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Sustainable fashion in the Netherlands

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The Netherlands is at the forefront of sustainable development and circular economy. Numerous Dutch-based civil-society organizations and consultancies have been active in helping companies and designers to go green while at the same time increasing consumer awareness about sustainability; just to name a few, MADE-by, Fair Wear Foundation, Circle Economy, Clean&Unique, Marieke Eyskoot and W.Green. When looking at the role of the government, it is worthwhile mentioning the *Green Deal* approach that came into being in 2011. *Green Deals* are mutual agreements among the Dutch government, companies, civil-society organizations and other parties to remove barriers and accelerate the transition to a sustainable economy. For example, the *Natural Fibres Green Deal* covers a pilot project to stimulate the cultivation of hemp for the textile industry. More recently, in July 2016, a wide coalition of Dutch fashion brands, national government, unions, trade and civil-society organizations have signed the *Agreement on a Sustainable Garment and Textile Sector*. The aim is to increase sustainability within the international garment and textile supply chain, environmental pollution.

Dutch education institutions have also an important role in fostering future designers and entrepreneurs to embrace sustainability in all its aspects: from integrating sustainability in their curricula to organizing symposia (e.g. *Beyond Green* by the Amsterdam Fashion

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Institute, *What's Next? The Future of the Fashion Industry* and *Pioneers in Fashion: Better and Greener* by Erasmus University Rotterdam, Creating 010 and Het Nieuwe Instituut) and running projects that focus on sustainable material and (local) production processes (e.g. *Going Eco*, *Going Dutch* and *Closing the Loop* by the Centre of Expertise Future Makers). The future generation of designers can ultimately act as a Trojan horse that triggers change from the inside out of the fashion system.

When looking at Dutch independent fashion designers and other smaller fashion companies, we could argue that more or less all of them are going green. For them, it is easier to control and green the supply chain not only given their smaller size but also their ability to be more

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flexible in terms of production volume, process and distribution. They incorporate sustainability in their business models and, doing so, they are standing out in the crowd, carving out a unique niche in the hyper competitive fashion industry. Three interrelated main trends can be distinguished in their approaches to sustainability:

1. Clean materials and Recycling;
2. Craftsmanship and Timeless design;
3. High technology and Smart textiles.

The brand MUD Jeans tackles social and environmental sustainability. It has a network of factories that ensures fair working conditions, and it aims at reducing environmental pollution and waste. MUD Jeans mostly uses BCI (Better Cotton Initiative), organic and recycled

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cotton (Fig.1). It works with a loan system, where consumers can lease a pair of jeans (7.5 euro per month) that can be repaired for free; after one year, consumers can decide to keep the jeans or replace it with a new one. The old jeans will be up-cycled and turned into a cool vintage design. When the jeans cannot be up-cycled anymore, the material will be recycled and used to produce a new pair.

Craftsmanship and designing with sustainability in mind (timeless design, zero waste) are priorities of an increasing amount of Dutch independent fashion designers, such as Monique van Heist, Elsie Gringhuis, Mevan Kaluarachchi, Joline Jolink, Margreth Oolsthorn and Barbara Langendijk. They tackle not only environmental and social sustainability, but also cultural sustainability, for example by preserving artisan culture. Elsie Gringhuis only uses natural textiles and highly innovative patterns to reduce waste; she produces everything in The Netherlands and she does not develop new collections every season but designs a basic collection that she call “Books”. A number of styles, so-called “Chapters”, then complement these “Books” regularly. (Fig. 2). It is a similar idea to the continuous collection “hellofashion” by Monique van Heist and the “Wardrobe” collection developed by Mevan Kaluarachchi.

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The Textile Lab within the Textile Museum in Tilburg has been particular important for designers that use high technology and smart textile, for example Conny Groenewegen, Pauline van Dongen, Martijn van Strien, Marina Toeters and Karin Vlug. Within the Textile Lab they are able to experiment with different techniques and yarns and co-create with in-house product development and technical experts. Conny Groenewegen developed and

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produced the “01 Collection” for her new label Electric Co within the Textile Lab. The designs are produced on demand and in limited edition, employing 3D knitting with wool bio-fur yarn and recycled polyester monofilaments (Fig. 3).

A critical mass of civil-society organizations, government initiatives, education institutions, large and small companies in the fashion and textile industries are clearly paving the ground to a fashion revolution in the Netherlands.