refugees) visiting the *makershop* almost every day full-time, enjoying each other's company while creating garments together or individually.

Adopting the Human Scale Development matrix (Max-Neef, Helizade, and Hopenhayn, 1991) as a framework to analyse the interactions and environment of the *makershop* as contributing to meeting basic human needs, we observed a qualitative increase in the participants' capabilities, such as:

- *Senses, imagination and thought*: the participants were able to use their senses to imagine, think, and reason, in a 'truly human' way in order to produce garments and events of their own choice.
- *Affiliation*: the participants showed concern for others, engaged in various forms of social interaction, without discrimination on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion.
- *Emotions*: the participants were able to have attachments to clothes and people outside of themselves.

- *Play*: they were able to laugh, play, and have pleasurable experiences with others.

#### *4.1.3. Societal Value*

The creation of societal value was identified in the social interactions and integrations occurring among the participants. Although language and cultural barriers did exist, they were easily circumnavigated by finding ways of collaborating or demonstrating how to do things by hand. Strong social interaction was very visible in the acts of helping each other to measure or cut fabric, repairing machines and simply chatting while making. Those with higher practical skills clearly enjoyed sharing their knowledge with other participants (Figure 9). Some of the female migrants teamed up with other women from ethnic backgrounds who were partnered with locals and had been living in the area for some time. The participant observations highlighted new relationships between existing actors and new stakeholders, many based upon sharing resources, time, skills, and open-source patterns, thus giving expression to the potentiality of alternative exchange models, adding value to otherwise non-valued forms of exchange within a society.

#### *4.1.4. Environmental Value*

The garments were often made by using existing features of old clothing or waste textiles, such as cuffs, seams etc., enhancing the environmental value generated through upcycling. By using and repurposing undervalued materials (i.e. donated pre- and post-consumer waste), new clothes were made. Furthermore, the participants gained insights and skills for future practices of creative upcycling of old garments, potentially reducing unnecessary consumption and disposal.

#### *4.1.5. Economic Value*

The participants donated all the clothing they had made to the pop-up shop to raise money for Associazione Volontarius. As soon as each garment was finished, the participants put the maker's name, the number of hours worked and suggested price on a suitably printed label. This meant that the makers had to self-assess their creations and define the monetary value of their products. None of the customers who bought the clothes contested the prices which were set up; in fact, some people donated even more money. The *Make Yourself...* event confirmed that diverse locals could be brought together to co-create upcycled clothing for sale to the public, raising money for Associazione Volontarius, which was later redistributed between the refugees and migrants.

Overall, it emerged that the activities of the *makershop* generated different kinds of value, more typical of alternative exchange economies than of environmental transitional economies. This is, perhaps, to be expected since individual and monetary exchange are a necessary feature of environmental transitional economies, but non-monetary and other exchanges feature strongly within alternative exchange economies.

#### ***4.2. Value Propositions Generated through the Reflective and Speculative Workshops***

One month after the week-long *makershop*, a co-design workshop was facilitated with some of the original project participants. The VP tool described in Section 3.1.1 was used to reflect on the *Make Yourself...* project with the aim to collectively discuss and investigate possible VPs emerging from the clothes concepts generated through *social making*. Two VPs were chosen by the group to expand the concept and complete a value proposition canvas, as described below:

- Upcycled collection of woollen accessories (Figure 10), whose core design concept was to create zero-waste new garments from old jumpers;
- Specialized, customized gloves (Figure 11), whose core design concept was to measure people's hands and create bespoke gloves, e.g. a glove with an opposed thumb and forefinger with 3-finger mitten for using digital touchpads and mobile phones in cold temperatures.

A few weeks later, another workshop was held with a new group of refugees and migrants who were joined by several participants from the original *makershop*. New speculative clothing design concepts were generated by the participants at this workshop. After several concepts were generated, the group chose to further elaborate the following one:

- History brought to life through new clothes (Figure 12). This is a speculative concept for using the original clothing of Ötzi (i.e. the 5000 year old mummy of the Iceman found in the Italian/Austrian Alps and preserved in the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology in Bolzano) to stimulate new design concepts for the contemporary fashion market.

Through the reflective VPs, it was clear that multivalent outputs were achieved for individual maker-designers and their customers, the *makershop* community, the wider society, the environment and the local economy. For example, individual maker-designers gained satisfaction from learning new skills and knowledge, through the joyful experience of making clothes together. Customers had the opportunity to purchase unique pieces of clothing, gained a different perspective on fashion and helped others (migrants and refugees) through their money donations. For the *makershop* community the interaction amongst makers allowed not only strengthening community cohesion but also providing the basis for a different practice of generating clothing

concepts. For the wider society, the *makershop* was also identified as a place to help integrate locals and new arrivals, while valuing cultural diversities. Moreover, the participants of the co-design workshops recognised that the *makershop* and the concepts it generated offered an alternative model of local clothes production and upcycling, contributing to achieving environmental sustainability. They were also capable of understanding what kind of resources, activities, channels and partners could be needed to transform their design concepts into viable enterprise propositions. Finally, the participants understood that the *makershop* opened up opportunities for alternative economic exchanges, both monetary and non-monetary.

