



Research Article

Why Sustainability within the Fashion Market Needs Education

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Abstract

This project focuses on exploring sustainable-oriented options for young people as they are the primary target group of an accelerating fashion industry. The fast fashion market has major problems along its globally organised supply chain regarding its social and environmental compatibility. The project is conducted within a greater urban area, using the city of Freiburg exemplarily. Pupils of the Staudinger Gesamtschule, the only comprehensive school in Freiburg, engage themselves exploratively in the perspective of sustainability within the fashion market and create a catalogue of measures for sustainable-oriented handling. The main focus of this research project is to evaluate a sustainable-oriented course of actions by interviewing selected consumers and active participants as well as protagonists of the fashion market and textile research field. The empirical social research is conducted by using guidelines as an interviewing technique when contacting commercial and product enterprises as well as research institutes and welfare institutions. Explorations and interviews give pupils the opportunity to become familiar with the fields of work and its individual sustainability options within the fashion market. Thanks to the radio project, the pupils had the chance to widen their perspective outside of a protected school environment and to gain more experience about the complexity of the worldwide fashion market. The development of their personalities to competent consumers has become evident in first changes of attitude and more knowledge. The pupils of the study group have also gained know-how concerning journalistic strategies as well as in their articulation and their word-field on sustainability. The project was promoted by the programme "Our Common Future" of the Robert Bosch Foundation, Germany.

Keywords

Fashion; Design; Fashion market; Clothes

Purpose of the Research Project

In this project pupils develop skills on how to inform themselves about sustainability within the fashion market and develop strategies to gather information from key players of the fashion industry in order to frame action strategies which are applicable to the area of Freiburg. Establishing a catalogue of measures by doing research, explorations, guideline interviews and the accompanying evaluation, all this is done by pupils. The aforementioned procedure enables the pupils to master

the central research question: Which sustainable-oriented strategies are available for youngsters in the fashion market within the greater area of Freiburg?

The interviews are later on transferred into a catalogue of measures for a sustainable-oriented handling. They are the basis for segments that will be broadcasted via the radio show of the University of Education Freiburg. Pupils will develop specific skills as they are actively involved in this process too. The research project is embedded in the extended school curriculum.

Young People as Target Group of the Fashion Market

Current studies as the one by Greenpeace [1] show that although young adults think green, they do not act in a sustainable way in the fashion market. Considering resource efficiency and the fact that young adults are our current and future consumers, this development is one of the greatest problems we face nowadays. Therefore, we are urged to enhance the sensibility of youngsters in order to optimize the textile chain ecologically and to develop a consciousness for the value of textiles and clothes. The fashion market is a good example to show that school as an institution fulfils its educational mandate for a sustainable development at its best. In the department Fashion and Textiles at the University of Education Freiburg this has been a guiding principle in teaching and research for years.

In 2016 the Sinus-Study pointed out that fashion plays a significant role in expressing ones identity and life style mostly regardless of the consumers associated milieu and that price and fashionable appearance are the key purchasing criteria, whereas production methods only play a subordinate role [2]. This result is also proven by a survey conducted by the market research institution nuggets on behalf of Greenpeace [3]. According to this study more than 80% of young people buy their clothes in chains like H&M or C&A and more than half purchase their clothing online. Conditions of manufacturing or textile quality labels as a purchase criterion are only relevant for 10% of the youngsters.

According to the study of Iconkids and youth (2012), six- to nineteen-year old Germans spend most of their money – 5.2 billion Euros per year – on clothing, fashion and accessories [4]. Fashion within youth culture is also used to develop own textile codes in order to identify themselves with a particular group [5]. Therefore, young people show a very distinct awareness of brands: According to the inquiry of iconkids and youth (2016) out of the ten most popular brands within Germany five of them were the fashion brands Nike, adidas, H&M, Esprit and Puma [6]. Youngsters in Germany perceive clothing as mass merchandise with unlimited availability and affordable prices. Above all, in the past few years the trend of fast fashion led to uncontrolled and unstoppable fashion consumption [7]. Furthermore, most garments are only worn for a short time – sometimes they are not worn at all and disposed shortly after. Statistics show that women in Germany buy approximately 30 kg of clothing per year, but roughly one third of it is never worn [8].

Methodical Research Aim and Research Design

The project pursues the pupils' and students' perspective as consumers since they are key actors in the fashion market alongside

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politics, business and science. They shall recognize that sustainability research is continuously developing as its methods are in a dynamic process which is the basis of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) [9]. As part of an integrative approach to sustainability, natural and cultural-scientific approaches to sustainable development play a vital role in the further development of the ESD concept. This includes the communication and cooperation with practitioners and the scientific reflection.

