

## **Sustainable Fashion Employability Skills (SFES) Erasmus + Strategic Partnership – The Journey so Far**

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### **Abstract**

**Background scientific research:** The purpose of the testimonial presentation will be to share the results of the 1st year of the SFES project in terms of results (notably from a survey with fashion businesses in Europe) challenges and future plans in order to raise the awareness for the project, engender possible collaborations and get feedback from an expert audience. The underpinning for this project, from an academic perspective, related to sustainability in fashion in recent times has evidence of diverse approaches; from a production standpoint (Shrivastava et al. 2021); through a supply chain angle (Karaosman & Brun, 2020); a governance perspective (Wong & Ngai, 2021) and, of course, from a consumption perspective (Grazzini et al., 2021). All have a commonality relating to the purpose of the research, which is to raise awareness of the specific sustainability issues that are particularly pertinent to this industry.

In contrast, the figures which underpin the working context of this project, in particular the European fashion industry, look at employability factors and the value of this industry to the economy. Up to 1.7 million jobs (ec.europa.eu) are supported with a direct value to the economy estimated at €325 bn (Statista,2019). These

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figures are notwithstanding the addition of the consideration of the effect the Covid 19 pandemic is having on this sector, in particular in Europe.

**Research issue to be addressed:** Within this unstable environment, there are still many students studying or engaged in academic and creative programmes related to fashion within the European academic sphere. Therefore, understanding the sustainability skills gap in this sector means that students can be better prepared for a changing world, a sustainable one in which there is uncertainty, challenge and self-created opportunities, thus addressing both background approaches. Ultimately, this project aims to equip student participants with the skills and competencies to understand and implement sustainability in a professional environment, whilst addressing the issues relating to the sustainability of fashion, including its ethicality, heritage and environmental impact in the wider context of creation, production, marketing, retail and communication.

**Methodology used:** SFES is a 3 year €300 000 Erasmus + KA203 Strategic Partnership project awarded in October 2020 to Glasgow Caledonian University. It is a project focused on understanding the nature (in very practical terms) of sustainable actions and strategies that companies operating in the fashion industry are using or implementing in their businesses and determining the employability skills and competences which are required to implement them or the blue sky strategies that businesses have identified that they would like to use but do not have the resources or skills to achieve.

There are 5 academic partners from Portugal (Universidade da Madeira), Spain (Universidad Internacional Villanueva; Universidad Politecnica de Valencia), France (Edhec) and UK (Glasgow Caledonian University (also the principle partner)) and 2 industry partners, 1 from the UK (Harris Tweed Hebrides) and 1 from Spain (Tendam Retail Fashion Group). Tendam is a global fashion retail company who market 5 fashion brands (Pedro del Hierro; Springfield; Women's Secret; Cortefiel and Fifty), operate through omnichannel sales and have an international presence with headquarters in Madrid. The company is committed to sustainable practices with a special focus on corporate social responsibility. Harris Tweed Hebrides has sustainability as an ethos within its business and its brand. The company promotes the Harris tweed textile as a raw material. Community is vital in the production cycle of the tweed as it enables the manufacturing of Harris tweed whilst simultaneously supporting the transfer of knowledge and jobs throughout the community. The raw material starts with the wool from the sheep on the island of Harris in Scotland; is dyed in the island which due to the knowledge acquired over centuries and produces yarns which are transformed by a factory on the island into the finished fabric. Harris tweed is the original circular economy model.

This project uses the skills and the knowledge of both these businesses which are engaging with sustainability with completely different ways as well as the interdisciplinary expertise from the academic partners (Marketing, Communication, Environmental Science, Audio-visual competencies, Videogame creation and

Management). Over the course of the project, 90 multidisciplinary and multinational students from the 5 academic institutions will be immersed in a range of learning situations, including week-long innovative and co-creative workshops to underpin the development of the outputs. The final objective is to deliver a White Paper that will be accessible to businesses, academics, students and citizens which will cover the understanding of sustainability; its current state of play within businesses and further provide a toolkit which will address the demand and any potential employability skills gaps in this area. These opportunities will also equip students with the skills and competencies to enhance their employability in a sustainable business as well as create a community for knowledge exchange between HEIs and Industry.

**Results achieved (conclusions) or expected as well as their relevance for theory and practice:** The project has been running for nearly 1 year and this will be an opportunity to present its early activities, findings and challenges and gain feedback on possible areas of development and collaboration going forward. An initial survey of fashion businesses in UK, France, Portugal and Spain has been implemented to understand the nature of the sustainability actions which are currently taking place and the future direction that the businesses envisage taking to form a baseline for the project. The results of this survey will also be shared during this presentation.

**Keywords:** sustainability; employability; fashion; circular economy, omnichannel

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