## **5. Discussion**

The *Make Yourself...* project showed the potential of bringing diverse locals in a *makershop* to create different clothing concepts through *social making* and to generate different value propositions, challenging the fashion system to be more open, social and sustainable. It emerged that such collaborative practices of *making clothing differently* would require a shift in the production model (entailing participatory design processes of *social making*), business models (with the potential emergence of new social enterprises recombining existing and new actors), the design process (opening it up to professionals but also diverse locals as enthusiastic co-designers) and the role of consumers (becoming *prosumers* of their own clothes). The following paragraphs discuss how the findings from the *Make Yourself...* project addressed the research questions, contributing knowledge to the discourse on alternative exchange economies focused on sustainable fashion.

### ***5.1. Bringing together Diverse Locals in a Makershop to Generate Different Clothing Concepts***

Through the project, the practice of bringing diverse locals in a *makershop* was framed as a social approach to the circular economy, aligned with the notion of ‘collaborative consumption’ (Botsam and Rogers, 2011), but also co-design centred on soft system methodologies (Fuad-Luke, 2007). The need to build new and compelling synergies between design, production and consumption emerged as a way to support sustainable practices of *social making*. In order to activate new relationships and forms of exchange among existing and new actors in the fashion system (Hirscher and Fuad-Luke, 2013), a mindset shift was deemed necessary. In this regard, *Make Yourself...* showed that diverse locals were willing and primed to become maker-designers and *prosumers*, mixing their skills and traditional know-how. Moreover, locals and newly arrived locals (i.e. migrants, refugees and others, here termed as *diverse locals*), aptly demonstrated that they blend and hybridise their skills and cultural knowledge. This, potentially, provides positive implications for stimulating the fashion industry in a more sustainable and localised way, leveraging the arrival of large numbers of migrants in Europe. Moreover, the role of *Mode Uncut* was that of a change agent providing a vehicle (e.g. in terms of resources, facilities, a platform and network) to reconnect designers, makers, producers and consumers in new ways. It was recognised that such an approach could shape a more multicultural, open and localised fashion system, with the potential to join up with other socio-economically driven initiatives (such as makerspaces, repair cafés, second-hand clothing stores, swop shops, complementary currency systems, time banks, etc.) and the socio-technical communities of the maker movement. The project corroborated that *social making* shares many commonalities with the maker movement, whose activities are centred on local enthusiasts and communities of practice (Wenger,

1998) but, within such a practice, making also emerged as a means to evolve multicultural initiatives and led to the potential development of new VPs and socially-orientated enterprises. In line with a recent study on the cultural role(s) of makerspaces (Halligan and Charney, 2016), this project showed the potential for the emergent ‘maker culture’ to progress towards a ‘making culture’, joining up diverse organisations to make communities, systems, educational programmes, and markets, although perhaps such rhetoric currently outstrips the reality.

## ***5.2. Generating Different Value Propositions for Local Clothes Production***

Beyond the activity of retrospectively mapping the value proposition of design concepts created during the *makershop* (reflective value propositions), the use of the VP also enabled generating speculative value propositions. These were framed within different economic models of local clothes production, inspired by Schumacher’s (1975) concept of ‘small is beautiful’ where money and resources are retained in a locality or region. Within these models, as design researchers we took on multiple roles (i.e. entrepreneurs, facilitators, enablers, innovators, activists) creating value beyond the garments. We also enacted the concept of ‘designers as host’ (Williams, 2018) since in the *makershop* we created the conditions for meaningful interactions to happen and ‘communities-in-place’ (ibid.) to be built through micro-scale interventions. This might open up opportunities for independent designers to overcome the issue of precarious hire in the fashion industry and develop their own networks within local communities, working as catalysts for new enterprises creating alternative forms of value and exchange. We see great potential for designers to appropriate the VP tool in order to further develop their individual practice and new ways of making fashion differently, by fostering the creation of diverse types of value, incorporating local resources and skills. As the case study *Make Yourself...* illustrates, design can encourage a redefinition of enterprises,

whose value propositions focus on individual, community, societal, environmental and economic goals, and are attuned to the holistic principles of sustainable development. In fact, the diverse locals engaged in making clothing became key drivers for valuing cultural diversities, providing social engagement, triggering new economic exchanges and enhancing environmental stewardship. Furthermore, new commercial capital was created by adding value to second-hand clothes and waste production fabric. However, beyond the final products, the project stressed the importance of the processes of making together and mutual learning, gaining a sense of ‘togetherness’, echoing the words of sociologist Richard Sennett (2012). Throughout the *makershop* event, there was evidence of the aggregation of increased human capital, as people acquired new skills or extended their know-how as teachers (Fuad-Luke, 2011). The strong sense of conviviality and common purpose also helped building social capital through both bonding and bridging. Building on former studies on the joyful and collective acts of making clothing together (Hirscher, 2015), meeting human needs and raising individual and community responsibilities seemed to have marked this practice of *social making* the most.