The pupils' attitude at the beginning of the project and the end shall be compared to see how much they differ. Furthermore, a comparison is carried out with the young adults' attitudes of the Greenpeace study and the pupils of the study group to examine to which extent they are alike. The question is whether such a study group about fashion and sustainability can ultimately change the attitudes and maybe even the behaviour of young people, or whether the results are very similar to those of the Greenpeace study, according to which young people have the potential to notice the "green acting at the fashion market " but ultimately do not act accordingly.

Pupils and university students make use of the following social research methods: source research, participatory observation and guided interviews. The guideline interviews as a survey technique of qualitative empirical social research form the research methodological focus. They are evaluated by means of transcription and analysis of the main statements according to the qualitative content analysis by Mayring et al. [10]. The pupils are provided with professional audio devices for recording the interviews. A team out of pupils, university students and tutors transcript the expert interviews as well as essential text passages of the student and consumer surveys by using transcription software.

Project Implementation, Reflection and First Results

The project started in September 2016 and continued until August 2017. The organizational integration of the research project is carried out by study groups, which are part of a support programme taking place once a week. The target group of the project are young people aged 13 to 14, who currently attend 8th grade.

Project implementation

In order to gather data on the current situation of "Fashion and Sustainability" interviews with key players of the textile supply chain and research institutes are conducted as an applied version of the guided interview. A telephone interview is seen as an acceptable alternative if a face to face meeting is not possible. The project manager and the teachers are responsible for coordinating the interview appointments. The project also offers an intensive practice-oriented examination of textiles and clothing in applied research by offering an excursion to the Hohenstein Institute being one of the leading textile research institutes in Germany. Furthermore, two upcycling workshops are offered during the pupils' holiday at the textile department of the University of Education Freiburg. The pupils can create new-looking accessories from used clothing and reflect on the so-called Slow Fashion Movement as an opposite trend to fast fashion.

The results of the project are broadcasted at a radio show about "Fashion and Sustainability". With the support of the recording studio at the University of Education Freiburg and its experienced tutoring team, the pupils are taught how to journalistically direct an interview with a microphone as well as how to moderate and assist in the editing and cutting of the radio show. The pupils help preparing

the broadcast by selecting and editing the sequences of the project results and contribute their own speech input as well as their music proposals.

Reflection of the first project stage

During the kick-off meeting in September 2017 the documentary "The True Cost" [11] was presented, showing the globalization of the fashion world and the extreme opposites between the consuming and producing countries. The film was intended as a trigger as well as providing information to ask self-reflected questions and serving as a basis for the follow up discussion in the study group.

After the first interviews it turned out to be an efficient way of working with a guided question catalogue, which was then modified by the pupils. For this purpose they did their internet research based on a handout about the interviewee and the corresponding company or institution. Firstly, the pupils practiced the interviewing techniques among themselves in order to be better prepared. Secondly, they ran several pre-tests by interviewing their fellow pupils, students at the University of Education Freiburg and consumers in the city centre of Freiburg. The interviews were presented and discussed by the study group.

In a further step the interviews were cut into radio clips with the help of the freeware Audacity. Being involved in the preparation of the broadcast, turned out to be a major motivating factor for the pupils as they knew that parts of the consumer interviews and each expert interview would be aired. They were engaged in the process of editing audio files, they moderated the broadcast and decided which music was played. The first radio show was broadcasted at the beginning of February 2017, five other ones followed till the end of July.

After more than six months of contacting fashion companies it turned out that this is a valuable and satisfying strategy due to the fact that people are willing to answer and give information. The contacting process takes place as follows: At the beginning an official inquiry was sent by letter or e-mail which was then partially pursued by a follow-up via e-mail and/or telephone. Due to the fact that the pupils named fashion companies in which they usually purchase their clothing, those ones were contacted first.

The only fashion company in Freiburg which was named by the students as one of their shopping locations and actually agreed on an interview was C&A. Other Freiburg-based companies, which are preferred by young people such as H&M, New Yorker, Orsay and Pimkie did not agree to an interview appointment. Neither was it possible to reach the person in charge at the business management via the branch manager, nor was any direct contact with the business management achievable. Partially, the company websites were referred to or general feedback such as "We are available to you for a telephone inquiry" was given with no result. A student involved in the project wrote in her report: "I found it particularly astonishing that a large number of companies rejected the inquiry of our lecturer." (project report winter term 2016/17).

It is noteworthy that some of the requested global fashion enterprises were available for a personal interview for this project, even though they are very strongly positioned about their sustainability strategies. Other companies and institutions responded very quickly and positively to the interview request. In addition to C&A and the Fashion House Kaiser, eco-faire fashion stores and clothing companies in Freiburg as well as research and social institutions such as the Institute for Applied Ecology were interested and available for interviews.

First empirical results

After three months the pupils' attitudes and changed attitudes with regard to the fashion market were reviewed. Eight girls and two boys of the study group were interviewed, aged 13 to 14 years, who have been participating regularly in the project from the very beginning. The guided interviews were transcribed word-for-word as the subjective attitudes and reasoning of the actions and the pupils' behaviour in the fashion market were of particular interest [12]. The pupils' answers to 12 interview questions were grouped into categories based on the report by Greenpeace [3]. In the Greenpeace study, 502 young people aged 12 to 19 were surveyed with the help of an online-questionnaire. For the following evaluation the peer group of the 12 to 13-year-olds ($n = 126$) is taken into account in order to achieve comparability between the studies (Figure 1).

According to the pupil's answers of the study group, eight out of ten like to go shopping. The majority ($n = 7$) refers to their mother or parents as shopping companions as well as friends and siblings. It can be assumed that the pupils do not only go shopping with their parents, but also prefer to shop with friends or siblings in their leisure time. However, the clothing purchases are mostly financed by the parents. 63% of the 12 to 13-year-olds of the Greenpeace study collects ideas and information about fashion trends especially in their peer group. In contrast, the pupils of the study group are mainly influenced by local fashion shops. For both groups online providers such as Amazon or Zalando are listed as the second most important source of information.

Half of the pupils state that their shopping purpose is related to the circumstance that their clothes do not fit any longer. In particular, the girls find it important to be fashionably dressed and to acquire new clothing from current fashion collections. Similar selection criteria have been named in both studies, concerning the question which aspects are especially important when buying clothes. Fashionable looks are the most important factor (Greenpeace: 81%, study group $n = 9$), followed by the price (Greenpeace: 49%, study group: $n = 2$). Only two pupils answered that the price is an important buying

criterion. This can probably be explained by the fact that in these cases the clothing purchases were predominantly financed by the parents.

The Greenpeace study concludes that more than 80% of young people buy their clothes from conventional fashion chains. The young people of the project group also purchase their clothes mainly from fast fashion providers such as H&M, New Yorker, etc. In the Greenpeace study only 3 to 6% of the young people interviewed knew green fashion labels. Also the young people of the study group hardly knew any green fashion or textile labeling. Nevertheless, it is an option for them to buy eco-fair clothes as soon as they have an own income. Thus, a positive effect becomes evident by the fact that the Slow Fashion project has raised their awareness for sustainability criteria.

The Greenpeace study also shows that the interviewed teenagers know that the textile production causes problems. Nearly all young people in the German-wide survey (96%) have at least heard that working conditions in the fashion industry are partly very bad. In the interviews, nine out of ten pupils were able to comment on these circumstances, another three knew that clothing was treated with dangerous chemicals. The Greenpeace survey concludes that 83% of young people are aware of the use of chemicals and a further 74% know that textile production can be problematic for the environment. Consequently, both studies show that there is awareness among young people about the textile production and its related problems, but this is hardly connected with their behaviour (Figure 2).

In addition, the pupils of the study group were asked whether the project has triggered a change in their purchasing behaviour after a three-month period. Five out of ten pupils say that they have noticed a change. This change in attitude and their consciousness is especially evident for four pupils who started reflecting their purchasing behaviour. They do not shop randomly anymore and only buy something if they need it. Another three pupils have begun to reduce the number of shopping trips. Fairtrade clothing and textile labelling is given greater attention by three pupils.

All in all, it should be noted that the interview statements within the small sample of ten young people are very similar to the results of the German-wide Greenpeace study. Nevertheless, since most of

Which selection criteria do you have in mind when buying clothes?

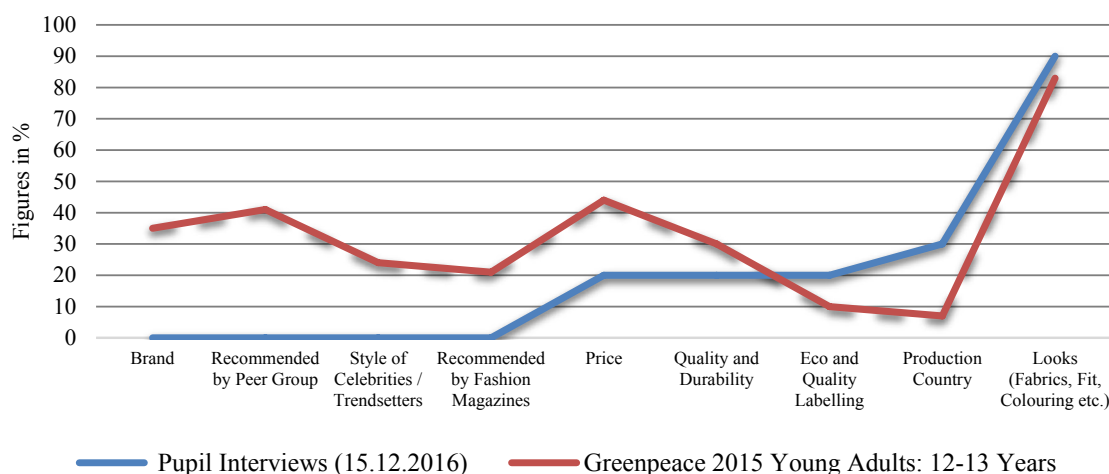


Figure 1: Selection criteria for fashion and clothing.