## **6. Conclusions**

The on-going economic and social crises are opening up an opportunity for activating practices of *making clothing differently* that contribute to transitional and alternative exchange economies. This article showed that *social making* practices – such as those activated within the *Make Yourself...* project – can empower a new generation of maker-designers (having capabilities as professional, amateurs and citizens) to become ‘complementary relational designers’ (Fuad-Luke, 2014), triggering social interactions and contributing to shaping sustainable business models.

In particular, a social approach to a circular economy emerged throughout this project, fostering co-making practices that rescue the value of craftsmanship. Environmental benefits were identified to be integral to the *makershop* functionality, while both monetary and non-monetary exchanges pointed to more ethical economic possibilities. The project demonstrated the potential for maker-designers to become *prosumers* by creating their own local production system, from the perspective of their own needs and values, facilitated by design researchers. A new social business model logic emerged, opening up the possibility to create communities of maker-designers and local fashion networks, connecting diverse small units through sharing platforms and co-design strategies. It is envisaged that such a logic — based on meaning-making, participatory settings, mutual learning, new value creation — can shape a different fashion system, one that is more sustainable through being more democratic, open and localised. In line with the principles of fashion localism (Fletcher, 2016) and craftivism (Greene, 2014), the elements of social solidarity, micro-political actions and the building of social and cultural capital were set alongside the ecological benefits of such forms of production. These socialised and localised forms of exchange appeared as counter-actions to global neo-liberal capitalist models of production and consumption, while the new relationships facilitated between diverse locals reinforced a politicisation of design. Finally, the *Make Yourself...* project embraced a ‘design mindfulness’ that values place, time, and cultural diversity (Findeli, 2001), as well as design intelligence, thinking, hermeneutics, persuasiveness, virtues, pluralism, new functioning and capabilities (Fuad-Luke, 2007).

### ***6.1. Limitations and Next Steps***

Given the timeframe of the project limited to three months (with one week of intensive *makershop* activities framed by prior- and post- co-design workshops to critically reflect

and develop the concept) a longer-term project is needed in order to better understand how the types of value generated would change over time. Moreover, in order to activate disruptive change, a mindset shift is necessary, and therefore further investigation on people's motivations towards *making clothing differently* rather than shopping is recommended. In view of future research, it is also advisable to consider how to re-frame making – and therefore production – and how to link it to different modes of consumption, by investigating how design processes can be linked to the use of the VP tool in a reflective or generative mode. Any VPs created then require testing in local conditions and markets; in fact, what might appear to be an innovative design concept with a viable VP on paper, might fail to galvanise support from local people as maker-designers or consumers. In fact, although the clothing concepts generated through the project embed a new value framework that addresses core sustainability issues, further experimentation is required to scale out and reach a broader audience of designers, consumers and producers, making fashion in radically different, fair and viable ways. Furthermore, how these VPs can be scaled up from niche initiatives to a critical mass that will genuinely disrupt the mainstream system of fashion manufacturing and retailing requires further investigation.

With this in mind, since the initial launch of the *Make Yourself...* project in Bolzano, we have applied the VP tool in a series of workshops with fashion design students at ESMOD Berlin (Germany) and Nottingham Trent University (UK), with a mixed student group in Konstanz (Germany), as well as in a workshop on 'alternative economies' in Helsinki (Finland). We also wish to further develop the concept of the *makershop* as a permanent space for local communities to prototype clothing concepts and implement sustainable business models of production and consumption. Finally, we envisage that such a model can offer an interesting platform on which to test future

strategies for pushing the traditional boundaries of the design discipline, facilitating the process of transitioning towards more ethically-driven and alternative exchange economies through socialising value creation by *making clothing differently*.

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Figure 1: Traditional and Neo-Liberal, Transitional and Alternative Economies (Source: Hirscher and Fuad-Luke, 2013).

Figure 2: Potential transitional and alternative exchange economies for the fashion industry focused on different types of value creation in relation to the *Make Yourself...* project.

Figure 3: Value Proposition (VP) tool.

Figure 4: Timeline of the different activities comprising the *Make Yourself...* project and the methods used.

Figure 5: Traditional shirt made by a refugee from the Afghanistan/Pakistan border showcasing his tailoring skills.

Figure 6: Upcycled woollen accessories generated through collaboration between four participants.

Figure 7: Garments made and showcased at the exhibition.

Figure 8: The core group of participants photographed at the makershop.

Figure 9: A local citizen explaining the use of a sewing machine to a group of recently migrated refugees.

Figure 10: Reflective Value Proposition for upcycled collection of woollen accessories.

Figure 11: Reflective Value Proposition for specialised and customised gloves.

Figure 12: Speculative Value Proposition for history brought to life through new clothes.