What do you consider when buying clothes?

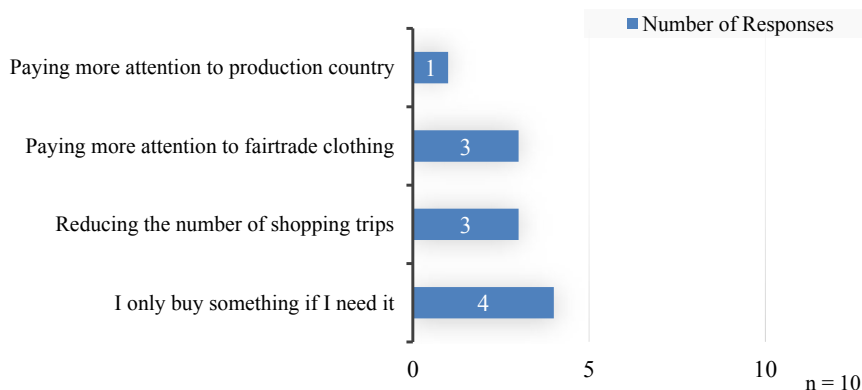


Figure 2: Change of awareness through the Slow Fashion study group.

the results aim in the same direction as the Greenpeace study, it is an encouraging project to continue doing research in this area. After a project period of three months, the pupils have undergone initial changes in their attitudes and behaviour, which were influenced by the activities in the Slow Fashion study group. These changes need to be monitored furthermore and surveyed again after one year in order to see whether there is a long-time effect of the project.

Within a qualitative research concerning communication fields, conducted in April 2017, we tried to find out whether the pupils had gained a more differentiated knowledge about fashion and sustainability by using a more elaborated vocabulary. Eight pupils of the study group were interviewed concerning specific word-fields and argued that they got further knowledge about a more environmentally-conscious consumption, but could imagine buying eco-fair fashion when being older and having their own income.

Altogether 14 expert interviews were conducted, transcribed and made into radio broadcasts. Five interviews were conducted with researchers and eight with people in the fashion industry. There were three telephone interviews and eight took place in the companies or research institutes. That way the pupils had the chance to make their own observations. Partly they were even invited to visit the company site. Mainly eco-fair fashion companies but also traditional fashion houses have taken part in this project and their comments were broadcasted. Further contributions of pupils and consumers in Freiburg were added so that by the end of July 2017 we had broadcasted six hours on fashion and sustainability. Each broadcast will also be repeated by the radio station within one year. The feedback of the interview partners and also some listeners was very positive so far (Figure 3).

Thanks to the radio project, the pupils had the chance to widen their perspective outside of a protected school environment and to gain more experience about the complexity of the consumer's world. They could experience that they have a free choice and that it is up to them whether to consume eco-fair or not. In this way they can influence the fashion market and can contribute to a sustainable change or they remain indifferent. Ritterbach [13] points out how pupils experience that some lifestyles cannot be realized without contradictions and that it is important to find a subject-oriented way of dealing with the influences of the overall digital media. The development of a pupil's personality to a competent consumer, that becomes evident in first changes of attitude and more knowledge,



Figure 3: Radio interview with Sascha Klemz, co-founder of zündstoff in Freiburg.

should be pointed out positively although it is not a quantum leap. It should also be mentioned that the pupils of the study group have gained know-how concerning journalistic strategies as well as in their articulation and their word-field on sustainability.

Final Remarks

Fashion and textile are areas that are closely linked to the youthful living environments but are hardly addressed or discussed in school. The project offers a variety of innovative perspectives and research approaches and makes it possible to show the topic of sustainability in terms of its own interdisciplinary consumption behaviour in different research contexts. It is also quite true-to-life regarding pupils' social environment. At the moment the consumption sector "fashion and textile" is attracting a great deal of attention, both in the media as well as in organizations like cultural landscape, environmental and consumer protection. In this project, pupils have learned how they are able to approach the actors of the fashion market in an explorative way and which action strategies they have in the fashion market. By multiplying the measures by the teachers and the pupils as well as implementing them in lessons, the project becomes part of the school curriculum in the sense of ESD.

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